

# Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

## Australian Skills Passport Consultation

Departments of Employment and Workplace Relations and Education

### Executive Summary

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities is supportive of a National Skills Passport.

DASSH Members see this proposed platform as a good way to recognise interdisciplinarity and help cultivate a workforce that is agile, adaptable and has the capacity to apply a wide range of skills across a range of contexts.

The skills taxonomy used to underpin any skills passport must accurately capture and reflect the full spectrum of skills needed across the broad scope of Australia's job market and education system, including cognitive and comprehension-based skills.

The proposed platform's potential to guide students in future decisions about their education is a welcome feature and could serve to help students from both traditional and non-traditional pathways to navigate the system.

If implemented, there must be reliable and transparent mechanisms used to direct students towards future study opportunities. Some of the most in-demand skills are among the most complex and difficult to define and measure, particularly from within the arts, social sciences and humanities. It is critical that the Skills Passport platform does not lead to students being guided towards vocational courses at the expense of complex and challenging areas that remain vital to Australia's national capabilities such as languages or the study of other societies and cultures.

### Measuring and Capturing Skills

It is critical that the skills taxonomy used to underpin any skills passport accurately captures and reflects the full spectrum of skills needed across the broad scope of Australia's job market and education system.

It is vital that diverse and complex skills are recognised, classified, measured and communicated accurately.

The arts, social sciences and humanities deliver graduates with complex skills and knowledge. Those skills have been repeatedly shown to be in high demand among employers world-wide. But these can be difficult to define precisely and categorise appropriately.

The government's [2023 Intergenerational Report](#) predicts an increasingly important role for the knowledge economy. Arts, social sciences and humanities graduates possess a range of core skills elaborated on later in this submission, which are central to the knowledge economy.

The World Economic Forum's [2023 Future of Jobs Report](#) which surveyed 800 companies from across the world found that analytical thinking and critical thinking were the most important skills for workers to have. These cognitive skills are central to the arts, social sciences and humanities, making arts, social sciences and humanities graduates highly valuable to employers.

Any skills taxonomy must reflect and feed this demand with appropriate ways of defining and measuring these capabilities.

These skills include but are not limited to:

- Communication
- Creative thinking and analysis
- Critical and analytical thinking
- Research
- Writing
- Close reading
- Problem solving
- Understanding processes of change
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Communication in languages other than English
- Question assumptions and applied logic
- Communication of complex research findings
- Ability to overcome bias
- Systematic attention to detail
- Cultural competence
- Online safety
- Understanding democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law
- Critical understanding of the self
- Critical understanding of the world

These are trans-vocational cognitive and comprehension-based skills which in various combinations are critical for many jobs across every industry, though some more than others.

Each of these skills can be assessed, measured and reported on by arts, social sciences and humanities educators.

Given these skills can be as broadly or narrowly applied as necessary it is important that different levels of skills attainment are measured and reported. The skills passport will need to be able to distinguish between the more basic level of communication skills that will be developed in a short microcredential in professional communications course and the highly sophisticated forms of written communication and analysis involved in a postgraduate program in anthropology.

It is absolutely critical that the vast distinction between the levels of attainment and applicability are accurately captured – both for the purposes of employers and also educators assessing prior learning.

Humanities, arts and social sciences graduates also obtain disciplinary knowledge, theory and intellectual rigour in ways of studying the cultural, historical, social, political and economic. This gives them a wide range of disciplinary skills, knowledge and experience in addition to learning cognitive skills.

DASSH Members urge the architects of this platform to capture the full dimensions of knowledge and skills.

## **Prior Learning and Pathways**

The National Skills Passport would be useful not just to employers, it would assist our members in capturing and communicating to future students the full range of transferrable skills contained in any given degree or course.

While the skills taught through any course are clear to educators, a transparent and easily interpreted system that allowed students to match the skills identified within certain courses to jobs or future study opportunities would be a positive step.

There would also be opportunities to better capture skills acquired through industry placements and work integrated learning.

Under a National Skills Passport that placement would become a qualification or level of experience recorded in their skills passport that would help the student demonstrate the full suite of skills and experience received through their degree.

## **CASE STUDY:**

### **Work Integrated Learning at Flinders University**

*Flinders University has a strong focus on work integrated learning, underpinned by the goal of producing career ready graduates. All undergraduate and relevant postgraduate coursework courses are required to offer work integrated learning opportunities.*

*In the College of Business, Government and Law, a range of options are available to students, including three-month internships and shorter 10-week placements as well as industry projects where students can utilise their knowledge and skills to work as consultants over a three-month period.*

*These opportunities enable students to improve their confidence, develop workplace skills, expand their networks, and increase their employability.*

*The proposed National Skills Passport provides a useful avenue through which to validate the skills obtained through work integrated learning. This would ensure that students who have taken part in industry placements are easily identifiable. Developing discipline specific metrics through which to validate the skills obtained through work integrated learning will be an important part of this process.*

It would also be very helpful to employers and educators to have a stepped approach to identifying the level of skills attained through a formal industry participation recognition scheme.

An excellent example of an existing skills passport within the social sciences is the Australian Archaeology Skills Passport.

