30 October 2020

National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund

JCU endorses the Innovative Research Universities and Universities Australia submissions and recommendations, and provides some institutional comments below.

<u>Principles and Tiered Indicators</u>

The tables relating to the three types of indicators 1) metrics, 2) demonstrators, and 3) innovators are confusing. The relationship between 'demonstrators' or 'Innovators' and 'metrics' is unclear. Presumably 'demonstrators' might have a clearer or perhaps more easily judged impact on 'metrics' with innovators potentially being an opportunity to design new 'metrics'. The assessment of demonstrators and innovators will also require 'metrics' in order to measure change.

One of the *principles* of the NPILF is to 'reflect integration of STEM-skills into courses'. The consultation paper provides an example of an *innovator* that is 'STEM-skills embedded across all degree programs', and provides an example of a *metric* that is 'increase proportion of STEM-skills embedded in curriculum'. A similar statement could also feasibly be a *demonstrator*. Here we have a single concept that can simultaneously be the principle goal as well as a metric indicator, a demonstrator indicator, and an innovator indicator. Does this mean that a university could have one thematic activity that can satisfy three very similar indicators in the STEM+ area?

While the principles do provide guidance on what is expected of an indicator, those principles listed for demonstrator indicators and innovator indicators do not necessarily align with the corresponding proposed assessment criteria.

<u>Additional Data Collection</u>

It is necessary to ask what any new data collection would be used for, and ensure that it does not result in unacceptable compliance burdens or perverse incentives. Metrics need to be carefully considered and designed in consultation with users. Data collection will take time to set up, and must be useful to universities themselves. There is potential for universities to internally align their innovation, industry and WIL activities in new ways in order to ensure value to industry partners and provide new opportunities for students – this will be more difficult to do if data collection is not aligned to this goal.

<u>Allocation/Reallocation/Assessment</u>

The consultation paper suggests that universities' assessment outcomes will not be made public, but that funding would be withdrawn if adequate results are not achieved. It would be better to publicly report on each university's outcome and not have the 'at risk' funding component. It is not necessary to reallocate funding in a punitive way in order to drive behaviour change. The pilot could proceed on the basis that at risk funding will not be introduced in 2024, rather than on the basis that it will be. This could be revisited in 2024 if needed.

Funding should be organised by base, EFTSL; and loadings to take into account the differences of engaging industry and students in WIL in regional areas. The scheme incurs a reporting cost to universities and this cost should be recognised and funded separately.

It is not clear that the Department is best placed to assess universities' work in this area, and 12 month cycles are too frequent. It would be good to incorporate an element of peer review, and move to longer cycles.

Promoting/enabling quality WIL, STEM+

There is a role for Government to support students to undertake WIL. It is difficult for regional students who need to travel to undertake WIL (and therefore leave their paid work), and it is also difficult for mature-aged students to juggle WIL placements, paid work, and caring work. Direct support to students would assist equity outcomes.

There is also a role for Government to support employers to offer WIL. In Queensland, Universities are currently in discussion with Workcover and the Office of Industrial Relations about the interpretation of new legislation on the requirement of employers to provide Workcover to university students on placement – a considerable new cost and regulatory burden, particularly for SMEs in regional areas, if determined in the affirmative.

Governments can link WIL to incentives for community-based employers to employ graduates. In addition it would be useful to provide free accreditation to SMEs and community-based employers, through providing a micro credential if they host WIL students. This accreditation would be useful professional development for the employer, and would help to ensure the quality of the WIL experience for students. ACEN have recently released a new framework to support assurance of institution-wide quality in WIL.

There is an opportunity for Commonwealth and State Governments to work together to provide WIL opportunities within the public service, and create public service graduate employment. An example is State Governments bringing together industry challenges into formats that enable students to engage in problem solving of problems while working in sprints or other e-WIL formats.

Undergraduate research methods subjects, whether taught in STEM+ or HASS, cover the research process (scientific methods), critically reviewing the literature, and the production, analysis and presentation of quantitative and qualitative data. These subjects can provide the basis of WIL opportunities where students carry out student-level, academically supervised, research projects for host organisations as part of WIL placements and internships. Understanding the research process, for employers and for undergraduate students, means that not only are graduates job-ready, but employers are graduate-ready and able to draw on new insights and talent.

Best Practice

JCU has a number of examples of best practice that bring together WIL, STEM+ and Industry Partnerships. The best outcomes come from long term relationships between academic staff and employing organisations, this is particularly so for regional areas.

COVID-19 has created the circumstances where online WIL projects have run in new, authentic ways, and there are further opportunities to more closely link innovation and entrepreneurship and SME through WIL, using online (and third party supported) group projects.

In terms of sharing best practice it would good to support similar universities to work together, similar to the IRU Vice Chancellor's fellows, who have looked specifically at WIL. The former Office for Learning and Teaching provided the necessary architecture to support innovation, quality and sharing of practice across the sector.

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