



Swinburne University of Technology

Submission to the National Skills Passport Consultation Paper

Introduction

Swinburne University of Technology appreciates this opportunity to make a submission in relation to the Commonwealth Government's proposed National Skills Passport (NSP) through this Consultation Paper. As a dual sector university, Swinburne is overwhelmingly in support of this initiative, combining a person's qualifications and skillsets across vocational (VE) and higher education (HE), supporting workers to promote their qualifications while making it easier for businesses to find more skilled workers.

Swinburne is a strong advocate and has long called for a tool to recognise lifelong learning across both VE and HE. If implemented correctly, it will be the first step towards creating a functioning national tertiary education system. To achieve this, government will need to take a co-design approach to the platform design and development with involvement from students, businesses, unions, peak bodies and education providers, while overcoming challenges aligning with varied government systems and policies of state and territory governments.

A national platform of this nature will be complex and have challenges to overcome, both with the interface and addressing privacy concerns. As such, central to Swinburne's submission is the recommendation of a staged approach to the rollout of an NSP. Initial focus should be to prioritise the core principle, as a useful tool for individuals to have their qualifications recognised on a single platform, while allowing verification and sharing with employers. Other applications can be considered at a later stage including a portal for career advice, recognition of prior learning support, certification of trade tickets/ cards and streamlining of admissions.

Swinburne makes the following recommendations:

1. **A staged approach to the rollout of a National Skills Passport**, with initial focus to prioritise the core principle as a useful tool for individuals to have their qualifications recognised on a single platform while allowing verification and sharing with employers.
2. **Cooperate and collaborate rather than replace existing systems** to provide a seamless ecosystem that overtime could evolve in to a one stop shop for users.
3. **No cost to be incurred by users of the platform**. Any cost will be a barrier to learners, employers and tertiary institutes. The cost needs to be incurred by governments and there is precedent of this in numerous sectors that demonstrates why this is important.
4. **A working group be established with representatives from key stakeholders** including students, businesses, unions, peak bodies (representing individuals from First Nations, disability and mental health cohorts) and education providers.
5. **Include experience gained through Work Integrated Learning**, as this is important to show on the job experience and can be verified by the educational institute.
6. **Two-factor verification of records** be investigated as a long-term strategy by both the education institute

and the employer/ government accuracy and mitigate falsification of records.

7. **Employers should be given an option to request verified educational records/ details of their employees.** Upon request, the platform can send a message to the employee to approve this request for short-term access.

Key principle 1: Valuable and useful

Swinburne agrees a NSP needs to be functional and beneficial to varied groups including jobseekers, employees, businesses, unions, peak bodies, education providers and state and territory governments. As previously highlighted, this will be a challenging task especially in relation to verification, privacy controls and alignment with existing government systems.

A suggested first step would be to take learnings from similar platforms overseas and what currently exists domestically. Domestic examples include the long-used Commonwealth Government Unique Student Identifier (USI) system for vocational education and My eQuals as an industry owned platform used by over 80 higher education providers across Australia and New Zealand. Both USI and My eQuals and varied government systems are trusted platforms with specific functions and limitations. **Swinburne recommends that a NSP cooperate rather than replace existing systems to provide a seamless ecosystem that overtime could evolve in to a one stop shop for users.**

For a NSP to be a valuable tool to all users, it will need to be an accessible platform linked to education providers' webpages and used on any device through a functional webpage or mobile app. The interface will need to differ depending on the user, for example:

- **A learner** will have secure access to all education records in details and upload/ request transcripts.
- **Education providers** will have a platform to upload and verify details of a student's learnings at their institute.
- **Employers** should be given an option to request verified educational records/ details of their employees. The platform can then send a message to the employee to approve this request, only then will the employer get access, this access should be limited for a short duration.
- **Governments** have their own comprehensive management systems that tracks, records and is used for payments to tertiary institutes (largely in the vocational sector). Long-term, a two-step verification process should be investigated using the institute and possibly governments/ agencies records, this interface will be challenging with many differing systems but will mitigate falsification of student records.

A NSP, if developed correctly, will support education providers, saving administrative time and costs. In many cases tracking and collecting of student's previous records takes time and includes contacting multiple parties. **Swinburne strongly recommends that no cost be incurred by users of the platform**, as any cost will be a barrier to learners, employers and tertiary institutes. The cost needs to be incurred by governments, and there is precedent of this in numerous sectors including aged care, health and through employment services.

