GRONINGEN DECLARATION
4th Annual Meeting

Executive summary

4-6 May 2015
University of Málaga, Spain

GRONINGEN DECLARATION

Education Executive Agency
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Uma
UNIVERSIDAD DE MÁLAGA

NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE

AACRAO

Dear friends,

The pages that follow will tell you about the meeting of the Groningen Declaration Network in Málaga that, for me, was exciting for many reasons, especially that a good number of people I like were coming to visit my home town and University, but also because I had the feeling that planetary forces were aligning in front of us, at just the right time.

Those forces help all of us to fight a battle in a peaceful war against isolation, building bridges with the tools of education (thanks Simone). We are battling for the free flow of skills globally, fighting paper to liberate information from the paper jail, and fighting fraud by easing the verification of the veracity of that information, both by digitisation.

The joint powers of policy and technology are our weapons, and technology already provides most of the elements needed to free the information and make it flow. Thus, the creation of the policy tools to support the technological development will help us win our battle, and then, the war for a better world.

As the last agenda item, I announced that SAQA, the South African Qualifications Authority had won the bid to host the fifth annual Groningen Declaration Network meeting to be held in Cape Town in 2016.

Please, read on and see how this develops, and come next year to Cape Town and join the ranks.

Victoriano Giralt
Chairman, Groningen Declaration Network, University of Málaga, Spain

Groningen Declaration Annual Meeting 2015
Rectorado, University of Málaga, Spain
4 – 6 May 2015

The Groningen Declaration is a declaration of intent that was signed on April 16, 2012 in Groningen, The Netherlands, at the closure of the Global Founding Seminar "Digital Student Data Depositories Worldwide". The aim of the network is to develop a digital student data ecosystem, bringing together depositories of digitised data from institutions of higher learning and other sources of learning.

The initiative supports developments in the mobility of e-identity systems, and in the education sector. In addition, it supports enrolment and admissions systems, and student loans and institutional funding systems. It also supports developments in the recording of data on competencies acquired from informal sources, such as online or other courses, books, and working experience. By signing the declaration, signatories promise to commit the necessary funding and to provide their best efforts in resources and expertise, so that the Groningen Declaration Network can support and lead the development towards a global federation of depositories containing digital student data.

The projects under the Groningen Declaration Network are helping to shape the future mobility of students, migrants, and job seekers who wish to work or study away from home, by forging new approaches to data verification and security, business process efficiency, environmental stewardship, and student-centeredness.

The digitised storage of student information is vital to the increasing mobility of students and migrants worldwide. How can the burden of applying for admission to universities and other educational providers be reduced? How can the global mobility of students and job seekers be facilitated and encouraged? How can qualifications and outcomes be authenticated? Central digital student data depositories can provide solutions to these concerns.

The meeting was hosted by the University of Málaga and held at the Rectorado of the University. It was attended by 84 enthusiastic participants from twenty-four countries. Beginning with an opening reception on the scenic rooftop of the Rectorado, the social events encouraged circulation and set the scene for the relaxed, friendly, and open atmosphere that characterised the event.

The event was streamed live for the first time, and an archive of the streamed presentations is available on the Groningen Declaration website.

Many delegates, but particularly first-time attendees expressed their appreciation of being among like-minded colleagues who actually com-

prehend what they do. The atmosphere of bonding and family-building responded to that very human need for feedback and understanding, and resulted in a very strong sense of purpose. Speakers in both the opening and closing sessions remarked on the passion and enthusiasm of the attendees.

In the poetic and inspiring words of Simone Ravaioli, International Affairs Manager of KION, "Education is our selected *weapon of mass construction to win the war against paper.* Collectively, we are all developers of bridges and our architectural blue print is the Groningen Declaration. By giving competence recognition, we shed light onto the good we all have within, making it evermore manifest so that we can share it as digital credentials with the whole world. We signed the Declaration not to get a badge for it, but to make history together."
The full text of Simone's message can be found on the Groningen Declaration website.

The signing ceremony of sixteen new members of the Groningen Declaration Network was held in plenary session, presided over by University of Málaga Rector, Adelaida de la Calle, bringing the total to forty-three signatories.

(from left to right) Michael Sessa - PESC, USA,
(Herman de Leeuw - GDN, Secretary), Andy Dowling - Digitary, Ireland, Tom Black - Stanford University, USA, Jim Wolfston - CollegeNet, USA, Vera Skorobogatova - Glavexpertcentr, Russia, Shelby Stanfield - University of Texas at Austin, USA, Baiba Ramina - AIC, Latvia, Lucie de Bruin - EP-Nuffic, The Netherlands, Neil Robinson - University of Melbourne, Australia, Emily Tse - IERF, USA, Elmer Sterken - Groningen University, The Netherlands, Adelaida de la Calle - University of Málaga, Spain, Sunny Lee – The Badge Alliance, USA, Matt Pittinsky - Parchment Inc., USA, Amee Shroff - CDSL NAD, India, Andrew Arida - ARUCC, Canada

The Conference

The event was officially the annual meeting of the organisation, but spontaneously, the term 'conference' came into use as the event progressed. Both the participation, and the depth and breadth of the programme ensured that the event lived up to all of the attributes of a full-fledged conference.

