

# **Australian Catholic University**

## **Feedback to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment**

### ***National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund: Consultation Paper***

**October 2020**

# Feedback to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment consultation on the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund

Australian Catholic University (ACU) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment regarding its consultation paper on the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF). ACU provides the following feedback in response to the questions raised in the Consultation Paper.

## Principles

### **1. Do the principles provide clear guidance on what is expected of an indicator?**

Yes. The principles are clear at the broad level and are in line with what would be expected for such a program of funding.

## Tiered indicators

### **2. How many indicators (i.e. 10, 12, or 15) might universities need to meet, to achieve the outcomes of NPILF, while also accounting for university missions?**

A lower number of well thought out indicators aligned with university missions would be preferable to a large number of indicators. Fewer indicators would allow a university to be more focused and would also be associated with less administrative burden.

### **3. Do the indicators provide enough flexibility to meet the varied needs of business?**

In general, yes. However, it is important to acknowledge that businesses' needs are many and varied. Consequently, the effectiveness of a set of indicators may change relative to the priorities of individual businesses, even within the same sector. Universities can only assure whether indicators are fit for purpose through interactions with their own industry partners. Therefore, a definitive response to this question may not be possible.

### **4. Do you agree with the metrics listed? Which are the most valuable? Would you add other metrics?**

Overall, and for an industry wide application, the metrics fit with the intent of the funding arrangement. However, the applicability of the metric for the inclusion of work integrated learning (WIL) in Higher Degree Research (HDR) needs to be assessed in the terms of how this may impact candidature requirements.

The following metrics are perhaps the most valuable of those listed in the Consultation Paper (page 16):

- Improvement in graduate employment outcomes (Industry Partnerships column)
- Increase/proportion of STEM skills embedded in Curriculum (WIL and STEM+ columns)
- Co-design of courses with industry (WIL and Industry Partnerships columns)
- Increase proportion of curriculum that is reviewed by industry (WIL column)

ACU would suggest also considering adding the following to the metrics: Authenticity + Proximity of STEM skills and WIL experience.

**5. To be able to measure industry linkages, is there an appetite to create a new system of data collection?**

ACU would favour a system that itself was created in partnership with the university sector rather than imposed upon it. More broadly, however, given the current situations being faced as a result of COVID-19 and recovery, there may not be a significant appetite for a new system and developing supporting mechanisms to report on metrics which would impose further burden on the sector.

**Allocation methodology**

**6. Is the proposed mechanism for allocation appropriate as a mechanism to incentivise new behaviours in the sector? Could re-allocation be introduced earlier/not at all?**

Yes, the proposed mechanism for allocation is appropriate. With respect to re-allocation, the scheme would reward universities who have successfully achieved the metrics. While universities are given 12 months to rectify any issues, it should be acknowledged that there may be circumstances beyond the control of a university particularly with programs/activities that involve a high degree of risk. Reallocation could make universities risk averse in their approach to experimenting with programs that are highly innovative or look to address difficult problems but bear a greater risk of failure.

**Distribution options**

**7. Which distribution method (i.e. banded; per EFTSL-rate; base; loadings) makes most sense? Or can you propose another method?**

Further considered assessment of the relative merits of the distribution methods needs to be undertaken. EFTSL rate alone may not be appropriate in terms of the setup costs for initiatives and ongoing maintenance. The issue of costs associated with delivery would need to be calculated and recovered, particularly for multi-campus institutions with regional presence, such as ACU.

**Priorities – WIL, STEM-skills and Industry partnerships**

**8. Do you agree with the definitions of WIL, STEM+ and Industry partnerships in the context of NPILF?**

Yes. We suggest using the terminology “Education-industry partnerships” instead of “University-industry partnerships”, to accommodate Pathways opportunities/programs targeting school students in years 10, 11 or 12.

**9. How does a university measure and maintain the quality of WIL activities? – consider if a current program/framework could be used broadly across the sector.**

Each discipline evaluates WIL differently and specifically for their own context. Evaluation occurs via partner/supervisor engagement (consultative committees, individualised feedback etc.) and via student evaluations (e.g. ProfEx or SELT surveys). We do not currently have a harmonised program/framework that would be suitable for measuring the quality of WIL across the whole university.

