National Engineering Policy Centre

Royal Academy of Engineering

Skills England Survey on Skills Passports

Survey Response

April 2026

Question 7

> *How could a skills passport be useful for employers?*

The value of a skills passport to engineering employers would lay in its potential to make transferable skills visible and comparable across sectors, disciplines and regions. However, a national skills passport is unlikely to add significant value in roles where sector-specific compliance, safety, and regulatory requirements already drive credential management as this is already managed within existing engineering bodies.

Engineering employers, particularly those in growing areas such as clean energy, digital infrastructure, defence, and advanced manufacturing increasingly need to draw on talent from adjacent sectors and disciplines. The NEPC's Engineers 2030 report[1] identifies adaptability and cross-disciplinary collaboration as defining characteristics of the engineer of 2030, and Skills England's Assessment of Priority Skills to 2030 projects engineering as one of the highest-growth sectors in the economy. Yet the current qualifications landscape, with its many sector-specific standards, impedes the movement of skilled people between sectors exacerbating existing recruitment difficulties.

A well-designed skills passport could address this by providing a common language for transferable capabilities (for e.g., technical, digital, sustainability-related and professional) that travels with the individual regardless of which sector they have trained or worked in. This would allow employers to identify relevant capability in candidates from adjacent industries, reduce the time and cost of sourcing talent, and improve productivity by matching people to roles more efficiently. It could also support regional inequality by making regional skills gaps and training needs more visible, strengthening alignment between local supply and employer demand.

Question 8

> *How could a skills passport support individuals and improve opportunities?*

A skills passport could support individuals as a tool that helps them more easily move between employers, sectors, and career stages.

For engineers and technicians already in employment, this is important. The Engineers 2030 Principle of being resilient and future-facing explicitly calls for continuous learning and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Yet the reality is that skills accumulated in one sector can be invisible to employers in another, even where the underlying competence is directly relevant. A passport that captures transferable capabilities such as systems thinking, digital fluency, project delivery, sustainability expertise in a consistent and portable format gives individuals control over their career, including moves into emerging fields such as net-zero infrastructure and AI-enabled engineering practice. The passport should also recognise the progression of engineers into managerial and leadership roles, capturing the development of skills such as leadership, decision-making, and organisational responsibility alongside technical expertise.

For people entering the engineering profession for the first time or returning after a career break or period outside engineering, a passport could reduce barriers to demonstrating capability acquired through non-traditional routes such as work experience, project-based learning, informal development, or employment in adjacent industries. The Royal Academy of Engineering's Inclusive Cultures in Engineering 2023 report[2] identified that underrepresented groups including women, minority ethnic engineers, and disabled people are more likely to have accumulated skills through varied and non-linear routes, and less likely to have those skills recognised by conventional hiring processes. A passport that makes such learning visible and credible could directly address one of the structural mechanisms that constrains diversity in engineering.

Question 9

> *How could a skills passport reflect both local and national skills needs?*

A skills passport should combine a nationally consistent framework with to local labour market needs, without being so tied to local or sector-specific definitions that it limits portability.

National consistency is essential as a passport that means different things in different regions or sectors cannot function as a transferability tool. The common core should describe engineering competencies including the emerging capabilities identified in Engineers 2030, such as digital fluency, systems thinking, sustainability expertise, and leadership in terms that are recognisable across regions and sectors.

Skills England's local dashboard and occupational maps, and Local Skills Improvement Plans provide an appropriate way to highlight the skill combinations most valued in different regional economies. The Royal Academy of Engineering's Engineering Economy and Place report[3] demonstrated that engineering employment patterns vary significantly across the UK, with major concentrations in the North West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber as well as the traditional concentration in London and the South East. A passport that can highlight locally relevant demands (for e.g., highlighting demand for power and grid skills in one region or retrofit and building services expertise in another) could support both individual career decisions and regional workforce planning, without constraining portability.

Question 10

> *How important is consistency across employers, sectors, and regions?*

Consistency is critical to a skills passport. The current landscape already contains multiple frameworks, occupational standards and competence schemes, but they do not translate across sectors.

The skills passport should therefore be built on a common framework: one that captures transferable, discipline-level competencies in a language that is recognisable across sectors rather than sector-specific. The UK Standard Skills Classification provides a possible framework for this purpose, though its practical adoption across employers and training providers remains to be demonstrated. The Engineering Council's UK-SPEC framework offers another reference point, particularly for the definition of professional-level engineering competence.

Consistency also matters for inclusion and for trust. Where standards are unclear or variable, employers revert familiar terms such as degree classification, institutional reputation, job title. These disadvantage candidates from non-traditional backgrounds and are poor predictors of capability. A passport underpinned by clear, consistently applied standards reduces that risk.

