



# The GDN Network Annual Meeting 2025

October 29–31, 2025 | The Grand Hotel, Oslo, Norway

Event organised by



**About the GDN Network:** The Groningen Declaration Network (the GDN Network) is an international, non-profit federated public benefits organization located in the Netherlands. It represents a voluntary network of like-minded organizations and individuals that seek to make digital student data portability happen. Its network of thought leaders from around the globe are collaborators who seek to support, advise, and offer innovative changes in the ways we share artifacts of learning through digital capacity building to advance rapid access to education and jobs for learners. The GDN Network seeks common ground in best serving the academic and professional mobility needs of citizens worldwide by bringing together stakeholders in the digital student data ecosystem to catalyze change through a Network of Networks model. It seeks to develop and support best practices and globally accepted standards for exchange of data and credentials through educational seminars, delegations, and convenings. Learn more about the GDN Network at: [groningendeclaration.org](http://groningendeclaration.org).



**About the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir):** The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills is the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research within the higher education and higher vocational education sectors and is responsible for the national skills policy. We advise the Ministry, we implement national policies, and we coordinate incentive schemes and management instruments.

More information on the [Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills \(HK-dir\)](#)



**About Sikt - Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research:** Sikt delivers products and services for education and research. We offer a common infrastructure and joint services for the knowledge sector. Our services shall support digitalisation, data sharing and open research. More information on [Sikt](#)

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# Context and Overview

The **2025 The Groningen Declaration Network (the GDN Network) Annual Meeting**, held in **Oslo, Norway**, marked a defining moment in the Network’s continued pursuit of global data mobility, interoperability, and learner empowerment. [Explore the conference site here.](#)

This year’s convening was co-hosted by Norway’s [Sikt](#) and [HK-dir](#) of the Norwegian government. It brought together an impressive **170 registered participants from more than 30 countries**, exemplifying the **rich diversity, collective expertise, and shared commitment** that characterize the GDN community. Participants included representatives from ministries of education, higher education institutions, credential evaluation agencies, technology innovators, and international organizations, all contributing to a vibrant and forward-looking dialogue shaping the global learner data ecosystem.

In Oslo, the GDN proudly welcomed **eight new patrons** and **numerous new signatories**, reflecting the growing recognition of the Network’s mission and reinforcing its role as a unifying platform for collaboration and innovation in digital credentialing worldwide.

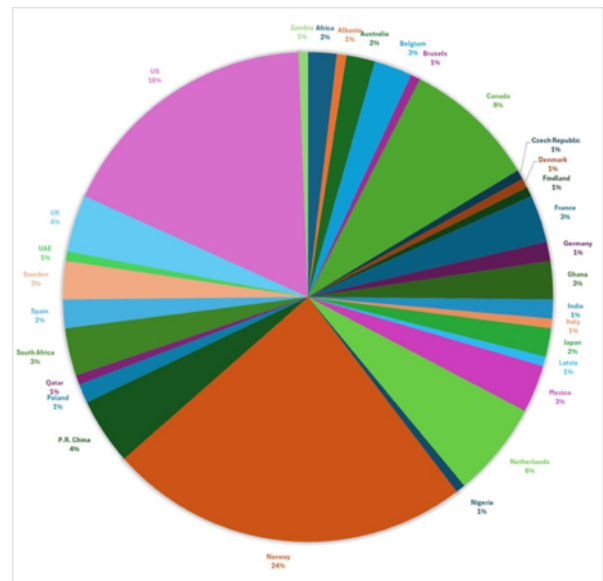
## Countries Represented at the 2025 Oslo GDN Annual Meeting

**170**

Registrants from **31 countries**, the largest in GDN history

**80+**

sessions covering themes such as open recognition, interoperability, workforce skills development, capacity development and more



## Strengthening Global Partnerships

The meeting marked an important step forward in international cooperation with the launch of **four new Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)** with global partners in recognition and data mobility:

- The [Association for International Credential Evaluation Professionals \(TAICEP\)](#)
- The [Canadian Association of Prior Learning and Assessment \(CAPLA\)](#)
- The [Velocity Network Foundation \(VNF\)](#)
- The [European University Foundation \(EUF\)](#)

These new partnerships, featured on the [GDN Partnerships and Endorsed Initiatives page](#), align directly with the [GDN Network of Networks](#) vision and the objectives articulated in the [GDN Strategic Plan 2025–2030](#).

