



Charles Sturt  
University

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SKILLS AND  
EMPLOYMENT

Consultation on the National  
Priorities and Industry Linkage  
Fund

30 October 2020

Office of the Vice-Chancellor  
Charles Sturt University



30 October 2020

The Hon Dan Tehan MP  
Minister for Education  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Charles Sturt welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the design of the National Priorities and Industry Linkages Fund (NPILF). The Fund will provide welcome recognition of, and encouragement for, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in a growing array of higher education courses.

At Charles Sturt, WIL is already a core part of many programs. In our Faculty of Science, for example, 29 courses involve some form of WIL and during 2019 we managed more than 11,500 student placements through internships, practicums, clinical placements and other forms of hands-on experience in the workplace. The University also offers WIL opportunities in the Faculty of Arts and Education, such as those for students in Teaching, Communications and Information Studies, and the Faculty of Business, Justice and Behavioural Sciences, such as those for students in Policing, Security, and Law.

Many of our courses and the associated WIL activities are designed in consultation with industry and professional accreditation bodies. These arrangements offer clear benefits to employers and to our students, as is shown by the Charles Sturt's consistently high rankings for graduate employment and starting salaries.

Our experience in providing high quality WIL opportunities suggests that flexibility must be an essential characteristic of the NPILF. The aims of the Fund will not be well served by a framework that limits WIL to certain kinds of activities, discourages students in some fields from taking advantage of WIL, or excludes some sectors of the economy. It is also vital that WIL arrangements ensure the best possible outcomes for industry, students and universities, and that the funding mechanism for the NPILF accommodates some of the additional challenges for universities in regional areas in establishing and maintaining effective relationships with regional employers.

Charles Sturt University would be pleased to expand on any of our responses in the attached submission or to provide the Department with more information on our approach to the development, delivery and evaluation of Work-Integrated Learning.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Germov'.

**Professor John Germov**  
Acting Vice-Chancellor

Encl:



## Consultation on the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund Response to Questions for Discussion

### Principles

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

The NPILF principles make the intended goals of the Fund clear, but do not offer clear guidance on what is expected of an indicator (however see response to Questions 2 and 3, below).

### Tiered indicators

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

The proposed approach is overly complex and would be burdensome to administer. There are too many indicators, which mostly focus on quantity rather than quality. This could restrict innovation. Charles Sturt supports the RUN suggestion that a short narrative could be included to address quality outcomes. We also suggest that rather than be prescriptive at this point, the pilot phase of NPILF offers an opportunity for universities and the Department to test various indicators and determine the appropriate number to achieve the outcomes of the Fund, including the development of a streamlined reporting framework.

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

The University notes it would be useful if the outcomes of business consultations were shared with universities before the NPILF goes online in 2021, so that they can inform their WIL offerings accordingly.

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

The NPILF metrics will need to be flexible, to accommodate different universities, businesses, and forms of WIL. The indicative metrics in the consultation paper are useful, but are heavily weighted towards measurement of the quantity, rather than the quality, of WIL. Charles Sturt suggests the metrics framework will need to include the impact of WIL for industry and community partners; improvements in learning outcomes and employability for students; and student retention. The metrics framework must also be clear, concise and readily understood by industry partners.

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

Our preference would be to avoid the introduction of a new data collection, and instead consider using and/or modifying existing metrics, such as QILT, for this purpose. If a new data collection is introduced, it will need to be 'light touch', and not add to the reporting burden for universities or their industry partners.

### 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?*

The allocation mechanism appears appropriate, but the Department will need to take steps to ensure it does not become overly complex, especially when it comes to re-allocation of funding.

Charles Sturt supports the Regional Universities Network proposal for a review the proposed allocation mechanism during the pilot phase.

### Distribution options

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

Charles Sturt supports the 'Per-EFTSL rate + base + loading' distribution mechanism as it avoids overly-simplistic drivers like EFTSL alone, provides incentive to improve and expand WIL offerings, and recognises challenges faced by smaller and regional institutions.