Peter van der Hijden, Independent Higher Education Expert, Belgium chaired the opening session, and the event was officially opened with words of welcome from Adelaida de la Calle, the Rector of the Universidad de Málaga.

Janie Ayers Barnett, the Associate Executive Director of AACRAO commented on the passion and enthusiasm of the group for the project, and this was later reflected in the closing words of Laura Howard, president of EAIE. This set the tone and atmosphere for the entire event.

In his opening remarks, Rick Torres, President of NSC National Student Clearinghouse clarified the objectives of the Groningen Declaration Network: to establish depositories of students' digital data, and figure out

"It's exciting to participate in the early formation of a global ecosystem of governments, educational institutions and service providers committed to enabling the secure exchange of electronic student records," explained Matthew Pittinsky, Parchment CEO.

"PESC's active engagement in the Groningen process helps ensure alignment between the work being done in North America and similar efforts around the world." Michael Sessa, President and CEO, PESC

how to use them to move that data reliably. He beseeched the group to challenge convention.

The conference presentations addressed the major issues, accomplishments, and goals of the Groningen Declaration: guidelines and uses for the data, showcasing use-cases, student-centeredness (privacy requirements, transparency, access, and consent), accumulation of lifelong/life-wide learning, and standards (interoperability and aligning standards, building a framework, and terminology).

The over-arching theme in all of the conference topics was Think Big/Act Small.

Commenting during the panel discussion, Andy Dowling, the CEO of Digitary explained that the road to the ultimate goal of a worldwide depository of digital student data is a process, and must be carried out stepwise, not in "one big bang". Organisations, countries, and regions are all at different stages and levels of attainment and have vastly different levels of digitisation. They are also organised nationally, provincially, regionally or sometimes even at institutional levels

Kor Brandts, Executive Director, Directorate for Registers and Examinations of DUO led the attendees in a chant of his ultimate goal for the organisation: "I would like a worldwide diploma register", but he also cautioned that the way to reach this goal is to "think big, but act small" . . . act small seems to be difficult in reality, . . . but we are working on it. . . . . not only for students, but also for cosmopolitans, the employees that want to work abroad. This is no longer an exception – immigration and emigration take place at all times and all places, and especially benefit from reliable and digitally available personal data.

in the different countries and regions. Countless technologies are already in place. This diversity includes the scale and scope of the networks and the different levels of willingness, as well as both the capacity and capability in the diverse regions to move forward. The "baby steps" in the process are **tried and tested best practice** that can be applied without the waste of time and money resulting from 'trial and error' methods.

Guidelines and Uses for the Data

As mentioned in the Annual Report, there is a growing synergy between the Groningen Declaration Network and some of the large, influential players in Europe. This growing relationship is demonstrated in the following accounts of plenary talks from the OECD and the European Commission's DG CONNECT.

"Our initiative now found resonance with a number of important international stakeholders that are not just attending but also presenting these last two days. To both the OECD and the European Commission, the issues of big data, data analysis, digital student data portability, and student centeredness – the student being the one that is in control of the sharing of his data … are what make the Groningen Declaration Network attractive."
Herman de Leeuw, Secretary, GDN

"In Search of New Paradigms of Education Data Use"
dr. Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin, Senior Analyst and Project Manager, OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development)

THE OECD produces guidelines to support the development of systems for cross-border higher education, and checks compliance, transparency, and the quality of collaboration. Supporting the new trend of increasing internationalisation, the guidelines will protect the privacy of students while giving them assurance of recognition of their qualifications and transparent accessibility

"How do we transfer all this collected data into actionable knowledge that can improve the students' experience? The next-generation longitudinal systems will link individual-level data over time to trace the academic history of each student. Do we understand what international students do and could we understand it better and improve their experience if we had this kind of longitudinal data system?
dr. Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin,, Senior Analyst and Project Manager OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

to their information internationally. They provide monitoring reports of the member countries' compliance with and implementation of the guidelines. Through harmonisation and collaboration between all stakeholders – governments, institutions of higher education, student bodies, quality assurance and accreditation bodies, academic recognition bodies and professional bodies - these cross-border systems can help countries to provide efficient, seamless, and cost-saving innovations for the improvement of education.

A new trend that has emerged is the development of 'longitudinal education systems', which follow an individual from their first days in school for their entire career, building an entire, detailed profile of their formal and informal learning, their study programmes and outcomes, and making verifiable recognition of qualifications available for further studies and job-seeking.

Recent surveys carried out by the OECD indicate that the data collected in expert data systems and e-government data systems can be used to personalise education by providing timely feedback to students and teachers, suggesting links to educational resources, proposing interventions and giving advice to both teachers and students.