In addition, a landmark **MOU was signed between DUO, a patron of the GDN, and six other organizations**, highlighting the strength of cross-border collaboration and shared dedication to advancing interoperable credential ecosystems. The partners to this MOU include the following organizations:

- EMREX, a system for exchanging student data;
- The State of the Netherlands, represented by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, for whom: Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs (DUO);
- The Kingdom of Norway, represented by the Minister of Education and Research, for whom: Sikt - Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research;
- Finland, CSC - IT Center for Science Ltd.;
- Sweden, The LADOK consortium representing all Higher Education Institutions in Sweden;
- Republic of Croatia, The Agency for Science and Higher Education representing Higher Education Institutions in Croatia;
- Poland, MUCI (University Centre for Informatization), representing Higher Education Institutions in Poland gathered in MUCI.

## Advancing Practice Through Collaborative Workshops

Three dedicated workshops were held in Oslo to advance the GDN's strategic goals and strengthen the foundations for future work. These were co-facilitated by Joanne Duklas, executive director of the GDN Network along with the other leads as noted below.

1. **Governance Workshop** – Focused on supporting the rollout of the [new GDN Governance Framework](#), this session examined pathways to establish and sustain national networks, laying the groundwork for robust governance and shared accountability. It was co-facilitated by Dr. Rooksana Rajab of Resonance Consulting.
2. **Workforce Skills Development Workshop** – This session explored the intersection of credential ecosystems and employability, emphasizing the need to align learner data mobility with evolving labour market demands. [View the workshop brochure here](#). This workshop was co-facilitated by Rick Torres (GDN Strategic Advisory Council chair), Jelger de Boer (GDN Immediate Past-President), and Melanie Gottlieb (GDN President).
3. **Recognition Workshop** – This session focused on strengthening [recognition](#) frameworks and operationalizing the Global Convention’s principles. This session was co-facilitated by Stig Arne Skjerven (chair of the Global Convention) and Beka Tavartkiladze (GDN board director).

Each of these sessions will **inform future GDN priorities**, with select topics evolving into **new communities of practice** to sustain engagement and innovation across the Network.

### **Celebrating Leadership, Legacy, and Service**

A highlight of the meeting was the launch of the **Kathleen Massey GDN Student Bursary**, created in honour of **Kathleen Massey, Vice Provost (Students) at the University of Lethbridge** and **former President of the GDN Board**. The bursary aims to **support students and emerging professionals** from around the world in attending future GDN meetings and convenings, ensuring that diverse and emerging voices continue to shape the Network’s dialogue.

Those wishing to support this initiative can do so via the GDN Bursary Donation Portal, helping to expand equitable access and global participation.

[GDN Travel Bursary Link](#)

In recognition of their exceptional leadership and contributions, **Kathleen Massey** and **William (Bill) Paver, CEO and Founder of the Foreign Credentials Service of America**, were each awarded the **GDN Ambassadorship**—the Network’s highest honour for outstanding service.

Warm congratulations were also extended to **Janie Barnett, Strategic Council Advisory Member**, who was recognized for her many contributions and steadfast support of the GDN’s mission and growth.



## Board Transitions and New Appointments

The GDN also welcomed new leadership to its Board, introducing:

- **Dr. Keiko Ikeda**, *Professor, Kansai University, and Vice Director, Institute for Innovative Global Education (IIGE), Japan*
- **Luis Alberto López Monreal**, *Director of Academic Regulations and Management, Tecnológico de Monterrey, and Vice President, Association of Registrars and Student Services (ARSEE), Mexico*

Their appointments bring invaluable international perspectives and strengthen the Network's global reach.

The GDN also extended deep gratitude to **Dr. Koichi Nakasaki** and **Chen, Wenjun (Edward)**, who completed their terms and were honoured for their dedicated service and lasting impact on the Network's evolution.

For more information about governance and leadership, please visit the [GDN Board page](#).



## Looking Ahead: Cape Town 2026

As the GDN looks to the future, the Network is pleased to announce that the **next Annual Meeting will take place from October 20–22, 2026, in Cape Town, South Africa**, in partnership with the **South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)**.

This upcoming gathering will continue to build on the Oslo outcomes, expanding the global conversation on interoperability, recognition, and learner empowerment. [Learn more about the 2026 Cape Town meeting here.](#)

[Annual Meeting South Africa video.](#)

We look forward to **welcoming you in Cape Town in 2026** as we continue to strengthen the GDN's collaborative and transformative work.

