

National Skills Passport Consultation – University of Tasmania response

February 2024

Submitted via online web form: www.education.gov.au/national-skills-passport-consultation

Introductory Statement

The University of Tasmania is highly supportive of a National Skills Passport, and we are pleased to provide this submission to the consultation process. We can see great opportunity in a seamless and integrated service which would provide benefit to students and graduates, education providers and employers. In our view, it will be important that a National Skills Passport can:

- Balance consistency and simplicity for users, with support for future innovation in education and skills development.
- Integrate across all forms of post-compulsory education, providing consistent credentialing that integrates across VET and higher education sectors.
- Build on, or integrate with, existing systems already being used by many education providers, to minimise duplication and complex processes.

If the National Skills Passport system is to include other features such as skills development advice, this should not be at the expense of user simplicity and a clear focus on the original intent of the system as a validated and trusted source of education and skills attainment should be retained. We urge for continued consultation on the National Skills Passport as the project progresses, to ensure that representatives from all user groups are involved in the system design and development phases.

Key principle 1: Valuable and useful

How do you currently access and assess and verify skills and credentials?

At the University of Tasmania, we use the Automated Results Transfer System (ARTS) national database when assessing domestic student applications, which enables data from Australian universities to be matched against student applications to verify previous study records. This database does not include VET credentials, other than VET courses taught at NSW or ACT universities. VET or other qualifications/credentials are checked and assessed manually, by requesting copies of certificates.

Does this process differ for international skills and credentials?

For International student applications, we access the National Office for Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) and Ecctis information databases, as well as requesting physical copies of credentials from applicants, to assess for equivalency, assess course admission requirements and to check prior study and completed qualifications.

How could a National Skills Passport reduce your cost and time impacts?

We can see a significant opportunity to streamline the sourcing and verification of qualifications for both domestic and international applicants. If implemented successfully,

this would result in time savings, operational efficiencies, and reduced costs for users, including individuals, workplaces, and training organisations.

For the National Skills Passport to be successful, and to reduce cost and time impacts, it will be important to consider how the platform functions to verify qualifications to ensure data integrity without adding barriers or burdensome processes for users of the platform. It will also be important to address how the platform can integrate with, or replace, other existing systems and processes to avoid further duplication by introducing another system. To aid this, we strongly recommend a working group involving operations managers from Admissions or Student Systems teams across universities and the VET sector are actively involved in the detailed design phases of the National Skills Passport.

Key principle 3: Integrated and interoperable

What systems do you operate or interact with that may be impacted by a National Skills Passport, and what systems would you like to see integrated?

As detailed in previous questions, we use numerous individual databases to assess domestic and international student applications for prior study, including ARTS national database, NOOSR and Ecctis. In addition to these systems used for validating and checking credentials, we also interact with the Tertiary Admissions Centres systems for each state.

As a dual sector provider, we currently use two student management systems – Tech One Student Management for higher education students and VETtrak for VET students. Using two systems within the one organisation can result in complex processes. It would be beneficial for a National Skills Passport to be integrated with these existing systems to streamline processes for individuals and for organisations. If a National Skills Passport enabled providers such as ours to upload all qualifications to the one system, which then integrated with student management systems, this would result in time and cost savings and an improved user experience for individuals and organisations.

Many universities currently use My eEquals for the higher education sector, to issue and manage official credentials for students and graduates. All public universities are registered with My eEquals, with significant usage levels – 99% of higher education students and graduates receive their academic credentials via My eEquals. This platform is well established and has been a significant financial investment for users. The My eEquals platform also has the capability to verify credentials, through external verification services (ie Parchment, CSSD, MyCredits), though these services are currently limited to qualifications from certain countries and could benefit from being expanded to include additional international countries. In developing a National Skills Passport, consideration should be given to leveraging the significant investments that many universities have already made in the My eEquals platform to avoid duplication and additional processes for users. We strongly encourage continued consultation with university admissions and student systems teams in the design, implementation, and operation of a National Student Passport, and would welcome the opportunity to participate in further consultation as this concept is developed.

Key Principle 4: Trusted and reliable

Do you see value in a National Skills Passport that includes skills and qualifications that are not verified, validated, regulated, or accredited? For example, work experience, unaccredited micro credentials, and industry or other training?

In the Australian education sector, we are experiencing increased interest in shorter form offerings, including micro-credentials and non-credentialled, skills based short courses. As reflected within the Australian Government's Accord Interim Report, short form and stackable qualifications will be important to develop the skills needed in our future workforce and support lifelong learning in the population.

We urge consideration on how micro-credentials and non-accredited certificates would be presented and validated within a National Skills Passport. Many Learning Management Systems (LMS) can issue badges or certificates on completion of courses, and these are used to encourage student participation in non-award learning. If the National Skills Passport is intended to represent all styles and modes of learning undertaken by an individual over their lifetime, consideration needs to be given to how course quality is evaluated and represented within the system. This is particularly important for users outside of the education sector (ie employers), who may require guidance or prompts to understand varying types and levels of qualifications, credentials and courses.

For the National Skills Passport to be successful, it will need to address how the validating process considers shorter form, skills-based offerings, without hindering innovation in education or creating barriers for new courses or educational offerings to be included in the passport.

In addition to academic transcripts and certificates, we suggest consideration of whether professional memberships could be included in a National Skills Passport. This may include industry group memberships (RACGP, CPA), Working with Vulnerable People and police checks, licenses such as truck, forklift. The National Skills Passport could potentially become a single repository for all relevant data related to further education/study and employment opportunities.

Key Principle 5: Privacy enhancing and secure

How would you expect third-party access to an individual's National Skills Passport to be managed? For example, would an individual provide one-off access, permanent revokable access, timebound access or another form?

Given the type of data proposed to be stored within an individual's National Skills Passport, there will need to be contemporary privacy, security, and access control for all users. Students or graduates should be in control of their own data and records, including deciding who can access their passport. Ideally, students and graduates would be able to grant access to organisations including training/education providers and workplaces and be able to select a time frame in which their data can be viewed by the organisation. We also recommend an access log is included in the passport, so the student/graduate can view who has accessed their data and records, and when.