National Skills Passport

Improving recruitment and training processes.

Chris Lehmann & Georgia Holmes
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Master Electricians Australia (MEA) is the trade association representing electrical contractors recognised by industry, government and the community as the electrical industry's leading business partner, knowledge source and advocate. You can visit our website at www.masterelectricians.com.au

MEA supports Energy Skills Queensland's (ESQ) position on National Skills Passport (NSP) in light of the proven expertise through SkillPASS. It therefore follows that our response echoes ESQ's submission. All data about SkillPASS throughout this submission has been sourced directly from ESQ.

SkillPASS is utilised by more than 45 000 workers, 1 000 Small-medium-enterprises (SMEs) and multiple large Gas corporations. These customers utilise SkillPASS to verify skills, access credentials and plan workforce needs. It has been operating for a decade and recently undergone upgrades to optimise user benefits. The professional scheme has been incorporated is audited for compliance against international standards (ISO9001 and ISO27001). Despite SkillPASS' having strong utilisation in QLD, it has does have huge potential for national adoption.[1]

Government's NSP scheme is a commendable initiative which we believe is complementary to MEA's position that embedding meaningful Vocational Education Training in Secondary Schools (VETSS) is a key tool to use in addressing the electrical industry's skills shortage crisis. NSP will allow all qualifications, trainings, licenses, assessments and trainings completed from as young voting age to be uploaded and recognisable in a centralised hub. Its intended ability to provide a centralised, validated, reliable and efficient hub of collective and individual career skills achievements and employment history provides the opportunity for industry stakeholders to plan, design and train a workforce to fill skill shortage gaps and prepare for the future.

We emphasise the importance of stakeholder confidence for sustainable success. This requires verification, validation, security, privacy, completeness, and agility. It is important government implement educational and incentivising policies to drive greater stakeholder uptake.

Key Principle 1: Valuable and Useful
How would you describe the value of a National Skills Passport?
- **For learners?**
  NSPs will be invaluable for learners as it organises and displays their formal and informal learnings. Learners will be able to better showcase their apprenticeships/trainings as NSP will allow for identification of gaps in training/skills/knowledge. Learners can also utilise the system to identify career opportunities they can develop their training/learning towards. The App would be particularly beneficial if aligned with learners Unique Student Identifier (USI).

- **For employees?**
  Employees will reap similar benefits as learners. NSPs will provide an organised hub for employees to access formal and informal learnings while making it easier to identify gaps in their skills/training/knowledge which may prohibit them from successful career progression. Furthermore, NSP would be useful in providing a tool for continuing professional development (CPD). The App would be particularly beneficial if aligned with learners Unique Student Identifier (USI).

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[1] David Cross (ESQ CEO), personal communication, February 14, 2024.

- For employers/business?
  Recruitment - NSPs provide a cheaper and more efficient recruitment process allowing advanced ability to match individuals with certain skills to vacant job requirements. Employers can also develop a workforce based on emerging trends.

  Current Staff - Employers can assess licences/training/ completed by their staff and therefore help plan, guide and assemble their employees' skills and career journey based on defined job roles and career competencies. The App can be aligned to the Unique Student Identifier (USI) and provide a useful tool for continuing professional development (CPD).

- For providers in the education and training sector?
  NSP will provide education and training providers better opportunity to identify current and emerging demands in the workforce, allowing teachings/apprenticeships/curriculums to be customised to reflect this and provide better opportunity for learners/employees. It will also provide trainers/educators with a centralised hub to upload students of their engagements, whether it be online, accredited, unaccredited skills sets or micro-credentials. Allowing verification through USI connection would enhance the benefits NSPs have to offer.

- For governments?
  If linked to ANZCO-defined job roles/job classifications, Government would collect more accurate data of Australian training and employment history/engagement. This will allow government to implement policies to prepare for foreseeable workforce gaps/shortages. "The benefits for international inbound migration can be better planned and mapped as well, enabling a more flexible, agile and more productive national (and state) workforce. Linking the app to USI numbers for verification purposes would be additionally useful."[2]

From the perspective of an employer –
Do you access and verify skills and credentials for current and potential employees? If yes-

- How do you currently access, assess and verify skills and credentials?
  ESQ operates SKillPASS and is utilised by thousands of users to verify skills, access credentials and plan workforce needs. It is professionally hosted and audited for compliance with international standards (ISO9001 and ISO27001). While SkillPASS is largely QLD focused, it has been adopted nationally.

