

Future-Proof: Protecting Australians through Education and Skills **Feedback from Macquarie University**

Macquarie University welcomes the work which the Business Council is doing in the area of higher education and the Council's preparedness to consult further on its proposals. We support the broad outcomes proposed for higher education (*Future-Proof*, p. 48, *Proposal 5*) and particularly the focus on catering 'to different cohorts at their stages of life'. We also welcome the desire for stable medium-term policy and funding in higher education. We would suggest, however, that the Paper overlooks the considerable work that has already been done on 'efficient costing' and in determining ratios of public and private contribution as well as work on improving 'market information'.

The University can most usefully comment on Component five of the *Future-Proof* Consultation Questions and this is done briefly below. We would be more than happy to provide detailed information to the Nous Group.

Component five: Create a culture of lifelong learning

19. *What are your view on adopting a more modularised approach to skills development to support lifelong learning?*

The proposal is that Australia needs 'an approach that allows adults to gain new skills or knowledge to supplement their earlier studies and what they have learned in their work' (*Future-Proof*, p. 96). Macquarie University is doing some of this already through MOOCs. This is an approach which fits the aim set out in *Proposal fourteen* about empowering 'graduates in the labour market to create a "qualification" that meets their skilling needs' (*Future-Proof*, p. 97). For example, we have recently introduced an Excel Skills for Business Specialization in Coursera. The objective is that:

on completing the four courses in this Specialization, learners will be able to design sophisticated spreadsheets, including professional dashboards, and perform complex calculations using advanced Excel features and techniques. They will have acquired the skills to manage large data sets efficiently, extract meaningful information from datasets, and present data effectively. In addition, learners will have mastered the skills needed to validate data and prevent errors in spreadsheets, create automation, and apply advanced formulas and conditional logic to help make decisions.

These kinds of courses are ideal because they allow busy working people to tailor their learning to their immediate needs and to their working schedules. They can study small chunks or work through the whole specialization and, if they choose, can earn certificates from Coursera.

21. *What role do you think business should play in creating a culture of lifelong learning?*

The focus of *Future-Proof* is on learning after 'foundational' qualifications. However, it is worth making the point that business can play a much more engaged role in the development of work-integrated-learning (WIL) opportunities for students and that this is the essential first step towards achieving the culture of lifelong learning which the *Future-Proof* Paper proposes.

We are always looking to extend the range of business opportunities for our students, particularly now as we seek more opportunities for them to have a practice-based education. All undergraduates at Macquarie undertake a WIL experience, through the University's PACE Program, under a mutual reciprocity framework; that is, a commitment to 'form partnerships which are mutually beneficial, and which foster mutual respect and joint ownership' of the placement. So, the WIL experience is intended to be a partnership between the student, the University and the business or other placement organisation.

This year, the University has gone further and is offering students the opportunity to undertake our Bachelor of Actuarial Studies in combination with a new degree of Bachelor of Professional Practice. This will see students alternating between classroom studies and workplace experience throughout their degree, with three vocational placements of three to six months each. (In total, this will add a year to the standard three-year degree.) Students will develop professional skills and networks across a number of professional settings during the course and use those practical experiences in the classroom to enhance their studies. The model is potentially highly valuable, and the Bachelor of Professional Practice is a pilot program which we expect to generalise to other professional areas such as accounting and engineering. Central to the success of this WIL model of education is the preparedness of business to provide internships.

Beyond these kinds of more focused 'foundation' qualifications, business can work with universities to enable 'adults to gain new skills or knowledge to supplement their earlier studies and what they have learned in their work' (*Future-Proof*, p. 96). There is a potential model here in Macquarie University plans to introduce an Academy for Continuing Professional Development in Education. The Academy will enable school teachers to undertake ongoing professional development. (From 2018, all NSW early childhood, primary and secondary teachers, executives and school principals are required to complete 50 hours of NSW Educational Standards Authority registered professional development over five years to maintain their eligibility for employment.) Although courses will not lead to awards per se, they could be stacked into awards or sequences of awards. The model has broader applications for professional learning and the University plans to extend the Academy to other academic disciplines in response to individual and corporate needs.
