

Positioning Paper

Understanding and enhancing research-policy linkages in Australian housing: a discussion paper

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This discussion paper introduces a project designed to enhance the linkages between social science research and public policy in the Australian housing system, with particular attention to the role of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). The project provides an opportunity for Australian housing researchers and policy-makers to engage in a process of reflection and action around AHURI's core business of research-informed policy. The discussion paper is divided into two main sections, the first focused on understanding research-policy linkages and the second on enhancing these linkages in the context of Australian housing.

The first section provides a themed, applied overview of the extensive, international, academic and practice literature on research-policy relations that has developed over the past thirty years. This overview identifies four inter-linked themes that represent the central concerns of this literature.

Firstly, there is an ongoing debate concerning aspirations and expectations to more effectively link policy and research. The idea that public policies should be based on social science research has a long pedigree, and the paper traces the evolution of this idea since the 1960s. It pays particular attention to the recent impact of the evidence-based policy movement that has brought these issues to the forefront of policy agendas in many policy fields. The debate over what our expectations should be of research-informed policy is presented as an ongoing dialogue between the champions of research-informed policy and evidence-based practice, the sceptics who view this aspiration as a mirage, and the reformers who pragmatically seek a middle way. This debate sharpens consideration of what research-informed policy really means in practice, and provides a basis for reflection on what our aspirations and expectations should be concerning relations between research and policy in Australian housing.

The second theme in the international literature concerns theories and models of research-policy relations. How should we best conceptualise research-policy linkages? This is a fundamental issue with direct practice ramifications. The extensive body of writing on this issue is condensed in this paper into three main models: the engineering model, the engagement model, and the enlightenment model. The main characteristics of these models are summarised in Table One. These three 'ideal-types' each present a way of thinking about the ways that research and policy are actually linked, and the ways that they should be linked. The discussion paper suggests that these represent choices to be made concerning the shaping of research-policy relations in Australian housing. Each is suggestive of different pathways - structures, processes, practices – to enhance these relations.

The third theme concerns the most appropriate structures and processes to achieve effective research-policy links. The literature argues that research-policy relations are shaped by institutions and, in particular, by the institutional arrangements set in place to achieve effective linkages. The discussion paper contrasts 'conventional structures' and 'emerging structures'. Conventional structures comprise research organisations that are specifically dedicated to policy research, and encouraged to widely disseminate their findings. Table two identifies seven types of conventional research organisations and summarises their main attributes. By contrast, emerging structures are based on the idea of 'research-policy networks' and stress concepts such as partnership, sustained interactivity, network development, and, within the realms of practicality, seamless relations between researchers and policy-makers. While AHURI has some features of a conventional structure, it also has many of the elements of a network organisation. It can be argued that the participants in AHURI are working through the practice implications of an organisation based on a quite different model to conventionally structured research organisations.

The fourth theme in the international literature is the emergence of a great diversity of practices that can be developed and implemented by researchers and policy-makers to achieve more effective engagement. In this section of the paper, the many prescriptions for enhancing research-policy practice are classified under five headings: doing the right research and doing research right; synthesising existing research findings; presenting and disseminating research findings effectively; bringing research into policy and political processes; and developing the capacities of research users. Underlying the many specific proposals to enhance the practice of research-informed policy is the theme that this is a matter to be approached in a far more systematic, theoretically-informed, and deliberate manner than has hitherto been the case.

The second main section of the discussion paper is devoted to consideration of how these ideas drawn from the international literature can be utilised to enhance research-policy linkages in Australian housing. Firstly, these ideas are used to provide a framework for describing and analysing AHURI as an organisation aiming to link research and policy in Australian housing. The AHURI experiment in enhancing research-informed policy is analysed under three headings: aspirations, expectations and models; structures and processes; practices and practicalities. This analysis provides a detailed picture of the character of AHURI as a research-policy linking organisation, and identifies the choices and priorities that have characterised its operations to this point.

With this departure point clearly established, the discussion paper outlines a three phase process of action-oriented, self-reflection designed to promote continuous improvement of the research-policy interface in Australian housing, with particular focus on the role of AHURI. The first analytical phase consists of the production and dissemination of this discussion paper. The second phase, 'reflecting on the issues and developing options', principally involves the convening of workshops of housing researchers and policy-makers to reflect on the issues raised in the discussion paper and their implications for AHURI and research-policy relations. This phase concludes with the writing of an 'options paper' proposing strategies to enhance research-informed policy in Australian housing. The third phase involves consideration and implementation of the options identified. Through these processes, it is intended that the project will strengthen the processes of continuous improvement of research-policy linkages in Australian housing policy and AHURI.

In summary, this project and discussion paper aim to provide further impetus to AHURI's goal of enhancing research-informed housing policy. The discussion paper provides a foundation for a process of analysis, reflection and action involving both housing researchers and policy-makers. It is envisaged that this will build on the relationships and linkages that have already been fostered through AHURI, and contribute to the development of a 'policy network' that will bring researchers and policy-makers together to enhance housing outcomes for all Australians.

1 INTRODUCTION

The idea that public policy should be informed by social science research is attractive in theory and elusive in practice. Many social science researchers are strongly attracted to the idea that their work should be useful to policy-makers and others seeking to address social problems and achieve social goals. But their experience of engagement with policy-makers can be one of frustration as they encounter the complexities and compromises inherent in policy processes, and what they sometimes perceive as lack of understanding of the nature and role of research. In a similar way, many policy-makers are attracted to the idea that their work should be underpinned by research findings. However, their experience of engaging with researchers is often frustrated by their perception that researchers are unable to communicate research findings in policy-relevant ways, and that research often fails to provide findings that are useful to those engaged in the complexities of policy processes. This problematic interface between social science research and public policy is the focus of this discussion paper and the research project of which it is a part.

The broad aims of this research project are to develop a systematic framework for understanding the relationships between social science research and public policy, and to use this understanding to enhance the linkages between social science research and policy practice in the Australian housing system. The project is funded by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), a research and policy organisation and network designed explicitly to develop effective linkages between social science research and Australian housing policy. The mission of AHURI is to improve housing and related urban outcomes throughout Australia by the creation and dissemination of knowledge, and by linking quality research with policy development, program evaluation and project development. AHURI plays a key role in the research-policy interface in Australian housing policy. This project has been commissioned and designed to provide an opportunity for the policy-makers and researchers associated with AHURI and Australian housing policy to reflect on this interface and to develop ways of further improving research-policy linkages. It provides an opportunity for the AHURI policy and research community to engage in a process of action-oriented, self-reflection around its core business of housing policy research.

Linking policy and research is not a new theme in Australian housing policy, nor is it unique to this policy field. The current AHURI arrangements continue a long tradition of applied housing policy research in Australia, a tradition that is briefly reviewed in section 3 of this paper. More generally, the goal of developing public policy based on social science research has had wide currency amongst policy-makers and social science researchers in many countries over the past three decades. This has spawned a large literature on the theoretical and practice issues involved in linking research and policy. This literature is both critical, raising questions about the meanings and limits of research-informed policy, and practical, focusing on how policy and research practitioners can best approach the task of working together. This literature represents the current 'evidence-base' for research-policy linkages and is reviewed in section 2.

The distinctive nature of this project is its aspiration to utilise this literature as a stimulus for a process of reflection by housing researchers and policy makers on how they can best work together to achieve improved housing outcomes for Australians. The research process is explicitly action-oriented, and is designed in three stages: analysis, reflection and implementation. These stages are described in detail in section four.

The first, 'analytical' stage involves a critical, conceptual and applied analysis of the literature on the relationship of social science research and public policy. This analysis is presented in a form that is engaged with contemporary issues rather than as a conventional literature review. The emphasis is on the relevance and application of

the literature to contemporary, Australian housing policy processes and structures, including the relevance to AHURI.

The second, 'reflective' stage is designed to provide an opportunity for reflection on the issues raised in the discussion paper by Australian housing policy makers and housing researchers. Two workshops will be conducted to reflect on the issues considered in the discussion paper, one with senior housing researchers and one with senior housing policy practitioners. The workshops will be complemented by a process of observation of the policy-research interface in current AHURI processes. Phase two will result in a 'options paper', proposing strategies based on the consultations to enhance research-policy linkages in Australian housing policy, and AHURI's role in this linkage.

The third, 'action' stage will focus on the transition from the options paper to implementation of a process of continuous improvement of the research-policy interface in Australian housing policy. The form that this phase takes will be considered in the options paper.

This discussion paper presents the findings of the first analytical stage of the project. It reviews the academic and professional literature on the relations between research and policy (section 2), links this literature to the Australian housing context and to the role of AHURI (section 3.1), and outlines a process for analysis, reflection and action (section 3.2). It is intended to provide a theoretical foundation for the complex task of building improved practices and processes in linking research and policy in Australian housing.

2 UNDERSTANDING RESEARCH-POLICY LINKAGES

During the past thirty years an extensive body of social science and public policy literature has been produced on the topic of the relations between social science research and public policy. This literature reflects the desire of many social scientists to play a useful role in policy development and implementation. It also reflects the wish of many policy practitioners to more effectively utilise the vast corpus of social science research that has accumulated during the past fifty years. Not all social scientists want to be policy relevant, and many policy-makers are indifferent, or even hostile, to applied social science. However, the idea of research-informed policy has had sufficient adherents in both camps to become a fixture on both the social research agenda and the agenda of those seeking to improve policy making processes.

A review of this body of writings indicates that there are essentially four inter-linked themes that represent the central concerns of those who seek to address this issue. Firstly, there is an ongoing debate concerning *aspirations and expectations* to more effectively link policy and research. This debate is between those who are optimistic concerning the potentiality of research informed policy, and those who see close linkage as either undesirable, impossible, or both. This is a debate about expectations and possibilities, and raises fundamental questions about the societal role of the social sciences, and the nature of public policy processes. Secondly, there is a body of writings that seeks to develop *theories and models* of research-policy relations. This literature proposes concepts and frameworks to elucidate the nature of these linkages, and provides a foundation for empirical studies of the utilisation of research in policy. Thirdly, writers have addressed the question of the most appropriate *structures and processes* to institutionalise effective research-policy links. This material concerns the institutional arrangements to achieve effective linkages. Finally, there is a large and growing literature on the *practices* that can be developed and implemented by both researchers and policy-makers to achieve more effective engagement. The whole body of literature on research-policy relations can be described and understood in terms of these four central and related themes.

These four sets of issues provide a framework for endeavours to understand and enhance research-policy linkages in Australian housing. Most of the debate on this issue within the Australian housing policy network in recent years has focused on these four issues. The relevance of this framework to Australian housing policy and research and to AHURI is apparent. AHURI represents an explicit aspiration to link research and policy more effectively, and it is based on particular theoretic understandings of these relations. It represents a distinctive, indeed singular, structure amongst the array of current and potential institutional arrangements, and it is actively engaged in promoting and developing practices to enhance research-policy linkages. A review of the literature addressing these four key issues of aspirations, theories, structures and practices provides a platform for informed reflection on enhancement of research-policy relations in the Australian housing context.

2.1 Linking research and policy – aspirations and expectations

The creation of AHURI in its present form in 2000 reflects in part the widespread currency of the idea that public policy, in this case housing policy, can and should be based more explicitly on the findings of social science research (Winter and Seelig 2001). This analysis of research-policy linkages begins with a critical appraisal of this objective. The aspiration to ground public policies in social science research findings is prominent on the policy agenda in many policy fields in Australia in the early twenty-first century. In contemporary public discussion this is commonly and increasingly expressed as an enthusiasm for 'evidence-based policy' (Marston and Watts 2003a). The term 'evidence-based policy' has come into common usage only in the past five years, and often carries a specific set of meanings and techniques associated with the

evidence-based practice movement. This paper draws extensively on the literature associated with evidence-based practice, but is focused more generally on the issue of the application of social science knowledge in policy processes. For this reason the term 'research-informed' policy is preferred to 'evidence-based' policy and is used throughout the paper. While some see the goal of research-informed policy as self-evident, it is not in fact uncontroversial or unchallenged. It raises fundamental and recurring debates about the nature and purposes of both social science and public policy in democratic societies. These debates about the aspiration to research-informed policy are the starting point for this discussion paper. There are three key sets of questions:

- 1) What is the history of the idea that social science research and public policy should be closely linked, and that policy should be research informed? Where does this idea come from and why is it so prominent on the policy agenda at the present time?
- 2) What are the broad parameters of the debate? What are the arguments and views of those who champion the idea of research-based policy, and of those who raise questions about this aspiration?
- 3) Specifically, what exactly are we aspiring to when we espouse more effective links between research and policy in Australian housing?

2.1.1 The history of the idea

The idea that public policies should be based on social science research has a long pedigree. It can be argued that 'the problem of the relation of knowledge to rule and decision is as old as civilisation itself' (Parsons 1995, 431). The idea that scientific knowledge should play a central role in improving policy and governance can be traced back to the period of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century (Nutley 2003a). The contemporary focus on research policy linkages in Australia has its roots in both British and North American intellectual traditions. The first clear use of social research to inform policy is often taken to be the Royal Commission on the Poor Law in 1832-1834 (Bulmer 1982), the forerunner to the long tradition of empiricism in British social policy. Social researchers and reformers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Chadwick, Mayhew, Booth, Rowntree, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb established the principle and practice that social research should be employed as a basis for the formulation and implementation of social policy (Bulmer 1982; Nutley and Webb 2000). Similarly, in the United States the origins of professional social science was closely linked to social reform and social policy, and social scientists continued to work closely on social policy issues through the early twentieth century (Weiss 1995). Skocpol points out the close historical inter-relationships between the social sciences and social policy: 'the modern, research-oriented social sciences and the socioeconomic interventions of modern national states – 'welfare states' as we now label them - emerged and grew up together' (Skocpol 1987, 41). As modern states increasingly concerned themselves with issues of social order, organisation and reform they required theoretical understanding of how societies function, and statistical data on issues deemed problematic. In this sense, the social sciences and social policy are fundamentally connected, even though the form and intensity of these connections vary from time to time in response to more immediate circumstances.

