

## UNSW Submission – National Skills Passport

UNSW welcomes the opportunity to comment on the National Skills Passport Consultation Paper. We welcome this initiative as an important step to further support lifelong learning in Australia, which can provide significant benefits across the education sector and more widely for the Australian economy.

### Executive Summary

The following are the key points of UNSW's submission in response to the National Skills Passport Consultation Paper:

- 1) The proposed National Skills Passport is a welcome opportunity to further support a culture of lifelong learning in Australia.
- 2) The proposed National Skills Passport presents an opportunity for Australia to build upon existing frameworks and processes to support a national uniform standard of recognised prior learning (RPL).
- 3) Should a National Skills Passport be established, the following components should feature to ensure it is set up for success and adds value for users. A National Skills Passport should:
  - Have a clear purpose as to what it will achieve in comparison to existing efforts so that it can be a value-adding platform for students, employers, and the education sector, and is responsive to future changes in the labour market;
  - Be developed based on the existing and effective assurance and regulatory frameworks within which higher education providers work, administered by national regulatory bodies;
  - Adopt a common currency between higher education providers that opens new learning pathways, enables potential system efficiencies, and allows individual providers to set the value of their respective offerings; and
  - Be ambitious in that it could be a successful example of international best practice.

We are broadly supportive of the proposed five principles that underpin the National Skills Passport, and the recognition that higher education providers, such as UNSW, are key stakeholders in shaping the purpose and function of the proposed National Skills Passport. UNSW considers that a National Skills Passport must have a clear purpose as to what it will add over and above existing platforms so that it can generate value for students, employers, and education providers, while being sustainable and responsive to future changes.

## **Principle 1: Valuable and useful**

### *Supporting lifelong educational opportunities*

UNSW is strongly supportive of the commitment to self-improvement through continuous education. The recent 5-Year Productivity Inquiry made a number of recommendations pointing to the importance of growing access to tertiary education and supporting a culture of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning opportunities need to be widely and equitably accessible, and broadly appreciated as an important step in career development – addressing both labour market supply and demand challenges. With the skills required by today's workforce rapidly evolving, ongoing education to adapt to these changes is more important than ever.

UNSW considers the National Skills Passport as an important opportunity to promote lifelong learning, by recognising the breadth of competencies that can be acquired through, for example, formal qualifications, courses, training, and microcredentials. This training is already offered (and would continue to be) by a range of accredited and non-accredited education providers such as universities, private providers, Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, and industry-led training.

At present, records of microcredentials are not effectively captured systematically across providers, which is important, particularly as these offerings can provide options for rapid reskilling, upskilling, and complementary or lifelong learning in line with industry and societal needs. This can also help to provide a broader picture of individual learner's breadth of experience that assists education providers decide appropriate levels of RPL. To do so, this would require a standard definition of 'microcredentials'<sup>1</sup>.

Additionally, a National Skills Passport can help recognise skills diversity and culturally reflective skills, which could help reduce barriers to employment for some groups. A universally agreed list of skills and competencies would be critical to achieving such benefits.

The National Skills Passport would therefore help to map a holistic post-secondary school education system and support an individual's learning pathways across these different forms of further education. In turn, this can also make it easier to combine an individual's qualifications and to more effectively demonstrate their competencies to prospective employers.

### *National uniform standard of recognised prior learning*

Broadly, it is important to consider measures that support better Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and UNSW considers that the National Skills Passport could be a critical tool in this regard. This would especially be the case if it builds on the existing qualifications recognition infrastructure and processes that universities and other tertiary providers already use.

RPL already widely occurs throughout the university system, but is subject to each individual institution's different application, and is often considered manually on a case-by-case basis. Developing a national framework would establish a uniform standard of recognition, in turn providing clearer pathways and greater mobility between different categories of provider. With a clearer pathway to a formal qualification, this measure would also play a major role in supporting greater lifelong learning. The National Skills Passport has the potential to support this, expanding access to RPL, enabling individuals to move into jobs faster while increasing educational options offered by providers.

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<sup>1</sup> As outlined in our [Microcredentials and Short Course Procedure](#), UNSW defines microcredentials as discrete certificated units of assessed learning that are additional, alternative, complementary to, separate from or a component part of a formal qualification. More broadly, microcredentials could include, for example, certificates, licenses, memberships, badges, ratings, endorsements and background checks.

Furthermore, by having a uniform standard, each institution is better able to automate their systems, in turn allowing for faster processing of applications, and a better user experience for students.

