



Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in response to the consultation paper on Australia's Strategy for International Education 2021-2030.

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) is a member of the Australian Technology Network (ATN) and supports their submission which covers international education in broad terms. This submission is attended to address one aspect of the vision contained in the consultation paper – to embrace innovation and new technologies to enhance existing and new modes of delivery. UTS is keen to engage with the Government on the development of a Universal Lifelong-learning Credential Exchange and is currently working with our ATN partners to further develop this concept.

Overview of Universal Lifelong-learning Credential Exchange Concept

The education sector is undergoing significant change with rising expectation of students, rapidly evolving digital technologies, growth in credential types (including microcredentials) and the requirement for lifetime learning to meet the massive increase in demand to skilling and reskilling in the workforce.

In addition, Australia's traditional high quality and successful international market is under threat from long term systemic changes (increased local quality education offerings), market dynamics (increased competitors and private providers) and geopolitical consideration.

What is missing is a structured, codified and portable system for people to build upon and clearly demonstrate their educational attainment. The development of a national, tamper-proof, standards-based (AQF) credentialing platform and exchange marketplace will meet this gap.

The platform will:

- 1) Drive the necessary domestic higher education revolution and transition to lifetime learning supported by universities, TAFE/VET, private provider and businesses, through streamlined admission, digitally verifiable credentials, and a market-place for valuing, recognising and combining credentials from various providers. This would particularly facilitate greater university and business integration through the education journey of an Australian citizen.
- 2) Provide a competitive advantage for the Australian education sector (public and private) in the provision of a valued online and hybrid education offering offshore with unique credentialing.

The exchange should enable an individual to combine micro-credential, part-courses as well as smaller qualifications, from a multiplicity of providers, towards the achievement of highly valued formal credentials as part of the AQF. The platform, being digitally verifiable and tamper-proof, enables learners to understand exactly what credit their prior education experiences contribute towards further qualifications, or how a bundle of various micro-credentials can be aggregated towards a formal award. It should allow university and other education providers to automatically validate and accept learning and microcredentials from other providers towards their own formal award courses, whilst keeping complete control of the quality of their own course through their ability to assess and determine the value they will ascribe to each shorter form of learning.



Since the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) is recognised internationally, this could be particularly powerful offshore, where there is currently no universal system for the valuing of microcredentials or online learning.

A realistic scenario if a platform such as this was created could see an individual in Indonesia enrolling in a suite of shorter forms of learning online (and maybe hybrid) from Australian TAFEs, universities and private EduTech companies. Over time, they build a portfolio which enables them to gain a formal qualification (AQF recognised) from a particular Australian university or TAFE. Importantly, as they start their learning journey, the system's transparency means they can understand the likely credentials their journey will result in.

This value proposition will enable Australia to build an offshore international market to complement our onshore one. Incentives and appropriate policy changes from the Federal Government in relation to work rights and recognition of shorter stays in Australia or Australian credentials delivered off shore would further enhance the value proposition.

Background

During the global upheaval of 2020, Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) boomed to >16,000 online courses internationally, led by the top 3 providers: edX, Coursera and Futurelearn. Most of these products are unaccredited, unverified, 'self-study' learning.

A small number of courses, both in these MOOC platforms and via individual university platforms, are university-backed as credit-bearing 'microcredentials'. These courses have the potential to combine into a pathway to formal accredited degree study. For instance, the UK-based Futurelearn currently offers 39 of these credit-bearing micros each leading to a single, partner university¹ degree.

Some world universities are starting to act unilaterally to accept the microcredentials of other providers (including private providers) as prior credit towards their own award study. The US and EU are currently leading on this.

The Australian Advantage

The AQF offers a common language for skill and knowledge outcomes. While there are other strong international exchange schemes, such as the EU's ECTS designed to support student mobility, none have yet managed to incorporate credit mobility, the new microcredentials or online providers into a common, quality-assured exchange.

Even as we continue to consider increased AQF regulation on these new products, a number of Australian universities have already moved ahead into this space, creating high quality microcredentials which are fully aligned with the existing, quality-assured, framework. Right now, Australia has the potential to offer hundreds of these micros which could, in principle, form the basis of a commonly agreed, universal, credit pathway towards study with a wide range of our great universities.

¹ As May 2021, via 36 micros and 3 programs: <https://www.futurelearn.com/programs>



A coordinated government approach would help capitalise on Australia's advantage and bring together early-adopter universities and ensure that the platform also included TAFE, business and private providers.

Benefits of proposed approach

- **International leadership** to partners in Europe, Asia and beyond
- **Improved experience and outcomes for individuals and employers** through a more accessible, flexible and digitally verifiable tertiary system
- **Increased productivity** through better alignment of individual, employer and industry needs, more streamlined pathways, and quicker up-skilling, re-skilling and study/employment transitions
- **Unique leadership opportunity for Australia** by scaling up the system internationally and sharing the social and economic benefits.

Consistency with current Australian Government plans

With Australia already committed to international leadership in supporting the new microcredentials, this initiative promises a low-cost, instant proof of concept to establish both an 'exchange rate' and 'exchange rules' to kick start this new business.

- In June 2020, the Government announced a plan for a new 'Marketplace' for microcredentials². This allows for a shop window for Australia's new, smaller format curriculum.
- In September 2020, the Government announced a National Credentials Platform (NCP) for all the credentials they award³, which would improve access to tertiary education records and better support the exchange of credit for formal study in Australian Higher Education.

These initiatives must eventually connect.

It is expected that the NCP will, in future, support the microcredential marketplace. The fully featured NCP will take some time to realise and to fit to partner requirements with each university and provider considering ways forward to support their existing business. In parallel however, the world is creating a new business.

The idea proposed here jumps immediately to the ultimate future state of that new business.

Other Government mechanisms to support Australian online education

As outlined at the beginning, critical to enhancing the value proposition of offshore Australian higher education beyond the platform would be incentive and recognition schemes by the Government. The Government could consider the following:

- Post study work rights in Australia for students undertaking offshore provision of HE

² <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/marketplace-online-microcredentials>

³ <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/new-platform-improve-student-access-learning-credentials>



PO Box 123
Broadway
NSW 2007 Australia
www.uts.edu.au

UTS CRICOS PROVIDER CODE 00099F

- Provision of a study visa that provides for short periods in Australia for particular activities such as professional experience, capstones etc. This enables hybrid as well as online learning.
- Mutual recognition at education jurisdiction level
- Extended support from government in providing information on and navigating international requirements e.g. education recognition; taxation; regulation
- Supporting recognition of offshore, online-only providers in international jurisdiction
- Greater alignment of Australian and major international competitors' immigration policies.