**10. How does a university promote WIL, and the benefits of WIL (especially new, innovative or ‘remote’ approaches) to SMEs and large organisations, and is there a role for Government?**

WIL is heavily promoted at ACU and in many cases is mandated, whether as a result of professional accreditation or university course policy. ACU deploys a range of staff resources to attract and manage relationships with WIL providers. ACU uses its broad, multi-jurisdictional footprint, across states/territories and internationally, to develop opportunities for students.

For example, in Health Sciences, ACU is deeply engaged with industry, government, and the community in the education of its students. ACU spends approximately \$15 million each year organising clinical placements for approximately 8,000 nursing and midwifery students. Course curricula are also developed and refined in conjunction with industry leaders to ensure they reflect local and international knowledge, rapid changes in the health environment, and advances in student learning. Several collaborative research partnerships have been established with industry partners, while professional appointments to joint chair positions are also in place with several health services. The University is continually working to expand and deepen new and existing strategic partnerships. ACU has developed a framework for managing clinical schools in collaboration with health providers to ensure closer involvement and alignment with their priorities; for example, the Clinical School based in NSW - St Vincent's Health Network – Sydney.

In Teacher Education, ACU spends approximately \$3.2 million each year organising professional experience placements for approximately 7,000 teacher education students. For instance, ACU has school partnership programs to develop students who are specifically suited to work in low-SES schools or in schools with high Indigenous student enrolments, which has resulted from programs developed jointly through university-industry collaboration. At postgraduate level, ACU works closely with industry partners in schools to provide bespoke professional learning opportunities and workforce development, such as embedded models of leadership formation, or literacy and mathematics support. ACU academics and teacher educators also work alongside one another as part of the initial teacher education (ITE) program, co-creating and sharing ideas and resources to enhance the teaching and learning process.

Meanwhile in Law, students take part in pro bono legal services as part of their legal studies. The pro bono program is central to the work of ACU's Thomas More Law School, and ACU law students have delivered more than 20,000 hours of pro bono service through the program. ACU connects with a wide range of government, private and community organisations and partners to facilitate pro bono placements for students, including community legal centres, dispute resolution associations, law firms, tribunals and courts.

ACU also promotes WIL to SMEs through an established business community within the university; this includes work through the state-funded "ACU Collaborate Plus" initiative, comprising a community made up of students, staff and local SMEs working both on-campus and across metropolitan Sydney. Government has a role to play in supporting (or continuing to support) initiatives such as Collaborate Plus and the Boosting Business Innovation Program (BBIP).

Promotion of WIL also occurs through engagement with industry (e.g. Industry Advisory Boards, consultative committees, clinical school committees) and smaller industry/supervisor forums. The benefits of WIL are promoted through these same channels, as well as providing industry organisations with access to ACU's online WIL resources and training.

There is a role for Government in incentivising relationships, especially with SMEs where relationships could be greatly improved through targeted resourcing.

## **11. How can universities best engage industry, particularly SMEs, with WIL?**

Initiatives to incentivise universities should be matched with incentives for business, particularly SMEs. Given their limited resources and existing challenges, small businesses can find it hard to engage in activities that do not form part of (or complement) their core business and do not, at least in perception, deliver immediate benefits to the business.

For example, universities would argue that students undertaking WIL could provide value to employers on both counts, however, SME perception of benefit or lack thereof would prevent these discussions even taking place.

We see the role of government as building the bridge between education providers and employers through an interlinked set of incentives, on both sides of the relationship. For example, utilising the business JobTrainer fund to specifically include WIL activities, and linked jointly to SMEs and universities, could encourage greater collaboration.

Engagement between universities and industry could be strengthened by facilitating initiatives and practices such as the following:

- Through collaborative relationships, where WIL outcomes are co-designed with clearly articulated benefits for activities/issues faced by industry/SMEs.
- Clear, concise, and simple on-boarding processes that identify and address expectations, time commitments, and hidden costs (insurance, WHS, HR, etc.) – especially to facilitate SME participation. Additionally, it would assist to ensure the supply (number of students available for placement) is consistent and readily communicated to business.
- Broader research profiles and relationships so SMEs engage with other parts of the university.
- Relationship development services to SMEs, which then translate into WIL opportunities. An existing example is ACU Collaborate Plus, where co-working hubs & programs for SMEs allow the relationships to develop, and then those SMEs can engage through unit offerings as presenters, hosts, project design support for WIL experiences and even moderators of assessment. SMEs have also been used to offer case study presentations through ACU’s School of Business, offer mentoring and expertise with entrepreneurship programs such as Univariate & Interchange through the Career Service or Collaborate Plus.
- Encouragement to “industry” – as broadly defined - to sponsor events that support skills acquisition relevant to a specific industry or to industry generally.
- Support for students to identify and align with emerging opportunities (e.g. there is greater opportunity for SMEs to collaborate on learning design, contribute to learning delivery and provide a context of learning application(s)).

