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Dear Australian Universities Accord Panel

The Heads of Student Administration (Australia & New Zealand) Inc. (HoSA) is an incorporated association that exists to promote excellence and to provide leadership in the area of student and academic administration services, and to inform higher education policy on matters related to student and academic administration.

HoSA ANZ members were responsible for gaining support across 47 ANZ universities to establish the My eEquals digital credentials platform. My eEquals is now serving more than 2 million students and graduates in their pursuit of employment, further study and lifelong learning.

Through this submission to the Australia Universities Accord discussion paper, HoSA advocates for the establishment of a National Credentials Platform (NCP) that builds on My eEquals.

Europe, North America and various countries in Asia are already working towards digital systems that enable citizens to store their formal and non-formal learning credentials, access credit, find pathways and further learning opportunities that advance their careers, or access employment opportunities that align with their qualifications and skills.

Australia embarked on its own NCP initiative through the allocation of \$2.5 million in the 2019-2020 federal budget. This initiative was limited in scope and ambition, and largely disregarded the \$30 million investment already made by the Higher Education sector to establish the My eEquals digital credentials platform.

The NCP initiative completed its "BETA phase" at the end of 2022. This delivered a proof-of-concept NCP platform (BETA phase) which in large part covered functions and features already existing and in production on the My eEquals platform. It is currently unclear if and how the NCP initiative will progress.

HoSA believes that the University Accord offers the opportunity for a "re-think" of the NCP initiative. In this context, HoSA makes the following recommendations for consideration by the Australian Universities Accord Panel:

- 1. Build on the My eEquals digital credentials platform and invest in the establishment of a National Credentials Platform.*
- 2. Leverage the strong My eEquals foundations when establishing the NCP.*

This submission impacts on the following topics and questions set out in the Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper.

Topic	Question	Proposal Impact
3.2.4 Collaboration with Industry	Q13 How could an Accord support cooperation between providers, accreditation bodies, government and industry to ensure graduates have relevant skills for the workforce?	DIRECT – An effective NCP requires the buy-in and a governance model where all parties are represented and work towards graduate skills that align with workforce needs
3.2.5 Lifelong Learning	Q15 What changes are needed to grow a culture of lifelong learning in Australia?	DIRECT – An NCP is universally recognised as being critical in facilitating lifelong learning
3.2.5 Lifelong Learning	Q16 What practical barriers are inhibiting lifelong learning, and how can they be fixed?	DIRECT – An NCP, together with a national credit framework, will increase the currency of non-formal learning and part-completed degrees, one of the barriers to engagement in lifelong learning.
3.3.2. Pathway for Students	Q20 How can pathways between VET and higher education be improved, and how can students be helped to navigate these pathways?	PARTIAL – An NCP can and should articulate pathways to learners, incl. VET-HE pathways
3.3.2. Pathway for Students	Q22 What role do tertiary entrance and admissions systems play in matching learners to pathways and supporting a sustained increase in participation and tertiary success?	PARTIAL - tertiary entrance and admissions systems form part of an NCP ecosystem and the TACs are potential stakeholders in the design and operation of a NCP
3.5.2. Addressing Barriers to Access	Q30 How can governments, institutions and employers assist students, widen opportunities and remove barriers to higher education?	DIRECT – An NCP provides learners access to their credentials and pathways to advancing their career. Removal of barriers will be further aided by other submissions that may propose improved financial support arrangements for lifelong learners (Lifelong Learning account)

Recommendation 1
Build on the My eEquals digital credentials platform and invest in the establishment of a National Credentials Platform

For many years, governments, industry, and the education sector in Australia have recognised the need for an education system that promotes lifelong learning.

However, despite this widespread recognition, many learners still encounter barriers when attempting to access or resume further education at various points in their lives, indicating that there is still further work to be done.