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**Day 1**  
**October 29, 2025**



## Welcome to Oslo!

- **Melanie Gottlieb**, *President, The GDN Network; Executive Director, AACRAO American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers*
- **Dag Hovdhaugen**, *Executive Director, the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir)*

### Welcome to Oslo – Where Innovation Meets Inspiration and the Future of Global Collaboration comes to Life!

The GDN Network Annual Meeting kicked off on October 29, 2025. The GDN Network was thrilled to co-host this dynamic event with HK-dir and Sikt, bringing together visionaries, changemakers, and leaders from across the world.

In the opening plenary sessions, the foundation was laid for what promised to be an exciting, transformative few

days of conversation, connection, and action. From insightful keynotes to forward-thinking discussions, speakers dove deep into the issues shaping the global networks, exchanged groundbreaking ideas, and ignited collaborations that would drive the GDN Network forward.

As the GDN Community gathered in Oslo—one of the world’s most innovative and sustainable cities—the stage was set for a meeting focused as much on action as on inspiration.

### Presentation Highlights

Melanie and Dag encouraged collaboration and practical action to advance policies, standards, and trust frameworks for credentialing, and concluded with gratitude to hosts and sponsors for supporting the GDN 2025 Annual Meeting in Oslo.

Watch Presentation



## From the Oslo Leadership Community: A Welcome to Open the Global Gathering

- **Anne Lindboe**, *Mayor, City of Oslo*
- **Frode Danielsen**, *Director, The Norwegian Digitalisation Agency (Digdir)*
- **Maria Kumle**, *Product Area Manager, Sikt - Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research*

As the GDN Network Annual Meeting 2025 opened its doors in the vibrant city of Oslo, the GDN was honoured to be welcomed by three distinguished speakers who represented both the spirit of innovation and the warmth of Norwegian hospitality.

The Director of the Norwegian Digitalisation Agency (Digdir) greeted participants on behalf of Norway's national digital leadership. With a commitment to openness, interoperability, and forward-thinking governance, the Director underscored the country's dedication to collaboration and knowledge-sharing across borders. This welcome set the tone for a meeting grounded in digital trust, inclusivity, and mutual learning.

The Mayor of Oslo, representing the host city, extended a heartfelt welcome to all guests arriving from across the globe. Known for its progressive approach to urban development, sustainability, and digital public services, Oslo was proud to serve as the backdrop for this important international exchange. The Mayor's greeting highlighted the city's openness to new ideas, its role as a hub of innovation, and its unique blend of nature, culture, and connectivity.

Together, their words formally opened the GDN Annual Meeting 2025—offering a warm Norwegian *velkommen* to an event that bridged global expertise with local insight.

Maria Kumle, Sikt, thanked the speakers and welcomed participants to the Oslo Annual Meeting.



### Presentation Highlights

The session focused on the theme of "**Dugnad**," a Norwegian concept of collective effort for the common good, and its relevance to international education and student mobility. The Mayor of Oslo and the head of the Norwegian Digitalisation Agency spoke about Oslo's digital transformation and the importance of collaboration in public services.

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## Learner Mobility Panel: Creating Comprehensive Opportunities to Access Work and Learning

- **Beka Tavartkiladze**, *Senior Director, Global Education and Knowledge, World Education Services*
- **Peter Kwasi KODJIE**, *Secretary-General, All-Africa Students Union (AASU)*
- **Jacob Blasius**, *Executive Director, Global Student Forum (GSF)*
- **Oscar dos Santos Hellberg-Kvalsvik**, *International Officer, National Union of Students in Norway*
- **Ivo Zalissa**, *Outreach & Engagement Officer / French Liaison, All-Africa Students Union (AASU)*
- **Anam Zakaria**, *Co-Founder / Strategic Director, Qissa*

This panel of learners and immigrants shifted the focus to their lived realities as they navigated access to further education and labor markets. This interactive discussion explored the importance of thinking more broadly beyond credential digitization and recognition and considered ways to ensure integration into meaningful future studies and employment. Credential sharing, assessment and recognition at the outset of applying to

pursue future studies are only initial steps--real integration and access to work demand deeper shifts in how institutions, employers, and society recognized and valued global talent.

This panel sought to amplify the broader learner purpose as when working together to find a common way forward for improving rapid access to work and learning.

## Presentation Highlights

A video presentation highlighted the challenges faced by immigrant professionals in Canada, particularly those from the Global South, who often experience undervaluation of their qualifications and end up in low-skilled jobs despite having advanced degrees. The meeting underscored the need for a holistic approach to recognizing international credentials and addressing systemic barriers to learner mobility and employment.