#### *International best practice*

Australia's tertiary education sector is consistently recognised as a strong global competitor, as evidenced by our strong results in all major international ranking systems. The National Skills Passport should aim to be similarly ambitious in that it could be a successful example of international best practice, alongside Singapore's unified credentials platform *MySkillsFuture* and the European Union's *Europass* which incorporates skills, qualifications and experiences in a consistent way across Europe.

### **Principle 2: User-centred**

UNSW broadly supports the principle of a National Skills Passport that is based on a user-centric design. Considering how individuals will navigate a digital skills platform and the challenges they may face in being able to effectively demonstrate their qualifications and competencies to prospective employers will be critical in realising the benefits from this initiative.

One of the key benefits of applying a user-centric design approach will be the ability to connect relevant services from providers that are tailored to the individual's educational needs. A tailored approach can then help to identify the best pathways for individuals who want to, for example, transition to critical areas of the economy with in-demand skills or support mobility across sectors and/or locations across Australia.

We envisage that there would need to be a common or standard language utilised by the platform so there is a clear expectation from users as to what data is required and how they can access information and resources as needed, and where there is the potential to apply automation to make it an efficient user experience. Furthermore, as every provider is free to determine the value they apply to each prior competency, users will be empowered to make well-informed decisions that best suit their needs.

As this is a new initiative that relies on the contribution and active engagement of a range of stakeholders, the National Skills Passport should be piloted and implemented over a period of time. An iterative approach can help to ensure that the platform achieves its purpose and becomes a valuable and useful tool for all stakeholders.

### **Principle 3: Integrated and interoperable**

#### *Consolidation*

The National Skills Passport should be developed and operated by the Australian Government to ensure maximum integration and interoperability across existing government infrastructure and platforms as highlighted in the Consultation Paper, while also flexible to incorporate other significant platforms such as My eQuals.

This will enable an initial foundation from which individuals can then combine and manage all their university and VET qualifications, microcredentials and competencies in one digital location. This will require substantial work to identify existing platforms and systems across education providers, and as outlined earlier, based on a common language to maximise accessibility and ease of use. UNSW sees that having a detailed understanding of the connections between current systems and platforms of education providers can then help to determine the purpose and scope of the National Skills Passport,

while ensuring the system does not impose high administrative and compliance costs on education providers.

#### *Data requirements*

As the Consultation Paper highlights, the lack of a common data standard or rules for structuring information regarding qualifications and skills across the tertiary sector complicates data collection and communication. While a National Skills Passport may be able to leverage data already being collected through existing systems, it will be important to consider how this data can be effectively streamlined across higher education providers, building on, and potentially strengthening, the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

Furthermore, if higher education providers are able to utilise a common currency for RPL, there may be an opportunity to realise efficiencies for individuals and create a standardised framework whereby microcredentials are stackable, providing a pathway to a certificate or full degree, now or in the future.

#### *Skills intelligence*

The National Skills Passport may be able to provide both policymakers and education providers new and valuable data insights indicating key trends and demands in the labour market. These will provide significant information to support guidance and counselling, recruitment processes, provision of education and training, and career paths. This will also encourage a two-way conversation between prospective employers and those individuals who seek to transition to critical areas of the economy.

### **Principle 4: Trusted and reliable**

Australia already has the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) that help to effectively regulate skills to a high standard and provide a strong foundation for a trusted and reliable National Skills Passport platform. We expect that any national platform for a skills passport should be developed based on existing TEQSA, ASQA and AQF standards.

### **Principle 5: Privacy-enhancing and secure**

UNSW broadly supports the principle of a National Skills Passport that is based on a digital platform which is secure and privacy-enhancing, particularly as skills passports can build trust between employers and employees. The platform must be able to verify and validate the relevant education provider and its offerings, and an individual's identification and qualifications. However, UNSW encourages any operational components of a National Skills Passport be considered following the clear determination of its purpose, policy scope and benefits.

## **Conclusion**

It is critical that a National Skills Passport can differentiate itself from similar existing efforts to maximise its value and usefulness as a tool for individuals pursuing lifelong learning opportunities, prospective employers, and education providers. A well-designed offering will be critical to better integrate the various post-secondary school education offerings, and ensure they underpin an Australian labour market that is able to meet the nation's future skills needs.

Should you wish to discuss any issue raised in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact our Head of Government Relations, Mr Robin Schuck, on 0411 124 258 or [r.schuck@unsw.edu.au](mailto:r.schuck@unsw.edu.au).