



# CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY

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Submission to: NPILF Consultation Paper

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**Re: National priorities and industry linkage fund**

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## INTRODUCTION

Charles Darwin University (CDU) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National priorities and industry linkage fund consultation paper.

CDU strongly supports the IRU submission on the NPILF consultation paper. In addition, it is important to highlight CDU's operating context, which is greatly influenced by its geographical and demographical challenges. These challenges guide CDU's specific response to the consultation paper and align with the intent, "to recognise each institutions' missions, goals and priorities". By way of a brief summary:

- CDU is a dual sector institution with around 12,000 HE and 9,000 VET students;
- 1 in every 8 Territorians work or study at CDU;
- Campuses or centres in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Jabiru and in Sydney and Adelaide;
- Provides face-to-face training at over 100 regional and remote locations throughout the NT;
- 80% of CDU's Higher Education students live outside the NT and study externally. They are mature age (75%), part-time (49%), living in a regional/remote area, and often, first in family to university;
- Indigenous student participation in HE of 13% in the NT and 7% interstate; considerably greater than the national average;
- Good Universities Guide five-star ratings for graduate and postgraduate Full-Time Employment and postgraduate median salary categories as well as a five-star ranking in the First -Generation student characteristics category.
- The Northern Territory (NT) economy is characterised by an abundance of natural resources, a large public sector and a significant defence force presence. The NT has a relatively small open economy, which is heavily influenced by external economic conditions such as exchange rates, commodity prices, interstate and international migration flows, as well as investment in major projects. The NT industry base is significantly smaller and more transient than other states. This poses a significant challenge for CDU to engage with local industry on an ongoing basis.

***Case Study: Next Practice in Regional and Remote Workforce Development*** is an emerging initiative of CDU and the Northern Territory Government, informed by the Regional Australia Institute<sup>1</sup>, to jointly enhance the NT workforce by creatively overcoming the challenges of design and delivery of sustainable pathways that maximise employment and education opportunities. Next Practice will be a case study referred to in this submission to illustrate the challenge and opportunity of responding to NPILF from a regional and remote perspective

## PRINCIPLES

Largely the principles clearly define the intent of the program, and what is expected of the indicators proposed. However, there are some gaps between the proposed metrics and the principles. The proposed WIL (Work Integrated Learning) metric indicators are heavily focused on measuring the volume and proportion of WIL activity offered by Universities. Increasing WIL participation is also about supporting students to overcome the barriers which prevent them from engaging with WIL. Surveys of CDU students suggest that some students dis-engage from study because of the high cost (both real and opportunity) of participating in WIL. Additional metric, demonstrator and innovator indicators could be included which measure, demonstrate and show innovation associated with reducing student barriers to participation in WIL.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/2019-future-regional-jobs/>

## TIERED INDICATORS

CDU considers the indicators to be overly complex and restrictive and suggest that the number of indicators a university is required to select should be reduced. The amount of funding available under NPILF (particularly for universities of CDU's size) is likely to provide enough funding to support the development of a small number (1-2) of highly targeted, strategic NPILF initiatives in a given reporting year. A requirement to report against 12 metrics may force smaller universities to only tackle small tactical projects that have minimal long-term impact towards the program intent. This would be counter-productive.

It could be argued that a large proportion of CDU's student cohort, already in existing careers with significant work experience, have job-ready skills at the time of their enrolment. What does JRG mean for these students? NPILF should also support university initiatives which increase the recognition and credit for existing job-ready skills; and which integrate these into the classroom experience. Initiatives like creation of RPL and pedagogical innovations which deliver learning integrated work rather than work integrated learning? How can resilience and readiness for work in regional and remote workplaces be incorporated?

