

Introduction

Universities, including Griffith have a long track record of industry engagement through research partnerships, industry-informed curricula and work-integrated learning opportunities across a wide range of discipline areas. The NPILF program will facilitate the expansion of our efforts to develop more mature and sustainable partnerships in which students form the conduit that will provide the lasting relationships between the university and industry. Griffith's 'Graduate of the Future' program aligns with many of the priorities of the NPILF program, with its focus on work-ready graduates who have had relevant workplace or industry informed experiences, and who undertake interdisciplinary degrees where deep discipline knowledge is complemented with opportunities to study outside of the main subject area.

Principles and Indicators

The NPILF program sets out a series of principles that generally align with Griffith's priorities, particularly those around employability and collaboration. However, the principles (employability, collaboration, flexibility, transparency and evaluation) are high level, abstract, and will be difficult to measure.

Both the NPILF principles and indicators need to be carefully designed to promote collaboration between universities and business that enhance the employability of graduates. They should encourage innovation and allow universities to develop and evaluate programs and activities over a reasonable period of time, which should be longer than the annual cycle proposed. Any reporting or data requirements must be manageable and reasonable, making use as much as possible of existing data collection. A new national system of data collection is unnecessary and potentially counterproductive.

To ensure effective outcomes, the indicators will need to align with each university's mission as well as the varied needs of business. They should complement and reinforce strategic priorities and initiatives already underway. Griffith strongly supports the adoption of indicators which encourage universities and businesses to partner on innovative approaches to addressing the NPILF priorities without risk of loss of funding.

The proposed indicators are more focused on measuring outcomes from the university perspective, rather than business, with the risk that they will not encourage greater industry participation. It is recommended that the Department engages broadly to further refine the indicators over the trial period to ensure they are fit for purpose, promote effective collaborations and improve graduate outcomes. Ideally, universities should be able to choose to be measured against a small number of indicators from an agreed long list.

Table 1 provides some useful exemplars; however, at this early stage it is important to retain flexibility to allow individual institutions to trial a range of metrics that suits their needs, and those of their partners. Many of the exemplar metrics are high level and long term (eg improve employment outcomes) that will require several years to achieve outcomes (eg a program in first or second year will not impact graduate employment for 2-3 years). Such metrics may not be suitable to measure the success of innovative pilots as they rely on scale. In addition, collection of supporting data is potentially administratively time consuming.

Specifically, HDR internship/placement opportunities are unlikely to occur within the first 18 months; this metric should be changed to include the entire period of candidature. Measures such as rating students as job ready are problematic and subjective. The proposed metrics also lack any measure of the impact of the program on industry.

Allocation methodology

The methodology proposed incentivises universities to extend their collaboration with industry partners but not vice versa. Additional financial incentives, above those provided to universities through NPILF, may be required to encourage industry engagement, especially for SMEs, which traditionally have had low levels of engagement and limited capacity. This could include through research tax incentives.

Re-allocation of funds should not be introduced before the conclusion of the trial and will need to be carefully managed to ensure it does not remove incentives for universities to pilot innovative new approaches.

Distribution options

Distribution should be per EFTSL rate, as the funding will be sourced from funds previously allocated by the Commonwealth Grants Scheme per student.

Priorities – WIL, STEM-skills and Industry partnerships

Successful relationships between universities and industry partners are based on mutual understanding of how each organisation works, negotiated to achieve an agreed goal. Compared to big business and government, SMEs rarely have the resources to engage at scale and the burden is often carried by universities.

Achievement of NPILF priorities at scale will require government and sector commitment, including incentives, to support a variety of innovative and flexible WIL opportunities and promote the benefits of the program to industry and to students. Universities can market the program and provide interns to individual partners. Government could undertake a more extensive, national campaign targeting SMEs that sets out the benefits of engaging with a university and the NPILF program to deliver innovative and flexible WIL on and off campus, as well as research opportunities.

There are a wide variety of approaches to demonstrate the range of career outcomes from a STEM+ qualification. Griffith embeds career advising within curriculum, involves industry advisory boards and partners in curriculum design, student events, mentoring, guest lectures and employability focused activities.

Although the proposed showcase should guide the sector about best practice and enable university to university knowledge exchange to occur, the framework does not explicitly encourage universities and groups of industry partners to work together to address specific issues or wicked challenges.

General

The framework does not sufficiently address the lifetime of learning challenge facing the workforce. The program is largely directed at students enrolled in conventional degree programs, which traditionally have limited uptake by mature, experienced workers. If an aim of the program is to promote lifelong learning, consideration will need to be given to short term programs, and embedding industry experience and collaborations into microcredentials. Although the program does not exclude this, the incentives are directed more towards CGS funded undergraduate programs.

Trends in indicators need to be monitored, not individual yearly fluctuations. The 12-month NPILF timeline proposed, with sign-off of annual NPILF priorities in March, after the commencement of the academic year, with reporting in November is well short of 12 months, and potentially limits opportunities to introduce new programs. A three-year reporting period will be necessary to demonstrate impact of actions.

Conclusion

It is recommended that universities are able to choose their own metrics from a long list agreed through consultation with the sector, including industry. Ideally, the number of metrics universities will be required to report against will be small and not onerous or overly bureaucratic. For the first three years, universities should report on activities, as the program is established and trialled, with opportunities to innovate and share best practice across the sector. Outcomes should be reported after this initial phase, when meaningful and measurable change could be expected. Ideally, metrics should include results from industry, especially if additional funding or tax incentives are provided. Such a program will facilitate the development of lasting partnerships with universities and industry, catalysed by student interns, which will improve both student employment outcomes and the innovation culture.