Zalissa shared her personal experiences African students facing difficulties when moving between countries for education, emphasizing the need for formal and informal recognition of skills. The discussion also explored how employers influence employment markets and advocated for more inclusive solutions that value diverse skills recognition and experiences.

[Download Presentation](#)

[Watch Presentation](#)



## Introducing a Governance Framework to Support National Digital Ecosystems

- **Rooksana Rajab**, *Director, Resonance Consulting Services*

The GDN was pleased to announce the launch of a principles-based Governance Framework to support creating and sustaining national and trans-national digital ecosystems.

As requested by the GDN community in 2022, a research team was formed and led by Dr. Rooksana Rajab to identify and analyse governance models from around the world. A subsequent consultation round sought input from

the community on what a potential framework should include. A third phase included a final consultation of the framework itself. The final framework was introduced during this plenary session.

For those interested and as follow up, another session at the Annual Meeting occurred on October 31 to explore the framework further as a way to deepen understanding and adoption locally.

### Presentation Highlights

Dr. Rooksana introduced a new Global Conference Framework for Digital Platforms, aimed at ensuring ethical and transparent governance of digital credentialing systems, and called for its implementation by GDN members.

[Governance Consultation Website](#)

[Watch Presentation](#)



## The Skills Exchange: investing in human capital through LifeLong Learning Accounts (LLA)

- **Shizuka Kato**, *Skills and Lifelong Learning Policy Specialist, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)*
- **Simone Ravaioli**, *Director Global Ecosystem and Innovation, Instructure*
- **Peter Beard**, *Vice-President, Policy and Programs, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation*

This session introduced the concept of a Skills Exchange, where innovative financing models empower individuals to invest in their own lifelong learning.

International experts explored two key approaches that shaped this marketplace: Skills Savings Accounts (SSAs), which have gained traction in the U.S., and Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), which have been widely adopted across the EU. SSAs offer employer-funded, portable solutions for skills development, while ILAs leverage government-supported schemes to boost adult participation in training programs.

The presenters critically evaluated these models, comparing their benefits, challenges, and effectiveness across diverse socioeconomic contexts. The discussion delved into global policy

trends that drove these mechanisms and examined how emerging technologies—such as digital credentials and online learning platforms—serve as tools to enable and scale these initiatives.

Participants gained actionable insights into closing skills gaps, fostering workforce adaptability, and ensuring equitable access to upskilling opportunities. The session provided practical strategies to help policymakers, educators, employers, and workforce development professionals navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of lifelong learning and reskilling—enabling individuals to “trade” skills for opportunity in a future-ready economy.

## Presentation Highlights

### Skills Savings Account Discussion

Peter presented the concept of a Skills Savings Account, a proposal for a tax-advantaged savings account in the US to fund skills training, which would be funded by both employers and employees. Shizuka from OECD discussed Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), a similar concept already implemented in various forms across Europe and Singapore, highlighting the challenges of funding and quality assurance. The panel examined mechanisms, such as worker ratings, to address fraud and maintain program standards, while highlighting the importance of adaptable, equitable access to lifelong learning through these innovative models.

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## A clear path forward – connected services in recognition and career guidance

- **Dag Hovdhaugen**, *Executive Director, the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir)*
- **Helén Sophie Haugen**, *Head of Department, the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir)*

At the GDN Conference in San Diego in 2024 HK-dir presented Norway's vision of common connected public services. For the 2025 conference in Oslo, the presenters brought the newest developments in the field of recognition and career guidance.

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Norway received close to 100.000 Ukrainian refugees, amounting to about 2% of the total Norwegian population. Many of these individuals had higher education and had worked in highly skilled professions in Ukraine. Even so, national reports showed that many of them struggled to find suitable

jobs in Norway where they could make use of their competencies.

To aid in this situation, HK-dir launched an ambitious plan to create connected services between recognition and career guidance that targeted not only the individual user, but also employers, higher education institutions, immigration, and social services in Norway. The initiative received special funding from the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion.

This presentation featured the newest developments of the services along with the plans for the coming years.

