

Dr Bronwyn Evans AM, FTSE, HonFIEAust

Non-Executive Director GME Pty Ltd

Feedback: Australian Universities Accord interim report

The views below are mine and do not necessarily reflect the views of GME Pty Ltd.

In this brief submission I will make a single recommendation to address the interim report's comments on "improving Work Integrated Learning (WIL)¹ and placements by providing participating students with better incentives and financial support "

My comments are framed from my experience and continued participation in the engineering profession. The Engineers Australia report of August 2022² estimates that there approximately 50,000 more engineers required to meet Australia's current and short-term needs.

A significant portion of those 50,000 engineers will come from Australia's tertiary education sector. For engineers to be effective contributors to Australia's industrial and business future their education needs to combine the theoretical basis that a university can offer and the practical knowledge that industry can offer. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is an excellent pathway for engineering students to get the practical industry-based knowledge.

However, WIL is a challenge for the universities, for the students and for industry.

- For universities it is a challenge to understand the current and future needs of all industries, which are diverse and fast changing.
- For students it is a challenge to manage economically particularly if they must pause any paid employment to take up a work placement that will often be unpaid. This is rightly referred to as "placement poverty".
- For businesses it is a challenge and cost to release experienced engineers from their work to create effective placements and give time to supervise and mentor and encourage the engineering students on WIL placements.

The solution would be to have shared responsibility for WIL where industry, universities and the government all have an important role to play. This could be achieved through a WIL Skills Development tax incentive scheme.

¹ Part 2: Areas for further consideration; C - Meeting Australia's future skills needs; k) improving Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and placements by providing participating students with better incentives and financial support

² [Strengthening the engineering workforce in Australia \(engineersaustralia.org.au\)](https://engineersaustralia.org.au)

Recommendation:

Government should consider designing and implementing a *Work-Integrated Learning Skills Development* tax incentive regime (akin to *the Research and Development* tax incentive regime³). This would encourage investment by companies in the development and resourcing of meaningful WIL placement programs for tertiary students so these students develop the skills and capability of the future and allow them to pay an allowance to the students during their WIL placements.

³ [Research and development tax incentive | Australian Taxation Office \(ato.gov.au\)](https://www.ato.gov.au/Research-and-development-tax-incentive/)