There is also broad recognition, both in Australia and internationally, that a Credentials Platform or Learner Account is a critical component of a broader ecosystem that facilitates and advances lifelong learning. Parties and studies that have highlighted this include:

- ***Emeritus Professor Beverley Oliver: Implement Lifelong Learner Accounts¹.*** “citizens can log their credentials, bank their credit, and find new opportunities for formal and non-formal learning to find or create meaningful work, or advance in their careers.”
- ***Business Council of Australia – A Lifelong Skills Account and a single platform for Market Information².*** “allow <learners> to go to one site and have all the information they need to support each stage of their decision-making process in the one place” and “The centrepiece of the tertiary system is a Lifelong Skills Account (LSA) for all Australians”
- ***The Monash Commission – Introduce a Universal Learning entitlement and Lifelong Learning Account³.*** “The introduction of a Lifetime Learning Account to track, credit and verify learning, will enable all Australians to learn, train and re-skill as their needs and circumstances change.”
- ***American Workforce Policy Advisory Board⁴ – provide a system where citizens have agency over verified and universally understood records of their learning accomplishments..*** “Learners collect credentials from multiple issuers (education, training, testing, and employer organizations) and curate them through an application or interface to understand their own strengths and weaknesses as they progress on career pathways. Employers and education and training/testing providers are other key stakeholders in an ecosystem, as they both issue credentials and consume the <learner records> that learners curate”.

Australia and other countries around the globe are in various stages of establishing credentials platforms and learner accounts as contemplated in the reports referenced above.

The Australian National Credential Platform initiative

As part of the 2019-20 Budget, the Australian Government committed \$2.5 million over four years to “*pilot the first phase of a tertiary learning repository; a digital platform for students*”

¹ Making Microcredentials work for Learners, Employers and Providers (August 2019)

² Future Proof – Protecting Australians through Education and Skills (2017)

³ Monash Commission, Three recommendations for renewal of post-compulsory education in Australia (2018)

⁴ White Paper on Interoperable Learner Records. Data Transparency Working group (September 2019)

and graduates to access, compile, display and share their higher education qualifications, transcripts and learning credentials through a secure online system”⁵.

The Department (DESE under the previous government, DoE since) was charged with the management of the project and HES (the My eQuals Managing Organisation) and the Universities Admission Centre were engaged to deliver the NCP BETA stage.

On 25 August 2022, Mr Josh Donnelly from the Department of Education (DoE) presented on the National Credential Platform (NCP) initiative at the HoSA annual conference.

At the end of 2022, the NCP BETA stage was completed with the delivery of a “proof of concept” platform and the “testing of the feasibility, desirability and viability” of a limited set of functionality and features defined by the Department.

HoSA understands that the \$2.5 million government funding allocation has now been disbursed and next steps to the establishment of a National Credentials Platform are yet to be determined.

HoSA fully endorses the Government’s commitment to the establishment of a National Credentials Platform and supports the allocation of further funding to realise this ambition.

HoSA strongly recommends that a pathway to a National Credentials platform should build on the existing My eQuals digital credentials platform.

⁵ <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/new-platform-improve-student-access-learning-credentials>

Recommendation 2

Leverage the strong My eQuals foundations when establishing the NCP

What is My eQuals?

My eQuals started in 2016 as a sector collaboration involving all (47) Australian and New Zealand universities to issue academic credentials in a digital format to students and graduates. These credentials are authentic, tamper-evident and legally valid, can be accessed “anytime anywhere” by learners, and shared with receivers (employers, agencies, education providers) in the pursuit of employment, further study, visa applications or other purposes that require submission of verified academic credentials.

My eQuals launched in 2017 and has been embraced by Learners, Education providers and receivers alike. My eQuals is now an established platform that provides a strong foundation to serve as a National Credential Platform, as supported by key metrics below:

My eQuals Key metrics

- \$30 million+ sector investment to date
- 99%+ of Higher Education students and graduates receive their academic credentials through My eQuals.
- 74 participating education providers, including all public universities and more than half of the Australian TAFE providers.
- 2.5 Million Learner Accounts.
- More than 8 million credentials records (Transcripts, Testamurs, AHEGS).
- More than 5 million credentials records shared by learners.
- Records received, verified and accepted globally by recipients across more than 135 countries.
- More than 12,000 badges across 150 badge classes (attesting obtainment of micro credentials) issued.

Establishing a NCP that builds on My eQuals presents many benefits, including:

- Support from-, and ready adoption by- the education providers already participating in My eQuals.
- An established user base of millions of Learners.
- An existing governance and operating model that is readily scalable to serve the NCP.
- Significantly reduced risks and investment compared to an option of building a new NCP from the ground up.

Yours sincerely



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