Broadly, universities’ engagement with industry is, in a sense, fluid and continuous involving: course development; course reviews via research or stakeholder engaged research, or careers sessions for students; Innovation Hubs; guest lecturers in class; industry advisory boards etc. It is part of the DNA of university work.

**12. How can universities help STEM+ students “think beyond the lab” and expose them to the vast employment landscape they can access?**

Universities need to ensure they expose students to the employment landscape and educate them on navigating that landscape (rather giving them a “map” with specific destinations already set out). This can be achieved through:

- Greater collaboration (relationships) with STEM and non-STEM industries and organisations.
- Authentic assessment for students to collaborate with organisations to solve STEM problems and make discoveries.
- Enhancing the understanding of the principles and role of STEM in future practice of the STEM+ disciplines (e.g. allied health). This must be done in an application-based manner so that these disciplines understand the integration and use of STEM in practice.

Industry can be pivotal in working with universities to provide the application contexts for “beyond the lab” utility in STEM+ professions. Equally, it is important that in order to show students the employment landscape, providers and government are aware of what the current Australian landscape looks like and what Australian businesses are projecting for the short term (1-5 years) given the length of degrees. Graduate destinations survey data are a key part of this, but it is backward looking and is not sufficient to establish credible advice to students beyond the short term.

**13. Are there specific challenges for SMEs in engaging with universities that need to be addressed in the framework?**

A major challenge is the resources required (or lack thereof) for SMEs to significantly engage in WIL and other partnerships. SMEs are often resource and time poor and need to be supported and incentivised to support WIL activities with universities. Furthermore, there is considerable work involved in establishing relationships with individual SMEs; particularly with smaller enterprises this may involve placements for very small numbers of students and each enterprise may have very limited time or capacity to spend on cultivating student learning experiences. In contrast, larger

organisations typically have more capacity when it comes to developing WIL in conjunction with their university partners and accommodating students. Initial challenges may entail making SMEs aware of the WIL services available at a university, and ensuring clear articulation of the benefits for SMEs in investing in WIL and/or partnerships with the university sector. Addressing these challenges would include allocation of WIL promotion costs and extending the delivery times beyond the 12 months cycle (recognising the considerable work and time it takes to build relationships with SMEs especially).

At ACU, the university already provides extensive WIL opportunities to the majority of its students. The outcome of this strategy is evident in its outstanding achievement in graduate outcomes. ACU is ranked first in Australia when it comes to graduate employment outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of ACU's partners are medium to large organisations including government, and not-for-profits who are well versed in establishing effective WIL relationships that have been effectively shown to benefit students.

Ensuring the provision of a quality WIL experience can involve businesses reporting against pedagogical measures which can be seen as an impost, and the work of universities, not business. Thus, in order to manage the expectations of business and universities' needs to utilise sound pedagogical approaches and measures, there should also be a common understanding of the pedagogical and administrative requirements to support the WIL experience.

#### **14. Does the framework allow sufficient knowledge sharing to enable universities and industry to build on successful models?**

The framework is a good start and may facilitate knowledge sharing, however, how this happens would need to be further detailed. For enduring impact and success it is imperative that sufficient knowledge sharing is an outcome of the framework.

#### **Existing practice**

#### **15. Does your business or university have good examples of WIL, or partnerships, which can be used as exemplars?**

As a university with longstanding strengths in the fields of teacher education and health sciences, ACU works closely with schools and hospitals. ACU organises placements and clinical practicum associated with our accredited courses in education and health (see response to Question 10). Each year, ACU organises clinical placements for approximately 8,000 nursing and midwifery students, and professional experience placements for approximately 7,000 teacher education students.