The rapid growth of the social sciences and the development of social intervention in the latter half of the twentieth century saw the development of a closer, more complex, and at the same time more troubled, relationship between the research and policy communities. The War on Poverty in the United States in the 1960s represented a major advance for policy-oriented social science as did the large-scale social experiments of the 1970s (Weiss 1995). Similarly in the United Kingdom, the 1960s were seen as a high point for applied social policy research (Nutley and Webb 2000). However, the collapse of the social democratic consensus, an increasing recognition of

the ineffectiveness of many social interventions, and, most of all, a fundamentally different political environment in the late-1970s and 1980s began to cast major doubt on the capacity of social science to usefully inform social policy. Under the Reagan Administration funding for social science research in the United States was cut and social scientists increasingly 'lamented the fate of policy-oriented research' (Weiss 1995, 140). Under the Thatcher Government in Britain, the social sciences developed a predominantly adversarial relationship with Whitehall, criticising what many viewed as the ascendancy of an ideologically-driven approach to policy formulation, in which the social sciences had little role to play.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century the relations between social science research and public policy became increasingly complex involving a great diversity of organisations and processes, one writer describing these relations as 'the haphazard connection' (Weiss 1995). In both countries there was much searching to find better ways of re-establishing effective linkages. This resulted in the development of an identifiable academic and practice literature focused on understanding and enhancing the links between social science research and public policy. This literature dates from the late-1970s, and particularly from the seminal work of Carol Weiss in the United States (1977; 1977a; 1979; 1980) and Martin Bulmer in the United Kingdom (1982; 1986).

In the Australian context, a similar pattern of ebbs and flows in the relations between social science and public policy during the latter half of the twentieth century can be traced. Social research played a major role in the development of plans for post-war reconstruction in Australia, and there is a long tradition of engagement by economists in public policy. However, in general the social sciences were late to develop in Australian universities and played only a muted role in Australian social policy prior to the 1960s. The first major period of engagement between social science and public policy was immediately prior to and during the Whitlam Labor Government of 1972-1975. Since that time, the social sciences have experienced considerable expansion in Australian universities and the pattern of relations between the social sciences and the policy making process has become increasingly complex. Governments directly and indirectly fund most social science research in Australia, and, as in the UK and USA, there is increasing interest in finding more effective ways of linking the nation's social science research effort and the development of effective social policy.

As already noted, in recent years discussion of these issues in Australia is increasingly cast in the terminology of 'evidence-based policy'. This current formulation of the issue of research-policy relations reflects three influences: the evidence-based practice movement, the impact in Australia of the current British Labor Government's 'modernising government' agenda, and, more generally, what may be termed the 'new instrumentalism' in public policy. Each of these is impacting on the shape of the contemporary debate on research-policy relations in Australia.

The evidence-based practice movement developed during the 1990s as a movement concerned to promote the use of scientific evidence as a basis for professional practice in health and human services. It rapidly achieved widespread acceptance and adherence by many professional practitioners and researchers: 'the emergence of evidence-based practice has to be one of the success stories of the 1990s' (Trinder 2000, 1). Originating in the United Kingdom in the field of medical practice, the movement quickly spread to many countries including Australia, and to many fields of professional practice including dentistry, nursing, public health, mental health, social work and education (e.g. Zlotnik, Biegel and Solt 2002). In the field of medical practice, the Cochrane Collaboration has emerged as an international organisation aiming to enable medical practitioners to make well-informed decisions on the basis of systematic reviews of the effects of health care interventions (The Cochrane Collaboration 2003). The proponents of evidence-based practice promote it as a paradigm shift ensuring that professional practice is based on the application of sound

scientific knowledge (Trinder 2000): 'professionals must be ready to explain not just what they advise and why it is appropriate, but also what they know of its likely efficacy' (Solesbury 2001, 6). Critics argue that while the principles are laudable, the evidence approach is based on too narrow a view of scientific evidence, that it poses a threat to the key role of professional judgement and that it is costly and difficult to implement effectively (Trinder 2000; McDonald 2003; Marston and Watts 2003a).

These criticisms notwithstanding, the translation of evidence-based practice into evidence-based policy was not long coming: 'public policy has caught up with these trends in the worlds of research and practice, endorsed and amplified them' (Solesbury 2001, 6; see also Black 2001; Klein 2000; Packwood 2002). By 2000, the concept of 'evidence-based policy' had achieved widespread currency in the United Kingdom both in the academic community and amongst policy-makers, and it was claimed that this had created renewed interest in the goal of linking research and policy (Davies, Nutley & Smith 2000, v). The evidence-based movement was heralded as a timely influence that would 'help policy makers see the benefit of greater openness and academic researchers the value of closer engagement with practice' (Davies, Nutley and Smith 2000, vii). The Campbell Collaboration was established in 2000 as an organisation to undertake systematic reviews in the style of the Cochrane Collaboration on social and behavioural interventions and public policy (Petrosino et. al. 2001).

The primary impetus for the rapid adoption of the concept of evidence-based policy by many UK researchers and policy makers was the strong endorsement and backing of the concept by the Blair Labour Government that came to power in 1997. In a marked departure from the 'conviction politics' of the previous two decades, the Blair Government adopted an anti-ideological, pragmatic, utilitarian approach to governance focused on the question, 'what works?' (Solesbury 2001). Central to its approach was an emphasis on the use of evidence and research in policy-making. This theme was prominent in documents such as *Modernising Government* and *Professional Policy Making for the Twenty First Century* issued by the Cabinet Office in 1999 (Clarence 2002; Nutley, Davies and Walter 2002a; Solesbury 2001). It was developed in a major speech by the then Secretary of State for Education to the Economic and Social Research Council, who called for 'a revolution in the relations between government and the research community', arguing that, 'it should be self-evident that decisions on Government policy ought to be informed by sound evidence. Social science research ought to be contributing a major part of that evidence base' (Blunkett 2000).

Over the period 1999-2004, evidence based policy has become a central theme in British public policy. The Centre for Management and Policy Studies, set up within the Cabinet Office, surveyed senior civil servants and found numerous examples where evidence, evaluation and expertise fed into policy thinking and review (Bullock, Mountford and Stanley 2001). In 2000, the Economic and Social Research Council established the UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice and the Evidence Network to foster exchange of social science research between policy makers and researchers and to develop the capacity of social science research to impact on policy (Nutley 2003; Nutley, Davies and Walter 2002). The momentum of the evidence-based policy movement in the UK is unprecedented in the history of research-policy relations (Nutley 2003). As Wyatt concludes, 'in the space of a few years the language of 'evidence-basing' has entered in the discourse of British public administration, and become practically a standard element in any discussion of good practice in policy making' (Wyatt 2002, 26).

The migration of the concept of evidence-based policy from the United Kingdom to Australia is partial and incomplete, but there are clear signs that these ideas are having an increasing impact on researchers and policy makers in Australia. Evidence-based policy has not as yet received clear endorsement by governments and research funding bodies in Australia, and there are no institutional equivalents to the Evidence Network. However, the language and concepts of evidence-based policy have

acquired a strong foothold in Australia, as documented by Marston and Watts (2003). There is increasing interest in linking research and policy in fields such as ageing (e.g. Bartlett and Findlay 2003). The concept of evidence-based policy has been adopted by the recently-elected leader of the Federal Labor Opposition, Mark Latham, who, in language redolent of British Labour, proposes evidence as a means of rising above ideology in policy development: 'The myths of the welfare state are based on old ideological ways of thinking. ... Policy makers need to look beyond the old Left and the new Right to those evidence-based policies that can end the human tragedy of poverty' (quoted in Marston and Watts 2003a, 149-150).

It can be argued that this 'new instrumentalism' expressed by Latham provides fertile ground in Australian politics and policy for a closer linking of social science researchers and policy makers, whether expressed in the language of 'evidence-based policy' or not. In the United Kingdom context, several commentators have suggested that the rapid acceptance of the idea of evidence-based policy by governments, policy makers and many social scientists reflects a fundamental shift in the nature of politics in the early twentieth century (Nutley 2003; Solesbury 2001; Young et. al. 2002). Solesbury argues that while the issue of the role of research in policy is 'an old debate', there is 'something new in the air which gives both a fresh urgency and a new twist' to the issues: 'To my mind the key factor is the shift in the nature of politics; the retreat from ideology, the dissolution of class-based party politics, the empowerment of consumers' (Solesbury 2001, 9). Nutley similarly emphasises the undermining of ideological certainty and the more open quest for social problems: 'In this context, evidence could be a bigger player than in the previous era of conviction-driven, ideological politics' (Stoker, in Nutley 2003, 9).

The extent to which a similar pragmatic impulse is emerging in Australian politics is a matter for conjecture. Premature claims of the 'end of ideology' are not unprecedented in the social sciences. Nevertheless, the idea that policy should be based on sound evidence and research resonates with several elements of the contemporary Australian policy and political environment. It is highly compatible with central elements of the corporate management framework that has dominated Australian public management since the late-1980s. Central tenets of managerialism such as clear specification of goals, measurable performance indicators, financial and political accountability, and 'management by results' are congruent with an emphasis on data and research to provide substantiation of current and proposed policy settings. Furthermore, the emphasis on closer links between researchers and policy makers is also consistent with the current interest in developing partnerships and networks that cross conventional boundaries. Australian social science research is now a relatively large, established and diverse enterprise with significant analytical capacity and many practitioners seeking new roles and opportunities. It can be argued that the idea of evidence based policy has appeal across the board: to political leaders seeking pragmatic solutions to social problems, to policy-advisors in government seeking to modernise and professionalise policy development and to sections of the Australian social science research community seeking closer engagement with policy processes.

In summary, the impetus to develop closer links between research and policy has a long history, grounded in the inter-related expansion of the social sciences and social policy in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia during the twentieth century. The relations between social science and social policy have become increasingly complex in all countries. There have been some historical periods characterised by close collaboration and others dominated by conflictual, even adversarial relations. Currently, the advent of 'evidence-based policy' is heralded by many as a significant new approach to research-policy linkages reflecting, in the opinion of some commentators, a new pragmatic, instrumental emphasis in contemporary politics. Embraced enthusiastically by many in the United Kingdom associated with the Labour Government, the idea of evidence-based policy is now making headway in Australia. The next phase of development of research-informed

policy in Australia will be influenced by the ideas given currency by the evidence-based policy movement as well as by the longer historical legacy of relations between social science and social policy.

2.1.2 Champions, sceptics, reformers

It is perhaps not surprising that the issue of research-policy relations should be somewhat controversial, given that it raises fundamental questions about the roles and responsibilities of both social scientists and policy-makers. What is more remarkable is the vigour and intensity of the debate between the champions of research-informed policy and those who are sceptical about the whole enterprise. The rise of the evidence-based policy movement has given increased focus to this debate, resulting in a polarisation of views. For some the idea that policy should be based on the findings of social science research is self-evident, requiring little if any justification. However, others suggest that social science-based public policy is a mirage, based on unrealistic assumptions about social science, the policy process and the capacity of researchers and policy makers to work effectively together. In between the 'champions' and the 'sceptics', a third group whom we can dub the 'reformers' suggest the need for new structures and practices if research-informed and research-enhanced policy is to be successfully progressed. Categorising the participants in this complex debate into these three groups is a considerable over-simplification, but helps to sharpen presentation and understanding of the issues. Sketching out the main contours of the debate between the champions, the sceptics and the reformers provides a context for clarifying aspirations and expectations, and for assessing the possibilities and probabilities of enhancing research-policy linkages in Australian housing.

One of the most unambiguous statements of the case for a close relationship between social science research and public policy was the speech (referred to earlier in this paper) by David Blunkett in his capacity as British Secretary of State for Education to the Economic and Social Research Council in 2000 (Blunkett 2000). This address uncompromisingly championed the case for policy-oriented social science under the heading 'Can Social Science Improve Government?'. The paper began with a strong commitment to pragmatism in policy-making: 'This Government has given a clear commitment that we will be guided not by dogma but by an open-minded approach to what works and why?' (para. 6). Given this commitment, there is a clear role for the social sciences to provide evidence to underpin policy: 'the potential for research to have a clear practical impact is now much greater than it has been for a very long time' (para. 12). Blunkett's faith in the potential of social science is strong: 'I believe passionately that having ready access to the lessons from high quality research can and must vastly improve the quality and sensitivity of [political] decisions' (para. 13).

The major hurdles to the social sciences achieving this crucial role, according to Blunkett, are the values and priorities of the social sciences themselves. The social sciences have a frustrating tendency to neglect issues that are central to political and policy debates, and there is a consequent lack of good quality, well-rounded research evidence concerning many key policy issues (para. 7). The social sciences are too 'supplier driven' and inward looking, not sufficiently focused on the concerns of policy makers and the public at large (para. 19). Social science should give greater prominence to systematic reviews of existing research, and concern itself more with the timeliness, relevance and accessibility of research (para. 17). Equally importantly, it should become more 'street-wise' (para. 8) and it should pay far more attention to dissemination of research findings (para. 29).

Policy makers too, accordingly to Blunkett, must mend their ways. For social science to be more influential those working in government must change the way that they approach and use research evidence (para. 34). This means overcoming an organisational culture in which ideas are unwelcome, and developing the structures, techniques and skills needed to use and apply knowledge in a systematic and cumulative way (paras. 38 & 40). All of this means building a 'genuine partnership

between the worlds of policy and research' (para. 48). The bottom line, Blunkett concludes, is that 'we need to be able to rely on social science and social scientists to tell us what works and why and what types of policy initiatives are likely to be most effective. And we need better ways of ensuring that those who want this information can get it easily and quickly' (para. 63).

The Blunkett address contains all the elements of the case for research-informed or evidence-based policy: a pragmatic, instrumental stance; a belief in the capacity of social science research to provide answers; a moral position emphasising the societal obligations of social science; an emphasis on the need to disseminate research findings; the desirability of close partnership between social scientists and policy-makers; and the need for a policy environment conducive to research utilisation. This in essence is the case for research-informed or evidence-based policy as set out by one of its most prominent champions.

Blunkett's address and the wider enthusiasms for evidence-based policy that it reflected sparked a wave of critique. There is a long tradition of academic writing voicing scepticism about the effective utilisation of social science research, captured succinctly by the title of a book published in 1979: *Why Sociology Does Not Apply* (quoted in Bulmer 1986, 276). As the evidence-based policy movement gained momentum, the sceptics mounted their challenges. Evidence-based policy was accused of 'crude instrumentalism' (Young et. al. 2002, 215), and described as 'an intellectually muddled form of positivistic and mechanistic managerialism' (Parsons 2002, 58) and as 'naiveté bordering on the reckless' (Marston and Watts 2003, 36). Beneath the brickbats, there were five serious arguments. The champions of the contemporary version of research-informed policy have misunderstood the nature of politics and policy, over-estimated the capacity of research, under-estimated the difficulties of developing partnerships between researchers and policy-makers, ignored the evidence of the limited influence of research and endangered the role of the social sciences in a democratic society. Each of these 'sceptical' challenges requires brief elaboration.

