



Western Sydney University (Western) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the NPILF consultation and the Government's initiative to fund WIL and related industry partnerships.

Western's founding legislation establishes its role to support the Western Sydney region; the University has a long history supporting the particular needs of its community by providing teaching and research to underpin improved employment prospects for its students and wider economic development. This role is amplified in the context of a national recession that has disproportionately impacted Western Sydney. The University is committed to work with partners across government, industry and the community to enable a rapid recovery and transition to a sustainable new social and economic environment. In this context, Western endorses the NPILF use of 'industry' in a broad sense to encompass business, government and community partners and the focus on universities' unique missions, to be embodied in individual compacts.

Western similarly welcomes the emphasis in the consultation paper on quality, the ambition to achieve sustainable cultural evolution within universities and industry, and the encouragement to pursue innovative new solutions. Western is concerned however that aspects of the more detailed framework are inconsistent with these principles.

Defining WIL and Capturing Quality

Curriculum partnerships across the sector are often perceived as limited to work-integrated learning partnerships. The consultation paper extends this to consider co-design of curriculum with industry, but, even then, suggests too narrow a definition of curriculum partnership. At Western, our *Partnership Pedagogy* strategy encompasses broader themes of co-creation i.e. co-designed, co-developed, co-delivered, or co-assessed, including co-credentialing with partners, to ensure authenticity, relevance and engagement. Partnership Pedagogy includes students as partners, as well as community, industry, research and innovation, edu-venture, commercial and university network partners. Quality of curriculum planning, design, development and enhancement and the importance of review processes are at the centre of the strategy.

Indicators that relate to the proportion of curriculum that is co-designed and/or reviewed by industry may drive a focus on quantity rather than quality. While the principles of Demonstrators and Innovators offer some recognition, ideally metrics would also reflect quality as well as quantity—including mutual benefit, sustainability, social responsibility and governance – consider the student experience, and inputs as well as outputs. TEQSA guidelines for WIL and other quality assurance structures, such as those developed by the Australian Collaborative Education Network (e.g. research report and framework accessible at <https://research.qut.edu.au/wilquality/resources/>), should be considered in the further design of the NPILF indicators.

These broader, more diverse and valuable curriculum partnership models also give rise to significant considerations of consistency of reporting. A short summary of relevant issues is provided as a footnote* to this response though Western would be happy to engage with the Department to provide further details as to practical implications of the proposal. Departmental support for the cross-sectoral communities of practice (including universities and industry) would be valuable in encouraging shared learning and best practice.

STEM+

The consultation paper appropriately references that flexible, multi-faceted skills sets will be required in order for students to succeed in multiple careers however, arguably, goes on to promote a relatively narrower paradigm. In the same way exposure to STEM skills affords HASS students a wider perspective and industry-relevant skill-set, the reciprocal is also true.

In supporting the professional development and employability of STEM+ graduates, it should be noted that real problems come from a domain or context and that this exposure cannot be 'bolt-on', it should be integrated throughout training programs. An over-emphasis on STEM risks perpetuating training that encourages technical solutions without properly considering community or industry need. Appropriately contextualised design-thinking, ideation and co-design occurs where real world project-based approaches are adopted, often in a cross-disciplinary context that leverage HASS capabilities. Western emphasises such approaches across teaching and research as a mechanism to ensure social and industry relevance and impact.



Metrics and Reporting

The consultation paper describes an ambition to mitigate the administrative burden on universities however Western suggests that annual planning and reporting is not consistent with this principle. While not a direct comparison, the triennial ERA assessment is relevant as an example of an onerous exercise that demands resourcing across the reporting cycle. Data is not currently collected for a number of the metrics suggested; it is important the NPILF avoids a new system of data collection. NPILF resources and effort should be concentrated on delivery of the most impactful programs at greatest possible scale. Western proposes bi-annual planning and reporting as the shortest appropriate cycle, though would also support longer cycles with light-touch interim reporting.