Key principle 2: User-centred

Like most Australian universities, Swinburne learners use My eQuals. This platform is limited to providing secure access to certified records of their qualifications. Key to success of a NSP is that the needs of the user are at the core of the platform, particularly learners. Swinburne agrees with Universities Australia in their submission: *learners should have ownership of their NSP, including managing its content and verifying their skills and experiences. This aligns with the NSP's goal of promoting lifelong learning.*

Included in a NSP should be a variety of credentials, qualifications and experiences that has been undertaken including:

- Qualifications (both VE and HE)
- Micro credentials
- Short courses/ skill sets (individual units of competency)
- Work Integrated Learning
- Proof of identity (visa, birth certificate or photo identification)
- Licenses/ working with children check.

Longer term, working with other government agencies, a NSP can evolve to include work related tickets/ cards for example those in the construction industry for electricians, plumbers and in civil construction. **Swinburne recommends that in the first stages of the NSP that it incorporates experience through Work Integrated Learning. This is important to show on the job experience and can be verified by the education provider..**

To address the needs of the users, it is crucial that they are heavily involved in the consultation and development. **Swinburne recommends that a working group be established with representatives from key stakeholders including students, businesses, unions, peak bodies and education providers.**

In addition, a NSP will need to address barriers for different cohorts including first nations, from non-English speaking backgrounds and individuals experiencing and managing physical and mental health challenges. This can be undertaken through consultation in the design stages of a NSP.

Key principle 3: alignment

A first step in designing a NSP is to assess existing systems. Swinburne agrees that it is important the Government identifies and assesses opportunities to leverage established digital infrastructure that meets stakeholder needs, including USI, My eEquals and existing state and territory government systems. As outlined earlier, in addition to our own internal systems, Swinburne, like most Australian universities, extensively uses My eEquals and industry owned platforms, and USI to log and track our vocational students studies.

As a dual sector university, Swinburne is a strong advocate for a NSP and has long called for a tool to recognise lifelong learning across both VE and HE. If implemented correctly, it will be the first step towards creating a functioning national tertiary education system. An extensive amount of administrative time is taken up manually inputting into different systems and reporting to numerous regulators and existing government systems to log, track and receive payments a student's studies. Overcoming all these hurdles will be challenging and complex to undertake all at once. As outlined earlier, Swinburne recommends a staged approach to the rollout of a NSP, with Initial focus to prioritise core principle as a useful tool for individuals to have their qualifications recognised on a single platform while allowing verification and sharing with employers.

Key principle 4: Trusted and reliable

A NSP will hold a high level of sensitive data for users, particularly the learner. Swinburne agrees with the Consultation Paper: *It is important that a NSP creates an experience and provides functionality that is trusted by all users and stakeholders and is highly reliable.* In addition, it is crucial that records are verified to limit falsification and that learners are comfortable with the level of information provided to employers. Strict measures will need to be implemented while continuing to be functional to users.

Swinburne suggests that a NSP assess existing systems and their protocols including the well-used My eEquals,

with educational institutes having to verify records. **Swinburne recommends a two-factor verification of records be investigated as a long-term strategy by both the education providers and the employer/ government.** Often records of a student's studies are logged with the government for the institute to receive payment. In relation to work integrated learning/ experience, both the employer and education provider will need to provide verification.

Employers should be given an option to request verified educational records/ details of their employees. Upon request, the platform can send a message to the employee to approve this request, only then will the employer get access, this access should be limited for a short duration.

Key principle 5: Privacy enhancing and secure

It is important that any data held be secure from cyber threats and include two-factor identification to gain access. One option is for the NSP to be linked to the Commonwealth Government's My Gov platform which already holds high level of personal information linked to Medicare, Australian Taxation Office and Centrelink.

As outlined above, third party access for example by the employer should be given an option to request verified educational records/ details of their employees. Upon request, the NSP platform can send a message to the employee to approve this request, only then will the employer get access, this access should be limited for a short duration.

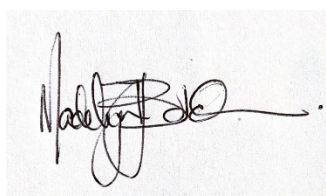
A staged approach to the rollout of a NSP, with Initial focus to prioritise core principle as a useful tool for individuals to have their qualifications recognised on a single platform while allowing verification and sharing with employers. As such, it should focus on post-secondary school education and experience, incorporating other levels of education can be investigated later once reliability and security is proven to users.

In Summary

As a dual sector university, Swinburne is overwhelmingly in support of this initiative, combining a person's qualifications and skillsets across vocational (VE) and higher education (HE), supporting workers to promote their qualifications while making it easier for businesses to find more skilled workers. Swinburne is a strong advocate and has long called for a tool to recognise lifelong learning across both VE and HE. If implemented correctly, it will be the first step towards creating a functioning national tertiary education system.

Swinburne is eager to contribute further through the consultation on design and development of a NSP and happy to discuss any of the above recommendations in further detail.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Madelyn Bolch', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Madelyn Bolch

Pro Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Vocational Education