The first critique of the case for research-informed policy is that it misunderstands the nature of the policy process. This point is sometimes made somewhat crudely. Asserting that 'evidence-based policy is the exception rather than the rule', Leicester enumerated 'the seven enemies of evidence-based policy': 'bureaucratic logic, the bottom line, consensus, politics, civil service culture, cynicism, lack of time' (Leicester 1999). However, this argument that there is a fundamental disjuncture between research and evidence, on the one hand, and the real world of policy and politics, on the other, can also be developed systematically based on the large body of writing on the nature of policy processes (for a comprehensive overview of this literature see Parsons 1995). Several discussions of research-policy relations review this literature and its implications for the role of research in policy (Stone, Maxwell and Keating 2001; Nutley and Webb 2000). Essentially, the sceptics argue that the champions of research-informed policy underestimate the role of interests, ideology and irrationality in policy, and that they misunderstand the nature of the knowledge needed for effective policy making.

The idea that policy processes can best be understood in terms of the competing interests of social groups, organisations or social classes has a long history and underpins neo-pluralist and neo-Marxist understandings of policy processes (Parsons 1995). Critics of evidence-based policy in the field of housing and urban policy have been quick to point to the 'narrow interests' that impact on these policy areas: 'urban policy is political in the meanest sense of the word' (Harrison 2000, 207). Expressing views firmly embedded in American pluralism, Carole Weiss argued that 'the policy making process is a political process, with the basic aim of reconciling interests in order to negotiate a consensus, not implementing logic and truth' (Weiss 1977, 533). Closely linked is the emphasis on the role of ideology in shaping policy processes. Doherty

(2000) in an article critical of the relevance of evidence-based policy to British housing policy, argues that 'ideology enters the policy process to mediate the impact of evidence. ... Ideology acts as a purposeful filter through which evidence is passed and selected before it impacts on policy' (Doherty 2000, 180).

Other sceptics draw on theories that emphasise the non-rational elements of policy processes, ranging from theories focused on the bounded nature of rationality in decision-making, such as disjointed incrementalism, to theories that view policy-making as inherently irrational, such as 'garbage-can' decision-making (Parsons 1995). Such theories have recently been applied to Australian housing policy (Tiernan and Burke 2002) and are commonly perceived to represent the real world of policy. These perspectives underpin the belief that knowledge is not necessarily valued by policy makers: in Keynes oft-quoted remark, '... there is nothing a government hates more than to be well-informed, for it makes the process of arriving at decisions much more complicated and difficult' (Solesbury 2001 p. 7). The idea of the limited role of rationality in policy-making reflects and reinforces many policy practitioners experience of the hectic day-to-day reality of policy-making, characterised by Weiss as 'limited search, limited reading, modest receptivity' (Weiss 1986a, 275-6). Sceptics suggest that policy-makers may have too much, rather than insufficient knowledge (Marston and Watts 2003). The sceptics also suggest that the types of knowledge required by decision-makers are diverse, and that research-based knowledge is only one aspect. 'Given that policy-making takes place in conditions of ignorance, unpredictability, uncertainty, chaos and complexity', good policy-making requires 'tacit' knowledge i.e. insight and judgement based on understanding of context and the practicalities of decision-making and policy implementation (Parsons 2001, 104).

Secondly, the sceptics also question whether the champions of research -informed policy understand the nature of social science research. Social science research, they argue, is not detached from wider political processes. The production of scientific knowledge is itself shaped by politics: 'the various sources of evidence ... have been shaped to some degree by the different institutional interests, values and discourses of those who produced and commissioned them' (Davies, Nutley and Smith 2000, vi). This 'contingent and political nature' (Brannen 1986, 169) of social science research has been documented in several policy fields including British housing policy (Doherty 2000).

Furthermore, the sceptics argue, it is frequently the case that social science research by its very nature does not provide unambiguous guidance for policy-makers. 'The reality of research is that ... it is not always possible to provide governments with the precision they would so clearly like' (Clarence 2002, 7). The hope of those who champion evidence-based policy is that research findings are cumulative and that as research multiplies, knowledge will converge. In reality, the opposite often occurs (Nutley and Davies 2000, 317-318). Moreover, measuring impact and effectiveness is often difficult in areas like housing and urban policy because, 'policy involves complex interventions and their impact or effectiveness is difficult to isolate and measure. ... Urban policy interventions are not like those in education or clinical practice where there is wide consensus on objectives' (Harrison 2000, 208-9). In many policy areas, there is a need for a range of evidence involving both quantitative and qualitative research findings (Davies, Nutley and Smith 2000, vi), but multi-method and multi-disciplinary approaches often result in the production of 'complex evidence' (Doherty 2000, 183). 'It would be wrong to expect the same sort of evidence base as that available, for example, from randomised controlled trials in the medical field' (Harrison 2000, 224-50). Research is concerned not only with 'what works?' but also with many other policy-relevant questions, and there is a need for research that is descriptive, analytical, diagnostic, theoretical and prescriptive, as well as evaluative (Solesbury 2001). In summary, 'the demands of policy-making [for unambiguous findings] are, arguably, in tension with the demand for the rigorous research that so much emphasis is being placed upon' (Clarence 2002, 7).

The sceptics also question whether social science research should be privileged over other forms of knowledge (Marston and Watts 2003). In a sceptical moment, Weiss proposes that postmodernism suggests that 'social science is just another mode of discourse, another narrative; it has no access to an independent reality and no claim to authoritativeness; it is designed to mystify the reader and preserve the position of its elite practitioners' (Weiss 1995, 138). From this perspective, the question of what should count as evidence in policy is itself contentious (Marston and Watts 2003).

The third set of arguments of the sceptics is that there is a deep cultural divide between researchers and policy makers that makes the development of effective linkages extremely difficult. As one group of writers expressed the problem, 'researchers are from Mars; policy makers are from Venus' (Feldman, Nadash and Gursen 2001). This cultural separation has been observed by many writers (Nutley 2003; Nutley and Davies 2000; Neilson 2001; Wiltshire 2001), and was documented in one of the earliest empirical studies of research utilisation by policy-makers (Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980). Researchers tend to stress the importance of academic detachment and independence, the importance of basic as well as applied research, the nuanced character of research findings, the importance of viewing research as a medium to long-term activity, and, above all else, the need for rigour. Policy practitioners, on the other hand, tend to stress the value of applied and problem-focused research, the need to pay close attention to the political environment, the importance of explicit policy guidance and short-term timeframes, and, above all else, the need for relevance. In this sense, researchers and policy-makers live in different worlds: 'they have different sets of interests and concerns in relation to any research project and hence find it difficult to communicate with one another' (Nutley and Davies 2000, 317). This has been succinctly summarised as a clash between the world of scientific rationality and the world of political rationality (Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980).

Fourthly, the sceptics argue that champions of evidence-based research ignore the evidence that social science research typically has only a limited impact in the political process. In this sense, the champions are hoisted by their own petard. Doherty concluded from his review of British housing policy that 'research evidence seems to only rarely impact directly on ... government housing policy' (Doherty 2000, 173; see also MacLennan and More 1999; Erickson 1998). Similar reviews in other policy fields have concluded that 'service planners and policy-makers march to some distant drum which is only remotely related to research' (Marshall 1999, 86). Where research does play a role, this seems to be more likely to be influential in defining problems than in generating policy solutions (Cook 2001). Most studies that attribute some degree of impact to research findings point to the ways that research interacts with ideology, interests, and other factors to affect policy outcomes (Cook 2001; Duke 2001; Lavis et. al. 2002; Robinson 2000) rather than following a rational model of decision-making (Marston and Watts 2003).

Finally, the sceptics warn that an undiluted enthusiasm for research-informed policy and policy-focused research poses dangers to the values underlying liberal, democratic societies. In part this reflects concerns that under such a regime, social scientists and the universities and research organisations they work for would 'become handmaidens to the state and lose their independence and autonomy' (Weiss 1995, 138; Hammersley 2000). More broadly, the concern is the tension between the elite expertise represented by the social sciences and the need for policy-making to be responsive to public opinion (Weiss 1995). The idea that policy should be 'rational based on science', say the sceptics, is in tension with the idea that it be 'democratic based on responsiveness to the public' (Cook 2001, 3). Social scientists should be on tap, not on top (Nutley and Webb 2000).

Located between the champions and the sceptics are a growing group of researchers and policy-makers calling for a more nuanced understanding of the role of research in policy and of research-policy relations. Their stance is to seek enhancement of these

relations without necessarily assuming that this will radically reshape either social science or policy processes. These 'reformers' accept the basic propositions of the case for research-informed policy, while acknowledging the complexities and constraints of policy and research processes. The stance is one of cautious optimism. Sandra Nutley, a leading proponent of evidence-based practice in the United Kingdom, argues that there is a 'new interface between policy makers and knowledge producers which will begin to unfold over the next few years' (Davies, Nutley and Smith 2000, vi). In her view, there is the potential for policy decisions to be better informed by research evidence than has hitherto been the case, and the key issue is to work out what will best facilitate this new relationship (Nutley 2003, 2). This will require considerable commitment and resources because the relationship is not simple or straightforward (Davies, Nutley and Smith 2000; Tilley and Laycock 2000), and has never been a smooth one (Bulmer 1987, 1-2). 'Although the evidence-based approach to policy and practice offers the research community major new opportunities, it would be wise to remain modest in its claims to improve the conduct of public affairs' (Solesbury 2001, 2).

The reformers' case is that research utilisation is a process 'where evidence does and should compete with other forms of knowledge and other interests', rather than necessarily having a determinist or predominant role (Nutley 2003, 3). This is not to downplay in any way the significance of research for policy. As Weiss asserts, 'social science has become an indispensable mode of discourse in the policy arena. ... Nobody can hope to be a player in public life these days unless she can speak the language of social science' (Weiss 1995, 147-8). Indeed, the reformers argue that the actual use of research in policy is considerably greater than is often acknowledged. This is in part a matter of understanding the diversity of uses of research in policy. 'Once we acknowledge that evidence is used in various ways by different people in the policy process, government does not appear to be the 'evidence free zone' that is sometimes depicted (Nutley, Davies and Walter, 2002, 7). The reformers assert that, 'research can have at least some incremental impact most of the time' (Bogenschneider et. al. 2000; see also Harrison 2000; Brereton 1996). As Weiss concludes: 'Although research does not move mountains, at least right away, it does sometimes move hills. And over the long run, knowledge of all kinds drastically reshapes the policy terrain' (Weiss 1986, 275).

Finally, the reformers argue that greater reliance on research and evidence in policy and decision-making is likely to enhance rather than detract from democratic processes. Skocpol points out that democratic societies are the hungriest of all societies for social knowledge, and the most congenial to the growth and potential application of social science (Skocpol 1987, 41). Pressure groups and political parties, as well as governments at all levels, seek information and analysis of problems and issues. Provided research findings are widely and openly disseminated within the political system, policy research can and should make a significant contribution to informed debate. The goal is a research-informed polity as well as research-informed policy.

2.1.3 What should our aspirations and expectations be?

This review of the history of the idea of research-informed policy and of the contemporary debate on this topic provides a useful basis for consideration of aspirations and expectations by the Australian housing research and policy communities. The contemporary interest in research-informed policy, sparked in particular by the evidence-based policy movement, presents challenges to those concerned with Australian housing policy. AHURI, as an organisation explicitly designed to link research and policy, will need to take account of the new impetus and ideas occasioned by this movement. Australian housing researchers need to consider to what extent and in what ways they will commit themselves to achieving research-informed policy. Australian housing policy makers in all jurisdictions similarly need to

assess their commitment to the use of research evidence in policy. Researchers and policy makers need to engage around the issue of what research-informed policy means in theory and practice, and around the questions of what their expectations are of one another.

The central question is: what are our aspirations and expectations concerning relations between research and policy in the context of Australian housing? Answering this question involves consideration of a range of issues raised in this section of the discussion paper. These are:

- 1) What are the main drivers of the idea of research-informed policy in Australian housing policy in the early-twenty first century? Is this issue prominent on the policy agenda? Why or why not?
- 2) What is the basis of the interest by Australian housing policy-makers in research-informed policy at the present time? How strong is this interest? Do policy makers in the various jurisdictions have similar or different interests in this issue?
- 3) What is the basis of the interest by Australian housing researchers in research-informed policy at the present time? How strong is this interest? Do researchers in different universities and research organisations have similar or different interests in this issue?
- 4) Is the 'evidence-based policy' movement likely to have a major impact on Australian housing policy and research, and if so, what are the likely implications?
- 5) To what extent is Australian politics characterised by an instrumental and pragmatic impulse comparable to Britain under the Blair Labour Government? What are the implications for Australian housing research and policy?
- 6) Are there characteristics of Australian social science, and particularly housing research, that impact on the ways that research and policy relate in this country (history, culture, size, capacity, organisation)?
- 7) Are there characteristics of the governance of housing in Australia that impact on the ways that research and policy relate in this country (history, culture, size, capacity, organisation)?
- 8) In the light of what is known about the characteristics of public policy processes, what are realistic expectations concerning the capacity of research to inform Australian housing policy?
- 9) In the light of what is known about Australian social science research, particularly research on housing, what are realistic expectations concerning the capacity of research to inform policy?
- 10) Is there a cultural divide between housing researchers and housing policy-makers in Australia? What are the implications for enhancing linkages between researchers and policy-makers?
- 11) How influential has housing research been in Australian housing policy? What does this signal concerning the future of research-informed policy?
- 12) Would closer linkages between researchers and policy-makers in Australian housing undermine the independence and autonomy of researchers or not?
- 13) Would a greater focus on research-informed policy make governments less responsive to public opinion or would it enhance democratic processes by providing a sound basis for public debate?
- 14) In the context of these questions, how should AHURI frame its aspirations to promote research-informed policy in Australian housing? What expectations should the research and policy communities have of AHURI?

Discussion of these issues by the housing policy and research community will result in greater mutual appreciation of what constitutes appropriate and well-reasoned expectations of the relations between research and policy in Australian housing.

