

National Priorities and Industry Linkages Fund (NPILF) Consultation

University of Western Australia response

The University of Western Australia (UWA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed National Priorities and Industry Linkages Fund (NPILF) Consultation Paper.

The UWA 2030 strategic plan has a strong focus on providing world-class education, research and community engagement for the advancement of the prosperity and welfare of our communities, with a vision to create the next generation of global leaders through experience-rich education and world-leading, trustworthy research.

We offer the following key recommendations:

- **A three year funding cycle would offer a workable approach and realise more sustainable opportunities for all stakeholders.**
- **A smaller number of indicators, potentially selected by each institution and measured by a set survey mechanism, will lead to focused effort and more effective reporting, ensuring program longevity and providing an opportunity to gauge the scale and quality of industry linkages, and identify sector best practice.**
- **Base plus EFTSL is the preferred distribution methodology.**

12 month NPILF cycle

- The funding timeline, linked to performance outcomes, is too short to see material changes from some, if not most, initiatives. Some activities, particularly those with broad reach or requiring scale with partners, can take time to build, and are also constrained by the structures of academic years.
- A more workable approach may be a three year rolling plan with annual reporting aligning program development and implementation, and giving time to observe marked changes in metrics. Funding could link to the expected timing of performance changes, per the plan, rather than on annually based on activities that may have not yet had time to deliver intended benefits.
- Regarding the pilot, flexibility and consideration are important around finding and managing the complement of current WIL placements and partnerships, and the self-funded nature of some of these.

Indicators, data collection and reporting

- A focus on a smaller number of key indicators is a strong approach which we expect will lead to focused effort and minimal variability in definitions. Those currently presented for WIL and Industry Partnerships are appropriate, though it may take time to set systems for reporting the data (particularly for the Industry Partnerships metrics). Those for STEM+ are more difficult to implement and arguably of low value when looking across the unit options for students in a comprehensive institution. An alternative single STEM+ metric could be as simple as 'increase in students taking a STEM unit from non-STEM courses'.
- Prescribing a larger number of indicators may encourage the creation of more (and potentially lower-value) activities in order to be compliant with the framework, while a single focus may have a greater or broader contribution to improving metrics or engaging industry and students. The same rigour can be applied to a simpler approach by removing this requirement and instead allowing each university to construct a plan with the applicable and relevant metrics

(which may still be from a prescribed list) to form the basis of a discussion with the Department about the scale of change prior to approval. This approach is also likely to be easier for industry partners.

- Distinguishing between Demonstrators and Innovators may be difficult, as while they may deliver improvement to the same metric, some demonstrators could also be innovative. A qualitative reflection of activity is important, but innovation and demonstration can be captured and assessed in the planning process more effectively.
- A measure of 'sentiment' or 'usefulness' of work placements, both qualitative and quantitative, from both the student and industry partner will be critical to developing program longevity and to identify breadth, depth and quality of industry linkages. A consistent set of questions and a shared survey mechanism (adaptable to add individual questions or include only relevant questions), administered by each university, would create cross-university reporting, and help identify benchmarks and how best practice is applied.
- A new, simpler system of data collection and reporting could be helpful, provided the cost is covered by the Federal Government. The Employer Satisfaction Survey (ESS) is one example where research with industry already occurs and an opportunity to align could exist.

Definitions

- Placements offer the opportunity to develop more transferable and 'life-ready' skills. Career Development Learning as a definition and broader experience set may be a better reference point for a definition than WIL alone.
- STEM/STEM+ - this definition is broad, inclusive and incorporates attributes from other disciplines. Recognition of the freedom this provides universities and students is important, though this may lead to inconsistent reporting across institutions.

Equity issues

- We see value in the understanding of equity issues in this program and will seek to be able to distinguish these students from the broader cohort to ensure placement design and partners and university support programs to encourage success. Sharing of best practice across Australia in this space, once the program is more established, would be welcome.
- Indigenous industry partnerships, cadetships and collaborations should be included, due to the beneficial outcomes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and industry partners, in building graduate capabilities and cultural competence.
- Increased financial support from government to students from equity backgrounds could be considered to encourage more inclusive participation in WIL programs.

Engaging with SMEs

- A challenge for SMEs may be where the total cost of participating in WIL could outweigh the benefits. Universities might need to provide a greater level of administrative support to an SME to ensure the WIL placement is undertaken in a manner that satisfies compliance and the expectations of all stakeholders. Universities may struggle to manage this cost and the reporting targets in the pilot period while systems are being established.
- Noting these challenges, government incentives may enhance SME participation. The R&D tax incentive and the apprenticeship support model are two examples where behaviour change was supported with policy in this area.
- For knowledge to be meaningfully shared, the framework must require the disclosure of goals, objectives and measures in a clear and unbiased manner. As the Discussion Paper notes, the risk of "gaming" may be higher where there is a lack of clarity around the purpose of the NPILF and how its performance is to be planned for and subsequently evaluated. This is not yet clear.

Distribution

- Base plus EFTSL is the preferred distribution methodology. Rather than a weighting for regional (or otherwise) institutions, targeted funding for innovative programs could be available with the proviso that these models are shared and expanded across the sector. This would make it easier for industry to see consistency across the sector.

Existing UWA practices and innovative programs

- The CEED program <http://ceed.wa.edu.au/>
- The McCusker Centre for Citizenship <https://mccuskercentre.uwa.edu.au>
- WIL programs with a Student Equity focus:
 - [Aspire UWA](#)
 - [UWA Girls in Engineering](#)

Professor Amit Chakma
Vice-Chancellor
The University of Western Australia

For further information please contact:
David Norman
Senior Policy Adviser, Vice-Chancellery
david.norman@uwa.edu.au