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

The definitions are adequate starting points. The final definitions will need to be flexible to ensure that potentially beneficial activities are not excluded, or that potential partners are not deterred.

Charles Sturt suggests that the final definitions for WIL include: purposeful student learning in academic *and* industry contexts; for STEM+, agriculture, environmental science, viticulture, and policing and security studies in addition to the stated fields; and for industry, the public sector.

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.*

Information on evaluation and qualitative assessment of WIL at Charles Sturt is included in the attachment.

An accepted, sector-wide WIL quality framework, drawing on examples of best practice, would provide guidance for universities seeking to develop their WIL activities and enable benchmarking 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?*

Government can support the goals of the NPILF by promoting WIL through advertising and social media, and in targeted communications with priority industries. It can also ensure the NPILF is integrated with other Australian Government programs, particularly those aimed at small businesses and those managed by the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources.

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

Studies of successful industry engagement in Australia and many other countries emphasise the importance of person-to-person relationships, and the value a single point of contact within the university for industry partners. For example, the Directors of External Engagement for our six main campuses are a key part of Charles Sturt’s strategy for building and maintaining relationships with regional industries, employers and communities.

Responsibility for developing and promoting WIL cannot rest with universities alone. Employers and industry groups need to be alert to the opportunities offered by WIL placements and engage with universities to develop WIL activities that meet their needs. Many WIL opportunities at Charles Sturt have been developed in collaboration with industry or in response to a need identified by our industry partners, and they are actively involved in the assessment of students and evaluation of WIL programs.

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

Charles Sturt University’s experience indicates there are three challenges to undertaking effective WIL in regional and rural environments:

- **Scale issues** – generally regions have smaller industry players and therefore a smaller involvement in WIL. Regional universities need a much larger number of partners to support their programs
- **Distance issues** – relative to regional campuses, where access to opportunities for partnerships / relationships can be limited with relevant industry groups.
- **Student costs and support issues** – access to accommodation, distances to and from WIL sites, access to part-time work during WIL.

In addition, there may be costs to businesses participating in WIL programs. Universities and industry can work together to manage these costs, but there is also a role for Government to incentivise industry. As above, Charles Sturt suggests the Department explore options to integrate the NPILF with other Australian Government business-facing programs, to provide assistance to firms participating in university WIL activities.

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

Clear and timely reporting by the Department (per page 19 of the consultation paper) will be essential.

### **Existing practice**

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

Information on long standing and innovative WIL partnerships at Charles Sturt University is included in the attachment.



## **General**

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

No. The reporting cycle and framework described in the paper does not operate over a long enough timeframe to capture post-graduation workplace learning and development.

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

No. New and/or innovative WIL activities may take more than 12 months to develop, and annual reporting and reviewing would involve considerable additional work for universities and the Department, with little additional benefit.

Charles Sturt suggests that the NPILF agreements should last for three years, consistent with universities' compacts, with 'light touch' annual reporting consistent with the nature and maturity of the WIL activity and more detailed reporting at the end of the agreement.

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

Yes. Charles Sturt would welcome further information on how the NPILF will interact with:

- Other university funding programs, including the Performance-Based Funding (PBF) for the Commonwealth Grant Scheme, noting both the NPILF and the PBF may include reporting on graduate employment outcomes
- Other elements of the Job-Ready Graduates package, including proposed arrangements for indexation and regional loading
- Other Australian Government policies, programs and priorities, such as the Modern Manufacturing Initiative and National Manufacturing Priorities
- Research funding, noting the consultation paper makes several references to 'industry-university engagement/collaboration in teaching and research'.





## Attachment

### Work Integrated Learning at Charles Sturt University – current activities and approaches to assessment and evaluation

#### Communication and Creative Industries

Work Integrated Learning is a key element of the success of the Charles Sturt University Communication student experience, and is linked to above average employment rates for our graduates.

