Turning obstacles into challenges
Welcome address by Kor Brandts, DUO

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Kor Brandts. I am director of the Registers and Exams department at DUO.

It is my great honour to open the third Groningen Declaration Network meeting, the world conference on diploma registers, on behalf of DUO and of our co-partners at NSC and AACRAO. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our hosts for the very kind welcome you have given us. I would also like to thank everyone who has contributed to the organization of this meeting.

I am honoured to welcome you here on behalf of DUO. DUO is the Dutch Government’s Education Executive Agency. DUO finances and informs participants in education and educational institutes and furthermore DUO organizes exams. By doing so, DUO contributes to high quality education. Our communication with the educational institutes and participants in education is largely carried out digitally.

Digitization, our continuous effort

That is why DUO’s key objectives for the future aim at ongoing digitization, in order to improve the quality of our services, to improve efficiency and decrease the financial impact. Also, we want to reduce the financial burden for the public (the students!), the educational institutes and Dutch Government.

Groningen Founding meeting, 2012

In 2012, many of you were our guests in the Netherlands, in the city of Groningen which is up north in our small country. A small, but bustling university city!

DUO has been located in Groningen for years, so in 2012, I was able to meet you there in person.

Groningen then became known through the so-called Groningen Declaration, which many of you have signed. By signing the Groningen Declaration, we stated that we strive in unison for a worldwide digital exchange of student data. In the first place, we think about exchanging diploma data and we wish to link information from the national diploma registers to each other.

Rob Kerstens, our Director-General, signed the Groningen Declaration on behalf of DUO with great pleasure. Furthermore, DUO has promised to support these new developments for the
coming years, by offering funds and staff to set up an administrative office for the Groningen Declaration, to help organize international meetings, and to shape the Groningen Declaration as an organization for international collaboration.

**Beijing, Second Annual meeting, 2013**
The second conference was held in the overwhelming, large city of Beijing. Thanks to the tremendous effort made by CHESICC, that conference was a great success as well. Several new parties gave their official support to the objectives of the Groningen Declaration by signing it. New contacts were made and what is equally important, the first actual partnerships have been set up.

**DUO's Diploma register warming up**
In 2012, we presented a demonstration of the Dutch Diploma register. This register contains some five million diplomas, covering secondary and higher education. The diplomas of all recognized and subsidized educational institutes are recorded there. The Dutch government uses the Diploma Register to promote the digital use of authentic diploma data. The register provides clarity about recognized diplomas, it reduces the financial burden on the public and government, it suppresses fraudulent diplomas and it provides services in case of loss or theft. The Diploma Register can be consulted by citizens themselves. Owners of a diploma or a degree can consult how their diploma data are registered with DUO, and only they can download a secured PDF. Other parties that may consult the register are the educational institutes and a number of government agencies appointed by law.

In 2013, in Beijing, we showed you the fully operational Diploma register. The system proves to be very stable and is now being consulted some two hundred thousand times a month.

**Ambitious and/or realistic goals?**
DUO has a clear ambition with the Diploma register. Last year, we discussed with our principal, the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Science, our ambitions for the Diploma register which we laid down in a document. The Ministry shares our ambitions and collaborates with us on the following issues:

- We would like the register to contain more historical data.
- In addition to the educational institutes subsidized by the ministry of Education, we would like to record data from non-subsidized recognized institutes.
- Our wish is that the register contains all diploma data recognized by the government, covering not only the diplomas issued under the auspices of the ministry of Education, but of other ministries as well.
- We would like to make the Diploma register more widely accessible, as for instance the corporate sector feels the need to use validated diploma data to fight against résumé fraud.
- We would like to exchange data with other European and non-European diploma registers in order to digitally support the registration process for international students.
Turning obstacles into challenges

However, there can be many obstacles: technological problems, financial issues, political hurdles, managerial obstacles, judicial barriers and major differences in the educational systems. Moreover, privacy legislation may vary from country to country.

We can regard these as threats, but I would prefer to see them as challenges.

Milestones to date

We took on those challenges in the past year, and at the start of the present annual conference, I would like to mention a few significant milestones:

- Right from the start, DUO, recognized and shared with the ministry and other stakeholders that these developments are of the greatest importance to the promotion of international student mobility, to suppress fraudulent use of diplomas and to facilitate administrative procedures in Higher Education. All this leads to a substantial reduction of necessary financial budgets in the public sector. However, the most important thing is that international students receive the benefits from this.
- We have started a pilot project with two parties in the private sector for supplying diploma data in the context of pre-employment screening. This is extremely important, as the principles we will be using, will also serve as guidelines for other parties and pilot projects.
- With e-Enrolment in Europe, DUO intends to digitize the registration process for students in European Higher Education as much as possible. In Flanders we have taken the first step for this by preparing a pilot project. Peter Parmentier from Flanders and Jan Otten from DUO will share the details with you.
- We have already started preparations for a similar pilot project in Germany, as the majority of student mobility takes place between the Netherlands and our neighbouring countries Belgium and Germany.
- We have also started discussing with the National Student Clearinghouse how to set up a pilot project for the registration of American students in Dutch higher education and Dutch students in America. Rick Torres and Jan Otten will update you in the coming days.

These are the cases we would like to discuss with you in the course of this conference.

Looking forward to cooperate!

I hope and expect that other parties who support the Groningen Declaration will present some tangible results as well. We will be able to learn from each other, support each other and together shape our ambitions.

On behalf of DUO I would like to wish you a very pleasant and productive conference.

Thank you.