- Does this process differ for international skills and credentials?
  "No – it is an integrated system and part of a global activity."[3]

- What cost and time impacts do you currently incur? If applicable, provide details around relevant processes.
  ESQ annually charges each SkillPASS individual $75 (GST Incl.).

- How could a National Skills Passport reduce the cost and time impacts?
  SkillPASS evidences the significantly positive impacts NSP will have on costs and time. It benefits employers/industries by allowing responsive workforce development toward market demands and also benefits employees/learners by making it easier and more

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[2] (n1).
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organised to provide employees with trustworthy information about skills, experience and availability.

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

Yes. SkillPASS has proven the success of apps such as NSPs and its ability to beneficially change hiring/application processes.

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

Boundless positive financial and time impacts will be generated from NSP, as demonstrated through SkillPASS. NSP benefits employers/industries by allowing responsive workforce development to meet current and emerging market demands. Employees/learners benefit from an organised system making it easier to provide employees with trustworthy information about skills, experience and availability.

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

Do you currently access and assess applications for course admissions, recognition of prior learning and credit transfer? If yes-

- **How do you currently access and assess and verify skills and credentials?**
  ESQ operates SKillPASS is utilised by thousands of users to verify skills, access credentials and plan workforce needs. It is professionally hosted and audited for compliance with international standards (ISO9001 and ISO27001). While SkillPASS is largely QLD focused, it has been adopted nationally.

- **Does this process differ for international skills and credentials?**
  No. It simply provides more efficient, reliable and complete information to any employer and employees wanting to utilise the system.

- **What cost and time impacts do you currently incur?**
  Time for customers/users of the SkillPASS is negligible as everything is organised by a third party. There is an annual cost of $75 (Incl. GST) which equates to $0.20 per day.

- **How could a National Skills Passport reduce the cost and time impacts?**
  Time for customers/users of the SkillPASS is negligible as everything is organised by a third party. There is an annual cost of $75 (Incl. GST) which equates to $0.20 per day. This saves employers cost of marketing and verifying information. Furthermore, it saves potential opportunity costs of better candidates that would have been otherwise selected based merely on CVs.

  MEA are strong advocates that streamlining and integrating vocational education training in secondary school (VETSS) with an equal weighting to Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a key solution to resolving the skills shortage crisis. SkillPASS creates a centralised hub to store all accreditations, trainings, assessments from this young age which is particularly useful as it can be difficult to keep track of these records years-to-decades after completing secondary and tertiary education.

Key Principle 2: User-Centred
From the perspective of an individual -
How do you currently access and/or share your credentials and skills with education providers, employers and others?

- What does and doesn't work well?
    Benefits provided by SkillPASS includes –
    - "Robust, international platform used by employers and employees to manage workforce requirements.
    - A cheap, tax-deductible, easy to use, easy to access, third-party verified, proven and secure platform that maps one's career journey, training gaps, and opportunities will benefit individuals as it will employers, industry and governments."[4]

- How would you like to see this improved?
    SkillPASS underwent upgrades in January 2024, substantially benefitting workers and employees.

- Is there a different experience for individuals from different backgrounds – for example, First Nations people, people living in regional Australia or people from a non-English speaking background?
    No. "SkillPASS supports all trainings (formal, informal, CPD) and inclusive of all backgrounds. However, the software is capable of being adapted to specific needs (i.e. linking up to funding programs or recognising individual needs/requirements)."[5]

- Is there a different experience for individuals experiencing economic hardship?
    SkillPASS has this ability, but we emphasise the purpose and design of SkillPASS is focused on training and employment.

- Is there a different experience for individuals experiencing and managing physical and mental health challenges?
    SkillPASS has this ability, but we emphasise the purpose and design of SkillPASS is focused on training and employment. SkillPASS is designed to tailor towards the individuals' needs, and therefore can be 'filtered' to ensure opportunities reflect these needs.