At the same time, consistency must not become rigidity. Engineering is changing rapidly, and the passport must be able to evolve alongside it.

Question 11

> *What lessons should be learnt from existing skills passports or similar systems?*

The engineering sector already has established competence management systems within many of its disciplines and sectors. Professional registration under UK-SPEC is a respected model at the professional level, built on clearly defined standards and independent peer review. A scheme like this works because it serves a specific sector or context, but this can also mean that restricts movement across sectors. Schemes need to facilitate mobility, not enforce silos.

A national skills passport should be designed to address exactly this gap. The risk is that, if designed too closely around existing occupational standards and sector frameworks, it simply reproduces those silos in a new format, adding administrative burden without delivering the transferability that would make it genuinely useful. A well-designed passport should, over time, lead to the reduction of overlapping frameworks, rather than sitting alongside them as another layer.

Professional Engineering Institutions operate globally, and many engineers work across international boundaries. Consideration should therefore be given to how a UK skills passport aligns with international frameworks and supports mobility into and out of the UK. Coordination with similar initiatives in other countries, including the EU, will be important.

Systems succeed when they deliver clear value to the majority of users, when they reduce friction and when the verification model is credible without being onerous. The design and rollout strategy must therefore focus on achieving wide and consistent adoption from the outset, not on building a technically sophisticated system that few engage with.

Question 12

> *What features should a skills passport have?*

Individual ownership and genuine portability. The passport must belong to and travel with the individual across employers, sectors and regions. It must not be dependent on any single employer's or provider's system and must remain accessible through career transitions and breaks.

The primary purpose of the passport, enabling transferability should drive the design of its competency framework. Skills should be described in transferable, discipline-level terms, not in sector-specific vocabulary. A passport designed around the existing occupational standards landscape would risk reinforcing rather than resolving fragmentation.

Verification must be layered and transparent. The passport should distinguish clearly between self-declared information, employer-validated evidence, provider-awarded qualifications, and independently assessed credentials. Different employers and contexts will require different levels of verification.

The interface should be simple, mobile-accessible, and designed for a wide range of users, not primarily for those already embedded in professional networks or large employers. Engineers in SMEs, in regional economies, or entering the profession from non-traditional routes are among those who stand to benefit most from a well-functioning passport. They must be supported by its design, not excluded by it.

Compatibility with AI recruitment tools should be a design requirement from the outset. A standardised, consistently structured passport format would allow employers and recruitment platforms to filter and compare candidates accurately, reducing the reliance on keyword matching that currently disadvantages well-qualified candidates who do not happen to describe their skills in the expected terminology.

Engineering is an internationally mobile profession, and Professional Engineering Institutions operate globally. The design of a skills passport should consider how it supports international mobility, including potential alignment with similar initiatives in the EU and elsewhere, and compatibility with international professional standards. This is a practical requirement for a profession whose members routinely work across borders.

Finally, the passport should be designed to evolve as the skills landscape changes. It should capture the recency and currency of credentials, not merely their existence, and should be structured in a way that allows new competency descriptors to be added. For example, in AI, decarbonisation and digital engineering.

Question 13

> *Further comments*

The NEPC considers that a skills passport could play a valuable role in strengthening the UK's engineering workforce, provided it is designed to complement rather than duplicate existing systems. It should make engineering skills easier to recognise, compare, and grow across careers and places, while respecting the reality that competence in engineering is developed through multiple routes and maintained through experience and CPD. That is especially

important given continuing shortages, rapid technological change, regional variation in demand, and the need to widen participation in engineering and technology.

It should:

- support a common national language for skills,
- integrate with established engineering standards and sector schemes,
- and deliver clear value at key transition points, including entry into employment, progression, and reskilling.

Above all, it should reflect the reality that engineering competence is developed through diverse pathways and maintained through continuous learning. A well-designed passport could therefore support a more resilient, inclusive, and future-ready engineering workforce, aligned with the UK's economic and technological ambitions. The Academy's Skills Centre[4] has already begun to undertake such work, and the Government should create a continual working relationship with the centre if a passport is being created.

References

[1] https://nepc.raeng.org.uk/media/ttoie1vl/nepc-engineers-2030-final-report-4.pdf

[2] https://raeng.org.uk/media/jurcggcm/inclusive-cultures-in-engineering-2023.pdf

[3] https://nepc.raeng.org.uk/media/fccax2kq/nepc-engineers-2030-rn-report-v3.pdf

[4] https://raeng.org.uk/education-and-skills/skills-centre/