External students studying outside the NT pose different challenges with WIL participation - not only in relation to the financial burden to CDU of managing effective industry engagement across multiple jurisdictions, in what will be an increasingly competitive environment, but also for the mature age/part time student who is already in full-time work and is studying part-time to improve job/career development. The requirement for WIL or other forms of industry-immersed learning (simulation blocks or labs) for these students can, unfortunately, contribute to student attrition. Similarly, CDU forming research and industry partnerships only in the NT will disadvantage those students from outside the NT (80% of the CDU HE cohort) and so initiatives to further reduce those barriers to participation will also be important.

The cost to CDU in forming national industry partnerships and partnerships in regional Australia, aligned to where our students live, will be a more costly exercise than for those universities based in large metro areas. A regional loading should be considered to help offset this cost.

## ALLOCATION METHODOLOGY

This needs to support long-term change with support provided during the transition period and a healthy tolerance of failure.

## DISTRIBUTION OPTIONS

CDU supports the current band model but advocates for regional loading to be included to recognise the:

- additional cost students in regional areas and at regional universities face in engaging with WIL; and
- relatively higher cost regionally based universities will incur engaging with the breadth of industry partners required and the cost of engaging with industry across the regional areas of Australia (where our students are located).

## PRIORITIES – WIL, STEM-SKILLS AND INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

There should be a stronger focus on the demonstrator and innovator indicators which could be designed to encourage universities to forge new ground and push boundaries of WIL/partnership and engagement. It should also be recognised that STEM skills are found in HASS graduates: critical thinking, creativity and communication, as noted in the consultation paper description of a job-ready graduate.

**Onshore HELP:** Could consideration be given to HELP supported on-shore study that is either a part of, or supplementary to, the curriculum requirement of their course and offers development of job ready skills. This could be undertaken in the same way that OS HELP is applied and could recognise, for example, opportunities in remote communities.

The Next Practice case study, built in close partnership with key stakeholders, investors and NGOs could be an avenue for on-shore student engagement in regional workforce research, innovation, policy development and programs - building students' regional/remote job readiness

**Vocational Education and Training:** There would be significant value in including support for students to undertake Vocational Education and Training (VET) into the framework to encourage the uptake of supplementary work focussed training that aligns with and enhances students' course of study. Aligned or nested VET study can provide tangible employability outcomes for students and provide them with increased certification for a competitive job market. Australia's six dual-sector universities have recently addressed these opportunities in their 2019 paper "*Reforming Post-Secondary Education in Australia: Perspectives from Australia's Dual Sector Universities*" and in their subsequent 2020 response to the Productivity Commission's Interim Report of the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development ("*Dual-sector paper in response to VET funding reform discussions*").

**Industry participation:** How can industry be incentivised to be involved with this program? The onus is currently heavily on universities to make this happen but in regional areas with low population should universities be penalised if they struggle to increase industry engagement year-on-year? Attempting to increase the number of students involved in WIL could undermine the depth of a university's engagement with industry in a thin market.

CDU already has extensive mandatory WIL associated with nursing and education programs where our largest cohorts of students' study. In a somewhat counter-intuitive situation, state health care systems currently charge universities for hosting health-practitioner WIL placements (e.g. compulsory nursing clinical placements - why should the educator be charged to train the industries own future workforce WIL development?). Increasing WIL in these areas is not possible, so will CDU be penalised for failing to achieve significant gains in WIL as a result?

**Regional/Remote Workforce Development:** Could NIPLF incentivise partnering with industry/community/Government that offers WIL opportunity and has focus on regions as a source of ideas and innovation to solve local challenges (an objective of Next Practice).

## GENERAL

The suggested timeframe for NIPLF cycle is too short and the dollar amount per reportable indicator is small for the level of reporting required; it imposes an unreasonable additional administrative burden on a sector that is becoming increasingly burdened by administrative reporting. A one-year funding cycle is too short to effectively measure industry outcomes from the program. A three-year administrative cycle would be preferable and a three-year review of how the model is working once established is also suggested. Would it be possible to include reporting for NPILF as a component of Compacts, rather than a separate process?