

**Professor Roland De Marco**  
**Deputy Vice-Chancellor**  
**(Research and Innovation)**  
**Tel: +61 7 5430 2867**  
**Email: [rdemarc1@usc.edu.au](mailto:rdemarc1@usc.edu.au)**

30 October 2020

Research Sustainability Working Group Secretariat  
Job-Ready Graduates Taskforce  
Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment  
Via email: [JobReadyGrads@dese.gov.au](mailto:JobReadyGrads@dese.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

I refer to the invitation for submissions on the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF) consultation paper and provide the following comments.

- The establishment of a new system of data collection to complement the Government's focus on job-readiness and industry linkages is welcomed.
- Sectoral diversity and playing to strengths is eminently sensible. However, the details of possible matrix measures is the key.
- The combination of 12 indicators is complex and only requires a simple process.
- Meeting 9 out of 12 (75%) indicators is a fair percentage, moving to 11 out of 12 over a five year period is recommended.
- The proposed length of the Pilot is too long given the term of government and won't drive behaviours and outcomes that the framework desires.
- The percentage allocation in the years following the pilot is complicated and recommend using the arrangements used for the roll-out of the RBG allocations.
- The intention that during the transition phase all universities will receive 100% of their allocation with no penalty delays the intended impact. A smoothing of allocations with an appropriate transitional period seems more appropriate.
- The present government may change before implementation of the final model from 2024 and may be reversed by the new government.

Further comments relating to the discussion questions are provided on the attached document.

Yours sincerely



**Professor Roland De Marco**  
**BSc MSc (RMIT), PhD (La Trobe), FRACI, MRACI CChem, MEUAS**

## RESPONSE TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS - NPILF CONSULTATION PAPER

### **Principles**

#### *1. Do the principles provide clear guidance on what is expected of an indicator?*

The high level principles of this framework are fair and reasonable. However, the details of the proposal are complex, and subsequently difficult to follow and understand.

### **Tiered Indicators**

#### *2. How many indicators (ie 10, 12 or 15) might universities need to meet, to achieve the outcomes of NPILF, while also accounting for university missions?*

Recommend 10 indicators; any more and the matrix will become complex and confusing.

#### *3. Do the indicators provide enough flexibility to meet the varied needs of business?*

The idea of a flexible approach to select fit for purpose measures is positive. This is consistent with the principle of mission based compacts, and encourages sectoral diversity, which is healthy for the creation of a diverse and robust higher education system. In this way, institutions play to their strengths, and do not try to be all things to all people.

#### *4. Do you agree with the metrics listed? Which are the most valuable? Would you add other metrics?*

Table 3 needs further explanation. For example, why is there a restriction on STEM and STEM-skilled? Arguably, Australia achieves as much, if not more, engagement and impact in the non-STEM fields.

#### *5. To be able to measure industry linkages, is there an appetite to create a new system of data collection?*

The sector is overburdened by data collection and measurement. Every time a new system is implemented, it imposes a massive cost on the sector including the associated Government departments. With a view to sectoral efficiency, we strongly recommend that the Government utilises existing information that is available in existing frameworks such as RBG, ERA, EI, etc.

### **Allocation Methodology**

#### *6. Is the proposed mechanism for allocation appropriate as a mechanism to incentivise new behaviours in the sector? Could re-allocation be introduced earlier/not at all?*

Recommend immediate financial repercussions (ie, penalties) for not meeting the program framework and provide a transitional period (eg 4 years) with budget smoothing to not disadvantage affected Universities during the implementation of the scheme. After this transitional period, penalties should apply. Without this approach, the sector does not incentivise and reward the objectives of the scheme.

### **Distribution options**

#### *7. Which distribution method (ie banded; per EFTSL-rate; base; loadings) makes most sense? Or can you propose another method?*

The banded allocation option is preferred since it is more costly to produce education and research outcomes in the high banded disciplines, and less costly in the low banded disciplines.

### **Priorities – WIL, STEM-skills and Industry partnerships**

#### *8. Do you agree with the definitions of WIL, STEM+ and Industry partnerships in the context of NPILF?*

As stated above, it is dangerous to focus on STEM at the exclusion of the engaged and impactful work of the non-STEM disciplines.

#### *9. How does a university measure and maintain the quality of WIL activities? – consider if a current program/framework could be used broadly across the sector.*

USC would benefit from participating in a benchmarking project in collaboration with other Universities to identify a framework for measuring the impacts and success of different forms of WIL, not just traditional models such as internships and placements. There is an opportunity to develop sector wide measures which can be applied to diverse forms of WIL across the sector.

#### *10. How does a university promote WIL, and the benefits of WIL (especially new, innovative or 'remote' approaches) to SMEs and large organisations, and is there a role for Government?*

Profession based programs/degrees have established partner relationships with government and corporate partners whilst Science-industry partnerships are less common. Universities located in regional areas often have difficulty in providing increasing and equitable opportunities for students due to financial costs associated with travelling to a host organisation offering a science and engineering based placement opportunity hence the need for innovative or remote approaches. A partnership approach similar to engaging with sponsorship partners would assist in promoting WIL.

*11. How can universities best engage industry, particularly SMEs, with WIL?*

For programs with embedded WIL such as Nursing, Midwifery, Paramedics USC partnerships with government and corporate organisation are aligned and committed and supported by robust governance and compliance processes. USC being a regional University would benefit from working with other universities in similar catchment areas to identify and benchmark how to move from transactional and episodic relationships with small to medium enterprises and not for profits which can be problematic and costly. Smaller organisations are sensitive to resources and time challenges and partnerships which are ad-hoc and administratively burdensome. A review of the opportunities within existing partners should also be considered, for example: business, ITC students in Schools and hospitals. A WIL framework including support for organisations to understand supervision would assist in engagement.

*12. How can universities help STEM+ students “think beyond the lab” and expose them to the vast employment landscape they can access?*

- (a) summer studentships in the workplace;
- (b) innovation and entrepreneurship training to engender a culture of self-wealth and employment creation among students;
- (c) industrial site visits embedded in University course syllabi;
- (d) harnessing University-Industry partnerships to offer student engagement opportunities across the full spectrum of first year to doctoral levels.

*13. Are there specific challenges for SME’s in engaging with universities that need to be addressed in the framework?*

SMEs typically have a low turn-over of cash and limited staffing, so they are unable to co-invest and attribute too much in the way of funding and staffing to their external engagement initiatives. As is the case with ARC Linkage Projects, a removal of the need for a cash investment by SMEs below a critical threshold, together with a resourcing of staff in the company, if necessary, may improve engagement.

*14. Does the framework allow sufficient knowledge sharing to enable universities and industry to build on successful models?*

Unable to comment from the information provided.

**Existing Practice**

*15. Does your business or university have good examples of WIL, or partnerships, which can be used as exemplars?*

USC would be interested in collaborating with other University’s to identify, learn and adopt multi-discipline practicum experiences which incorporated simulated, virtual, authentic and industry-based activities which are scalable for future growth. USC does not currently have such a model implemented.

**General**

*16. Does the framework sufficiently address the lifetime of learning challenge facing the workforce?*

Life-long learning has little or nothing to do with industry engagement. It is about the creation of a culture of independent or self-directed and inquiry-based learning (at the University) that achieves this imperative.

*17. Does the 12 month NPILF cycle (as set out above) allow enough time to implement and report on activities?*

The 12 month NPILF cycle provides sufficient time for universities to meet its objectives (note caveat re transitional period with budgetary smoothing). The scheme needs to incentivise and reward its objectives.

*18. Do you have any other feedback or comments?*

No further comments.