

# National Skills Passport Consultation Paper Response

**February 2024**

These are notes for the webform submission.

## **Key principle 1: Valuable and useful**

### **1. How would you describe the value of a National Skills Passport?**

**[separate boxes for each]**

- a. For learners?**
- b. For employees?**
- c. For employers/business?**
- d. For providers in the education and training sector?**
- e. For governments?**

### **Learners**

The value for learners will be in ease of attaining verified skills recognition with greater ease, and without having to apply to each individual employer, assessor, trainer or educational institution. A key to value will be the recognition of skills rather than the recognition only of formal qualifications and support the self-assessment of skills and also support career planning and development. While it is difficult to envisage how this will happen, the potential for skills and competency mapping would be very beneficial for learners (and others). Benefit would also come from recognition of industry and professional body certifications, as well as from recognition of current competency (based on units of competency) and workplace experience. The value provided will need to exceed readily available and free products with similar approaches (although not requiring independent verification) such as LinkedIn. Value may also be diminished by this personal information being stored on a government database (privacy, access by other Depts), increased risk of identity theft and access for overseas employers for gap year/"backpacker"/Business visa opportunities.

## **For employees**

As well as the same value as for learners, the Singapore system is designed in a way that highlights access to upskilling and reskilling opportunities which appears to be very advantageous to employees seeking lifelong learning opportunities (there may be more competition and market requirements in Australia than Singapore, as well as major regional and local needs across Australia). Employees may be able to access more advanced standing in training opportunities through the recognition of verified current competency.

## **For Employers/Business**

Employers would potentially have improved access to active recruiting (most systems require applicants to come to them through word of mouth or advertising, though some do active recruiting through LinkedIn) by being able to conduct database searches, if they were to have access to the system for such searches. This would require examining issues of consent, use of private information and the potential for unintended inclusion of biased recruitment, especially towards formal and higher education completion rather than current skills competency. The value to employers may be limited if the term "Passport" is retained and this requires examination. A passport is a formal, official document which is only issued after application and substantial verification prior travel. The use of "Passport" in the context of skills may lead to a culture where formal credentials are seen as essential and better than actual workplace experience, leading to greater discrimination against regional Australians (where access to formal qualifications may be limited), priority cohorts and older members of the workforce. Unless the government intends to mandate and require verification of skills, competency and credentials through this system, we would suggest that Passport is too strong a term, compared to other naming alternatives such as skills records or skills channel and portal, for example.

Note: When considering employers/businesses, there is a need to include the roles of recruiters and recruitment agencies, especially for online application systems and the black box analysis/prioritisation/AI systems that are now more often used to support them.

## **For providers in education and training sectors**

Depending on the information collected, value would most likely be gained through an improved ability to undertake and provide consumer guidance on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Recognition of Current Competency (RCC), as well as credit transfer. Being able to provide value for these sectors is likely to be critical, as they will most likely face increased technology, compliance and administration costs if they are to provide verifiable information of qualifications to the system.

## For Governments

A central and verifiable repository would allow governments at all levels to understand skills, completions and workforce information in their regions based on a reliable database. While there could be extensive value to governments, much of that value would be dependent on being able to access and utilise the data held on a government database for government purposes, which may provide barriers to value propositions for other stakeholder groups.

### **2. From the perspective of an employer:**

#### **a. Do you access and verify skills and credentials for current and potential employees? If yes:**

- i. How do you currently access, assess and verify skills and credentials?**
- ii. Does this process differ for international skills and credentials?**
- iii. What cost and time impacts do you currently incur? If applicable, provide details around relevant processes.**
- iv. How could a National Skills Passport reduce the cost and time impacts?**

#### **b. Could a National Skills Passport change your current hiring or other practices? If so, what would it need to offer?**

#### **What impacts do you anticipate if your organisation started using a National Skills Passport?**

Our organisation verifies skills and credentials.

We currently access skills information for potential employees through means provided by applicants, including hard copy credentials, email attachments, LinkedIn searches, personal websites (esp for portfolios) and (rarely) through institution verification sites for formal qualifications. We verify skills through reference checks, and occasionally through practical testing.