2.2 Linking research and policy – theories and models

A careful analysis of the ongoing debate about linking research and policy reveals that there are a number of conceptions of what 'linking' means in this context. For some 'linking' implies a tight, direct relationship where evidence from research is used explicitly in policy development and review. The concept of 'evidence-based' policy tends to imply this type of linkage. For others, linkage is a broader concept implying a range of relations, both direct and indirect. The phrase 'research-informed policy' suggests this wider meaning. Some proponents of evidence-based policy have suggested that phrases such as 'evidence-influenced' or 'evidence-aware' may more accurately reflect the kinds of linkages that need to be created (Davies, Nutley and Smith 2000b). These discussions about terminology are underpinned by the literature on theories and models of research-policy linkage. This literature and its implications for Australian housing research and policy is the focus of this section.

Developing a clear understanding of the nature of research-policy linkages is important for three reasons. Firstly, much of the ambiguity and misunderstanding concerning the relations between research and policy stems from conceptual confusion (Weiss 1979). Being clear about what is meant is a necessary foundation for informed discussion. Secondly, meanings shape expectations. What constitutes 'effective linkage' may have quite different meanings in various sections of the research and policy communities, and will impact on the assessment of achievement. Thirdly, the conception of what it means to link research and policy will have a considerable bearing on strategies to achieve greater linkages: theory will shape practice. A clear theme in the literature is the need to develop a better theoretical understanding of research-policy relations: 'There is a growing realisation of the failure of simple models of research-into-practice ... and a need for thinking through in more depth and in a more integrated fashion, the concerns surrounding research utilisation' (Nutley Walter and Davies 2002, 1).

The starting point for analysis of the different types of research-policy linkages is Weiss's seminal typology of the seven meanings of research utilisation (Weiss 1979). Weiss argued that the use of social science research in the public policy arena is a complex phenomenon, and that seven types of utilisation can be distinguished. She called these the knowledge-driven model, the problem-solving model, the interactive model, the political model, the tactical model, the enlightenment model, and research as part of the intellectual enterprise of the society. This framework has been widely used and adapted by subsequent writers (e.g. Nutley, Walter and Davies 2002; Nutley and Webb 2000; Young et. al. 2002). Others have adopted a simpler framework contrasting the two 'ideal types' of research utilisation: the engineering model and the enlightenment model (Bulmer 1982; Nutley and Webb 2000). Landry, Amara and Lamari (1999) propose a different approach involving four models: the technological model ('science push'); the economic model ('demand pull'), the institutional model (focus on dissemination processes), and the social interaction model (focus on relations between researchers and policy makers).

For purposes of this discussion paper, three broad models will be distinguished and discussed: the engineering model, the engagement model and the enlightenment model. These three models present alternative conceptions both of how research actually links to policy and of how it should link i.e. these are both explanatory models and normative models. The broad characteristics of each model are portrayed in Table One.

Table 1: Models of research-policy linkages

Characteristics	Engineering model	Engagement Model	Enlightenment Model
Type of linkage	Linear	Interactive	Indirect
Purpose of research	Problem solving	Policy development	Social progress
Type of research	Applied	Policy research	Basic, discipline research
Orientation to policy	Technocratic	Participative	Sceptical
Consensus on goals	High	High or moderate	High, moderate or low
Role of researcher	Technician	Collaborator	Social critic
Role of policy maker	User	Collaborator	Target
Research-policy relations	Contractual	Partnership	Detached
Research beneficiary	Policy-maker	Policy network	Society
Dissemination mode	Targeted	Networks	Percolation

2.2.1 *The engineering model*

The engineering model of research-policy relations encompasses the ‘knowledge-driven’ and ‘problem-solving’ models in Weiss’s typology (1979), and the ‘technological’ model in the formulation by Landry, Amara and Lamari (1999). It has also been referred to disparagingly as the ‘hypodermic’ model (Bogenschneider et. al. 2000, 328). In the engineering model, the link between research and policy is essentially linear: ‘a problem exists; information or understanding is lacking either to generate a solution to the problem or to select among alternative solutions; research provides the missing knowledge; and a solution is reached’ (Bulmer 1982, 42). The purpose of research is primarily to assist in solving policy problems by providing relevant empirical evidence and conclusions (Weiss 1979). The definition of the policy problem is mainly the responsibility of the policy or decision-maker. The assumption is that decision makers have a clear idea of their goals and their information needs, and they engage social scientists to provide data, analysis and interpretation of research findings.

In the engineering model, the focus is on applied research i.e. the research is driven primarily by the needs of the intended users, and is centred on a specific problem or set of problems. Research can be of many kinds, qualitative or quantitative, theoretical or descriptive. However, ‘whatever the nature of the evidence that social science research supplies, the expectation is that it clarifies the situation and reduces uncertainty’ (Weiss 1979, 427). The orientation of the engineering model is technocratic and instrumental, and policy is viewed principally as a solution-focused activity concerned with ‘what works’, results and outcomes. It is assumed that researchers and policy makers have a fairly high level of agreement on social goals, and that this reflects a similar consensus in the society as a whole.

In this model, the roles of researcher and policy-maker are clearly delineated. The role of the researchers is primarily technical. ‘Social science provides the evidence and conclusions to help solve a policy problem. The social scientist is a technician who commands the knowledge to make the necessary investigation and interpret the results’ (Bulmer 1982, 42). The policy-maker commissions research to fill knowledge gaps and is the end-user of research findings. Relations between researchers and policy-makers are in nature, and often in fact, contractual. The customer (policy maker) sets the objectives and limits within which the contractor (researcher) works

and pays the contractor for his or her services (Bulmer 1982). The policy maker is viewed as the prime beneficiary of the research, although it is assumed that the clients of programs and the citizenry at large are the ultimate beneficiaries. In this model, researchers are expected to have the skills not only to undertake high quality research, but also to disseminate research findings directly to policy-makers.

Paradoxically, the engineering model is both widely held and widely criticised as a portrayal of the nature of research-policy relations. The model represents the 'prevailing imagery' (Weiss 1979, 428) of many champions of evidence-based policy and of policy-makers seeking 'answers' from research. However, the model is widely criticised as simplistic and wildly optimistic. 'Simple and unproblematic models ... in which evidence is created by experts and drawn on as necessary by policy-makers and practitioners fail as either accurate descriptions or effective prescriptions' (Nutley, Davies and Walter 2002, 9; see also Redner 2001). As description, the model has limited relevance due to the complexities of both social science research and policy processes. It requires 'an extraordinary concatenation of circumstances for research to influence policy directly (Weiss 1979, 428). As prescription, the model is courageous, assuming a level of rationality in policy and a level of conclusiveness in research that are rarely apparent. Much of the disappointment concerning the contribution of social science research to public policy can be attributed to the idealisation of the engineering model (Weiss 1979; Young et. al. 2002).

2.2.2 The engagement model

The engagement model of research-policy relations encompasses the 'interactive', 'political' and 'tactical' models in Weiss's typology and the 'social interaction' model of Landry, Amara and Lamari (1999). In this model the linkages between researchers and policy-makers are portrayed as interactive, complex and multi-dimensional. Weiss describes the linking processes viewed from this perspective as 'a disorderly set of interconnections and back-and-forthness that defies neat diagrams' (Weiss 1979, 428). In this model, the purpose of research is to bring the distinctive knowledge, skills and values of the social sciences directly to bear on policy issues, through ongoing engagement and interaction of researchers and policy-makers. The type of research can be basic or applied, but is characterised above all by its commitment to policy-relevance.

The engagement model is inherently political. Research-policy linkages are located within the wider political processes of which they are a part. Research is seen as one element in policy processes, 'characterised by competing influences and claims and by wider contextual factors' (Duke 2001, 290). Researchers need to understand and take account of this political environment. Research can play a key role in policy development, but this is contingent on many factors and circumstances, including the political skills of researchers who can themselves sometimes become influential figures (Young et. al. 2002). Policy-makers interact with researchers out of a commitment to research-informed policy. However, research utilisation is part of the political process and is used for many political purposes: '... to reinforce officials' commitment to a decision, reduce their uncertainties, persuade or neutralise critics, bolster supporters, shift responsibility ..., legitimate decisions already made on other grounds' (Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980, 11). Duke refers to these practices as 'playing the research card' (Duke 2001, 285). These and other such uses of research such as deflecting criticism and delaying decisions are not necessarily improper and are intrinsic to policy-making in complex political environments: 'only distortion and misinterpretation of findings are illegitimate (Weiss 1979, 429; also Weiss 1995).

In this model, researchers need to develop the stance and skills of 'active policy entrepreneurship' (Stone, Maxwell and Keating 2001, 13), and to focus on network development and active involvement in 'policy communities'. The quality and depth of their interaction with policy-makers is crucial: 'the more sustained and intense the interaction between researchers and users, the more likely there will be utilisation'

(Landry, Amara and Lamari 1999, 5). While researchers and policy makers have distinctive roles and positions in policy processes, their relations are often characterised by collaboration and partnership, and moderate to high levels of consensus on policy goals. Researchers also seek to develop links with interest groups and the media, as these groups are important in bringing research findings to the attention of policy-makers (Weiss 1986).

The attraction of the engagement model is that it corresponds to the experience of many policy makers and researchers of the messiness and uncertainty of the world of policy, and the complexity and indeterminacy of research-policy relations. It is a theory that resonates with the 'real world'. However, critics point to the dangers of the politicisation of research inherent in the model, and the development of somewhat complacent 'policy communities' comprising researchers and policy-makers of similar views occupying the comfortable middle ground. Effective implementation of the engagement model is demanding on all concerned. Researchers need to be both committed to the values and methods of social science and capable of engaging effectively in the world of policy and politics. Policy makers need to be not only responsive to the political environment but also receptive and open to the findings and implications of policy research.

2.2.3 The enlightenment model

The enlightenment model encompasses the 'enlightenment' and 'intellectual enterprise' models in Weiss's typology, and reflects the longstanding liberal-democratic tradition that emphasises the importance of the independence of academic research (Hammersley 2000; Wilensky 1997). In this model of research-policy linkages, relations between social scientists and policy-makers are indirect, and research is undertaken for the benefit not of policy-makers as such but of society as a whole. From this perspective, the stance of researchers towards policy processes is one of scepticism and detachment, and the predominant role is that of social critic. Research tends to be driven by the theoretical and conceptual framework of academic disciplines rather than by particular policy questions.

Like the other two models, the enlightenment model purports to be both descriptive and prescriptive. As description, the model suggests that 'basic social science makes its way in the long run by shaping elite and mass perceptions of social reality' (Wilensky 1997, 1242). Research provides the 'intellectual background of concepts, orientations and empirical generalisations that inform policy' (Bulmer 1982, 48). Weiss refers to this process as 'knowledge creep' (Weiss 1987, 277) and Bulmer talks of the 'long term infiltration of social science concepts, theories and findings' (Bulmer 1982, 48). Weiss constructs the image of social science concepts and generalisations 'percolating through informed publics and coming to shape the ways in which people think about social issues' (Weiss 1979, 429; see also Weiss 1977, Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980; Neilson 2001). It is argued that much of the policy process is characterised by contest between underlying, often tacit, structures of belief, and these frames of reference rather than 'evidence' are the predominant influences on policy. Critical social science research that analyses these broader concepts and understandings exerts its influential in the long run (Young et. al. 2002).

Proponents of the enlightenment model suggest that the practical value of applied research has been oversold and should be resisted: 'the idea that applied research in the social sciences is more relevant to the public agenda and public policy than basic research is a mistake; it tends to divert money, talent and attention away from the job of developing cumulative knowledge about culture, social structure, and politics' (Wilensky 1997, 1242). There needs to be greater appreciation of 'the essential role that a qualified scepticism can play in the development of knowledge' (Hammersley 2000, 1). Housing research, it is argued, exemplifies the limitations of a tradition dominated by applied research and lacking a strong critical, theoretical tradition (Jacobs and Manzi 2000). Proponents point to evidence suggesting that policy-makers

often welcome research that challenges prevailing frames of reference and makes them rethink comfortable assumptions (Weiss 1977; Bulmer 1982). The enlightenment model views social science research as playing an important role: 'but that role is less one of problem solving than of clarifying issues and informing wider public debate.... Policy research can be more effective as an instrument of the democratic process than of the decision-making process.' (Young et. al. 2001, 218).

The enlightenment model reflects traditional views about the role of social science in liberal democracies, and has strong appeal to the research community. It has, as Weiss notes, a comforting quality: 'it seems to promise that, without any special effort, truth will triumph' (Weiss 1979, 430). However, the model pays little attention to the processes linking research and policy. It suggests no strategies for ensuring that the findings of social science research are utilised by decision-makers, or for dealing with the problems of distortion, over-simplification and 'endarkenment' (Weiss 1979, 430). It can be argued that as a model of research-policy relations it demands too little both of researchers and of policy-makers.

2.2.4 What should be our model of research-policy relations?

The three models of research-policy linkages described above should be viewed as 'ideal-types' that can assist in clarifying alternative and choices. Each presents a way of thinking about the ways that research and policy are actually linked, and the ways that they should be linked. It can be argued that all three models have a place and that each model represents part of the complexity of research-policy linkages. However, in the context of this discussion paper they also represent choices to be made concerning the shaping of research-policy relations in Australian housing. Each model is suggestive of different pathways - structures, processes, practices – to enhance these relations. The issue is not necessarily one of choosing a preferred model, but of using the delineation of these three different approaches to reflect on future directions.

The central question is: how should we conceptualise research-policy relations in Australian housing as a basis for the enhancement of these relations? Answering this question requires consideration of the models and issues raised in this section of the discussion paper. The questions are:

- 1) What does it mean to 'link' research and policy in Australian housing?
- 2) Which of the three models – engineering, engagement and enlightenment – provides the most satisfactory understanding of how research and policy are linked in Australian housing? Why or why not?
- 3) Which of the three models – engineering, engagement and enlightenment – provides the most satisfactory understanding of how research and policy could and should be linked in Australian housing? Why or why not?
- 4) Which models represent prevailing views and expectations concerning research-policy linkages in Australian housing? Do researchers and policy makers have similar or different models of research-policy linkages?
- 5) What overall conceptualisation of research-policy relations should guide the future of efforts to enhance research-policy relations in Australia, including the future of AHURI? Is there a preferred model?

2.3 Linking research and policy – structures and processes

A key consideration in developing effective linkages between social science research and public policy is the nature of the institutional arrangements created to advance policy-relevant research. In all liberal-democratic societies, structures and processes have developed that seek to foster the production and dissemination of policy-relevant social science research, and enhance relations between the research and policy communities. These arrangements include the ways that social science research in

universities and other research organisations is funded. They also include the establishment and operation of university research centres, privately sponsored research foundations, 'think tanks', research units within government, special inquiries with a limited time span, and private research consultancies of many hues. Additionally, many pressure groups, political parties and non-government organisations have developed significant research capacity. The character of research-policy relations in any particular country is shaped by these arrangements and by the structures of government. As Weiss states, 'Institutions matter. The structures of government and the modes of organisation of social science have large effects on the fate of social science research' (Weiss 1995, 138). There is ongoing interest in many countries in exploring ways to enhance research-policy linking structures and processes.