With over 500 formal and informal partnerships across all communication and creative industry disciplines, these relationships provide the basis for a range of community and industry-based placements and professional projects – integrated learning experiences that focus on principles of project management, design thinking, complex problem solving, research and engagement. Industry partners are involved in course design, and contribute as guest lecturers.

Bathurst Communication students have contributed to the production of the National Radio News service, broadcast to 350 community radio stations across Australia, for more than 20 years, and the experience has provided the launch pad for many alumni careers in media.

Industry placements include around 100 internships each year in subjects including Strategic Communication, Event Management, Theatre Media and Radio and Journalism.

Students also undertake project-based community work that delivers real benefits to the students and the community. Recent examples include a social media campaign in Bathurst, to raise funding for cancer research, and major events like the Bathurst 1000.

It is a testament to the high value placed on the University's approach to WIL (and the quality of our graduates) that many industry partners have offered virtual placements in 2020 to continue their relationship.

#### *Assessment and Evaluation*

Students involved in WIL are required to set professional goals and review and evaluate the placement experience – a process which helps prepare them for their post-graduation careers. Students are also evaluated by host employers, and their feedback is shared with academic staff.

#### Education

The University has established strategic partnerships with local government bodies in the Eastern Riverina (Bland, Cootamundra-Gundagai, Greater Hume, Junee, Lockhart, Temora and Wagga Wagga). Regional councils are centralising educational services and are actively exploring opportunities for workplace learning for Early Childhood Education students, and, potentially, establishing graduate programs as a post-university employment option.

Arrangements with the Catholic education system include placements for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year Teacher Education students in the Wilcannia-Forbes Diocese. These arrangements are seen as essential for dealing with a potential future shortage of teaching staff in the region.

The University is also engaged in ongoing discussions with corporate education providers in the Early Childcare Sector, with options including scholarships and strategic partnerships.

Other education programs have been co-designed with G8 Education (Bachelor of Education Birth-5 years program).

#### *Assessment and Evaluation*

- Teaching and Learning Progression and Completion
- Teaching and Learning Feedback from Supervising teachers
- Reports and comments from University Liaison Officers or Professional Experience Liaison Officers.

University Professional Experience Liaison Officers are assigned to all workplace learning students at Charles Sturt.

### **Engineering**

Charles Sturt University's Engineering program was developed with industry. It involves a unique program design which has student engineers engaged in an innovative program involving a 'topic tree' approach to learning.

Following successful completion of the first three semesters of the program (1.5 years) student engineers undertake regional work placements with firms that employ them with the same starting wage as a fully qualified graduate. Their employers include local councils, private and public engineering companies, and in industry sectors including mining, health and construction.

While on the work placements students continue their study and are provided with an opportunity to change placement every semester to ensure they gain a broad range of experience prior to graduation.

Charles Sturt's engineering program has led to excellent employment outcomes for the students involved. Many have been offered continuing employment before they complete their studies. Employer feedback focuses on the students' high level of applied learning, and the level of interest in the program is such that the University has a waiting list of employers wanting to engage a student engineer.

#### *Assessment and Evaluation*

Students are assessed on their academic progress, the practical application of their knowledge and their conduct in the workplace.

### **Information Studies**

Charles Sturt offers the largest Library and Information Science program in Australia, with graduates employed across various information management professions. Course Advisory Committees meet industry representatives twice a year to discuss accreditation requirements, and course and subject design – a process that this year has led to changes to the core structure of our Bachelor and Masters programs in Information Science.

Academic staff are members and leaders of many industry associations and relevant accrediting bodies, such as the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). ALIA provides guidance to universities on work placements and the University has been engaged in discussions with ALIA this year on virtual placements, to accommodate COVID restrictions.

Alumni are actively involved in supporting study visit programs and placements.

#### *Assessment and Evaluation*

Assessment of WIL includes students being required to identify professional goals for their industry placements, and post-placement evaluations include the link between theory and practice, student experience on placement, and professional standards.





The School of Information Sciences undertakes regular qualitative evaluations of its WIL programs, a process that involves students as well as industry partners. The shift towards virtual placements this year was achieved with input from stakeholders and feedback from students and has been positive. The possibility of including virtual placement options in all future professional placements is being explored.