## Presentation Highlights

Helén and Dag presented on Norway's progress towards digital public services, highlighting the country's high expectations for digitalization and the challenges of coordinating across different sectors. They focused on two ongoing projects: "A Clear Path Forward" for Ukrainian refugees and an in-house initiative to create connected services within their organization. The outlined plans include implementing a common login system, shared content and functionality, and AI integration to improve service coherence. The discussion also addressed questions about change management and the importance of establishing a common ontology for service definitions to facilitate semantic integration across different systems.

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## CredLens: Gathering Outcomes Data to Support Credit Recognition and Learner Agency

- **Stacy Caldwell**, *President & CEO, CredLens*
- **Holly Custard**, *Senior Director, Learning Mobility & Data Ecosystem Partnerships, Strada Education Foundation.*

The number and range of non-degree credentials, micro-credentials, and industry-based certifications grew rapidly across the globe over the past decade, but data about the results of these programs (employment outcomes, earnings outcomes) remain limited. In 2024, Strada launched a new non-profit - CredLens - to address this gap in outcomes data. This session introduced the approach that CredLens took (in the

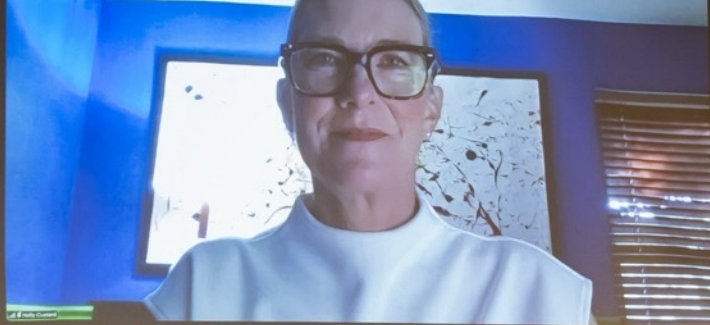
US, for now!) to build a new data set that enables education and training providers, certification issuers, and workforce agencies to make more informed decisions and drive meaningful change. The Discussion highlighted challenges in accessing outcomes data, lessons learned, and key collaboration efforts that were underway to improve the recognition of qualifications.

### Presentation Highlights

Stacy Caldwell, CEO of CredLens, described the nonprofit's efforts to collect and analyze outcomes data for non-degree credentials in the U.S. CredLens is building a national data trust based on partnerships already reaching 15 credential issuers and 3.6 million records, with plans to double that reach by year-end. She discussed challenges in data matching and collaboration with data providers, as well as the initiative's progress toward delivering meaningful insights for education and workforce decision-makers. The session also covered future possibilities for using this data to support KPIs, benchmarking, and wider recognition of non-degree qualifications.

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## Learning Mobility in Action: Exemplar Projects Across the United States

- **Melanie Gottlieb**, *President, The GDN Network; Executive Director, AACRAO American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers*
- **Holly Custard**, *Senior Director, Learning Mobility & Data Ecosystem Partnerships, Strada Education Foundation.*

This session provided an overview of exemplary state, system and institutional-level learning mobility initiatives that are underway in the United States. Presenters shared insights into diverse projects aimed at enhancing credential recognition, streamlining transfer pathways, and empowering learners to navigate their educational and career journeys towards participation in the global ecosystem. The

session explored projects focused on non-degree credentials, skills-based learning, digital credentialing, and innovative partnerships between educational institutions and workforce agencies. Through real-world examples, attendees gained a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in fostering seamless learning mobility.

### Presentation Highlights

Melanie and Holly presented AACRAO's work on learning mobility in the U.S., highlighting their reframing of the Global Convention principles into learner-centered engagement, interoperability, post-secondary education value, and equitable opportunity. They discussed AACRAO's coalition building with 12 higher education associations and their development of a framework for learning and employment records as a process rather than a static concept. Holly shared examples of state-level initiatives in Arizona and West Virginia, demonstrating different approaches to implementing learning mobility frameworks. The discussion concluded with questions about employer reactions to skills-based credentials and the potential for employers to become active credential issuers, with Melanie noting that while employers are increasingly validating learning through employment, AACRAO's focus remains on helping institutions recognize non-institutional credentials.



## The Role of the ACQF Network in Advancing Mobility, Recognition, and Digital Credentials in Africa

- **Nadia Starr**, *Chief Executive Officer, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)*
- **Nolusindiso Kayi**, *Senior Manager: Research Projects, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)*

Formally established in June 2023 and backed by the European Union's ACQF-II project, the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) Network is a collaborative, continental effort to improve the recognition, comparability, and transparency of qualifications and skills among African nations. Based on the founding ACQF policy document and motivated by continental frameworks like Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the ACQF Network seeks to promote integration through the development of an ecosystem of future-oriented and interoperable National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) in Africa.