Our organisation does not verify international skills and credentials.

A National Skills Passport could potentially become the main source for checking, with verification having already taken place if this was feasible, and if we could access the information directly. If access is dependent on individually provided access, there may be issues especially as these may be unrecognisable links and questionable from a cyber-security perspective. Given recent experiences with the hacking and takeover of private information from a range of government, semi government and private company systems this is an important consideration when it comes to employer usage.

## Key principle 2: User-centred

No answers

## Key principle 3: Integrated and interoperable

### **What challenges do you currently face aligning information and qualifications across VET and higher education? What do you need to overcome these challenges, and how could a National Skills Passport assist?**

This is a key consideration, given that there are currently a number of different “alignments” applied, including the formal AQF and ANZSCO levels (which we note are often inconsistent with each other). Further complication is added when considering non-formal training, and workplace skills development including experience that is mainly overlooked by a focus on formal qualifications. In addition, there are credentials which are complementary but which may exist within different tertiary systems such as the bachelor degrees and VET diplomas related to, for example, Agronomy. Often, systems are designed as though the AQF levels are a pathway that climbs upwards, whereas the learner journey is often fluid and multidirectional. Any system will need to be based on treating skills and competency acquisition and practice (experience) as the central focus, and that the differences in AQF level choices are mainly based on the learner’s preferences for how they can best acquire skills. For there to be value in this system, all stakeholders need to be able to understand the current safe, effective and productive skills of the individual, regardless of how those skills were obtained.

## Key principle 4: Trusted and reliable

1. What level of validation of qualifications and skills would you expect from a National Skills Passport? Would you expect more than one level, if so, what can that look like?
2. Who would you expect to provide the validation? For example, would you expect qualifications to be validated by a university, Registered Training Organisation or regulating body, and skills verified by an employer or third party?
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?
4. What do you see as the role of government in the design, implementation, and operation of a National Skills Passport?

**What level of validation of qualifications and skills would you expect from a National Skills Passport? Would you expect more than one level, if so, what can that look like?**

If this system is to be hosted on a government website, there is going to be an expectation that records are official and have been verified. It is unlikely that a fully operational system could achieve this without extreme complexity and major resource allocation. A resolution may be that there are different descriptors used for different records. For example, a formal credential may be marked as verified, professional and industry association recognition could be marked as industry verified, a workplace report or reference may be workplace verified or requires direct checking, training by vendors could be vendor verified (eg Microsoft verified training) and informal learning, claimed by the worker could be marked as self-verified.

**Who would you expect to provide the validation? For example, would you expect qualifications to be validated by a university, Registered Training Organisation or regulating body, and skills verified by an employer or third party**

Formal qualifications and credentials will need to be verified in accordance with current legislation by formally recognised issuers, and provided through secure systems direct by those issuers into the system (subject to security concerns). The system will need to be able to capture formal licences from national, state, territory and local regulatory bodies, and these should also be received directly from these bodies. Skills and competency should be certifiable through industry and professional bodies, and through workplace reports or references, subject to reliance on those reports being subject to checking with authors.

**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?**

Yes, and we would go further to say that without this, the system will almost certainly lack value and potentially introduce discrimination against regional Australians and members of priority cohorts if work experience and on the job learning and training was not included. Any national system will become the starting point for searching for candidates, and if it only includes formal credentials, this would then be the only (or main) filter for the search, leading to an entrenchment of disadvantage that already exists due to lack of formal education access. We suggest that the "skills" in National Skills Passport (or Record, Channel or Portal) be defined quite broadly. We would agree with the Regional Universities Network observations that equity gaps may emerge based on how effectively a user can use the system, rather than on their skill levels.

### **What do you see as the role of government in the design, implementation, and operation of a National Skills Passport**

If this system is to be hosted by government, there will be a public expectation that the system will also be the responsibility of government in the long-term. Having a government hosted system will raise privacy concerns, particularly as government sites are highly targeted by bad actors. There needs to be balance and alignment between the multiple needs of stakeholders, based on the needs of individuals and industry, and delivering productivity outcomes, with those taking priority over opportunities that may exist to provide additional benefits to government (such as statistics and data)