From the Office of
Professor Helen Huntly
Vice-President (Academic)
Tertiary Education Division
Telephone: 07 4930 6731
Email: h.huntly@cqu.edu.au
Internet: http://www.cqu.edu.au

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Department of Education, Skills and Employment
via email: JobReadyGrads@dese.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

On behalf of CQUniversity, please find attached our response to the Consultation
Paper on National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF).

Please note that our submission is over the requested length of two pages, however
it is our view that given the number of questions (18) and given the strategic
importance of ensuring graduates are job-ready, it is not possible to provide a
considered and meaningful response to the questions raised within that limit.

Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in this important consultation.

If you require further information about this submission, please don't hesitate to
contact me via email at vp-ted@cqu.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

Professor Helen Huntly, OAM
Vice-President (Academic)

***CQUNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND LINKAGES FUND
CONSULTATION PAPER***

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

CQUniversity, in general, supports the five principles that guide the framework. It appears that the onus for achieving forms of collaboration that promote professional readiness rests with universities and does not address the required contribution of industry to this preparation. Industry engagement is pivotal to the development of the job-ready graduate. Ideally, the principles should align with existing reporting metrics to facilitate a smooth transition and clear outcomes. It is also important for the NPILF and its principles to recognise and support the importance and effectiveness of industry engagement and WIL by graduate research students.

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?

While indicators for the two dimensions of metrics and demonstrators may be feasible as the focus for data collection and evaluative purposes, innovations may only be observable and measurable following establishment of secure partnerships and institutional evaluation processes with a focus on continuous improvement. The indicators should be tied wherever possible to university strategies and plans to reduce the additional reporting burdens. Therefore, it is proposed a maximum of 6 robust indicators would be CQUniversity's preference.

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

The indicators propose a range of ways in which universities can partner with industry to design and implement WIL activities. Access to suitable WIL or STEM experiences appears to underpin the successful demonstration of indicators. This requires buy-in from industry that tends to extend beyond the boundaries of their core business. Partnerships with businesses that encourage innovation and support creative and critical thinking rather than the reproduction of existing business processes may be beyond the direct control of universities. This would require up-skilling or professional development opportunities for industry-based partners in many instances.

Collaboration with industry on the future needs of their employable workforce is a desirable goal of the indicators. Still, this may involve more complicated processes than workplace experience for Higher Education students, and this may be an impediment to universities in successfully demonstrating their selected indicators in each of the priority areas.

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

The metrics listed allow flexibility in the reporting by measuring qualitative and quantitative outcomes. Close collaboration with industry to ensure relevancy of WIL activities and STEM integration within all sectors, ensures currency, allows for growth to embrace innovative technologies and promotes entrepreneurial ventures to future-proof graduates and ensure professional-readiness. The engagement of SMEs provides a symbiotic relationship with the business and the student, embracing the sharing of knowledge which may not be accessible otherwise without high cost to the business. Similarly, the student is exposed to soft skills within the professional environment. The measuring of student satisfaction and quality feedback of the experience, transferable skills obtained through the WIL activity or STEM integration promotes continuous improvement of these activities.

Current workforce shortages are not accounted for in this metric which has become abundantly clear in the health care sector during the COVID pandemic. The focus should also be aimed at producing Job-Ready graduates in areas of workforce shortages.

CQUniversity reserves its endorsement until more details on the specific metrics and methodologies are available. Externalities are a very important consideration. For example, in recent years a range of WIL providers in different disciplines (currently Nursing, previously Paramedic Science, Sonography and Engineering) have limited the number of opportunities that are available to students because of economic factors and the cost of placement fees

can be prohibitive in obtaining student placements. It is our view that the NPILF needs to be able to differentiate between HE provider and placement provider issues and constraints.

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

Data collection that measures the success of industry linkages must take into account the impact of these partnerships on graduates' preparedness for entry into their profession of choice. These measures tend to exceed the limitations of quantitative measures and would require longitudinal methods that traced graduate performance into the beginning years of employment. CQUniversity acknowledges the benefits of accurate, consistent and efficient reporting to inform activities and drive improvement and outcomes. However, introducing a new system for data collection will add to the complexity of reporting and will require significant investment by institutions in purchasing and training. Any new system would need to be supported by appropriate funding to reflect these costs.

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?

Re-allocation of funds will not guarantee innovative practice in the sector. While the framework incorporates a focus on risk-taking, re-allocation of funds assumes that those risks lead to measurable outcomes in the short-term (on an annual basis) and this may shorten the timeframe available to universities to forge new partnerships or approaches to WIL or STEM integration and application. The allocation does appear to favour universities with an established reputation, especially in terms of metrics which acknowledge maintenance of reputation or graduate employability as a measure of success.