What personalised information, advice or links to services would be helpful to allow an individual to more effectively demonstrate their skills to employers, encouraging further education, upskilling, reskilling and workforce mobility.
"The SkillPASS platform has been evolving over a decade and has most aspects covered, but it can evolve further as need is demonstrated and required. The goal is to empower individuals as well as industry."[6]

What design and accessibility features should be considered in a National Skills Passport?
NSP needs to be low-cost, tax-deductible, user-friendly, accessible, third-party verified, proven and secure that illustrates employees training and employment history as well as available opportunities.

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[4] (n1).
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How do organisations access and use credentials when engaging with students, employees, apprentices, or job seekers?

Based on SkillPASS interaction, ESQ had described that organisations have different needs regarding access (PC, App, etc) and use of credentials. NSPs must be agile and allow stakeholders to utilise the information according to their individual needs (i.e. recruitment, or staff improvement, etc).

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

All credentials, qualifications, licences and skills should be included.

Key Principle 3: Integrated and Interoperable
Questions to consider from the perspective of both individuals and organisations:
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?

NSP would successfully complement SkillPASS in benefitting training providers, employers, contractors, industries, governments and employees on a national scale. "Artificial Intelligence (AI) and changing workforce demands requires a responsive individually-empowered workforce, and a single data-driven platform on which to allow a flexible but single-trusted-source of the 'skills record' to be captured, verified and made available within the bounds of individual control and privacy is paramount to a competitive global market that Australia must operate within."[7]

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?

A reliable centralised hub of employment and training information of individuals is necessary.

There are two impediments to successful alignment of information and qualification across VET and higher education:
1. Indifference
2. Underappreciation for the benefits NSP offers.

The current USI platform is inefficient and inconsistent regarding the recording of training, accreditation, licence and/or qualification. We do not consider the information available about individuals complete and is therefore uninformative for users. Information uploaded is not truly reflective of the form of training accomplished (i.e accredited, unaccredited, microdential or another type of training).

NSP provides an efficient and reliable alternative that assists individuals to conveniently training and employment history while allowing employers/industries to develop workforces to meet operational needs.

Noting the different levels of data standard maturity between VET and higher education, would you see benefit in establishing a single data standard across the tertiary education system? If yes, what features would you expect to see in the data standard?

SkillPASS includes the below features which we believe are essential to NSP- Robust
- Secure

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[7] (n1).

- Privacy
- User-friendly
- Dynamic
- Low-cost
- Useful to all stakeholders
- Third-party verified (independent) endorsement
- Capture all formal and informal training engagements of an individual regardless if online, accredited, unaccredited skills or micocredentials.

Features the App needs to include –
- Employee driven
- Linked to ANZCO defined job roles/job classifications
- Ideally linked to USI for validation where appropriate.

NSP should allow for analysis of Australia's skills, training and career trends allowing workforce gaps to be identified and therefore allow greater foresight/preparation to meet those needs. "Government would become better positioned to provide funding of targeted training or CPD opportunities."[8]

Key Principle 4: Trusted and Reliable
Questions to consider from the perspective of both individuals and organisations:
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?
MEA would expect the following functions to be included-
- Validation
- Independent verification
- Smooth and rapid interface with existing USI platform. However, we note USI is not utilsied by all training providers and therefore on its own is not a reliable centralised hub for such information.
- Utilised by all training providers who have training in utilising the system. These trainers must be knowledgeable in the importance of prompt uploading of documentation to the system.

"We note that the skills and qualifications recognised by trainers cannot be restricted to accredited training, and the best means of handling that might be to enable the USI to remain focused on what it does and improving what it does, and integrating it with systems such as SkillPASS that are more agile and flexible and pick up through independent verification activities the 'other' types of training and skills capture already prolific in the community/industry."[9]

"The reality of training and of skills capture cannot be dependent on validation alone, as verification will need to be an important and managed part of this process. SkillPASS has been seeking an interface with USI for some years with progress slow. It is a necessary element for success."[10]

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[8] (n1).
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NSP must be independent from educational/training facilities. Separation of power, and checks and balances are all crucial towards trust and integrity of the system.

Yes. For completeness, the NSP must record all work experience, unaccredited training, micro-credentials, industry or other training, among others (conference attendance, CPD activities, etc) to provide a true and accurate reflection of the individual.