The big data collected can be analysed, and turned into actionable knowledge. This knowledge can then then be used to answer questions about how data-driven innovation can be used to transform and improve education. The emerging next-generation education systems have an important synergy with the agenda of the Groningen Declaration Network in the areas of portability, harmonisation, collaboration, convergence, and efficiency, raising the question of how the GDN's agenda connects with bigger questions about the use of data and the digitisation movement.

"CONNECTing the Dots - An Intervention from the European Commission's DG CONNECT about Electronic Data"
dr. Giuseppe Abbamonte, Director, European Commission, DG CONNECT, Luxembourg

The European Commission's digital agenda for Europe will have a significant impact on the digitization of students' data and thus, on the agenda of the Groningen Declaration Network.

Student mobility doubled between 2000 and 2012 and tripled between 1980 and 2000. In 2012, approximately 4.5 million students were studying abroad. UNESCO and OECD now have non-binding guidelines for quality cross-border provision of data, built around the objectives of supporting and encouraging international cooperation and understanding. The guidelines serve to protect students and other stakeholders from low-quality provision and disreputable providers, and encourage the development of quality cross-border higher education that meets human, social, economic, and cultural needs. The guidelines also strive to ensure fair and transparent recognition of qualifications.

Students require protection, not only from degree fraud, but also from purchasing an expensive education that is essentially worthless. The reputation of institutions and the qualifications they offer have to be based on quality and trust. In a world of ever-increasing mobility, you not only have to strengthen your relationship with your local, regional, and national partners, but also with international partners.

These guidelines and objectives align closely with the aims of the Groningen Declaration Network. Through collaboration, a great deal of data can be collected, and the resulting big data sets can have other uses. Analytics can be used to monitor the progress and achievements of each learner and can also be used to intervene and shape the learning progress for students and teachers.

The European Commission strives to build concrete steps toward a better learning experience for students. Through learning analytics, next-generation systems will have individual-level indicators and longitudinal perspective. They will offer integration and interoperability as well as benchmarking, contextual data, real time data and feedback and will also be capable of offering administrative and other services for institutions of learning.

"We have set up a partnership with industry; it is an instrument overarching the research and innovation framework, called PPP (Private Public Partnership), to use the resources of industry to steer the European research agenda and help Europe achieve a competitive edge."
dr. Giuseppe Abbamonte, Director, European Commission DG CONNECT, Luxembourg

"It's a policy thing . . . how well the Groningen Declaration fits with the agendas of the major players: UNESCO, OECD, Council of Europe, and the European Union. If I read the guidelines of the OECD and UNESCO . . . . they read like a Groningen Declaration for the world."
Peter van der Hijden, Independent Higher Education Expert, Brussels

Showcasing Use-cases

"Involving the Continent: Universities Australia on "the Road to Málaga"
Neil Robinson, Academic Registrar, University of Melbourne, Australia

Universities Australia's Digital Student Data Reference Group has now evolved a Task Force to develop a business case for the electronic transfer of records for state-based admission processes, as well as to enable institutions to deal with admissions of international students directly. The Task Force is talking to registrars, exploring the viability of a mechanism to improve the verification of credentials. They are also striving to provide a better student experience by improving access, removing barriers and placing the student in the centre of the system.
Universities Australia actively participates in the Groningen Declaration, particularly in the field of the management of students' digital data.

"China Reaching Out to Serve European Institutions: Furthering Enrolment all Digitally"
CHESICC China Higher Education Student Information and Career Center, China Michael Zhang Zhiyuan, Project Manager for International Promotion, CHESICC China Higher Education Student Information and Career Center, China

This pilot project studies the process management needed to promote student mobility through digital enrolment, focussing on various delivery modes. There has been concern that applications to attend Chinese schools may decline, and efforts are being made to reduce the barriers to admission by improving data portability, especially for schools that have little local expertise in IT infrastructure and maintenance.

The pilot mapped the structure of European systems of higher education in order to compare them with the Chinese systems and also mapped European and Chinese credentials, with plans to include comparisons of degrees and evaluations of outcomes. Partnerships were forged with organisations to address the issues of how to reduce fraud, as well as reduce the burden for students applying for admission courses, and the administrative paperwork, and to create a safe, reliable, efficient, and transparent framework for the collection, storage, and transfer of digital data.

This pilot was successful and consideration will now be given to ways to include more platforms, such as XML and EDI formats and a platform for institutions with no IT systems, and to include more content, such as course evaluations and ways to compare outcomes to those in other countries.

"Digital Student Data as a Means to Further Recognition and Visa Applications: Showcasing China's Experience"

dr. Cheng Weixing, Director, CHESICC (the China Higher Education Student Information and Career Center), China

Mrs. Liu Xuyan, Director, CSCSE (the Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange), China

Michael Zhang Zhiyuan, Project Manager for International Promotion, CHESICC, China

In his plenary address, dr. Cheng Weixing explained that CHESICC is an official government agency in the Ministry of Education and is the only agency on China that can verify qualifications. Ms Liu Xuyuan, director, CSCSE explained the role and tasks of CSCSE. The agency keeps an information database of educational institutions at all levels, and maintains China's incoming mobility database, which is widely used for the evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications obtained by returning Chinese nationals and incoming foreign graduates.