Structures to promote research-informed policy have taken different forms within particular national political contexts and cultures. Skocpol's comparative review of the relations of social science and public policy in the United States, Britain and Sweden concluded that 'each national array of social sciences ... has its own distinctive modalities for becoming relevant to politics and public policy-making' (Skocpol 1987, 48). Thus, it is argued that in corporatist democracies with relatively high levels of consensual politics, such as Japan, Norway, Sweden and Austria, there is relatively tight integration of research and policy through centralised employer and employee organisations, political parties and governmental structures (Wilensky 1997; Skocpol 1987). In the United States, by contrast, there is historically a disjuncture between social science and social policy. Social science has been a largely university-based profession distrustful of too close an involvement in the practicalities of government. In this context, American social scientists have looked for 'arms-length' ways to make their research findings policy-relevant (Skocpol 1987). In the United Kingdom, relations have similarly been shaped by academic and bureaucratic structures and traditions (Bulmer 1982; Skocpol 1987). Political culture also plays an important role. The Confucian tradition in East Asia emphasises the role of the scholar-bureaucrat, and the dominance of the bureaucracy tends to exclude non-state sources of research and policy analysis. In China, the tradition of patron-client relations is reportedly an important determinant of relations between researchers and state officials (Stone, Maxwell and Keating 2001).

The design of structures to link research and policy also reflects prevailing ideas in public sector management. Of particular relevance in the context of this discussion paper is the contemporary emphasis on the importance of networks, partnerships and interconnectivity in public administration and public policy. In this section of the discussion paper we will contrast 'conventional' structures designed to promote policy-relevant research with emerging structures that emphasise the centrality of policy-research networks and partnerships. This brief review of the range of possible structural arrangements provides a context for reflection on the distinctive features of AHURI as a structure designed to enhance research-policy relations, and for consideration of the implications of emerging conceptualisations of policy-research linkages for Australian housing.

2.3.1 Conventional structures: research organisations

The conventional approach to developing policy-oriented research capacity is to establish research organisations specifically dedicated to policy research, and to encourage them to widely disseminate their findings. As already noted, there has been a proliferation of policy research organisations in many countries during the past fifty years reflecting the growth of the social sciences and of state intervention in the economy and society. Seven broad types of policy research organisations can be distinguished: university-based research centres, non-government research centres and foundations, in-house research units in government, statutory research

organisations, special commissions of inquiry, in-house research units in non-state organisations, and private consultancies.

As shown in Table Two, these types of organisations vary markedly, although there are also considerable variations within categories. Five variations can be distinguished: the extent of state-initiation and financing, the level of independence from government, the degree of interaction with state institutions, the specificity of the research agenda, the extent of ideological or sector alignment, and the level of commitment to research dissemination.

Table Two: Types of research organisations and their attributes

	State sponsorship	Independence	Interaction with state	Specificity of research agenda	Sector or ideological alignment	Focus on research dissemination
University-based research centres	Varies	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium
Other non-state research centres	Low	Varies, often high	Medium	Varies	Varies, often high	Medium
In-house research units in government	High	Low	High	High	Low	Medium
Statutory research organisations	High	Medium	High	High	Low	High
Special purpose inquiries	High	Medium	High	High	Low	Medium
Non-state in-house research units	Low	High	Medium	High	High	High
Private consultancies	Low	Low	Varies	Varies	Low	Low

The creation of university-based research centres to undertake policy-relevant research has a long history both in Australia and internationally. Such research centres may be initiated primarily by universities themselves. Examples in the area of housing and urban research, or which there are many worldwide, include the University of Birmingham's Centre for Urban and Regional Studies established in the 1960s (Doherty 2000) and the Centre for Urban and Social Research (now the Institute for Social Research) established in 1978 at Swinburne University. University-based research centres are also initiated and funded by state agencies. For example, the Social Policy Research Centre was established in 1980 as a collaborative venture of the then Commonwealth Department of Social Security and the University of New South Wales. Most university-based research centres are formally independent of government, although state organisations may be represented on management bodies and may seek to influence research agendas. University research centres typically do

not espouse any ideological alignment, and increasingly seek funding from a diversity of sources. These include general university research funding, such as that provided through the Australian Research Council, and contract research.

Non-state research centres in the social sciences are of two main kinds. Firstly, there are private foundations and trusts that fund social science research, including policy-relevant research. For example, the Joseph Rowntree Trust in the United Kingdom has funded housing research since the 1950s. In the United States the Fanny Mae Foundation, established in 1979, provides funding for research into affordable housing. Secondly, there is the array of 'think tanks' concerned with social and economic policy issues. These play a significant role in public policy in many countries, particularly in the United States through such influential organisations as the Brookings Institution. Think tanks are frequently, but not always, associated with a particular political perspective and may have close links with political parties. For example, in Britain the Institute for Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute provided much of the policy agenda for the Thatcher government, and the Institute for Public Policy Research plays a similar role for the Labour Party (Nutley and Webb 2000). In Australia, the Centre for Independent Studies undertakes policy research from a free enterprise perspective and the Evatt Foundation and the Whitlam Institute concern themselves with social justice issues.

In-house research units within government departments represent another type of policy research organisation, sometimes referred to as 'policy shops' (Bhatta 2002). The phrase, 'perhaps, Minister' has been coined to portray the complexities and ambiguities of in-house social research (Walker 1987). Most housing departments in the Australian States have policy and research units responsible for undertaking or commissioning research, and the provision of research and evidence-informed policy. Commonwealth Departments similarly have significant in-house policy research capacity. These policy and research units are strategically placed to play important roles in linking research and policy.

A distinguishing feature of Australian policy research is the important role played by statutory research organisations. The most prominent of these is the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which has responsibilities under the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* and the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* for providing a national statistical service. Another example is the Australian Institute of Family Studies, an independent statutory authority established by the Commonwealth Government in 1980 to undertake and disseminate family policy research. Similarly, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare was established by statute in 1987 to provide health and welfare statistics and information, and promote informed community discussion. These statutory bodies operate within a charter established by government, but within that charter have significant discretion in developing their own research priorities.

Other important, although typically time-limited, research bodies are the various special purpose inquiries established by government agencies. These can take a variety of forms. They include focused investigations conducted directly by government such as the National Housing Strategy conducted in the early-1990s, and special commissions of inquiry such as the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty in the early-1970s. This category also includes investigations undertaken by statutory bodies such as the Burdekin inquiry into youth homelessness in 1989 for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, and the inquiry into public housing by the Industry Commission (now the Productivity Commission) in 1993. Such inquiries typically involve researchers and policy experts drawn from the social science community, draw on existing research and commission new research.

Policy research capacity has also been developed in-house by a range of non-state organisations including industry bodies, pressure groups and political parties. Peak organisations such as the Australian Council of Social Service, Shelter and the Housing Industry Association, to name but a few, both undertake policy-relevant

research and draw on research for their lobbying and public education activities. Finally, private consultancy organisations are increasingly involved in policy-relevant research, particularly social program evaluations that are increasingly required by government agencies as part of their processes of policy and management review.

2.3.2 Emerging structures: research-policy networks

While there is great diversity amongst the types of research organisations discussed in section 2.3.1, they do share one feature in common. In almost all cases, a clear distinction is drawn between the producers of ideas and information – the researchers – and the users of information – the policy-makers and other participants in policy processes. However, in recent years there has been increasing interest in the development of different types of arrangements that stress the importance of partnerships between researchers and policy-makers, close personal contact, the development of research-policy networks, and, within the realms of practicality, seamless relations between the two groups. These ideas represent a different way of thinking about research-policy relations, and suggest new and unconventional ways of approaching the policy-research nexus.

There has been recognition of the central role of ‘policy networks’ since the late-1970s (Neilson 2001; Stone, Maxwell and Keating 2001). Policy networks are broadly understood as the patterns of formal and informal relationships that shape policy agendas and decision-making within a policy domain (Nutley and Webb 2000). Networks that are loosely integrated are referred to as ‘issue networks’. The various participants – policy-analysts, politicians, researchers, pressure group members, consultants, journalists – share an interest in a particular issue or policy field, but have conflicting interests and values, and differing views about problem definition and policy goals (Neilson 2001). However, certain circumstances can result in the emergence of ‘policy communities’ i.e. stable networks of individuals from inside and outside government with shared understandings of issues within a policy field, and mutual interests. More recently, the notion of ‘epistemic communities’ has been developed. These are ‘networks of experts with recognised expertise and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge in a particular domain’ (Stone, Maxwell and Keating 2001, 33). They have a common understanding of the nature of policy problems and objectives, and are likely to be given ‘insider’ status if these correspond to the central values of the policy community (Stone, Maxwell and Keating 2001).

These concepts underpin the idea that there is a need to rethink the practice of research-policy relations in terms of networks. Conventional structures emphasise the distinct domains occupied by researchers and policy-makers, the former engaged in the production of knowledge and the latter in its utilisation. It is argued that this runs counter to what we know of the importance of policy networks in shaping policy processes. Rather, we should view research-informed policy ‘as a partnership activity between all the stakeholders with no clear discontinuities between evidence creation, validation, dissemination or use’ (Nutley and Davies 2000, 342). These activities do not belong in separate domains: ‘both experts and users are partners in the generation and utilisation of knowledge’ (Nutley and Davies 2000, 325).

The two key concepts in this prescription for enhancement of research-policy relations are ‘partnership’ and ‘sustained interaction’. The task is not to link the separate worlds of research and policy, but to develop ‘open partnerships that span the creation, validation and incorporation of research’ (Davies and Nutley 2002, 12). It is argued that ‘when partnerships operate throughout the research process they appear to increase both the quality of research and its impact’ (Nutley 2003). One key to successful partnership is ‘sustained interactivity’ between researchers and research users (Nutley 2003, 13). ‘The more sustained and intense the interaction between researchers and users, the more likely there will be utilisation’ (Landry 1999, 5). Informal and multiple exchanges between researchers and policy-makers, and ongoing

personal contact are seen as key factors (Nutley 2003; Elliott and Popay 2000; Harries, Elliot and Higgins 1999; Innvaer et. al. 2002).

From this perspective, different types of structures and processes that emphasise partnership and interaction are required. Proponents suggest the need for 'knowledge pools' or 'policy action teams' drawing in the best research evidence and stakeholder perspectives to support particular policy areas (Davies, Nutley and Smith 2000, x; Nutley 2003, 11). The Scottish Housing Network (Duncan 2000) and the Canadian Employment Research Forum (Picot 2003) are cited as possible models. Brokering organisations that bring researchers and policy-makers together are emphasised (Feldman, Nadash and Gursen 2001) and there is discussion of the use of the internet to promote closer relations (Willensky 2003; Nutley and Webb 2000; Nutley 2003). The Evidence Network in the United Kingdom, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, provides a focus for much of this contemporary thinking and innovation around structures based on networks, partnerships and interactions of many kinds (Nutley 2003a).

2.3.3 How should we structure research-policy relations?

Institutional arrangements matter. The structures that are put in place to promote research-informed policy reflect national political contexts and cultures. However, in developing new structures, there are many choices to be made. Current arrangements vary according to their degree of independence from government, their level of interaction with state institutions, the specificity of their research agenda, the extent of their ideological alignment and their level of commitment to research dissemination. Recently, it has been proposed that the practice of research-policy relations needs to be reconceptualised in terms of networks, partnerships and higher levels of interaction.

These debates raise important questions for researchers and policy makers involved in Australian housing policy and AHURI. The structure of AHURI does not fit neatly into the typology of research organisations presented in Table Two. While it is comprised of university research centres, it also has many of the elements of a network organisation seeking to develop partnerships and sustained interactivity amongst the participants in the policy network. It can be argued that researchers and policy makers involved with AHURI are still working through the practice implications of an organisation based on different assumptions to conventionally structured research organisations.

The central question is: how should we structure research-policy relations in Australian housing as a basis for enhancement of research-informed policy? This requires consideration of the issues raised in this section of the discussion paper. A useful starting point for discussion is the following set of questions:

- 1) What are the features of the Australian political system and culture, including the modes of organisation of social science, that impinge on research-policy relations in the field of Australian housing?
- 2) How effective have conventional structures (those classified in Table Two) been in achieving research-informed policy?
- 3) Is it desirable, as has been suggested, to move towards structures based on policy networks, partnerships and greater levels of interactivity amongst researchers, policy-makers and other participants in policy processes? Why or why not?
- 4) Where does AHURI 'fit' in terms of the conventional structures identified in section 2.3.1 and the ideas about research-policy networks considered in section 2.3.2?
- 5) What types of structures are most likely to enhance research-informed policy in Australian housing? What are the implications for AHURI?

2.4 Linking research and policy – practices and practicalities

Enhancing research-policy linkages concerns aspirations, expectations, theories and structures as already shown in this discussion paper. However, on a day-to-day basis it is about practices and practicalities. For many researchers and policy-makers, including those involved in AHURI, grappling with the practicalities of research-informed policy is a central professional concern. AHURI, as a policy-research organisation, has introduced many specific practices designed to improve research-policy linkages in Australian housing. The purpose of this section of the discussion paper is to examine the literature on research-policy linkages to identify a wide repertoire of potentially effective practices. This can be used as a basis for review of existing practice and consideration of new practice.

There have been several attempts to classify practices to enhance research-informed policy. Some writers have distinguished between activities undertaken by researchers to disseminate research to potential users, and those undertaken in practice and policy contexts to encourage demand for and uptake of research findings (Walter, Nutley and Davies 2003). Others have developed taxonomies of practices with over two hundred types of practices identified (Walter, Nutley and Davies 2003). However, for the purposes of this discussion paper, the many prescriptions for enhancing research-policy relations can be usefully organised around five headings: doing the right research and doing research right; synthesising existing research findings; presenting and disseminating research findings effectively; bringing research into policy and political processes; and developing the capacities of research users. Each of these is discussed below, concluding with an appraisal of priorities and possibilities.

