



30 October 2020

To: Working Group, National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF)
JobReadyGrads@dese.gov.au

REF: RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND INDUSTRY LINKAGE FUND (NPILF)

Dear Sirs / Madams,

As a practitioner in the higher education space designing programs led by government for implementation by universities, I commend the efforts of the Working Group in preparing the consultation paper for the design and implementation of the NPILF.

The overall direction of the NPILF priorities and metrics based structure is designed to be flexible and provide the universities with enough scope for customization, while aligning reporting with the high priorities of the NPILF. It is substantively based on a wide range of studies and empirical data where relevant.

Given that this is a consultation paper and comments were invited, I humbly provide my views which I hope will be taken as well meaning and constructive comments intended to achieve our shared vision of a higher education sector that is fully aligned to the needs of industry and that delivers for learners as well.

INDUSTRY PULL INCENTIVES

While I appreciate that this fund is primarily directed at universities, the paper does not directly address the fundamental challenge of incentivizing industry linkages and how to facilitate this for industry that is primarily made up of small and medium sized businesses.

It is acknowledged that there are substantial incentives for industry to engage with universities; however those are primarily focused on research-based commercialization which target intensive R&D in the first place. This does not cater to a large segment of medium-sized businesses which may not have large R&D spending budgets. These industry segments are not short of need for harnessing youthful talent but may need to direct their energies to solving more immediate but nonetheless critical challenges of these businesses through innovation.

As such, there has to be appropriate incentives for medium sized businesses to engage in such activities and by focusing primarily on university engagement (push factors), it may potentially limit the effectiveness of the implementation of this program.

How might we also provide incentives in this program for industry to also engage with universities (pull factors)?

This could include a number of soft and hard incentive mechanisms including:

1. Tax incentives in the form of additional tax credits
2. Funding for student engagement programs
3. Funding for innovation challenges / grants specifically utilizing university student talent

In the absence of appropriate incentive mechanisms (such as the illustrations above), it is likely that it will be an uphill climb for universities to convince medium sized businesses who are already having challenging times to pursue 'investment' with universities.

THE VOICE AND VALUE OF LEARNERS / INDUSTRY THROUGH DESIGN LED APPROACHES

The second point that is evident throughout the consultation paper is paucity of perspective – both of industry and learners. Learners and industry can provide valuable empathy with their perspective and point to key pains that need to be resolved in the search for solutions.

The consultation paper, in its references to studies and research, takes an empirical and scientific approach to solving a problem that has belied academic / scientific approaches in the past. Given that most of the evidence is anecdotal, one potential option is to appoint a design driven consulting firm / entity to actually explore the issues that are constraining all three elements of the triple helix from working together, identify the major issues that are blocking such activities from occurring and propose rapid experiments that can point to the way forward.

VALUABLE CASE STUDIES OF NEW MODELS

Given that industry linkages and the continued relevance of higher education is being questioned all around the world – particularly due to COVID pandemic – it might be worthwhile to also point out potential new models at the frontiers that are transforming higher education to be more connected to industry. These include everything from Coding schools such as CODE University in Berlin or KAOS Pilot in Denmark to full scale universities such as the London Interdisciplinary School or MINERVA Academy. Through looking at these models (even though they are not as large as our institutions), we can uncover valuable insights into how unhinged innovators are developing new models.

RE-ORGANISATION OF VALUABLE RESOURCES

It is evident that universities possess some of the most valuable resources for high impact outcomes both for industry and for learners. Yet, due to legacy constraints and the mindset of 'its always been done this way', those valuable resources have not always been directed towards solving for the right questions. As such, sometimes the answer to our problems can be right under our nose – if we re-frame the question from first principles.

What are the key mindsets and skills we need for our learners?

How might we enable them to be life long learners?

What are the key elements of a universities product proposition for learners? Which elements are most valuable and which elements are commoditized? How can we delineate and then retain the valuable elements while outsourcing the commoditized elements?

How might industry benefit from our learners unique capabilities?

What are the kinds of faculty we need to drive those outcomes?

I hope these points will be considered in the light that they were intended – to enable the NPILF Working Group to achieve its desirable and noble objectives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sayd Farook', written in a cursive style.

Sayd

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