CHESICC's national student record database, CHSI, is widely used to further study opportunities inside China and for enrolment for national examinations. It is also widely used for outgoing mobility (overseas study enrolment), such as for credit card applications or for foreign visa applications. It can provide translated certificates.

CHSI provides credential verification and the results of study programmes for both Chinese and overseas students and also for employers, as well as managing records of military conscription. The inter-connected databases provide information for post-graduate enrolment and certificates for all post-secondary records. They also track employment records. The CHSI database also has administrative functions and the data collected is analysed and used for making national policies for education.

Using its own offices abroad and qualification information collected from many foreign institutions through co-operation with partner-organisations (now with HEDD and NSC), the CSCE provides online evaluations and written reports of evaluations. CSCSE seeks to broaden these partnerships.

"Panel Discussion" - "Digital Student Data and Automatic Recognition: uneasy bed partners? Or a match made in heaven?"

Moderator: Anna Glass, Policy Analyst, Higher Education, OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), France

The panellists were Joe Samuels, the Chief Executive Officer of SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority), Michael D. Sessa, President and CEO, PESC in the United States, and Richard Edvin Borge, of the University of Oslo in Norway.

The panel tackled the issue of automatic recognition and digital student data. Automatic recognition has been on the UNESCO agenda for a couple

of years and is developing slowly. Anna asked why student data depositories and automatic recognition are not compatible.

Richard argued that automatic recognition would not be easy to accomplish but should be the goal. With the huge increases in the mobility of students and job seekers, the workload would very quickly become too large for a manual system.

Michael reminded us that students are used to a digital life and would certainly be uncomfortable with the use of paper.

During the discussion period, Peter van der Hijden expressed his opinion that automatic recognition is doable, but automatic admission is not: access can be automated, but admission cannot. He maintained that UNESCO's world recognition convention (the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region) is not really a recognition convention, but a recognition procedure convention. Qualifications need to be examined and the procedures being developed help admissions officers to make quick and informed decisions.

Joe Samuels of SAQA, the South African Qualifications Authority, explained that it is possible to automatically recognise student data from other countries if systems are in place to verify the source of the information and to compare the information with the local education system. It must be possible to check if the institution is legitimate, and the documents (certificates) and reported outcomes are reliable and actually belong to the person claiming the data.

Richard Edvin Borge of the EMREX Project (Erasmus+) explained that the project is trying to improve student mobility by providing data in a standard way so that it can be sent to another system that uses a different format. He pointed out that automatic recognition would be costly and difficult but there is much to be gained.

dr. Vera Igorevna Skorobogatova of the Glavexpertcentr in the Russian Federation described the centre as a State Agency that recognises and verifies qualifications. Compliance is required by law, and there is some automatic recognition, but this is not complete, due to diversity. The system has three information systems: a list of the executive bodies authorised to issue education certificates and diploma apostilles; a register of the outcomes of students in state final examinations for secondary education; and a federal register of education transcripts and qualifications including training in skills. Michael Sessa of PESC in the United States told of the rapid doubling of knowledge and of the amount of data about every individual, and stressed the vital and urgent need for new frameworks and mechanisms. The question remains: whom do you trust and how do you verify that trust? The members of PESC are associations, institutions, and service providers and its role is to set standards for common records. PESC advocates a student-centred approach to access and authentication.

"Toward the Digitization of Credential Evaluations for Universities"

Emily Tse, Director of Evaluations, IERF International Education Research Foundation, USA

Shelby Stanfield, Vice Provost and University Registrar, University of Texas at Austin, USA

Emily Tse spoke of the successful project of the University of Southern California (USC), which outsourced the implementation of the systems developed by the project to the International Education Research Foundation (IERF). The aim of the project was to work out a system to help American students with the recognition of overseas credentials, and foreign students with credentials earned in the USA. The project was concerned with degree verification and fraud detection and involved the electronic transmission of the results of credential evaluations over the SPEEDE plat-

form. It uses recognised open standards, with emphasis on tools that are available now to institutions or service providers interested in moving into electronic data exchange (EDX).

USC was chosen for the project because it has the first and largest foreign student component. Coordination was the biggest challenge, with many parties involved. Also, identification of the universities was confusing, due to unclear identification and inconsistencies in translation. Thus, the project was trialled by mapping a limited list of the 400 most prominent institutions. Shelby Stanfield addressed the more technical aspects of the project. The packaging and transmission of the data is done on the SPEEDE server, which provides a framework and standards for exchanging academic records 'SPEEDily' and securely. The validation works well in fraud detection and also provides an additional safety factor - acknowledgement of receipt of the data. It is very flexible, allowing the receiving institutions to use many different formats. Implementation guidelines in the form of a 'recipe book' are provided, explaining how to package data to recognised standards. Institutions can register online at no cost and use of the system results in huge cost savings for them. The system does accreditation of institutions, not degree equivalences, but it does do credit and grade conversions.

