



Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion

Response to the National Priorities and Industry
Linkage Fund Consultation Paper

UTS CRICOS 00099F



Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion, UTS response to the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund Consultation Paper

BACKGROUND

UTS has successfully operated Community Engaged Learning and Research Programs for over 20 years. The Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion's curriculum embedded Shopfront program is the longest running initiative of its kind and is internationally recognised as leading practice. This is demonstrated through featured case studies in international journals and the program's receipt of multiple international awards.

UTS has also led and participated in a number of global initiatives that support the growth of University engagement with industry, government and community. Alongside CSU, UTS has spearheaded the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification pilot which involves 17 universities as founding members or observer institutions. This initiative aims to support the growth of engaged scholarship across the sector – which we will touch on later in this document. UTS has also been invited to actively engage in the Global Engagement Summit and has participated in the Engagement ranking pilot – an initiative of Melbourne University, Kings College London and Chicago University.

Our contribution is based on this experience. We welcome further dialogue and continued involvement.

ELEVATING ENGAGEMENT BEYOND INDUSTRY

The Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion commends the consultation paper's focus on collaborative partnerships between universities and 'industry' and the extension of such partnerships to include work integrated learning and other benefits. Although the definition of 'Industry' has been broadened to include government and the community, the presence of third sector and community engagement across the consultation paper is muted. The use of language is important as it can actualise the future state that it articulates. The lack of inclusion of a broader range of sectors at a high level, can therefore limit important outcomes.

Elevating consideration of the third sector is important because:

- Community Engaged Learning opportunities offer meaningful professional placements. Recent studies on Meaningful Evaluation suggest that experiences that are more meaningful have the potential to support longer lasting sustained change – meaning that there is potential for deeper learning outcomes. The Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion is interested in further researching this space.
- Community Engaged Learning opportunities offer transdisciplinary engagement opportunities where students practice transferable skills, better preparing them for jobs of the future.
- The third sector itself is a significant employer that offers graduates future employment opportunities. A 2017 Deloitte study titled "Economic Contribution of the Australian Charity Sector" valued charities alone at \$129 billion and found that they employed 840,500 FTE people. According to the report: "the sector is roughly equivalent in size to the Australian retail sector, education and training, or the public administration and safety sector".
- The work undertaken as part of Community Engaged Learning opportunities adds value to work that is often publicly funded, thereby furthering the Government's investment and interest.

Recommendation: The NPILF guidelines need to explicitly and consistently state that ‘work integrated learning’ is a sector-neutral concept, and that university partnerships with the government and community sectors are equally desired, valued, and funded by the NPILF.

EXPANDING BEYOND WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

The focus on Work Integrated Learning is understandable as the work of the NPILF commenced with Industry as a starting point. The inclusion of other sectors brings with it the opportunity of also expanding beyond WIL to include innovative models of engagement that equally contribute to the outcomes that the government is seeking.

UTS’s COVID Community Ambassador Program offers an example. The program offered employment to students who were financially impacted by COVID-19 and had no access to alternative support sources. These students were then placed with our partner community organisations responding to COVID. The initiative was reciprocal and an effective use of funds as it:

- Supported students to develop workplace capabilities and experience, enhancing employability
- It contributed meaningfully to the community organisations who were impacted by loss of volunteering resulting from COVID
- Social outcomes for the community were achieved through the work

As noted in the consultation paper, WIL can include other forms of practice. Broadening the definition, however, does not capture the myriad of innovative practices that fall outside of WIL. We would recommend the use of a broader term that captures WIL and simultaneously encourages the use of alternative engagement practices that can lead to capability building and employability.

Recommendation: The NPILF broaden beyond Work Integrated Learning and support Engaged Learning.

DEFINITIONS

The definitions offered in the consultation paper do not include the critical component that must be present in all university / industry partnerships and collaborations, that of mutual benefit. The concept of mutual benefit is fundamental to the sustainability of the partnership over the longer term, and also acts as a driver for cultural change within the university. An additional requirement that the partnership or engagement ‘contribute to the public good’ is standard in university community engagement globally and highly appropriate for a publicly funded program such as the NPILF.

