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Submission on the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund Consultation Process

Recommendations and questions for consideration

As the Government considers ways to enact the NPIL Fund, I would like to make the following comments for consideration. These comments are based on my 28 year career in Work-Integrated Learning including, among other credentials; the award of two Citations and 1 Program Award for WIL or SL activities, the authorship of two ALTC national WIL projects, and the inaugural President of the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN)

I am acutely aware of the different conversations that can be had around WIL depending on whether you are at an executive level in the University - responsible for broad outcomes; or whether you are a WIL practitioner, delivering WIL experiences to students. I write from the latter practical perspective, albeit with an awareness, and experience of advising high level decision-making around WIL.

I understand some of my comments may be beyond the scope of the Reference Group, or be considered as more appropriate for discussion within Universities and I respect that others will decide on the importance of my comments. I present them for your consideration as general questions or statements:

PRIORITY 1. Increase the number of internships, practicums and other innovative approaches to WIL

1. Will the metrics include whether WIL is a stand-alone experience, or is integrated into the whole student experience, and likewise will employability be expected to be scaffolded, perhaps with the capstone WIL experience?
2. Will the metrics include ways to ensure the authenticity of the WIL experience, with authenticity having been identified in existing WIL research as critical to the growth of employability skills through WIL?
3. There are many examples of students who, while not performing well academically, perform very well in WIL experiences, and it improves their focus on other academic subjects. Will the metrics include equitable access to WIL experiences for all students, including other access issues such as students who can't afford a WIL experience for various reasons.

PRIORITY 2. Increase the number of STEM-skilled graduates and improve their employment outcomes

- 1) Workload: WIL is a resource-intensive pedagogy. When applying the WEI principals the close relationship of the University to supervise the student's learning can be recognised; I.E. It's not a case of WIL being less work than students in the 'classroom'.

Also, in addition to the normal conduct of classes, supervision and assessment, the work of WIL includes an additional component: Building and sustaining relationships with industry partners. There needs to be a national approach to equitable provision of resources within WIL funding allocation to recognise this time. Otherwise what happens is an additional inequitable unpaid load for WIL staff.

- 2) Compliance Costs: Does the funding include provision for the additional compliance requirements which will fall on all levels – through to the subject staff – of the University?

PRIORITY 3. Supporting universities for the development of partnerships and collaborations with industry

Reciprocity in Responsibility: What are the balancing provisions for industry to provide appropriate quality WIL internship opportunities for students. For the last few decades WIL in Australia has been growing in terms of increasing inclusion in University programs, but Universities struggle, and have to employ staff specifically to encourage Industry to be willing participants. With this new initiative, competition for internship places will increase, and may outstrip demand, unless demand is also increased from industry. A further complication is that some industry areas are expecting Universities to pay them for placing WIL students in their organisation. What encouragements or incentives can the Government provide industry to be willing participants and make the push-pull equation more equitable. For example, the Thai and Canadian governments have industry incentives in place.

Other Comments or Questions

NATIONAL COLLABORATION

There are considerable publications and research projects that have been funded nationally to explore best practice in WIL. How can that, and research in WIL practice generally be leveraged through this opportunity for the benefit of all WIL in the sector?

TIMING OF THE APPROACH

I would suggest the sector, and WIL staff in particular have an abundance of advice to give in terms of the needs related to scaling up WIL approaches at the level of delivery, and the opportunity to have a trial year to explore different approaches, and refine discipline or WIL types for example, including ways to include and market to industry could be beneficial. WIL staff are hungry to share practice, and providing and funding such opportunities at a national level could provide the sector with resources to draw on for upscaling, rather than every University reinventing the wheel. A collaborative approach would also respond to the desperate desire WIL staff have for communication with their peers about approaches and pitfalls to avoid etc. A national approach to such collaboration, perhaps through ACEN (whom I am aware have made a submission), could inform best practice going forward before bedding the exact framework down of how the fund will work. My suggestion is for something with the imprimatur of the Government as an incentive for Universities to engage in collaboration.