The session chair, Michael Sessa commented that this is an excellent example of successful collaboration, leveraging the strengths of both partners.

"Tuning Into the Groningen Declaration: SAQA's NLRD"

Yvonne Shapiro, Director, NLRD (National Learners Records Database), SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority), Republic of South Africa

As one of the first signatories of the Groningen Declaration, SAQA is proud to house one of the Groningen Declaration Network's trusted national digital student data depositories, and seeks participation in one of the pilot initiatives under way among the Network's signatories.

SAQA's National Learners Records Database (NLRD) is South Africa's national digital student data depository. It is a comprehensive information database, and the collected data are processed, providing information for policy makers. The same system is also used to provide students and job seekers with the information they need to continue their education or find a suitable job. SAQA includes a register of professional bodies and a completely integrated system of present and past qualifications, and verifies the achievements of learners from various institutions of all sizes and levels. Learners can receive transcripts but not their certificates.

The NLRD has had significant success fighting fraud. It is believed that applicants are afraid to make fraudulent claims on their applications because potential employers or registrars check with the database regularly. Applicants are so afraid they will be checked, they steer clear of making fraudulent claims on their applications.

Peter van der Hijden endorsed the accomplishment and commented that this is a good example of what we want and need in Europe.

"African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN) - An Overview and Looking Ahead"

Joe Samuels, Chief Executive Officer, SAQA South African Qualifications Authority, Republic of South Africa

In a world rife with fraudulent qualifications, diploma, degree, accreditation and verification mills, setting up a network of trusted, credible verification agencies makes sense. SAQA took the initiative to do that and established AQVN to combat qualification fraud by making the verification of learners' records quick, reliable, and affordable. The rapid growth in the mobility

of job seekers – in addition to student mobility- has made it urgent and essential to have a system in place to verify and authenticate domestic and foreign credentials and thus combat fraud. This issue was included in UNESCO's revised regional Arusha Convention that was recently signed by fifteen African countries and the Holy See. The vision is to embark on the digital exchange of information for the recognition of qualifications, and to establish a service to authenticate documents. Digital Student Data Depositories will use a centralised online database that can be accessed quickly, in full compliance with security concerns and privacy regulations. The project is now working on pilots for ARUSHA with a long-term vision of expanding the initiative to many more countries in Africa.

Student-centeredness

"What if you could spend less money and time to assess and manage accounts for new prospects in your admissions portal? And - what if you could correctly match their third-party records without a second thought? In the USA, the CommIT Project is using Federated identity to answer these questions."
Ann West, Associate Vice President for Trust and Identity, Internet2, USA

"Making Admissions Easier for Schools and Students: The CommIT Project and Federated Identity"
Ann West, Associate Vice President, Internet2, USA

The CommIT Project is committed to making admissions easier for schools and students, using Federated Identity to streamline login credentials. Applying for college is cumbersome and costly and students have to manage many sets of login names and passwords. The outcome of the project is to make one user ID (Single Sign On) a reality.
The project is running two pilots, one at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and the other at the University of Southern California. The system will make it possible for students to log in and open an account on the CommIT website, which will provide an improved authentication process. Their identity will be authenticated and their consent will be required for information to be provided to the institutions requesting it.

"An Alternative to the Central Depository Model: A Hub and Spoke Approach to Secure Credential Delivery"

Andy Dowling, CEO, Digitary, Ireland
Jim Wolfston, CEO, CollegeNET, Inc., USA
Tom Black, Associate Vice Provost and University Registrar, Stanford University, USA

Tom Black introduced a new initiative of Stanford University that works with two vendors. Digitary is an Irish provider specialising in the secure digital certification and delivery. The initiative combined their expertise with CollegeNET's student information system to create a 'hub and spoke' approach for the on-demand, secure delivery of credentials. This model ensures accurate, up-to-date record retrieval, and it also empowers students, because they initiate the data transfer.

Andy Dowling explained that in the Hub and Spoke model, customers (students) can determine where their records are stored, and these records can be certified, but remain at their institution and are available only with their permission. Students are able to collect records from multiple institutions, and use these for applications for jobs or for applying to other institutions. Jim Wolfston of CollegeNET gave an inspiring talk, likening the aims of this project to those of the Groningen Declaration – to encourage and facilitate student mobility. He re-enforced the concept of the Hub and Spoke model: to have the student at the centre, as an authorisation point for the transfer of his data. Looking to the future, students should be able to create a portfolio, a journal about the whole person, including a history of their studies and outcomes, their experiences, and their impressions. Students could then use this portfolio for admission applications. He reiterated that data should stay at the institution and students would use a student interface to give permission for others to access only those parts of their history that are relevant.

Accreditation of Life-long/Life-wide Learning

An interesting development was the increased attention given to the broadening of the scope of learning that should and will be included in students' digital data, including many forms of informal learning acquired outside of formal educational institutions: trades and skills, self-taught learning from books, online courses, competences gained through work/study programmes, working experience, and attendance at conferences – to name a few. These competences will provide useful information to include on school, college, and university applications, but will also be useful for applications and interviews with immigration and visa authorities, and with potential employers overseas.