2.4.1 *Doing the right research and doing research right*

The first set of practice issues focuses on the research agenda and the quality of research. Many writers have made the point that unless the right research is being undertaken, efforts to improve dissemination and usage are futile. Research communication methods and channels may be improved, but these will be in vain if the substance of 'messages' is not what is needed or required (Maclennan and More 1999; see also Maclennan and Banister 1995). It is argued that in many policy fields, despite the vast volume of social science research, a robust knowledge base is lacking. 'The current state of research-based knowledge is insufficient to inform many areas of policy. There remain large gaps and ambiguities in the knowledge base, and the research literature is dominated by small, ad hoc studies, often diverse in approach, and of dubious methodological quality' (Nutley 2003, 5). In the context of British housing policy, Doherty argues that there is a 'mismatch between the widening and increasingly complex identification of the nature of housing problems and the type of research being conducted' (Doherty 2000, 177). In Australian housing policy, Winter & Seelig's assessment is that 'despite previous research and analysis, significant knowledge gaps remain' (Winter and Seelig 2001, 2).

A range of difficulties in ensuring that the right research is conducted have been identified. Some writers have criticised the tendency for policy-makers to commission research on specific operational issues rather than on larger issues of national policy (Doherty 2000). Others have emphasised the need for balance between the need of policy makers for short, sharp and timely research and the need for large, longer-term studies (Blunkett 2000). There is also a danger of focusing on topics that readily lend themselves to research but which are relatively peripheral from a policy perspective (Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980). A further issue is to strike an appropriate balance between new primary research and the exploitation of existing research through secondary analysis (Davies and Nutley 2002). It has also been observed that additions to the research literature tend to be research producer-driven rather than led by research users' needs (Nutley, Davies and Walter 2002).

The central issue has been defined as the need to develop a strategic approach to knowledge creation within particular policy fields. The implementation of such an approach is complex, involving issues such as the processes for commissioning of research, the development of research capacity, and the means of identifying research gaps and priorities (Nutley, Davies and Walter 2002). As a possible model, Nutley refers to the example of the National Educational Research Forum established by the Department for Education and Skills in the United Kingdom, which brings together researchers, funders and users of research (Nutley 2003). A fundamental issue is control of the research agenda. There is strong adherence within the research community to the ideal of theory-driven rather than policy-driven research (Priemus 2001). Reconciling this commitment with a strategic approach emphasising the collaborative development of research agendas by stakeholders is a recurring tension (Winter and Seelig 2001).

Closely related issues are the quality of research and research quality criteria. The academic community has quite rigorous processes in place for assessing the quality of published research, particularly with respect to conventional criteria of theory articulation and methodological rigour. However, the increase in commissioned research published in reports and non-academic media raises issues of quality control, and there are questions concerning the capacity of research users to appraise research quality. There is also a debate over the meaning of quality. It has been suggested that 'fitness for purpose' is an important quality criterion, and that quality should be judged in terms of quality in reporting and relevance to policy and practice, as well as methodology (Boaz and Ashby 2003). It is interesting to consider what policy-makers consider constitutes quality research. One study found that what they most valued was research that was relevant to their own work, conformed to their prior knowledge, methodologically sound, oriented to action and challenging for current agency policy (Weiss 1995). All this suggests that policy-relevant research will need to satisfy a wider range of quality criteria than conventional academic research.

2.4.2 Synthesising existing research findings

The importance of paying greater attention to synthesising existing research knowledge is a recurring and central theme in the literature on the practice of research-policy linkages. As discussed earlier in this paper, during the past fifteen years the Cochrane Collaboration has established a repertoire of processes for systematically reviewing the findings of research as a basis for evidence-based practice. More recently, the Campbell Collaboration has been formed to prepare, maintain and make accessible systematic reviews of research on the effects of social and educational interventions (Petrosino et. al. 2001). The evidence-based policy movement places great reliance on systematic review techniques. These involve identifying all studies relevant to a particular policy issue, assessing them in terms of their methodological rigour, and synthesising the findings (Nutley 2003). 'The systematic review, while not universally appropriate, provides a powerful driver for more rigorous review practices' (Young et. al. 2002, 220).

There appears to be widespread agreement that there is considerable value in greater utilisation of existing data and research findings (Solesbury 2001). It is argued that social science has been remiss in its inattention to the cumulation of past research findings, particularly the studies that are reported in the 'fugitive literature' such as theses, government reports, conference papers and the like (Petrosino et. al. 2001). Reviews of previous research, which are commonplace in the social sciences, are often descriptive rather than evaluative, and lack the clear focus and method of a Cochrane or Campbell Review (Young et. al. 2002). Greater attention to building cumulative knowledge around well-defined policy questions appears to offer considerable promise.

However, there is also some disappointment about the pay-off of systematic reviews that have been undertaken in the policy context. It is reported that reviews often

conclude that there are few satisfactory studies that bear on the policy issue in question, that they are too narrow in their definition of methodological rigour, and that they are expensive to conduct (Nutley 2003). It is also questioned whether systematic review techniques are appropriate in the messy world of policy where contextual factors are so important in determining the effectiveness of policies and programs. The need to synthesise, summarise and package prior research findings in ways that are relevant to policy is indisputable. However, it may be that the most appropriate means of doing this requires further consideration.

2.4.3 Communicating and disseminating research findings

The third set of prescriptions for enhancing research-informed policy is directed primarily to the research community, but also has implications for policy practitioners. Researchers, it is suggested, need to develop greater sophistication and expertise in research dissemination. At the most basic level, they need to become more adept at communicating research findings to policy-makers. More generally, they need to develop improved dissemination and diffusion strategies based on an understanding of communication theory and theories concerning the diffusion of knowledge and innovation.

The importance of effective communication of research findings to policy-makers is widely acknowledged. 'How to structure a report, write in plain English, make a five minute presentation; these are skills which are now seen to be as important as how to design a questionnaire, conduct an interview or analyse data' (Solesbury 2001, 5). Researchers are not short of advice on how to improve their communication. They are encouraged to communicate throughout the research study, to pay close attention to effective presentation, to use verbal as well as written communication, to keep reports brief and concise, to provide accessible summaries of research, to use the language of policy-makers, to be explicit about policy and practice implications, to be proactive in communicating research findings, to pay attention to timeliness, and so on (e.g. Majchrzak 1984; Feldman, Nadash and Gursen 2001; Nutley 2003). Despite these injunctions, poor communication practice is still commonplace. This may reflect the relatively low value placed on research dissemination in the academic community, the difficulties inherent in the task of translating research findings to a range of audiences, or simply lack of resources of time or money (Nutley 2003a).

However, developing better communication techniques is only part of the issue. More recently, focus has shifted to a consideration of the implications of the large academic and professional literature on the communication of knowledge designed to bring about innovation. This literature stresses that research utilisation involves a number of processes, ranging from awareness of research findings, understanding of their implications, changes in beliefs and attitudes, and consequent changes in decisions and behaviour (Nutley 2003a). These complexities of the process of research utilisation need to be understood, and strategies to maximise research impact designed accordingly.

The literature on knowledge diffusion identifies a range of social processes involved in the adoption of a new set of ideas or practices. Diffusion is understood as a multi-faceted process involving not only dissemination of information, but also processes of education, social influence, communication, incentives, reinforcement and facilitation (Walter, Nutley and Davies 2003). This literature is suggestive of multiple strategies and approaches designed to maximise research utilisation. It suggests the importance of dissemination strategies explicitly targeted to intended users, and the need for educational strategies designed to enhance understanding of research findings. It emphasises the importance of social influence and the development of shared understandings through social interaction of researchers and policy-makers. It indicates the need to consider the roles of incentives and reinforcement in promoting research utilisation, and the importance of processes to facilitate research-informed policy. Shifting the emphasis from communication to dissemination and diffusion of

research findings represents a major development in the theory and practice of research utilisation. It has been referred to as a move from passive dissemination towards more active, targeted, holistic, proactive, multifaceted change strategies (Davies and Nutley 2002).

Many types of specific practices based on this orientation to research utilisation have been identified and enumerated (Walter, Nutley and Davies 2003; see also Kirst 2000; Lomas 2000). These include a great diversity of techniques and processes: use of various forms of written materials, oral presentations, videos, and online formats; use of mass media; research access strategies; development of guidelines; staff development and training; interactive education, including workshops; expert support; feedback processes; use of research incentives; use of the internet; quality improvement initiatives; and so forth. It is argued that the research and policy communities should develop strategies for research utilisation that draw on this wide repertoire of identified practices, that are grounded in the theory of knowledge diffusion, and that are tailored to specific situations and contexts.

An indicative example is the use of 'family impact seminars' by researchers at the University of Wisconsin to communicate up-to-date, solution oriented research findings on family policy to state-level policy-makers (Bogenschneider et. al. 2000). This process involved meticulously planned two-hour seminars for senior policy-makers focused on particular policy issues. The seminar process also comprised an audio tape, a background briefing report summarising state-of-the art research in an easy to understand format, and follow-up activities. Careful attention was paid to such details as developing diverse delivery mechanisms, providing a non-political forum for discussion, identifying timely topics, careful speaker selection, drawing explicit policy implications, and targeting the unique information needs, work culture and writing preferences of policy makers. The family impact seminar process was based on explicit consideration of theories regarding the utilisation of social science research, and involved carefully designed evaluation processes. The report on the project concluded that success in connecting research and policy-making depends on 'theory-driven planning, strategic legitimisation, and precise execution' (Bogenschneider et. al. 2000, 336-337). Effective diffusion of research to policy-makers may require this level of theoretical consideration, careful planning and attention to detail.

2.4.4 Bringing research into policy and political processes

A further set of prescriptions emphasises the need for researchers to understand the political nature of research utilisation, and to develop their roles and capacities as participants in policy processes. These prescriptions are based on the evidence suggesting that research findings typically find their way onto the political agenda through indirect channels. Policy makers, it is argued, often hear about research findings indirectly via conferences, briefings, conversations, the media, and contacts with 'issue networks' (Weiss 1987; Weiss 1995; Bulmer 1987; Orosz 1994). Of particular importance are interests groups who use research findings to make their case for policy change to decision-makers. The mass media is also important as policy makers tend to be attuned to the media as a surrogate for public opinion (Weiss 1995). It follows that researchers and research organisations need to develop linkages with a wide range of political actors and to place emphasis on dissemination of findings to a wide range of policy participants. 'Research evidence does not always, or even often, enter the policy process as part of a rational consideration of policy options. Instead research tends to become known and discussed within policy networks through a process of advocacy' (Nutley 2003, 2).

In considering the roles of researchers in policy processes it has been suggested that there are three models (Thomas 1987). The 'limestone' model is essentially passive requiring nothing more of the researcher than to conduct the research and present findings in a readable way. It is hoped that the findings will gradually seep into the consciousness of the public and decision-makers. The 'gadfly' model involves

sporadic, but enthusiastic participation in policy processes, based on a strong commitment to policy and social change. The 'insider' model involves close, continuous engagement with policy processes, and identification with the goals and needs of decision-makers. Researchers need to consider which model or combination of models represents their stance with respect to policy processes. Whatever approach is adopted, there is a need to acknowledge the complexity of the policy process: 'It often takes time and patience and multiple messages conveyed through multiple channels before social science has an impact' (Weiss 1986, 281).

2.4.5 Developing the capacities of research users

Strategies to enhance research-policy linkages need to focus on the users as well as the producers of research. 'Pushing information ... out is insufficient and often ineffective: we also need to develop strategies that encourage a 'pull' for information from potential end users' (Nutley Davies and Walter 2002, 6). The task is to improve the capacity of policy-makers and policy practitioners to more effectively utilise research. Two broad types of strategies can be distinguished: those focused on the individual policy practitioner and those focused at the organisational level.

At the level of the individual policy practitioner, strategies that have been proposed include better tools to assist in research location (Sorian and Baugh 2002), in-service training programs in research management and utilisation, secondments to research organisations, and generally the development of closer, ongoing linkages with researchers (Stone, Maxwell and Keating 2001). It has been suggested that there is a need to develop reflective policy practitioners: 'when evidence is contested and highly context dependent, improving the capacity of practitioners to access, assess and incorporate evidence in a dynamic and flexible manner may have potential' (Davies and Nutley 2002, 11). It needs to be borne in mind that policy-makers and policy practitioners are a diverse group comprising ministers, politicians, staffers, senior and middle-ranking officials and front-line officials. Strategies to enhance the capacity of individuals to use research will vary depending on which of these groups is being targeted.

Strategies to enhance the capacity of organisations to utilise research can focus on organisational culture, organisational structures, or both. There is evidence that many government departments are not well equipped to utilise research evidence (Percy-Smith 2002; Van Vliet 2002). Some may lack a 'climate of rationality' (Nutley 2003, 10) and a culture of research use (Marston and Watts 2003). There is a need for organisations to commit to research utilisation in policy, both symbolically by emphasising this in formal goal statements and tangibly through the establishment of units with responsibility for promoting research utilisation. The role of policy and research units within government departments is vital. These units can play key roles in linking departments to the research community, commissioning high quality research, and generally promoting a culture that is supportive of research within the organisation. Taking the process one step further, departments could mandate the use of research by practices such as requiring the publication of the research and evidence base for policy decisions, and requiring departmental spending bids to provide a supporting evidence base (Nutley, Davies and Walter 2002). An important issue is access to research and policy studies undertaken or commissioned by government departments. It can be argued that open access to research findings is conducive to an organisational culture that values research-informed policy.

2.4.6 What practices should we develop to enhance research-policy relations?

There is no shortage of prescriptions for enhancement of research-informed policy. Much of the current literature is a product of the current preoccupation with evidence-based policy, particularly in the United Kingdom. Underlying the many specific proposals to enhance the practice of research-informed policy is the theme that this is a matter to be approached in a far more systematic and careful manner than has

hitherto been the case. The contemporary literature proposes that practice be based on social science theory and knowledge concerning communication, diffusion of knowledge and policy processes. It argues that dissemination and utilisation of research be given a far higher priority by both researchers and policy-makers. It suggests the need for a comprehensive repertoire of practices. This is a demanding agenda. It remains to be seen to what extent and in what ways researchers and policy makers in particular policy fields, such as Australian housing, will respond to the challenge. For AHURI, the burgeoning literature on the practice of research-informed policy presents many options and possibilities. The tasks are to make strategic selections of those practices that best match AHURI's goals, structure and context, to promote 'best practice' in research-informed policy, and to monitor and evaluate performance.