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

Clarity is required around the application to all students, i.e. undergraduate, postgraduate and research students. Funding needs to take into account the enhanced employability skills of students in these different levels and their geographical location. Loading for regional and small institutions would appear to a more equitable funding model. The allocation of a fixed base amount to all universities that adequately addresses the costs associated with industry engagement regardless of student numbers is imperative for providing support for regional or newly established universities. For these institutions, students' course preferences may not necessarily focus on courses with a STEM skill base as defined by the framework. The framework definitions may therefore limit the opportunities available to these institutions to develop innovative future-focused courses that expand the professional learning and ultimate employment opportunities available to their student base and the communities they serve.

CQUniversity supports the general sentiment that the EFTSL figures need to be broader than just CSP places. However, there are some reservations about asking that the EFSTL should include the 'proportion of total RTP distributed to each university'. As we know, RTP no longer reflects load – it only reflects completions. RTP therefore works at a disadvantage for those universities that are rapidly growing their HDR cohort, since the completions figures lag well behind the EFTSL growth curve (particularly for universities such as CQUniversity, which has a large part time contingent), which means the figures can be up to 4-5 years. The RTP formula no longer includes load, however this load information should still be broadly available through DataCube etc – so perhaps reporting of load rather than RTP distribution is an alternative.

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

It is CQUniversity's view that the definition of WIL should be broad enough to include simulated and virtual WIL as well as workplace-based opportunities. This would enable students to demonstrate that they can adapt their skills across a range of industries and workplaces that may not traditionally be considered to be within their discipline. CQUniversity welcomes the broader definition of STEM to be inclusive of allied health but suggests there is opportunity to be flexible enough to meet the needs of a twenty-first century job market that we may not currently have considered.

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.

Measuring the quality of a WIL activity is complex; however, it must consider the students' reflection on their participation in type of WIL activity to promote critical thinking as a result of their involvement. Evaluation should focus on learning outcomes, application of acquired knowledge and development of transferable skills from the combined perspectives of all stakeholders. WIL activities must be based on a clear rationale and explicit criteria for assessment of achievement. WIL outcomes should be quality assured through communication of clear roles and responsibilities of all participants. WIL activities in the workplace must be conducted and assessed in partnership with academics to achieve the mutual benefits of knowledge sharing that underpin their inclusion in university coursework. In addition, WIL placement must be followed by pre-placement and reflective components where students have opportunities to draw on theoretical knowledge and evaluate the outcomes and impact of their WIL experiences on their professional learning. This type of framework can be enacted in all disciplines but is particularly vital in courses that are subject to external accreditation or standards frameworks.

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 activities must be promoted as central to professional learning and the development of employability skills which includes the student's reflection on their WIL experience. The adequate preparation of workplace mentors is an often underestimated or under-resourced aspect of WIL placements that would benefit from government intervention. Recognition of supervision and mentoring roles and the need for formal training of workplace mentors is a vital aspect of success in developing students' employability skills and job readiness. Universities can promote WIL through positive acknowledgement of the contribution of workplace mentors to student learning and viewing these partners as 'co-teachers'. CQUniversity has mandated WIL in all undergraduates courses as a commitment to preparing our graduates to be workplace-ready; however this is not a requirement of courses in the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015.

Remuneration for the role or reward through recognition of service is a critical aspect of success. Development of a shared understanding of the purpose of WIL-related activities and supporting buy-in from industry through clear communication and collaboration is vital for success especially when gaining support for new initiatives.

There are many avenues here for government intervention and support especially in terms of paid mentoring roles, tax incentives for businesses that support WIL, or training that contributes to the professional development of mentors/supervisors as some examples. Any opportunities and benefits of WIL needs to address the more limited opportunities for regional and rural students to undertake WIL without travel to avoid disadvantaging these students.

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

Communication strategies are vital to the success of WIL activities. Collaboration with industry supports currency for academics in terms of the design of practical WIL tasks and assessment activities. Students' professional learning must be viewed as a partnership where roles and responsibilities are clear; there is shared knowledge of students' prior knowledge and experience, and the expected outcomes of the WIL activities; and, support for all participants is provided by university staff. Liaison with SMEs and awareness-raising of course/program goals is essential. Establishing reference committees or communities of practice that encourage knowledge sharing can be one way in which the university can raise the profile of WIL activities. There needs to be a sense of reciprocity underpinning industry support for WIL so that engagement can be facilitated through the provision of short courses and professional development opportunities. These need to be open to the invested group of stakeholders can support university processes for sourcing practical, high-quality placement opportunities.

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

STEM thinking can be facilitated through a range of simulation or project-based learning activities. A cycle of inquiry supports design-based review, student autonomy for identifying a problem/issue. Researching a topic and designing and evaluating a solution would be helpful in any context or specified field outlined in the framework. Contemporary learning platforms create opportunities for virtual networking so these opportunities should be facilitated for students in all locations and can transcend the limitations imposed by geographical location. Networking and collaboration skills are vital to the success of STEM-based courses and universities must take action to ensure that students have access to a broader professional community and audience for their ideas.