"If you ask any universities or learning institutions whether their graduates are fit for the market, with the right skills – they would say" yes, of course", but if you ask the same question to the employers, they would tell you "the graduates do not have the skills for the market."
Simone Ravaioli, International Affairs Manager, KION, Italy

"Life-long "Earnings": Closing the Skills Gap with Open Badges and e-Portfolios"

Simone Ravaioli, International Affairs Manager, KION, Italy

KION SpA is a software development company that is controlled by CINECA, the leading consortium of Italian Universities, and is exclusievely dedicated to the University information systems market. Together they are working on the Bestr project, which is developing a system of portfolios and open badges, so that people can receive accreditation for their lifelong/life-wide learning. The project is developing tools so that people can aggregate,

collect, and share their competencies in a wide range of skills and learning that goes beyond study in schools and includes competencies acquired from informal sources, such as online or other courses, books, and working experience. Open badges will provide this accreditation for informal learning. JISC in the United Kingdom has provided a skill-matching service for the project.

"Open Badges: Promotion and Adoption of the Standard in Finland"
Eric Rousselle, CEO/Research and Development, Discendum Oy, Finland
Sunny Lee, Director of Infrastructure Strategy, The Badge Alliance, USA

The Badge Alliance promotes the adoption of Open Badges and creates solutions for their implementation. The alliance recently partnered with IMS Global, a standards body. Sunny explained that badges are a representation of achievements, interests, and competencies. The Badge Alliance is building an infrastructure to provide digital credentials, and to replace the traditional learning records that are mostly on paper.
Eric outlined the function of his firm, Discendum, an e-learning service developer and provider. The firm is a member of Badge Europe, a cloud-based issuing platform and management system for Open Badges, supporting one of the goals of the Groningen Declaration Network by ensuring that the owner of the data controls the evidence of learning.

Standards
(interoperability, building a framework, terminology)

"Erasmus Without Paper (EWP), an Update"
Valère Meus, International Relations Expert, Ghent University, Belgium

Most of the student information systems of European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) process and store student data electronically. However, most exchanges of student data in Europe are still processed by exchanging information in paper form, without any standardisation. The Erasmus Without Paper consortium is piloting a project to enable the digital exchange of student data.
The presenter stressed that while there are bi-lateral agreements to transfer transcripts with grades and all student records, there is still much to be done on the road to the creation of networks of data depositories that keep the data where it is, while allowing access to it. He stressed that these networks should focus on methods to transfer data, not documents. The project plans to develop interoperable, open source systems and make it possible for all to participate by providing training and assistance.

". . . with continuing rising numbers of students earning credentials from more than one institution of higher education, often in more than one country, global usage of data in digital format would be safer, more economical and sustainable, and more user-friendly."
Laura Howard, President, EAIE

"e-ID and e-Enrolment in Europe"

Jan Otten, Senior Policy Advisor, DUO (Education Executive Agency) of The Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science,
Stefanie Van den Bossche, Deputy Head of Unit, AHOVOS Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, and Student Finance, Belgium

The first pilot built a business case for the creation of an improved infrastructure for the sharing of data to support the considerable movement of students between the Netherlands and Flanders by assisting in enrolment procedures and the availability of diplomas and outcomes. One important condition for the recommended standard is that it will require no new legislation or changes to legislation. It will be carried out without subsidies or new funding, and will use existing technologies. While relatively successful, it was found that more integration was needed as not all institutions were registered.
The second pilot was carried out by linking some Belgian students to the University of Maastricht. The study indicated a clear need to get the semantics right, even though the two countries speak the same language. The two countries have different procedures for application and enrolment, as well as different facilities, such as Studielink in The Netherlands, which is not available in Flanders. The two countries also require different data and have different regulations, particularly for privacy and security.

"The business case indication from these pilots was to make an authentication tool. The idea has been put forward to carry out a pilot project to study the possibility of combining e-Enrolment with e-ID and creating a tool with the potential for use in the whole of Europe."
Jan Otten, Senior Policy Advisor, DUO (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs), The Netherlands

"ASREN - Enabling Innovation for Arab Academe through Advanced e-Infrastructures"

Yousef Torman, Managing Director for Networking, Technology and Infrastructures, ASREN (Arab States Research and Education Network), Jordan

The creation of an Arab States Research and Education Network (ASREN) was the first step toward building an infrastructure that can collect, store and share digital data in the region by providing a common network for the universities and research centres to share resources. This was certainly not a small step, but it was a necessary step, paving the way for the building of digital depositories.
Work began in 2005, and by 2011, there were seven networks. Now there are fifteen, providing common services for all universities: for example, Eduroam®, a science gateway, middleware and identity federations, and international connections to the rest of the world.
ASREN is looking forward to participating in the Groningen Declaration and in addressing the issues of the mobility of their students, migrants, and job seekers through the exchange of digital data.

