

National Priorities & Industry Linkage Fund - Consultation Input

Introduction

Practera (www.practera.com) is an Australian edtech SME with 10 years of experience helping Universities deliver employability, experiential & work integrated learning programs which equip students & professionals for the future of work. We founded our company to develop learning technology to help power programs which create skills, careers & opportunity for people through experiential learning.

These are programs like online industry projects, skills credentialing, work simulations, global mobility, accelerators, mentoring networks and internships. We work with 32 Australian Universities to deliver programs like these more scalably and systematically. We help support tens of thousands of students per annum engage with thousands of employers around Australia in high quality, authentic online Work Integrated Learning experiences.

Endorsement

Practera broadly endorses and is very supportive of the intent and design of the proposed NPILF, which aims to deliver block grants to Universities Work Integrated Learning metrics and demonstrator / innovator programs showcasing emerging & breakthrough practice, particularly in STEM fields. The rationale and drivers of the NPILF align very well with our mission.

Recommendation 1

Practera regularly delivers programs for Universities which produce exactly the kinds of metrics and examples provided in the NPILF discussion paper. Scale and accessibility is often a challenge in WIL. We believe that the notable requirement for large scale innovator initiatives & demonstrator programs outlined in the consultation paper will have a positive impact. By way of an example of a substantive innovator project and the data readily available from systems like Practera, our recent whitepaper analyses quality outcomes from authentic digital industry projects connecting >5300 students from 22 Australian Universities with >1000 employers from a wide range of sectors
<https://practera.com/lp/quality-in-online-project-based-learning-white-paper/>

Recommendation 2

That NPILF focus on promoting & supporting authentic industry engagement & interaction. There are a lot of models inside Universities and external to them that purport to provide WIL experiences, but do not actually engage students with industry practitioners in a learning context. While simulations, case studies & other models have benefits, we believe increasing the authentic opportunities students have to engage with industry as part of their learning, preferably in for credit and/or paid capacities is the important factor in achieving the policy objectives.

Recommendation 3

One element that we recommend considering to promote **as part** of the NPILF are cross-University, national scale 'innovator / demonstrator' models to address the policy objectives through the development of broad based ecosystems.

This is generally considered very difficult in Higher Education policy, but Practera have repeatedly demonstrated its feasibility. As an example, over the past 4 years, Practera have developed strong networks of digital industry project programs for *international students* for 5 State Government Agencies (eg; Study Queensland, Study Melbourne, StudyNSW etc). These innovative, digital WIL programs have over 4 years successfully delivered against policy objectives to provide tens of thousands of international students from 32 Universities (working primarily in cross University teams) with employability opportunities with Australian employers (primarily SME's). An exporter

variant has connected international students with more than 600 exporters (95% SME's) to provide research into offshore markets. For example in 2020, the Study Queensland LaunchU Trade Accelerator will include 13 Queensland Universities providing students to work in cross University teams. The StudyNSW Global Scope program transitioned from 2 years of Government funding to a model fully funded by Universities. The programs are run through and with Universities. These models are globally leading, operating at national scale, have developed co-investment based funding models and can be readily adapted to support NPILF objectives.

Two examples of adaptation might include;

Student Industry Project Network Australia

- A Student-Industry Projects Network Australia (SIPNA) - a national scale portal and program supporting authentic, virtual work experience projects for Australian Higher Education students with business, government, community and startup employers. A subsidised co-investment rate for Universities, this program could readily and cost effectively scale within 2 years to 100,000 young people per annum. The program could specifically target low SES, rural & regional, minority group and differently abled young people to help address the well established challenge these groups have in accessing WIL and employment pathways.
- Practera has proposed this program concept at the 10,000 student scale to the Commonwealth National Careers Institute Partnership (NCIP) Grants Program (no feedback on submissions has yet been received at time of writing). For this grant application Practera mobilised a national consortium of 17 Universities and 6 Government agencies from 6 States & territories that we already work with systematically, all willing to work on a collective action program.
- The program can be made accessible to participating Higher Education providers and their students on standard, subsidised terms, complementing internal Work Integrated Learning offerings and offering long term scale & sustainability.

Innovation Projects Australia

Aligned with NPILF's focus on STEM and in a model similar to the above - focusing industry project models for students to work with SME's (and other businesses, agencies, applied R&D groups) on technology adoption & innovation. This would be on projects like; megatrends, innovation & prototype development. Real projects like these help STEM+ students "think beyond the lab" and expose them to the vast employment landscape they can access. The CSIRO as well as CRC's and applied research & commercialisation groups within Universities would be natural partners for this network. Practera has previously run an industry engaged innovation program across 8 Universities within curriculum that delivered STEM skills training to 2500 students.

Recommendation 4

Without any objection to the policy objective to focus on STEM+ skills & outcomes, or more broadly the goal to enhance innovation outcomes through them, the humanities disciplines have much to contribute to the understanding, adoption and translation of emerging technologies by businesses and societies. WIL programs that aid the cross skilling and training of ALL students to gain better understanding and develop skills relevant to innovation outcomes should be explicitly included. The above 'Innovation Projects Australia' proposal for example would be much stronger if it were genuinely multi-disciplinary in nature.