## **CASE STUDY:**

### **The Australian Archaeology Skills Passport**

*The [Australian Archaeology Skills Passport](#) is a national initiative by the Australian National Committee for Archaeology Teaching and Learning (ANCATL), under the auspices of the Australian Archaeological Association.*

*The Australian Archaeology Skills Passport has been hugely successful, with more than 3,000 copies distributed to students, early career professionals and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander site officers and rangers.*

*It was launched in 2019 and has been well-integrated within the profession over the last four years, including within [state professional conduct guidelines](#), job advertisements and training pedagogies.*

*The Passport is a great example of a range of skills being measured and shared between employers and employees at an industry scale. The development of a National Skills Passport would be significantly more complex, but holds the potential to be equally as positive, particularly for transferable skills including analysis, critical thinking, and reasoning.*

*The Australian Archaeology Skills Passport grew from a need to clarify the core skills required to work within the Australian archaeological profession. This skill set – 28 core and 22 extended skills – is designed to reflect the needs of the Australian archaeological workforce, varying from the original Archaeology Skills Passport developed in the UK by the [British Archaeological Jobs Resource](#) in 2008. The skills identified within the passport are applicable to all subdisciplines of archaeology active within Australia (Indigenous, historic and maritime), and are transferable between related disciplines and within international contexts.*

*Of key concern in the development of the Australian edition was the need to:*

- *Clarify core industry expectations for both students and educators – both those learning the skills and teaching the skills*
- *Clarify industry expectations of the scope and scale of skills acquisition by recent graduates, contributing to the streamlining of professional development opportunities and mentoring needs at an industry level*
- *Address persistent skills gaps within Australian archaeology, identified through longitudinal surveys; and*
- *Provide a way for skills acquisition to be documented beyond tertiary qualifications, facilitating greater industry recognition of skills held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander site officers and rangers.*

*The development of the Passport provided the final piece to a nationally integrated learning ecosystem developed by ANCATL over the last twenty years, including national benchmarks for archaeology Honours degrees (the minimum qualification needed to practice archaeology under state and territory legislations), and longitudinal 'Profiling the Profession' surveys.*

*The Passport is structured as an integrated system with three components. The physical document, provided at-cost by the Australian Archaeological Association is also available as a free, open-access PDF from the Association's website, ensuring equitable access.*

*The passport itself is supported by digital 'skills sheets' and a guide for assessors. The skills sheets guide participants and assessors on what is expected for each of the three levels that a skill can be signed-off: full supervision, moderate supervision, and no supervision. The skills sheets also provide general information on each skill as well as recommended resources to support skills acquisition.*

*Feedback from users and assessors has been overwhelmingly positive. Students have reported feeling more in control of their learning, understanding that they need to seek routes for skills acquisition beyond the tertiary classroom. Equally, we have found that industry partners have increased 'buy-in', recognising that their skills and expertise are an essential component in the training of archaeology graduates.*

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander site officers and rangers have reported additional positive benefits from using the passport, including feedback that the recognition of accrued skills and experience within a discipline-based program is both transformative and empowering.*

*There have now been several examples where the Australian Archaeology Skills Passport has been used as a basis for registration as a Heritage Advisor under state legislation, providing a route into the professional industry beyond a university degree.*

*One limitation to the efficacy of the Australian Archaeology Skills Passport has been the high demand for archaeological investigations – archaeology forms a critical component of housing developments and infrastructure projects and as such, industry-based archaeologists are extremely busy in the post COVID-19 boom. As a result, some assessors have provided feedback that they are often too busy to sign the passports of student interns or their junior colleagues. In addition, there are also too few archaeologists graduating to meet industry need, reducing the incentive for students and Early Career Professionals to use the passport as industry employability is so high.*

*Dr Georgia L. Stannard – Lecturer, Department of Archaeology and History, La Trobe University; Co-Chair of the Australian National Committee of Archaeology Teaching and Learning; Co-editor of the Australian Archaeology Skills Passport*

*Associate Professor Melissa Marshall – Director, Nulungu Research Institute, University of Notre Dame Australia; former co-Chair and current member of the Australian National Committee of Archaeology Teaching and Learning; Co-editor of the Australian Archaeology Skills Passport*

## **Navigating the Education System**

A central focus of the proposed platform appears to be guiding students towards life-long learning opportunities with a view to both increasing their skill sets and addressing skills shortages.

DASSH Members support this approach and believe it will have benefits for non-traditional students who often report difficulty navigating the various opportunities for study as confusing and difficult to manage.

A skills passport has the potential to clarify to prospective students the range of pathways and alternative opportunities into sub-bachelor and bachelor programs. A skills passport would enable students to be guided step by step towards their ultimate goals.

The consultation paper notes: “A National Skills Passport could support personalised tailored career advice and guidance on education, training and career pathways including information on workforce demand. This supports the Employment White Paper finding that Australians will increasingly need to upskill and reskill throughout their lives to meet the needs of the labour market.”

DASSH is supportive of this goal. One of the key considerations in the case of guiding student preferences is that immediate vocational skills shortages should not be the only determinant of what is suggested or recommended to lifelong learners.

While there may be shortages in any given field at any given time, very high-level comprehension-based and cognitive skills as well as specialised knowledge are paramount to Australia’s workforce and economy.

It is clear that a large portion of employers not only in Australia but around the world place a premium on the skills associated with the arts, social sciences and humanities as discussed earlier in this submission.

Given this is the case there must be tools and mechanisms built into the platform that accurately reflect employer demand, not just vocational skills shortages, and guide students accordingly.

## About dassh

The [Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities](#) represents more than 250 Deans, and Associate and Deputy Deans, from 43 universities across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, leading schools and faculties that teach tens of thousands of students and several thousand scholars. DASSH supports those who have responsibility for governance and management of research, teaching and learning across those member institutions. DASSH members were consulted widely as part of this submission process.

## Contact

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