Success of NSP depends on user uptake which is driven by trust, system integrity and security. Government is essential in actioning this phase of the NSP through education and regulations.

The design should be left to external industry and workforce experts, independent of Government as Government is a key stakeholder in the NSP. To foster greater stakeholder confidence in the scheme, separation of powers is desirable. Utilising existing providers whilst benefiting from proven systems with clear evidence of success and data management success should be the key implementation strategy.

Key Principle 5: Privacy Enhancing and Secure
Questions to consider from the perspective of both individuals and organisations:

To foster public trust, NSP must exhibit privacy, security and fraud protection and therefore must at least[11]-
- Comply with international standards ISO9001 and ISO27001.
- Implement the latest available security mechanisms (such as multi-factor authentication).
- Certified by a government agency.
- Verified through the education and training provider system.

Public confidence is essential for NSP success in order to garner sustainable and ubiquitous adoption of NSPs. This can be achieved through[12]-
- back-end verification and validation processes;
- system integrity processes;
- third-party access (must be time-bound/limited); and
- be at the approval of the individual - either through terms and conditions or preferably through individual electronic real-time approval (or the option for the individual to not grant approval).

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[11] (n1)
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Permanent revoking/blocking needs to be at the discretion of the individual.

For individuals using a National Skills Passport, what does consent look like? At what age should people be able to obtain a National Skills Passport? For example, should it be accessible to secondary students?

"NSPs should become available to all individuals starting at secondary schools but only with parental permission, and at the age of voting rights. The question should be asked of individuals for their permission to migrate their schools journey as the starting point for their National Skills Passport. The schools profile (or an opportunity for that) needs to be available to pick up any VET or university advanced learning (such as in-school apprenticeship work) done by a young person in that institution."[13]

"Privacy is paramount as trust must be earned and so system integrity is key."[14]

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[13] (n1).
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Conclusion

Through our long affiliation and collaboration, MEA supports ESQ's position on NSPs given their proven expertise in such matters through SkillPASS over the last decade. As the leading industry representative trade association of electrical SME contractors, MEA believe the NSP scheme is an ancillary tool towards our advocacy position that integrating and streamlining VET into the secondary school curriculum with an equal weighting to ATAR is a key solution to help in addressing the skills shortage crisis.

We see NSP being accessible at voting age as advantageous for VET students as it provides them with an organised hub to access records of all trainings, lessons, assessments, qualifications, licences, etc. Additionally, it will allow students and apprentices to identify gaps in their career progress while having a clearer guide of opportunities they can work towards. On the flip side, NSPs will provide our members who own SME electrical companies a better ability to identify and essentially "headhunt"/reach-out to prospective employees. We believe NSPs have the potential to be invaluable in assisting the electrical industry in discovering a cohort of STEM workers who have the requirements to be a qualified electrician or relevant qualifications/licenses that have unknowingly put these individuals onto the path of being an electrician. It is essentially a centralised communication system for all stakeholders in all industries to take advantage of.

We emphasise that NSP's success depends on sustainable and ubiquitous adoption of the scheme which requires the fundamental functions of-
- third party verification
- validation
- agile
- secure
- user-friendly
- robust

We see the concepts of 'timely' and 'completeness' as pinnacle to the underlying success of the scheme. Comparatively, the USI scheme does not represent all qualifications, training, accreditations, etc, of individuals and is not always uploaded promptly by training/teaching facilities. It is important that an NSPs can promptly record all learning developments of an individual, including –
- Accredited Training
- Demonstrated Skills
- Accreditations and Licenses
- Non-accredited training
- Online training
- CPD
- Conferences attended.

This provides greater exposure to a wider cohort who might otherwise not individually recognise they are eligible/could be eligible with further skills advancement to fulfil a role.

NSPs will be a collective data centre, assisting industry, employers, employees and government to identify emerging trends and existing gaps in the workforce, giving all stakeholders the best opportunity of foresight to prepare a workforce in advance. Government will be essential in driving initiatives which educate and garner public trust.

We look forward to the future of workforce recruitment and development through NSPs. MEA are eager to be a part of any further discussion regarding NSPs and stand ready to support ESQ with the knowledge they offer to provide.