The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification provides a useful definition of university community engagement, articulating both the purpose and the process of the engagement:

“Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.”

Recommendation: The NPILF guidelines should include an overarching statement or definition that includes the concepts of ‘mutual benefit’ and ‘contribution to the public good’ in relation to opportunities funded through the NPILF.

INDICATORS

The articulation of the indicator system was not entirely clear. Based on our assumptions, we offer the following comments:

- We agree with the different indicator types which seem to allow for the simultaneous existence of well-established programs that need maintenance, alongside experimentation and innovation.
- Embedded failure tolerance is commended, however the description of failure tolerance seemed to contradict the funding penalties attached to the indicator system. The unintended consequence of such funding penalties could be that institutions will target low hanging fruit. One consideration could allow for a portion of indicators to be consequence free in order to encourage bravery.
- A tight indicator system would sharpen the focus on what is being measured. A longitudinal study should accompany failure tolerance measures in support of discovering unintended consequences. The paper references archaic measures that the program needs to extend beyond. The reality is that, in the absence of research evidencing the concerns, the measures quoted in the paper have remained across the sector and guide practice in an ongoing way.
- The consultation paper asks for other recommended indicators. We recommend that the pilot phase allows for three institution identified indicators, rather than selected from a pre-determined list. This will allow for the sector to respond to this question deeply and may result in new knowledge and practice.
- The consultation paper points to the fact that data evidencing partnerships is lacking. It notes that the number of WIL experiences are currently not collected and, later in the paper, it acknowledges that this output measure on its own is not meaningful. Identifying indicators that track the desired change would be a suitable complement. There are current measures in place that track this change for students – in terms of competency development and employability. Improved understanding of the contribution to the partner and the state of the partnership itself would add immense value to this space.
- The Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion, through our work with the Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification Pilot, became aware of our own institutional limitation associated with tracking Partnerships. As a result, working with our evaluation team, we designed a Partnership Evaluation Tool as a means of responding to this challenge. This was piloted this year. Post-refinement, we would openly share this tool with the sector and would welcome an opportunity to engage in cross-sector research study to assess its effectiveness.

OTHER COMMENTS

- The set of critical competencies and outcomes that extend beyond STEM articulated in the consultation paper, such as critical thinking and creativity, diminish in visibility as the consultation paper progresses to indicators. These may in fact be inherent considerations of 'employability'. We recommend a clearer articulation of the desired change in this space and the development of related indicators of success in order to make this explicit.
- The indicators of success for Priority Area 3 emphasise programmatic or intervention needs. Also needing consideration are the systems, processes and infrastructure that enable collaboration. Some institutions have these readily established, and others don't. Our work with the Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification pilot indicated a direct relationship between institutional resourcing – for example through a central body that supports partnerships – and capacity to engage. We recommend targeted investment in infrastructure and systems support to ensure sustained and effective impact.

THE AUSTRALIAN CARNEGIE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PILOT

Engagement Australia will be providing a submission to the NPILF consultation process in relation to the recent Carnegie Community Engagement pilot in Australia. The pilot saw nine Australian universities undertake a mock accreditation using the Carnegie framework that has been successfully operating in the United States since 2006. The Carnegie process involved each pilot university collating and analysing institutional data and undergoing a process of self-reflection that included specific proposals for improvement to institutional systems and processes to enhance community engagement.

Possibly the most significant benefit has resulted from the collegial and genuinely collaborative process that has underpinned the Australian pilot. The seventeen participating institutions (nine undertaking the mock accreditation) have met regularly to share knowledge and approach. This has led to a deeper understanding of the systems and rewards needed to 'embed mutual engagement in ... day to day operations' across our institutions.

With the establishment of an Australian Carnegie accreditation process, the repository of sector-wide data and expertise will only increase. It is our view that Carnegie Australia will be a valuable contributor in the development of NPILF indicators over the longer term, as well as a useful complementary mechanism that extends beyond the programmatic reporting articulated in the consultation paper.

Recommendation: NPILF to adopt the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification System as a complementary framework to the measures of success identified.