



Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA)

Response to the National Priorities and Industry Linkages Fund (NPILF) Consultation Paper

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Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations Incorporated

Compiled with the assistance of the staff and office bearers of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) and its affiliated member organisations.

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Foreword

The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) is the peak body representing the interests of the over 450,000 postgraduate students in Australia. We represent coursework and research, as well as domestic and international, postgraduates. We are comprised of 27 university and campus based postgraduate associations, as well as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate Association (NATSIPA).

CAPA carries out its mission through policy, research, and activism, communicating the interests and issues of postgraduate students (coursework and research) to higher education stakeholders as well as federal, state and territory governments, opposition parties, and minor parties. We welcome the opportunity to contribute ideas to the consultation paper of the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF) working group.

In previous submission to

Research training enables postgraduate students to address future challenges in society through academia or industry. The unique skill-set of research postgraduates are appreciated by experts and highly valued by industry employers (QILT, 2019). The only recognised pathway to a career in research is either in industry or academia and it requires undertaking research training towards a doctorate (PhD).

Research students are the main source of hours spent conducting research and development in Australia, contributing 58% of universities' share of human resources dedicated to research (ABS 2018). They work on their own projects, contribute towards their supervisors' work, collaborate with other academics, publish and perform tasks such as training new students. They engage in career development programs such as teaching and work related learning such as placements. For full-time graduate researchers, their responsibilities and tasks are similar to those of early career researchers. However, despite this close resemblance of graduate study to paid work, most graduate students are doing this work for free, with an estimated 40% of HDR's commencing their degree with a stipend scholarship. Those that are paid receive well under the national minimum wage (RTP, 2020) and the number of stipends awarded annually remains stable at around 3,500, even though demand for research study has increased (CAPA, 2018). It is therefore important to recognise and support the positive impact HDR students' have on industry.

The skills developed through the research training program, enable HDR students to develop innovate solutions, to real life problems such as, minimising the effects of drought on our agriculture industries (Department of Agriculture ABARES, 2019; CSIRO, 2019); developing new low-cost manufacturing technology (Carbon Nexus, 2018) and of course, developing a vaccine against COVID-19 (Mahar, 2020). For every \$1 invested in higher education research, \$5 is returned to Australia's GDP (Deloitte, 2015). As mentioned previously, it is research students who contribute to more than half of all human resources to conducting research at Australian universities. Therefore investing in research training through the NPILF must be seen

as an investment into the national economy, a key aspect of pandemic recovery and for the potential to create new industries, exports, and employment opportunities. APR intern, for instance, has placed over 400 HDR students in paid placements since 2017. Highlights from this program include an increased female participation rate in STEM and a growth in new industry partners. There are many other initiatives underway such as iPREP, IMNIS and eGrad to name a few. This indicates strong demand from both HDR students and industry partners; therefore CAPA asserts that HDR students will make strong contributions to the NPILF metrics.

Responses to Specific Discussion Questions

1 – NPILF Principles

CAPA supports the guiding principles for the proposed framework. However, strongly suggest the addition of a principle, which is inclusive and appropriately applied to all student cohorts, including undergraduate, postgraduate coursework and research students. Methods for data collection and reporting such as end-user already exist. Therefore the metrics should be simple and aligned to be streamlined with processes currently in place.

4 – Tiered Indicators – listed metrics

While CAPA strongly supports an increase in the number of HDR students undertaking internship/placements, the WIL metrics fail to acknowledge that HDR students partake in these activities during the life-cycle of their degrees and immediately after. One of the major barriers is that some universities discourage their students to partake in internships, it has been perceived as a potential risk of disrupting their research progress. The ACOLA Review encouraged the university sector to develop a range of industry engagement models in research to drive proactive industry-university collaboration. APR intern reports that 41% of interns are offered employment post-internship. Hence extending the WIL metrics to reflect the entire life-cycle of HDR degrees will not only drive proactive university-industry collaborations but also enhance HDR students' employability outcomes. Further, in response to the ACOLA Review, the Research Training Implementation Plan includes the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS) end user engagement elements, which already capture the variety of WIL engagement for HDR students, reducing the resourcing and additional workload burden.

7 – Distribution Options

CAPA has many concerns around how HDR students are financially supported for the work they do. The way in which rates per-EFTSL are linked to CSP-EFTSL indicates that research students miss out on the funding distribution. Most domestic research students are supported by the Commonwealth Government through the Research Training Program. NPILF should therefore be used to support HDR students and the NPILF guidelines should include a proportion of the total RTP-EFTSL distributed to each university.

8 – Definitions of Priority Areas

HDR students engage in both WIL and Industry Partnership readily. STEM+ priority area demonstrators and innovators should include researcher development initiatives.

12 – ‘Beyond the Lab’ - STEM Students

Scientific invention is not as much a linear process as it is a discovery involving collaboration. The biggest impact is felt when scientists collaborate in a series of innovations that include changes in policy, processes and technology. With this in mind, scientists *must* think beyond the lab to apply not just their technical, but also transferrable skills, in order to produce the kind of impact that will solve the problems affecting our world. There is a lot of focus on STEM subjects at the moment. However, in order to gain transferrable skills and see the world from a different point of view or to approach problems from multiple angles, as well as the ability to explore new concepts or ideas, and debate the challenges of contemporary society, STEM students—stand to benefit from taking up multidisciplinary units such as those of the Arts, as well as participating in student unions, clubs, and societies that provide many opportunities to develop the essential enterprise skills that will always be in demand in the workforce, and—indeed workplacements.

13 – Challenges for SME’s Engaging with Universities

A large proportion of postgraduates’ are international (e.g., 46% of Masters or equivalent; 34% of doctoral or equivalent) (2016 figures), however, there are major workplace inequalities between international research and coursework student visa holders and permanent residents. These inequalities may pose a barrier to SME’s engaging with the international postgraduate student cohort and vice versa.

International students commonly report discrimination and racism in hiring, and being unable to find work. Those who do find work commonly experience poor working conditions, including wage theft and exploitation, as outlined in our Temporary Migration submission. Working hours are also impacted by postgraduates’ enrolments and the number of hours they are able to undertake paid work. For instance, although HDRs have no formal limit on the number hours they are able to work, universities sometimes enforce limits on HDRs’ university work, and other students are restricted to 8 hours per week.

Another potential barrier to both domestic and international postgraduate students is that additional work may be perceived, as mentioned above, to disrupt the progress of their studies. These limitations may lead to students being discouraged from taking up such activities both by the university and their supervisors, even though they highly benefit and enrich the student experience. Therefore, the importance of additional workplace activities need more than just recognition within the university culture, they must be normalised and encouraged.

18 – Other Feedback or Comments

Graduate research students not only enjoy but also actively engage in WIL and industry collaborations. Supporting HDR student-industry engagement through the NPILF will not only improve student employment outcomes but will be a necessary performance indicator to place Australia in the top 25% of our OECD international competitors.

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