## **Humanities and Social Sciences**

Course Directors in Charles Sturt's Social Work and Human Services programs engage with industry to ensure courses meets employer needs, support pathways to ongoing learning, and provide professional development for the current and emerging professional workforce.

Planned engagement with NSW Education, Department of Communities and Justice and the disability, child and family welfare non-government sector is also an area of focus to support student placement opportunities, workforce planning and professional development for existing staff.

The University has a Social Work Board of Studies which includes industry partners – currently a representative from NSW Health and the Executive Director of a national NGO.

Course design is highly influenced by the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS). The School ensures that all elements of course and subject design, staffing and WIL activity are aligned with accreditation and association requirements. Various members of the school and relevant discipline areas sit on industry panels, advisory groups and professional association and accreditation panels.

### *Assessment and Evaluation*

Social Work field education is an accredited course of study. Universities are required to demonstrate that field education (WIL) meets the ASWEAS, in particular that assessment of students' professional knowledge and skills is linked to the Standards, including assessment of competency against the profession specific Graduate Attributes. Assessment requirements include:

- a documented learning plan
- a mid-placement presentation and report by supervising practitioner
- a final placement report, and
- a reflective paper on the integration of classroom learning with professional practice and development.

These requirements allow for the collection of feedback on the assessment tasks, the overall program, resources, and the host relationship with university staff.

The accreditation review process includes feedback from external parties.

## **Science**

In the Faculty of Science there are 29 courses that require students to undertake WIL at some point. WIL academic and professional staff work diligently to secure and support the large numbers of placements required to ensure timely graduation of all students.

Examples of current WIL activities include:

- long-standing arrangements for clinical placements with local health districts, private health providers, veterinary practices
- the establishment of on-campus enterprises that provide WIL opportunities for students and services to the local community (dentistry, speech pathology, podiatry, veterinary services and commercial farming)
- four week placements in an agribusiness for students in our Agriculture Business Management, Viticulture and Wine Science programs





- the Analytical Chemistry Industry Experience unit allows students to do a 160 hour work placement – often project-focused – in a commercial analytical chemistry laboratory, a government laboratory, or in a research group. The program is underpinned by prior learning in laboratory skills and safety
- new internship programs for Sports Media students; and
- work placements in aged care facilities across Australia involving approximately 275 first year students.

WIL arrangements also include support and training for industry partners, such as:

- short courses in student supervision (including grading of WIL) for paramedicine industry supervisors
- liaising with Practice Managers or Owners of the businesses to arrange placements and to support if any issues arise during the placement
- support for clinical educators involved in our Medical Imaging programs – in 2020 these have been conducted via Zoom; and
- advice on supporting struggling students.

### *Assessment and Evaluation*

Assessment of WIL activities in the Faculty of Science involves a range of inputs including:

- the development of a work plan/strategic plan/action plan before undertaking the placement
- written reports from students and their workplace supervisors
- oral presentations
- a record of competencies achieved
- monitoring attendance
- evaluating performance against general workplace competencies (presentation, initiative)
- employer feedback, and
- checking against professional accreditation requirements.

Charles Sturt academic staff and research students are also developing new WIL assessment tools including:

- a capability assessment framework
- clinical assessment frameworks with potential for national use in dentistry and nuclear medicine education
- benchmarking for paramedicine WIL
- developing a common site assessment template, to ensure workplaces are suitable for WIL, and
- developing quality indicators for rural health placements.

Quality assurance of workplace learning is achieved by monitoring student feedback and providing supervisor support and development. Charles Sturt uses a survey tool that can provide a basis for consistent evaluation of student placement experiences. The University is exploring options for common survey questions – for benchmarking – supplemented by discipline-specific questions.

The University is also implementing some innovative approaches to evaluation of WIL such as encourage students to document their placement through photographs, the use the images as a basis for reflecting on their WIL experience.