13. Are there specific challenges for SME's in engaging with universities that need to be addressed in the framework?

There is an opportunity to engage with partners to overcome some challenges with WIL more closely, that particularly SMEs may perceive, such as:
- Limitations in identifying appropriate projects for students, matching students to projects, staff available to mentor/supervise students
- That universities are large and complex, and SMEs may not know who to approach or how to implement these strategies within their business framework
- SMEs may not have considered how WIL may assist their business to develop or provide access to student research and graduate employment.

For research-based engagement, it is well known that SMEs and universities are mismatched as partners. This is because many of the signals for successful research (significant research income, multi-year projects, regular publishing of results, linking of results to existing knowledge and theories) are actually the opposite of what SMEs are looking for (rapid, cost-effective projects that are focussed on applied outcomes and which should be kept confidential so the business advantage can be exploited). Exploring WIL student placements may be a good way of addressing these disparities, as the two parties actually share more common interests (length of placement, focussed/niche outcomes, student learning outcomes etc).

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

The proposed framework favours industry partnerships and the indicators encourage the active participation of businesses and universities alike in the knowledge sharing process. The framework is underpinned by a focus on the mutual benefits of the knowledge sharing process. Still, the success of this strategy is reliant on industry recognition of the benefits, which must be tangible for them. These sorts of benefits take time to realise, and this should be an essential consideration in the way the funding model is applied.

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

CQUniversity has an established WIL framework that guides the establishment and enactment of effective partnerships. In courses that are subject to accreditation by an external authority, the principles and procedures of the CQUniversity WIL framework must be interpreted and enacted in a manner that meets these requirements, especially where there are mandatory assessable requirements for workplace learning experiences. These accreditation standards are viewed as value-added guidelines for achieving the goals of workplace readiness that underpin all WIL activities. Health, Medical and Applied Sciences have existing examples of solid framework around some industry partnerships in sonography and echocardiography (e.g. Townsville HHS, Gold Coast Radiology etc.) which could serve as examples as part of this consultation paper.

The School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Sciences have strong partnerships with several Hospital and Health services that partner with CQU to offer on-campus clinics for the community and for providing quality WIL placements for students.

CQU has entered into a partnership with Great Keppel Island Hideaway, allowing our students and researchers to work on an important project that will contribute to the environmental sustainability on the World-Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef.

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

The concept of lifetime learning is implicit within the framework through the expectation for ongoing collaboration with industry. This principle encourages currency in the design of WIL and supports effective teaching and learning in the higher education sector. The Framework's expectation for innovation also endorses the concept of lifetime learning. The Framework creates meaning for evaluation processes but the achievement of these outcomes for students is dependent on the quality of WIL and STEM-related learning opportunities in real-world settings.

17. Does the 12- month NPILF cycle (as set out above) allow enough time to implement and report on activities?

CQUniversity has concerns about the feasibility of being able to collect data and report on actions and outcomes in a meaningful way within the 12-month cycle. For example, collaborating with industry on a new course offering, progressing it through relevant approval channels, writing content and engaging staff means it would be unlikely for any student outcomes to be reported within 12 months. Similarly, key reporting metrics should be scalable, for example there may be little to report in terms of development of a partnership with industry in the first six months of the development of a course, and it may not be until the third year of the partnership that there would be student outcomes to report. The proposed timeframe also does not allow for systems to be implemented.

18. Do you have any other feedback or comments?

In addition to the response to specific questions, CQUniversity would like to note the following key points:

- *Recognition that different cohorts have different needs and experiences*
  As many CQUniversity students are mature-age with their own work and life experience, and many of whom are working in the industry, arguably the greatest WIL exposure that these students get is from their own employment experiences outside their course of study. For example, we might provide a Nursing student with 800 hours of placements over the course of their degree, but if they're a part-time student working as an Enrolled Nurse while studying, that student could easily accrue 10,000 hours of nursing experience in their paid job over the 6 years that it takes to complete their studies part-time, irrespective of what WIL opportunities we provide them with. It is CQUniversity's view that there is an opportunity as part of the NPILF to look at how this type of existing work experience builds graduate capabilities. Too often the sector considers students who are currently working as something that potentially detracts from academic studies and increases the likelihood of students attritting.

- *Management of the process*
  There is no real clarity around the implementation or the process to select the priories/metrics that are used to formulate a plan, and then manage the reporting. The range of priorities and metrics are diverse but largely focused on growth/improvement. The reality is that institutions will be looking to the NPILF to fund a substantial contribution to everyday placement costs, particularly given that the scheme is funded at least in part through reduced funding for "classroom" delivery. There is a risk that the proposed system will remain largely operational rather than supporting institutions to readily articulate a vision for moving WIL beyond the needs of induvial courses. It is CQUniversity's view that additional clarity is needed to ensure all stakeholders have the same view and understanding of the purpose and process.