The central question is: what repertoire of practices is best suited to enhancing research-informed policy in Australian housing? This requires consideration of the options and issues raised in this section of the discussion paper. Useful questions for discussion arising from the analysis presented in this section are:

- 1) What practices and processes will best ensure that housing research in Australia is well matched with the needs and requirements of policy makers? Specifically, how can enough research, on the 'right' topics, of high quality, be promoted?
- 2) What are the best mechanisms and processes to synthesise existing research findings, and build cumulative knowledge around defined policy questions in Australian housing?
- 3) What processes should be developed to enhance communication and dissemination of research findings to policy-makers in Australian housing?
- 4) How can Australian housing researchers develop their roles and capacities as participants in policy processes?
- 5) How can the capacity of Australian housing policy-makers to utilise research findings be enhanced?
- 6) How can AHURI most effectively promote 'best-practice' in research-informed policy in Australian housing?

3 ENHANCING RESEARCH-POLICY LINKAGES

The purpose of this discussion paper is to provide a foundation for a process of reflection by researchers and policy practitioners on current research-policy linkages in Australian housing. This process is designed to lead to the generation of options to enhance research-informed policy. Section Two reviewed the literature on research-policy relations, identifying and distinguishing four key themes: aspirations and expectations, theories and models, structures and processes, and practices and practicalities. In section three this framework is used to structure a discussion of how to enhance research-policy linkages in Australian housing. The focus in section 3.1 is on AHURI which was established in 2000 with the explicit purpose of enhancing these linkages. Hence, this section begins by describing and analysing the current AHURI arrangements, using the framework developed in section two. This is followed by an outline in section 3.2 of the planned process for collective reflection on these arrangements in the remainder of this project. The section concludes by looking ahead to possible directions that could be taken to develop and implement different approaches to the challenge of ensuring that Australian housing policy is underpinned and informed by high quality social science research.

3.1 AHURI: linking research and policy in Australian housing

The linkages between research and policy in Australian housing are complex, multi-faceted, and largely undocumented. The main producers of research are located in Australian universities, although much information and knowledge is also generated by the other types of research organisations identified in section 2.3.1. The main users of research are the 'policy-makers' located in Commonwealth, State, Territory and local governments. The term 'policy-makers' is used broadly to refer to Ministers, politicians, staffers, senior policy advisors in government departments and agencies, program managers and front-line officials. Researchers and policy-makers are linked and have contact through many formal and informal processes, at national, state and local levels. Linkages are both direct and indirect, and involve other policy actors including journalists, housing industry bodies and pressure groups.

Initiatives to enhance linkages between housing researchers and policy-makers can take place in many ways and at many levels. However, the main national initiative to enhance these relations and improve the quality of research-informed policy is AHURI. For this reason, this section of the discussion paper focuses on AHURI, while acknowledging the wider set of relations within which AHURI is embedded. Following the framework developed in section 2, AHURI is analysed under three headings: aspirations, expectations and models; structures and processes; practices and practicalities.

3.1.1 Aspirations, expectations and models

AHURI was established in its current form in 2000 as an organisation that explicitly aims to link research and policy in the area of Australian housing. AHURI's mission, stated in the introduction to this paper, concerns the creation and dissemination of knowledge to improve housing and related urban outcomes throughout Australia. More specifically, AHURI espouses two broad aims. The first is 'to link quality research and the development of ideas with policy development, program evaluation and project development in the public and private sectors'. The second is 'to be a leader in its field assisting policy makers at all levels in identifying trends, establishing possible solutions and drawing together the best information and understanding within Australia whilst drawing upon international experience'.

The establishment of AHURI as an organisation with an explicit goal of enhancing research-informed policy needs to be understood in its historical context (this brief account is based on Winter and Seelig 2001). Until recently, housing research was

relatively under-developed in Australia compared with some other countries, such as the United Kingdom. Prior to the 1990s, there were few well established centres for housing research. While a significant corpus of academic writing on housing policy had developed since the 1970s, mainly centred on the work of a small number of key academics, Australian housing studies as a whole struggled to achieve critical mass. Housing was not a central concern of any of the mainstream social science disciplines, or of most of the major applied social science research centres. The main strength was in applied empirical work, and housing research played a significant role in the development of national housing policy during periods of significant policy development in the early-1970s and the early-1990s.

Public funding of housing research prior to 2001 took a number of forms. In addition to funding through the Australian Research Council and the universities, there were four main sources. Firstly, some state housing departments established in-house policy and research units that both undertook research and commissioned external research projects (Winter and Seelig, 2001). Secondly, major public inquiries into housing, such as the National Housing Strategy in 1991-1992, commissioned research and generated research activity. Thirdly, the Australian Housing Research Fund provided modest levels of funding for a number of applied research projects during the 1990s. Funding was provided by Commonwealth and State housing authorities who also set research priorities. Many projects had a strong operational focus. Research was undertaken by both university and consultant researchers. The Fund was formally wound up in 1992.

The fourth source of public funding was 'AHURI Mark One', the forerunner to the current AHURI organisation. This first version of AHURI was established in 1993 as an outcome of the National Housing Strategy. It comprised a consortium of four research organisations: Monash University, RMIT University, the CSIRO Division of Building, Construction and Engineering and Queensland University of Technology (later The University of Queensland). Funding for research was provided by Commonwealth, State and Territory housing authorities and the participating research organisations. The consortium was formally managed by the member universities, with an advisory board with government, industry and academic representation. AHURI Mark One developed a research agenda based on a process of national consultations, and two main research programs, one focused on housing and the other on urban and regional development. Housing authorities collectively contributed some \$550,000 annually to AHURI Mark One, and the participating research organisations a further \$250,000, plus in-kind support. A large body of research was produced during the six years of operation of AHURI Mark One. However, these arrangements were formally reviewed by the Commonwealth in 1999, and it was concluded that a different structure was needed involving closer links between research and policy, and a significant increase in funding levels. The outcome of the review was the establishment of the re-structured and re-conceptualised AHURI that commenced operations in 2000.

The establishment of the new AHURI represented a major re-commitment to housing research by Commonwealth and State housing authorities and the participating universities. With an annual research budget of over three million dollars, it is claimed that AHURI is the largest collaborative research venture in the social sciences in Australia (Winter and Seelig 2001). However, this level of funding did not come unencumbered. The new AHURI was based on an unambiguous commitment to policy-relevant research, as is apparent from its stated mission and objectives, outlined above, and its structures and practices, discussed below. The prospectus issued by AHURI at its inception indicated that the new organisation would 'focus its efforts upon national *policy relevant* research (emphasis in original) and produce 'outputs [which] will aim to be solution-oriented'. This clear stance, and its enactment in a range of structures (see section 3.1.2) and practices (3.1.2), is the defining feature of AHURI as a research organisation. However, this statement of intent is not uncontested. There is a significant body of opinion, particularly within the research community, that housing researchers and housing theory should drive the housing policy agenda, if research is

to maintain a critical edge (Kemeny 1992). On the other hand, the impetus from the public sector organisations that fund and provide input to the management of AHURI is for the research agenda to be driven closely by the policy needs of governments.

AHURI itself seeks to steer what it perceives as a middle course. In the words of the former Research Director and now Executive Director, 'the dichotomy expressed between academic and policy control of the research agenda is ... unhelpful. The housing studies agenda should be shaped through dialogue between researchers, the researched, policy makers, and the community and industry sectors (Winter and Seelig 2001, 4-5). AHURI's stance is that it attempts to 'balance' the competing interests of researchers and the policy community: 'On the one hand it must ensure that research ... fits into the policy agendas of the day, and ... contributes to new policy directions. On the other hand it must encourage the development of housing research expertise ... and satisfy the demand for more theoretical and abstract research' (Winter and Seelig 2001, 14-15).

These debates within AHURI reflect the central issues in the wider literature on aspirations, expectations and theories in the field of research-policy relations (sections 2.1 and 2.2). It can be argued that AHURI reflects an emerging pragmatic impulse in Australian politics and that its creation reflects the influence of ideas drawn from both managerialism and 'network' governance. While AHURI is not located explicitly in the evidence-based practice movement, its central tenets are highly compatible with this movement, and the vocabulary of 'evidence' is increasingly prominent. Those associated with AHURI include representatives of the champions, sceptics and reformers of research-informed policy, as discussed in section 2.1.2 and the key issues in the ongoing debate amongst these groupings are highly relevant to AHURI. It can be suggested that underlying the contested expectations of AHURI are viewpoints that approximate the engineering, engagement and enlightenment models of research-policy linkages (section 2.2). Reflection on these themes from the literature may result in a clearer understanding of the choices facing AHURI, and clarify aspirations and expectations.

3.1.2 Structures and processes

The structure of AHURI is unique in Australian social science, and does not fit readily into any of the categories of conventional research organisations enumerated in section 2.3.1. The structure seeks to accommodate the interests of the housing authorities for policy-relevant research and the interests of the university-based researchers for academic autonomy in the conduct of research. This is achieved through a complex organisational structure that allows representation of the interests of stakeholders in key organisational processes.

The overall organisation is an unincorporated joint venture known as the 'Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute'. The joint venture partners are the Commonwealth, State and Territory Housing authorities that provide funding for AHURI research (the 'payers') and the participating universities. Within this umbrella structure, AHURI Limited is a management company responsible for commissioning and contracting research from the participating universities, and providing management and research leadership to AHURI. AHURI Limited enters into funding agreements with the 'payers' and into participants agreements with the universities. The universities agree to establish AHURI research centres, either solely or jointly with other universities, and these research centres become part of the overall research institute. The two main stakeholder groups are represented on the Board of AHURI Limited and on key bodies such as the research panel which makes recommendations on research funding.

At one level, this structure can be viewed simply as a stakeholder organisation seeking to formalise and operationalise a joint venture arrangement involving multiple and diverse organisations. However, viewed in the light of the discussion of emerging organisational forms in section 2.3.2, AHURI can also be considered a prototype of an

emerging organisational form that can be dubbed a 'network organisation'. From this perspective, AHURI can be viewed as a formal structure to facilitate a diversity of interactions and partnership activities amongst participants who conventionally operate in the distinct domains of social science research and public policy. As a network organisation, AHURI provides an organisational space for the sustained interactivity and open partnership between researchers and policy-makers that many have argued are vital for the enhancement of research-informed policy. This analysis suggests that those involved in planning and enacting the future of AHURI have a clear choice. AHURI can be developed as a conventional joint venture arrangement in which the finely balanced structures provide a basis for carefully negotiated and brokered activities that 'suffice' the requirements and expectations of all parties. Or it can be developed as a network organisation that facilitates informal as well as formal interactions amongst researchers and policy-makers, and creative partnerships around the creation and generation of knowledge. Both choices represent significant departures from the structures of conventional research organisations. However, the differences between a 'finely balanced stakeholder' structure and a 'network organisation' are considerable.

It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for the emergence of such a distinctive structure as AHURI in the context of Australian housing policy. As indicated in section 2.3, other public sector initiatives in Australia to provide a research foundation for public policy have taken more conventional forms. In part, AHURI's distinctive structure may reflect the long tradition of cooperative federalism in Australian housing embodied in the successive Commonwealth-State Housing Agreements that have been enacted since the end of World War Two. This broader set of arrangements for Commonwealth and State negotiation and cooperation in housing provides a context for collaboration in the funding and dissemination of research. AHURI's structure can also be viewed as a response to a specific set of circumstances requiring the balancing of a complex set of institutional relations. These included the need to balance academic autonomy and policy relevance, the perceived need to locate a centre for housing policy research in each State and Territory, and the need to take account of the interests of a growing number of universities with expertise in housing and urban studies. Whatever the factors underlying its establishment, AHURI's structures and processes are highly conducive to innovation and experimentation in research-policy relations, as evidenced by the practices documented below.

3.1.3 Practices and practicalities

A central theme in the literature on practices to enhance research-policy linkages, as reported in section 2.4, is the need for practices that are grounded in theory, carefully planned and implemented, and tailored to specific situations and contexts. The literature also emphasises the need for a multiplicity of practices to reflect the complexities of the knowledge utilisation process. Since its inception in 2000, AHURI has adopted a wide repertoire of 'linkage' practices spanning the five practice categories identified in section 2.4. These are listed below.

Doing the right research and doing research right

- *A negotiated, formal research agenda.* AHURI develops a research agenda on an annual basis that provides direction for its research activities, and in particular for the annual competitive funding round. The research agenda is developed by a research panel after extensive consultation with senior policy makers, academics from inside and outside AHURI, the community and industry sectors. It identifies both broad areas for research and specific project requirements.
- *Research application processes.* Applications for research grants in the annual competitive funding round must address the criteria of policy relevance and conformity with the research agenda. This ensures that funded research addresses topics that are on the policy agenda.

- *Research appraisal processes.* Decisions regarding research funding are made by the Board on the recommendation of the research panel, a body that has representation from the housing authorities as well as academics. Research proposals are assessed by housing authorities prior to their consideration by the research panel.
- *Collaborative research ventures.* A small number of large research projects involving several centres and focused on areas of national significance are funded. The choice of these areas follows extensive consultation with the policy community and research centres.
- *Tendering for targeted research.* From time to time, research projects deemed to be of high priority are put out to tender to research centres.
- *User groups.* All funded research projects have a project reference group, known as a 'user group', to provide advice through the course of the project, including advice on policy relevance. User groups mainly comprise representatives from Commonwealth, State and Territory housing departments and may also include representatives from the industry and community sectors.
- *Research capacity building.* A number of initiatives have been designed to support research capacity building in the research centres, to facilitate the development of a 'critical mass' of housing researchers into the future. Research project applications are required to address the criterion of capacity building. Funding is available for top-up scholarships for PhD and MPhil students, and a program of mentoring and support for these students is provided. The structure of AHURI research centres is such that any person within a participating university can work on AHURI projects. This is designed to attract researchers from a range of disciplines into housing studies.

Synthesising existing research findings

- *Systematic reviews.* AHURI funded a systematic review of housing assistance and non-shelter outcomes as part of the development of the first collaborative research venture.
- *Research summaries.* A number of AHURI research projects have focused on describing and analyzing current research, although not using rigorous systematic review methodologies. Many research projects include summaries of existing research.

Communicating and disseminating research findings

- *Engagement with policy makers.* A high priority is given to formal and informal interaction with the policy community at national level and at the level of research centres. This includes regular meetings with senior policy makers from the Commonwealth, States and Territories to discuss housing research.
- *Work-in-progress seminars.* An extensive series of work-in-progress seminars is held in all States and Territories designed to provide opportunities for dialogue between AHURI researchers and members of the housing policy community while AHURI research is in progress.
- *Dissemination of reports and findings.* AHURI research projects involve an extensive process of reporting and dissemination of findings. Each project requires a Discussion paper and a Final Report to be published and made available on the AHURI web-site. Each project concludes with a Research and Policy Bulletin that summarises the research findings in a succinct and accessible format.
- *National housing conference.* AHURI co-sponsors a regular national housing conference that brings together the research and policy communities.

