Uni database to help employers beat job fraud

Tim Dodd

Universities are planning to build a secure database for employers to check job applicants' academic records and check the incidence of credential fraud.

This week universities will ask technology firms for proposals to build a secure database to hold student academic records from all universities which it is hoped will be up and running by 2017.

The initiative, called the Digital Student Data Project, is also set to be expanded internationally with student academic records from over a dozen countries, including the US, China, India, the UK, Canada and New Zealand, made available to be accessed.

University of Melbourne registrar Neil Robinson, who chairs the project's reference group, said it would have benefits for students and for universities as well as employers.

For example, he said it would allow a student applying for a graduate program at an Australian university to give permission for the university to electronically access their academic records from other universities (including those overseas) to save them the trouble of getting all their documents together. "Students will be much more easily able to move between institutions," he said.

Mr Robinson said it would also help deal with the growing amount of fraud in academic documents.

He said it would give employers access "far more readily" to academic records of job applicants.

"From an employer's point of view it means the documents are validated and verified," he said. "It means both employers and universities would have to spend less resources in verifying academic records.

Mr Robinson said the new system would protect privacy, with academic records only being released with the permission of the student or graduate.

The project has been led by the universities' peak body, Universities Australia, and has worked closely with Universities New Zealand which is interested in creating a joint Australia-New Zealand database.

Other countries are involved through the Groningen declaration signed earlier this year which calls for an international system of student data exchange.

Mr Robinson said it would have major benefits for the international student industry, Australia's third largest export, if universities were able to easily access verified academic results of students applying for enrolment, particularly from China, Australia's largest student market. He said that China already had a national system to hold academic records, which included school results.

Once the international system was set up he said "an Australian institution could get access to a Chinese prospective student's school records in making a determination about an undergraduate application".

Mr Robinson said the cost of setting up the Australian system should be known by next March, once a technology partner had been chosen to build the data system.

He urged all universities to come on board and join the next phase of the project.

He said there was a case for federal government funding given the benefit it would have for education exports.

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Neil Robinson, University of Melbourne registrar

An ERA where everyone is a winner

Education observed

What could account for this surge of excellence in research in Australian universities? Surely it could not mean that when you prescribe an overtly competitive, highly rewarded system it is not worth doing it. The fact that society no longer values research and education as the most valuable tool we have, is surely the real culprit.