"Update on the NSC-China Pilots (CHESICC and CDGDC). Lessons on the Road to Scaling"
Rick Torres, President, NSC National Student Clearinghouse, USA

The pilot between the US and China began two years ago between CHESICC, CDGDC and the Clearinghouse. Along the way, other US-based entities stepped in and added a similar service to their existing bundle of services offered to US institutions. The Clearinghouse vision is to create an international standards-based ecosystem through trusted data depositories.

The pilot project between NSC in the US and CHESICC and CDGDC (Chinese Qualifications Verification) in China involved the ways to cooperate in the evolution from paper to digital. The desired outcomes were a reduction in the burden of administrative paperwork, and a reduction in fraud by creating a new ecosystem for students and schools.

The aim of these pilot projects is to produce tested and validated platforms so that transmission can be carried out on standards-based platforms, and to make these platforms available to international Groningen Declaration partners.

"Delivering 3 in One Stroke: Supporting Student Mobility, Automatic Recognition and Learning Mobility Statistics"

Anders Bøgebjerg Hansen, Special Adviser, Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Denmark

Richard Edvin Borge, University of Oslo, Norway

Anders stated that the EMREX project is at the core of what the Groningen Declaration is all about. It seeks common procedures to simplify the exchange of results – easier, faster, authenticated, secure, and controlled by the data owner (the student). It also seeks ways to promote a higher level of student mobility in higher education and to encourage more effective recognition of prior learning.

The field trials started with the Nordic countries and the project now has eight members. The trials tested new ways to support student mobility and auto-recognition of external studies, starting by making a glossary of terms. Useful information to make a business case was obtained from the field trials and EMREX is now an official project, part of the Erasmus+ programme. Its aim is to improve the availability, quality, and reliability of information about student records of achievement.

"Canada: Building on Student Mobility and Data Exchange Successes"

Andrew Arida, President and CEO, ARUCC (Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada), Canada

Kathleen Massey, University Registrar and Executive Director of Enrolment Services, McGill University, Canada

Leisa Wellsman, Manager, OUAC (Ontario Universities Application Centre), Canada

This presentation outlined the findings of two successful pilot projects carried out by a National Task Force in Canada to look at potential models and determine the best choice for a new, cohesive data-sharing model for connecting Canada to the world. The priority is supporting student mobility worldwide by creating and deploying a new data-sharing model for students coming to Canada to study and Canadian students going abroad Andrew explained the organisational, political, and administrative landscape of education in Canada. Funding and decision-making in education is provincial and there is no national, governing body. There are very diverse standards and many formats to move data, and there are a variety of agreements and partnerships in place. Finally, the presenters turned the tables on the attendees and asked for their help on recommending the best solution: build on the present, successful system or create an entirely new, centralised system. There appeared to be support for keeping the system that works, and building on it. An expression heard often in North America is 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.'

Members of the National Task Force are keen to engage in partnerships with signatories of the Groningen Declaration.

"Toward 'Third Generation' Qualifications Mobility"
Nigel Palmer, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Melbourne, Australia

This session highlighted innovations in qualifications mobility, and also explained how opportunities for alignment across different areas of activity may herald a 'third generation' in graduation documentation and student mobility. The APEC development initiative developed a model for the mobility of qualifications, a supplement that describes graduate achievement about a specific degree and is a companion document to an academic transcript. It contains the student's identity, a description of the qualification, information about the awarding institution, and information about certification and the achievement of the student.

Closing
Peter van der Hijden, Independent Higher Education Expert, Belgium

"...... the 47 Bologna ministers for higher education should be made aware that 'Bologna goes digital, and the Groningen people will do it for you''"
"...... make sure that the Groningen Declaration becomes a part of the public debate on widening access to higher education, roll out a calendar for applying for projects in the European Union and do advocacy for migration policy issues and so you have something to contribute to Bologna Going Digital."
Peter van der Hijden, Independent Higher Education Expert, Brussels

In his keynote presentation, Peter described the 'whole new world' of portable student data that he discovered during the event. The aims of the Groningen Declaration and its policies fit well with the agendas of the major international players, such as UNESCO, OECD, the Council of Europe, and the European Commission, which vary in scope but are doing very similar work with economic and geo-political dimensions. The principles guiding this exciting development are clearly laid down in the Statutes of the Network.

Peter assigned three pieces of homework for the signatories of the Declaration.

First, there are national system processes, working towards putting together a single digital market, including a package of measures that was laid out by dr. Giuseppe Abbamonte, Director of the EC's DG CONNECT (regulation codes, obtaining funding, and pilot projects). The Groningen Declaration should make sure that all of these national systems are members of the Declaration within three years.

Second, the European Commission funds projects and there is money available for projects concerned with DG CONNECT and the Digital Agenda. There are also funds available for the research infrastructure in Horizon 2020, and for projects dealing with the mobility of students in Erasmus+. These offer scope for the Declaration to obtain financial support. Further, there are funds available for regions with fewer resources, to provide for activities such as projects to provide training. Financing from these projects is obtained through proposals, and a careful roadmap should be developed to prepare them. The work done on the pilot project to build business cases would be an excellent starting place. The Groningen Declaration Network should roll out an agenda for creating proposals for funding from these sources.

