Submission by Prof Danny Samson (University of Melbourne)

This is to propose two initiatives that could be developed and deployed by the Department of Education that will significantly lift the quality of graduates' effectiveness in their workplaces and contribute to innovation in Australia. These proposed initiatives contribute to two of your terms of reference, namely,

• Meeting Australia’s knowledge and skills needs, now and in the future

• Delivering new knowledge, innovation and capability

Proposal 1 Diploma of Innovation

Develop, offer (to and through universities) and fund a Diploma of Innovation, across our university system. This is positioned as a 4 subject diploma, to be taken concurrently with any and every Batchelor degree. This proposal is to develop it once, centrally, to a very high level of quality, then provide the curriculum, materials etc to all universities. Funding should not be at the expense of existing government support, but be additional to present support. For students, this is the equivalent of one additional semester of study, but these four subjects could be taken in summers, or winters as compressed form offerings, hence not lengthening total study duration from the present usual three years. The outcome would be a large cohort of students entering the workforce their degrees in science, arts, engineering, law, music, commerce/ business etc, who ALSO have capability to contribute to and indeed drive innovation within their employing organisation. Innovation would include entrepreneurship elements, suitable for organisations of all shapes and sizes.

Proposal 2 National system for university-business innovation

A major problem – to be solved- is that all our universities are focussed on research and academics do at times come up with great inventions that are potentially of great use to society. Universities all have professional staff in ‘commercialisation’ units working to connect academics to the business world where IP can be transferred for scale up and commercialisation. With some (few) notable exceptions, success is quite rare, and much money is spent on these efforts, with low returns. Without going into reasons for this, a simple and powerful solution can be created to overcome the fragmented current approach. Most academics’ inventions fall into the ‘valley of death’ that exists between universities and business sectors. Each university has only limited resource, capability and network. The solution is to create a single national Innovation Clearing House, whereby universities and academics can ‘post’ and pitch inventions, and meet with businesses who may have interest. This will overcome the scale and capability issues that individual universities have, provide for much stronger exposure of inventions and technologies for possible commercialisation, and make it more efficient for the business world to find its way into our academic and intellectual national engine. It would be significantly more efficient than having 40 universities do their own thing, often not very well, as at present. Competition could be preserved. IP arrangements could also be preserved and conducted flexibly, through such a clearing house. Some universities might not opt in at first, but would soon see their loss of value by trying to ‘go it alone’ when a scaled up and expert market is created for bridging the valley of death. Business would be able to view and visit a one stop shop of IP. All stakeholders will win from it, and the promise is that Australia will finally and properly connect academia and business in a first-class and systematic way. Professor Danny Samson ( )