Western also suggests that indicators should accommodate and particularly incentivise multi-faceted partnerships that integrate a range of partnership activities; it is Western's experience that relationships are most productive, efficient and sustainable where institutional-level partnership is achieved. Reliance on indicators of, for instance, number of WIL experiences, job readiness or research income, in isolation risks siloed approaches to collaboration and missed opportunities to achieve greater scale and impact in university-industry partnerships. Western already has a strategy to encourage multi-faceted collaboration, including by leverage of commercial partnerships and co-location opportunities established through our *Western Growth* campus development strategy which seeks to blur the lines between the university campus and industry.

Similarly, as much as supporting student engagement is critical, the role of Early Career Academics and multi-disciplinary teams in achieving the short and long-term NPILF objectives should be emphasised. ECAs will teach many of the students, conduct much of the research and support sustainable relationships between industry and multi-disciplinary teams to deliver the applied STEM+ capabilities that are central to the NPILF.

The Pilot, Timing and Certainty

The suggested annual assessment also presents a narrow timeframe in which to realise outcomes from some of the more meaningful indicators. The pilot may therefore test the process but not necessarily the efficacy of some of the long-term programs developed. In this context, 2 years should be considered the minimum period appropriate for the pilot. This period will incentivise the development of new programs in the sector; re-allocation should not be introduced any earlier. The post-pilot distribution method should be subject to a further consultation process in early 2023.

Western strongly supports the objective to drive a cultural shift amongst universities and industry to better collaborate but recognises that such change necessitates major new initiatives, often introducing risk or uncertainty as to outcomes and implies a longer lead time. Longer-term funding cycles would provide confidence to both universities and industry to support the development and delivery of Innovator programs likely to achieve cultural change. Three-year funding cycles (from the commencement of the NPILF proper, following the pilot) would be preferred and the final guidelines should allow for high-risk high-reward Innovator programs to be ceased, reshaped or abandoned, without penalty.

Reciprocal Commitment

Much as it might seem intuitive, it is important to also call-out that collaboration necessarily involves two parties. NPILF is an important mechanism to encourage universities to extend their existing engagement, though success will also hinge on an equivalent commitment and investment by industry, particularly in the context of lifelong learning. It is established that Australian Business Expenditure on R&D is low relative to OECD standards and has been falling in recent years. There is no equivalent metric for industry engagement and investment in training the next generation though, irrespective, the point stands that industry has an important role to play; universities will depend on industry to support many of the WIL objectives of the NPILF.

Western has a range of established mechanisms to align with the needs and capabilities of SME and big business, government and community partners. Western looks forward to working with government to further demonstrate and more widely promote the importance of a mutual investment in university-industry collaboration.



*Footnote – Reporting Consistency

It is suggested that NPILF indicators should take into account that there are likely to be many, and diverse, curriculum elements that will be shaped by partnership pedagogy or similar industry curriculum partnership approaches, including subjects, minors, short courses, majors, and programs. For consistency, institutions may need to specify which curriculum elements will be measured.

Information capture in relation to these matters is currently inconsistent. For efficiency, data would be captured through curriculum approval processes for any new curriculum, however may be more difficult to capture for existing curriculum if systems are not already in place to collect this data.

Other challenges arise in determining appropriate metrics at institutional and sectoral level given variation in the depth and scope of curriculum partnerships. Some curriculum partnership activities may be limited to either co-designing, co-developing, co-delivering or co-credentialing curriculum to achieve a specific outcome at a specific time within a curriculum element. Others may extend to deeper and more extensive collaboration over an extended period of time and across related curriculum elements. An example of extended engagement in a unit would be where; course and unit learning outcomes are co-designed with partners; academic staff and partners continue to engage in co-development of teaching and learning resources; students participate in co-delivery of curriculum through a work-integrated learning activity; and partners work with academic staff on co-assessing student work each semester.

Institutional strategies should aspire to drive a more strategic and sustainable approach involving deeper engagement over time. Indicators that reflect these practices and that can be linked to other measures of impact across the sector could support identification of activities and partnerships that best support the development of job ready graduates in the longer term.

Use of shared categories of industry type across the sector would support more consistency of reporting e.g. industry sector (private, public, not-for-profit); ANZSIC industry code; size (small (1-4), small to medium (5-199), large (200+)), and would need to be relevant to international partnerships.