

National Skills Passport

University of Melbourne response to consultation

Key principle 1: Valuable and useful

3. From the perspective of a provider from the education and training sector:

a. Do you currently access and assess applications for course admissions, recognition of prior learning and credit transfer?

Yes, noting most of the assessment for entry relies on academic merit, and this is set out in policy (<https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1295/>).

ii. Does this process differ for international skills and credentials?

No, the same policy applies internationally but the systems are not consistent so there are issues of equivalency. We have credit calculators and so on to standardise these complexities as much as possible. There are significant calls on academic judgment to determine whether a subject or course is recognised for entry.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about key principle 1?

The value of a National Skills Passport will be highly dependent on the specific opportunity/issues it is designed to address. To date, three distinct purposes have been proposed:

- **Employability:** The consultation paper states that the Skills Passport will “make it easier for individuals to have their qualifications recognised and easier for employers to find well-trained and qualified employees.” This suggests that the Skills Passport will serve as an employment tool.
- **Recognition of prior learning and credit transfer:** The Universities Accord interim report argues that the Skills Passport could enable learners to “have their full range of qualifications, microcredentials, prior learning, workplace experience and general capabilities recognised across the education and training system and in the employment market.” This suggests that the Skills Passport would also have a role in recognition of prior learning and credit transfer between institutions.
- **Lifelong learning/career advice:** The consultation paper states that the Skills Passport “could potentially provide advice and guidance about skills, knowledge and experience that would be most complementary to an individual’s existing skills.” In this way, it would act as a tool to provide career advice and support lifelong learning.

If the purpose is simply to act as an employability tool, there may not be a need for an entirely new platform as these already exist in the market (e.g. LinkedIn, Seek). There is also the potential that such a tool could entrench the divide between the workforce and the structurally unemployed if a Skills Passport eventually becomes a universal criterion for hiring. In this instance, the tool would need to be tied to much stronger mechanisms than we currently have for educating people out of structural unemployment. The tool would also need to be sensitive to generational differences, as

older workers with less access to retraining opportunities may become less employable if they are not seen to have as extensive a Skills Passport as younger cohorts.

If the purpose is to improve credit transfer and recognition of prior learning, this may duplicate the role My eEquals plays for domestic students. All Australian and New Zealand universities are signatories to My eEquals, which acts as a 'single source of truth', providing secure access to certified qualification records for universities and learners. There may be enormous benefits in improving the data collected to automatically assess prior learning and credit transfer but enabling and maintaining this dataset would be an onerous task.

There may be some value in a tool that supports lifelong learning through career advice, like MySkillsFuture in Singapore. This would presumably provide additional tailored information beyond that already provided by services like [Course Seeker](#) and [Microcred Seeker](#). However, further research into the uptake of these services overseas would be needed to ensure that the benefits of such a tool would outweigh the significant costs involved.

The value of the Skills Passport could be in bringing these functionalities together into a single, user-friendly platform. However, this would be an ambitious undertaking and building such a platform would likely incur large upfront and ongoing costs. The opportunity costs of creating this platform need to be carefully considered.

Instead, existing tools such as My eEquals could be expanded to include additional functionality. Alternatively, the Government could play a role by setting standards across systems so that existing platforms could become interoperable. Microcredentials provide an example of how this might work. Microcredential platforms are voluntarily governed by open-source standards (the [Open Badges Specification](#)) which provide interoperability for badges issued. Having government direction in the form of IT standards (e.g. technical standards, data standards, security standards) to guide an interoperable, integrated system that is inclusive of all learners could bridge an important gap.

Key principle 2: User-centred

2. From the perspective of an organisation:

a. How do organisations access and use credentials when engaging with students, employees, apprentices, or job seekers?

Students submit their credentials as part of their application. There are some issues with fraud, which can be challenging for universities. The University of Melbourne currently has about six staff working in compliance and much of their work is focused on international applications. Issues with fraud are likely to increase as digital technologies expand. The National Skills Passport could help address these issues; however, given that it will likely be limited to domestic qualifications, challenges in assessing international applications will remain.

b. What data (such as credentials, qualifications, licences, and skills) and functionality should be included in a National Skills Passport?

Universities currently report students' specific, individual course completions (and subject completions) to the government. The information provided is like that of a transcript, including the course name and government classification, and field of education code for both courses and subjects. This means that universities could use the current TSCI data

collection and reporting mechanism (using the Unique Student Identifier – or CHESN for older records – to link students’ details across providers) to feed into the Skills Passport.

However, most of the data currently gathered about course completions is high-level. TCSI data does not include detailed information about the knowledge or skills that students might have developed from completing a course, subject, or microcredential. Enhancing this would require significant investment of University resources to enable this and maintain it over time.

More broadly, there are concerns that the focus on skills, if narrowly defined and quantified, risks leaving key outcomes of a liberal education, such as critical thinking, intercultural competence, clear communication, capacity to deal with complexity and ability to work in diverse teams, unacknowledged. These are capabilities that will become increasingly valuable in an economy that is transformed by artificial intelligence and in a society shaped by unmediated communication and information.

Key principle 3: Integrated and interoperable

1. 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?

The Skills Passport would likely need to interact with existing data collections such as TCSI and the Unique Student Identifier. It would also need to interface with My eQuals, Course Seeker and Microcred Seeker, noting the shared functionality.

The Department should also consider how the Skills Passport relates to the National Microcredentials Framework.

Key principle 4: Trusted and reliable

3. 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 microcredentials, and industry or other training?

It will be important to clarify the scope of the Skills Passport. If the Skills Passport is restricted to full AQF qualifications across vocational education and training (VET) and higher education, it will lose some of its utility. Existing platforms, including the Unique Student Identifier (which provides VET transcripts and has been expanded to higher education), already perform this role. Expanding the Skills Passport to include microcredentials and informal learning would increase its usefulness by bringing different forms of learning into a single platform.

However, including such a broad scope would increase the complexity and the costs associated with the Skills Passport. This could potentially include thousands of non-accredited credentials, creating significant integrity and quality control issues. The Skills Passport would need to have minimum quality standards and be limited to courses which involve assessments. If the Skills Passport included other, more informal learning, this would need to be clearly distinguished from formal, validated learning where the quality and learning outcomes can be guaranteed.

Key principle 5: Privacy enhancing and secure

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about key principle 5?

A future Skills Passport should protect and foster learners' agency and provide them with control over their own data or 'self-sovereignty'. This concept of self-sovereignty is defined as "the ability of a learner to control the sharing of their credentials without a required intermediary (i.e. registrar's office), while maintaining trust."¹ Users should be able to select which information is public or shared, tailoring their profiles as they see fit, as they would a resume.

It is unclear whether the proposed Skills Passport would be voluntary or mandatory. For example, the Unique Student Identifier is mandatory, aimed at providing a Government authenticated record of each learners' education and training over their lifetime. However, other analogous programs, such as My Health Record, have allowed users to opt out. The University recommends that the Skills Passport be opt-in, given the potential privacy concerns some users may have.

¹ <https://www.aacrao.org/resources/newsletters-blogs/aacrao-connect/article/alternative-credentials-considerations-guidance-and-best-practices> p. 8