The following ACU specific initiatives are also noteworthy examples of WIL and partnerships:

- Collaborate Plus co-working hubs have SMEs co-located on ACU campuses at North Sydney & Strathfield. This was originally funded under the Boosting Business Innovation Program through the NSW Treasury.
- SME members of coworking hubs have offered case study presentations to units through the School of Business so students can study real life businesses.
- SME members of coworking hubs have offered mentoring and expertise with entrepreneurship programs such as Univariate & Interchange through the Career Service.
- The Collaborate Plus education program, Launch Plus, provides free business incubator workshops to students and community SMEs to upskill and support development of entrepreneurial mindsets and skills. Students and industry learn together in a collaborative environment.
- Partnering with industry and community partners through Collaborate Plus to run business and networking events on campus open to students and industry (examples include a quarterly EdTech event with community group North Sydney Innovation Network and annual Data Buzz event with North Sydney Council during Spark Festival).

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<sup>1</sup> QILT 2020 Graduate Outcomes Survey, Longitudinal, full-time employment (August 2020).

## **General**

### **16. Does the framework sufficiently address the lifetime of learning challenge facing the workforce?**

The NPILF is too tied to Graduate Outcomes and hence is too restrictive in terms of those outcomes being met within the context of a degree. It is unclear where there is provision for ongoing learning. Fundamentally, there is certainty that students should be trained in a broad set of skills that deliver the flexibility and inter-professionalism required to adapt to a changing employment landscape. This could be better reflected and emphasised in the framework.

### **17. Does the 12 month NPILF cycle allow enough time to implement and report on activities?**

Given the disruptions faced during 2020 and the knowledge that we have not yet achieved “COVID normal”, a longer cycle may be more realistic. Universities should be provided with sufficient lead time to develop and implement the necessary processes and requirements for reporting to engage with the new NPILF.

Furthermore, the apparent assumption is that activities and negotiation with partners will occur at the same time in the year and that activities will be completed at the same time. However, given the various university models of delivery, placement of the WIL element in courses, and the variable availability of WIL opportunities, reporting on activities by the deadlines will be problematic. Metrics would have to be set considering potential variability in the timing in gathering data, in consultation with individual universities.

## ATTACHMENT A - Australian Catholic University Profile

Australian Catholic University (ACU) is a publicly funded Catholic university, open to people of all faiths and of none, and with teaching, learning and research inspired by 2,000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition.

ACU operates as a multi-jurisdictional university with eight campuses, across four states, one territory, and overseas. ACU campuses are located in North Sydney (NSW), Strathfield (NSW), Canberra (ACT), Melbourne (Victoria), Ballarat (Victoria), Brisbane (QLD), Adelaide (SA), and Rome (Italy). ACU's campus in Blacktown (NSW) will open in 2021.

ACU is the largest Catholic university in the English-speaking world. Today, ACU has around 32,000 students and 2,000 staff.<sup>2</sup>

ACU is ranked first in Australia when it comes to graduate employment outcomes.<sup>3</sup> ACU graduates demonstrate high standards of professional excellence and are also socially responsible, highly employable and committed to active and responsive learning.

ACU has built its reputation in the areas of Health and Education. ACU produces more nursing and teaching graduates than any other university in Australia, serving to meet significant workforce needs in these areas.<sup>4</sup>

ACU has four faculties: Health Sciences; Education and Arts; Law and Business; and Theology and Philosophy. This consolidation of ACU's previous six faculties in 2014 has created a more efficient and competitive structure focused on the needs of industry and employment partners. ACU has also moved towards the adoption of a shared services model where suitable, to improve efficiencies, internal processes and better allocate resources.

ACU is committed to targeted and quality research. ACU's strategic plan focuses on areas that align with ACU's mission and reflect most of its learning and teaching: Education; Health and Wellbeing; Theology and Philosophy; and Social Justice and the Common Good. To underpin its research intensification efforts, ACU has appointed high profile leaders to assume the directorships, and work with high calibre members, in its research institutes.<sup>5</sup> ACU is a world-leading research university in its priority areas of education, health, and theology and philosophy.

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<sup>2</sup> Student numbers refer to headcount figures while staff numbers refer to full-time equivalent (FTE).

<sup>3</sup> QILT 2020 Graduate Outcomes Survey, Longitudinal, full-time employment (August 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Department of Education and Training, '2017 Special Courses' in *Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2017 Student Data* (2018). Accessible via <https://www.education.gov.au/selected-higher-education-statistics-2017-student-data>.

<sup>5</sup> See Australian Catholic University, 'Research at ACU' via <http://www.acu.edu.au/>.