- *Local engagement through research centres.* Research centres develop their own linkages with State and Territory housing authorities and local housing policy communities. These take many forms including regular meetings, participation in local organisations and centre advisory committees.

Bringing research into policy and political processes

- *Media comment and contact.* AHURI Limited and the research centres from time to time make commentary on housing policy issues, and all efforts are made to ensure that AHURI research findings are reported in the media.
- *Linkage with sector and industry organisations.* Both nationally and through the research centres, AHURI has ongoing contact with many sector and industry organisations.
- Developing the capacities of research users
- *Staff secondments.* AHURI has provided opportunities for policy practitioners from housing authorities to undertake short secondments with research centres.
- *Engagement in research processes.* As indicated above, research users from the housing departments are involved in user groups that provide input into AHURI research projects.

This listing of practices indicates that AHURI has given a high priority to the development of innovative practices to enhance research-informed policy. A number of questions can be raised. Firstly, there is the question of whether the literature reviewed in section 2.4 suggests other practices that should be added to the repertoire. There is also the issue of balance. The list indicates that the highest priority has been given to ensuring that the 'right research' is being conducted and to dissemination of research findings. Synthesising research findings, bringing research into policy and political processes, and developing the capacities of research users have received less attention. The evaluation of existing practices is a further issue. For example, are current dissemination processes working effectively? The role of research centres is a further issue. Many of the practices listed have been initiated by AHURI Limited. What range of practices to promote research-informed policy should be developed at the level of the research centre? Finally, it should be stressed that organisational practices reflect organisational goals, culture and resources. The beliefs, values, objectives and capacities of all participants in AHURI will shape the ways that the organisation seeks to make a reality of research-informed policy.

3.2 Analysis, reflection and action

As indicated in the introduction, this discussion paper lays the foundation for a three phase process to guide AHURI in its efforts to promote continuous improvement of the research-policy interface in Australian housing. The phases are: analysing the issues; reflecting on the issues and developing options; and implementing preferred options. The methods and approaches to be followed in each of these stages are described in this section.

3.2.1 Analysing the issues

This discussion paper provides the basis for a critical reflection on research-policy relations in Australian housing, and on AHURI's role in enhancing these relations. The paper reviews the large body of literature on research-policy relations, with an emphasis on identifying central themes and issues. Particular attention is paid to the contemporary literature coming out of the evidence-based policy movement, which seems likely to become increasingly influential. Throughout the discussion paper, and then specifically in section 3.1, this literature has been linked to Australian housing policy and the role of AHURI.

The discussion paper proposes that reflection on research-policy linkages can be usefully structured around four sets of issues: aspirations and expectations; theories and models; structures and processes; and practices and practicalities. Section two identifies key themes and issues organised around these four headings, and section 3.1 describes and analyses AHURI using this framework. The discussion ranges from fundamental theoretical questions about the nature of research-policy linkages to specific issues of practice and practicality. Appendix one brings together the four key questions that arise from this analysis, and the list of sub-questions that elaborate the key questions. This provides a set of discussion issues that are grounded in the academic and practice literature and posed in a form that is directly focused on Australian housing and the role of AHURI. It is not necessarily intended that specific answers be found to each of the questions listed in appendix one. Rather, the questions provide a catalyst and framework for semi-structured discussions by researchers and policy-makers on how to continue to work together towards the goal of research-informed policy.

3.2.2 Reflecting on the issues and developing options

The process of reflecting on the issues and developing options involves three main elements. The first is the convening of workshops with members of the housing policy community to consider the issues addressed in the discussion paper. Two workshops will be convened, one with senior housing researchers and the other with senior policy-makers. The purpose of these workshops is to ascertain the expectations, aspirations, experiences, understandings, perceptions and opinions of housing researchers and policy practitioners concerning the issues raised in the discussion paper.

Each of the two workshops involves five processes: selection of participants, pre-workshop preparation, the convening of the workshop itself, the recording of proceedings, and the analysis of the findings of the workshops. Potential participants will be drawn from senior researchers and policy-makers who are directly involved with AHURI or with the development of research-informed policy in Australian housing. A list of potential participants will be developed after consultation with research centre directors, housing authorities, AHURI Limited and the project user group. A small number of participants familiar with issues of research-informed policy from outside the field of Australian housing may be invited to participate to provide an 'outsider' perspective. Approximately twenty invitations to participate will be issued to each group with the aim of achieving approximately fifteen participants in each workshop.

Participants will be asked to read the discussion paper prior to their involvement in the workshop, paying particular attention to the four key discussion questions in appendix one. They will also be provided with a document outlining the workshop agenda and processes. It will be made clear to participants that they are involved primarily as individuals rather than as representatives of organisations. The workshops themselves will be convened in a location that is facilitative of group discussion and interaction. It is envisaged that they will take place over a period of approximately five hours, comprising two two-hour sessions and a break. The workshop agenda will comprise an introduction, brief overview of the project and discussion paper, a series of semi-structured discussions focused around the four key questions in appendix one, a period of open discussion and, finally, consideration of the content of the options paper and the next steps. A central focus of the workshops will be the development of 'options' designed to enhance research-policy relations. The workshops will play a key role in moving from the analytical focus of the discussion paper to the action focus of the options paper.

The workshop will be facilitated by a member of the project team, and other team members will co-facilitate and take responsibility for recording. The data will be analysed around key themes and content areas, linked to the major themes in the discussion paper. The proceedings will be audio-recorded and one team member will take written notes. A systematic process of data recording based on participant-

observation techniques will be developed, built around the themes articulated in this proposal. Essentially this will involve the prior identification of key themes and issues in the form of an observation recording instrument, and the development of a series of observation and recording protocols. A detailed record of the workshop will be produced immediately following the workshop. Individuals will not be identified in the document summarising the workshop. The written records of the two workshops will be used as data to be used in the development of the options paper.

The second element of this stage is a process of observation or participant-observation of the policy-research interface in current AHURI processes. The researchers are themselves participants in AHURI, but do not hold central decision-making roles. The researchers will attend and observe a number of key AHURI and AHURI-related events involving the policy-research interface as currently practiced and constructed. The purpose of this process of systematic observation is to develop a sound understanding and appreciation of current policy and practice, both to inform and to provide a context for the overall project. Events and meetings that may be attended and observed include: the meeting of AHURI research centre directors; the policy research working group; AHURI work-in-progress seminars; the AHURI research agenda review meetings and AHURI Board meetings. A detailed schedule of events to be attended and observed will be developed in conjunction with the AHURI Research Director.

The third and final element is the writing of an 'options paper' proposing a number of strategies to enhance research-informed policy in Australian housing, with particular reference to the role of AHURI. The options paper will draw on the discussion paper, the two workshops, the observation processes and the research team's own analysis of issues and possibilities. The options paper will be titled and presented in a manner that is intended to stimulate informed debate and action to improve and enhance the policy and research interface, and AHURI's role in linking research and policy. The options paper will be a public document, accessible on the AHURI website.

3.2.3 Implementing preferred options

The form of the final phase of the project is at this juncture open-ended, and will emerge out of discussion of the proposals made in the options paper. The options paper may propose new or revised practices and structures that will need consideration by AHURI Limited, its funders and research centres. It may suggest the need for groups of researchers and policy practitioners in particular geographic locations or policy sub-fields to work together to develop context-specific approaches to the research-policy interface. Another set of possibilities is the development of ongoing research to underpin the development of effective research-based policy. This might involve documentation of successful examples of research-informed housing policy in Australia or action research projects to trial innovative approaches. In summary, it is intended that the project will provide an impetus for strengthening of the processes of continuous improvement of the research-policy interface in Australian housing policy and AHURI.

4 CONCLUSION

The development of research-informed policy is a vital objective for housing researchers and housing policy-makers alike. Access to good quality housing is fundamental to social well-being. It is crucial that Australian housing policies and programs are informed by the best evidence available concerning housing need, the factors impacting on housing supply and demand, and the effectiveness of public policies and programs designed to improve housing conditions and circumstances. Bringing knowledge and evidence based on sound research to bear on policy is a complex process, but one that is highly rewarding. As this discussion paper has demonstrated, there are no easy solutions. But there are many exciting, innovative ideas and practices developing worldwide that can be developed and trialled in the field of Australian housing policy.

The international literature that has emerged during the past thirty years on the subject of research-policy relations is a rich source of ideas about how to achieve research-informed policy. The evidence-based policy movement has brought these issues to the forefront of policy agendas in many fields, and has provided fresh impetus to the academic and practice literature. Those who are seriously attempting to bring research into policy must base their practice on the knowledge and evidence that has accumulated over the past three decades. This discussion paper provides an overview of this literature. It identifies four recurring and central topics: aspirations and expectations, theories and models, structures and processes, and practices and practicalities. This simple, fourfold classification provides not only a map of the literature, but also a framework for discussion and action. It suggests that we need to continuously clarify our aspirations and expectations, understand the nature of research-policy relations, seek to develop structures and processes that reflect our understandings and goals, and engage in a process of continuous improvement of our practices that seek to link research and policy in tangible and practical ways.

As an organisation, AHURI is strongly committed to achieving better housing outcomes for Australians through research-informed policy. AHURI's structures and processes are designed to bring researchers and policy-makers together in an effective partnership. Since its inception in 2000, AHURI has instituted a suite of practices designed to enhance the production and dissemination of policy relevant research, and its utilisation by housing policy-makers. AHURI's structures, processes and practices are unique in Australian social science and public policy, and AHURI is well positioned to be a world-leader in the practice of research-informed policy.

This project and discussion paper aim to provide further impetus to AHURI's goal of bringing high quality social research to bear on Australian housing policy. The discussion paper provides a foundation for a process of analysis, reflection and action involving both housing researchers and policy-makers. It is envisaged that this will build on the relationships and linkages that have already been fostered through AHURI, and contribute to the development of a 'policy network' that will bring researchers and policy-makers together to enhance housing outcomes for all Australians.

APPENDIX ONE: ENHANCING RESEARCH-POLICY LINKAGES IN AUSTRALIAN HOUSING: DISCUSSION ISSUES

- 1) **What are our aspirations and expectations concerning relations between research and policy in the context of Australian housing?**
 - a) What are the main drivers of the idea of research-informed policy in Australian housing policy in the early-twenty first century? Is this issue prominent on the policy agenda? Why or why not?
 - b) What is the basis of the interest by Australian housing policy-makers in research-informed policy at the present time? How strong is this interest? Do policy makers in the various jurisdictions have similar or different interests in this issue?
 - c) What is the basis of the interest by Australian housing researchers in research-informed policy at the present time? How strong is this interest? Do researchers in different universities and research organisations have similar or different interests in this issue?
 - d) Is the 'evidence-based policy' movement likely to have a major impact on Australian housing policy and research, and if so, what are the likely implications?
 - e) To what extent is Australian politics characterised by an instrumental and pragmatic impulse comparable to Britain under the Blair Labour Government? What are the implications for Australian housing research and policy?
 - f) Are there characteristics of Australian social science, and particularly housing research, that impact on the ways that research and policy relate in this country (history, culture, size, capacity, organisation)?
 - g) Are there characteristics of the governance of housing in Australia that impact on the ways that research and policy relate in this country (history, culture, size, capacity, organisation)?
 - h) In the light of what is known about the characteristics of public policy processes, what are realistic expectations concerning the capacity of research to inform Australian housing policy?
 - i) In the light of what is known about Australian social science research, particularly research on housing, what are realistic expectations concerning the capacity of research to inform policy?
 - j) Is there a cultural divide between housing researchers and housing policy-makers in Australia? What are the implications for enhancing linkages between researchers and policy-makers?
 - k) How influential has housing research been in Australian housing policy? What does this signal concerning the future of research-informed policy?
 - l) Would closer linkages between researchers and policy-makers in Australian housing undermine the independence and autonomy of researchers or not?
 - m) Would a greater focus on research-informed policy make governments less responsive to public opinion or would it enhance democratic processes by providing a sound basis for public debate?
 - n) In the context of these questions, how should AHURI frame its aspirations to promote research-informed policy in Australian housing? What expectations should the research and policy communities have of AHURI?

2) How should we conceptualise research-policy relations in Australian housing as a basis for the enhancement of these relations?

- a) What does it mean to 'link' research and policy in Australian housing?
- b) Which of the three models – engineering, engagement and enlightenment – provides the most satisfactory understanding of how research and policy are linked in Australian housing? Why or why not?
- c) Which of the three models – engineering, engagement and enlightenment – provides the most satisfactory understanding of how research and policy could and should be linked in Australian housing? Why or why not?
- d) Which models represent prevailing views and expectations concerning research-policy linkages in Australian housing? Do researchers and policy makers have similar or different models of research-policy linkages?
- e) What overall conceptualisation of research-policy relations should guide the future of efforts to enhance research-policy relations in Australia, including the future of AHURI? Is there a preferred model?

3) How should we structure research-policy relations in Australian housing as a basis for enhancement of research-informed policy?

- a) What are the features of the Australian political system and culture, including the modes of organisation of social science, that impinge on research-policy relations in the field of Australian housing?
- b) How effective have conventional structures (those classified in Table Two) been in achieving research-informed policy?
- c) Is it desirable, as has been suggested, to move towards structures based on policy networks, partnerships and greater levels of interactivity amongst researchers, policy-makers and other participants in policy processes? Why or why not?
- d) Where does AHURI 'fit' in terms of the conventional structures identified in section 2.3.1 and the ideas about research-policy networks considered in section 2.3.2?
- e) What types of structures are most likely to enhance research-informed policy in Australian housing? What are the implications for AHURI?

4) What repertoire of practices is best suited to enhancing research-informed policy in Australian housing?

- a) What practices and processes will best ensure that housing research in Australia is well matched with the needs and requirements of policy makers? Specifically, how can enough research, on the 'right' topics, of high quality, be promoted?
- b) What are the best mechanisms and processes to synthesise existing research findings, and build cumulative knowledge around defined policy questions in Australian housing?
- c) What processes should be developed to enhance communication and dissemination of research findings to policy-makers in Australian housing?
- d) How can Australian housing researchers develop their roles and capacities as participants in policy processes?
- e) How can the capacity of Australian housing policy-makers to utilise research findings be enhanced?
- f) How can AHURI most effectively promote 'best-practice' in research-informed policy in Australian housing?

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