Third, the Groningen Declaration network should make sure that policy-makers understand the role that the Declaration plays and can play in the research and higher education areas. The upcoming Bologna Process meeting should be made aware that 'Bologna goes digital, and the Groningen Declaration will do it for you'. The goal should be to make Europe 'the university of the world', and the Declaration has an important role to play

Laura highlighted the passion and enthusiasm of the group to carry this agenda forward and briefly summarised the 'state of play'. The subjects of privacy, transparency, and consent were central to the messages presented, as was the importance of agreeing a precise terminology, for positioning the student at the centre, for aligning standards, and for working within a framework. The Groningen Declaration can provide that framework.

And finally, a rather pathetic email, received after we had all been back at our desks for a couple of days – "Can we go back to Málaga now?"

there. Furthermore, Europe should adopt a positive attitude to migration. The desperate refugees arriving on our shores, who are always character-ised as being illegal and threatening, should not be locked up, but should be given tests to discover their skills and competencies, provided with re-training, and allowed to enter the European economy. There was some resistance to this idea, but it is certainly a refreshing new approach. Thus, the third homework assignment is that the Groningen Declaration should ensure its voice is heard in the public debate about widening access to high-er education and in discussion of migration policy issues.
The event was officially closed by Laura Howard, President of the EAIE.

Groningen Declaration Network Annual Report and Task Force Reports

The annual report, regarding the current status and plans for the future was presented by Herman de Leeuw, secretary of the Groningen Declaration Network (GDN) to the Executive Committee at its annual meeting on 4 May 2015. Upon approval of the Executive Committee, the report was then read during the plenary session on Wednesday morning, 5 May. The following is an abstract from that report. The full report can be consulted on the GDN website.

The Groningen Declaration has found resonance with important and influential international stakeholders, who were not only in attendance, but have also made presentations at the event. The ecosystem that includes big data, data analysis, portability, and student centeredness has come of age, with pilots started in previous network meetings now being scaled up. These are now projects and they are either being funded or are seeking funding. It is now time to decide what the next stage should be, and how the network should develop. The Executive Committee will address this issue and seek ways to involve the signatories of the GDN.

The Executive Committee will address the issue of funding for future meetings, and an even more ambitious schedule for attendance of the Executive Committee at meetings of the European Commission. They will also continue to work on the identification of new research activities, the ongoing quest for new members, and the setting up of a GDN Finance Committee.

A permanent Programme Committee will be created to organise the programme for the annual meeting. The committee will develop a system for a call for proposals, and a review and acceptance process.

On 11 January 2015, the Groningen Declaration Network's Executive Committee approved the Statutes, Bylaws, Code of Conduct and Ethical Principles documents and the participants at the meeting in Málaga adopted them by a qualified majority.

A decision was taken by the Executive Committee to restrict membership of the committee to data providers (institutions), data custodians (repositories), and data owners (the students) and a new regulation will be presented to the members for approval and acceptance.

The Groningen Declaration was showcased at an impressive list of seven events worldwide, which significantly increased its recognition: the EUNIS Annual Conference; the EAIE Annual Conference, in which four sessions were related to the GDN; the first PESC EdInterop Annual Data Symposium and Summit; the launch of the African Qualification Verification Network; the Glavexpertcenter International Seminar; the IGC Working Group on Student Mobility and Border Crossing; and the AACRAO Conference.

The secretary closed by thanking the sponsors of the event and especially the University of Málaga for hosting the event.

The secretary closed his annual report by asking all signatories to include the GDN on their websites.

Task Force Presentations

The business part of the meeting continued with an update on the current Groningen Declaration task forces and plans for the future.

The task force that produced the four basic documents was dissolved, and

the Executive Committee is now planning a new one on verification services and verification policy.

Rick Torres, President of the NSC National Student Clearinghouse leads the pilot project on business cases, which is working on how to create a depository and how to evolve digital systems and the migration of digital credentials. Future projects can also continue to investigate how ICT can help to develop student mobility and to serve the increasing demands of the labour market.

The dissemination pilot, led by Victoriano Giralt, had a very productive year. In addition to maintaining the website and uploading the publications of members and international bodies, the task force significantly increased the profile and worldwide recognition of the Groningen Declaration through attendance and participation in the international events listed above.

Dik van der Wal of DUO explained that the pilot task force encourages members to identify small, manageable projects that would enable them to make a small step toward the ultimate goal of a worldwide, digital diploma register. Elmer Sterken suggested that there are presently opportunities for pilot projects for making the necessary accreditation information available to job seekers and potential employers. The task force encouraged many of the current pilots to present their progress and achievements at the conference in Málaga.
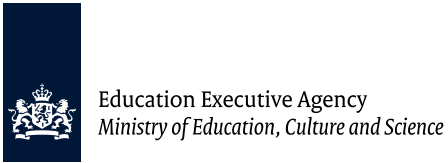
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- University of Málaga
- National Student Clearinghouse
- AACRAO

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