The aims of the network were to facilitate collaboration and mutual support among African qualifications authorities,

institutions, and stakeholders; promote transparency and comparability of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs); support lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning, and mobility of learners and workers across Africa; enhance the alignment of qualifications with labor market needs, green and digital skills, and social inclusion.

This paper explored how the ACQF Network intended to drive regional collaboration, facilitate cross-border recognition of skills, and position Africa as an influential voice in the global discourse on learner mobility and qualifications interoperability. It highlighted the Network's commitment to leveraging technological innovation, inclusive principles, and African knowledge systems to bridge national frameworks with global standard.

## Presentation Highlights

The session highlighted the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) and its role in advancing recognition and mobility across the continent. Nadia Starr and Nolusindiso Kayi, presented on the ACQF's nested approach, which includes national, regional, and continental frameworks to ensure alignment and mobility. They outlined the progress since 2019 focusing on establishing a sustainable ACQF network. The discussion also touched on the development of a qualifications and credentials platform to interconnect national databases and enhance data exchange. Participants explored how Indigenous knowledge systems could be integrated into the ACQF and the potential for business models to self-fund qualification frameworks.

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**Day 2**  
**October 30, 2025**

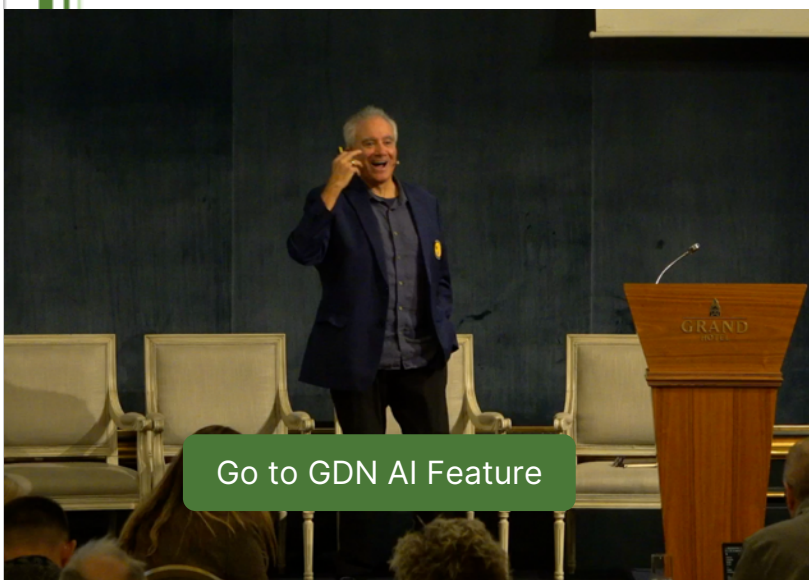


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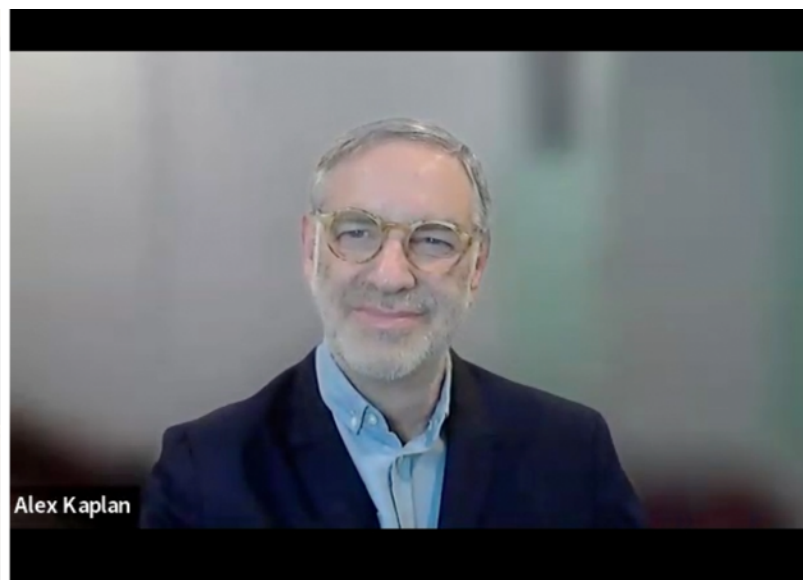
## Opening Remarks for Day Two

- **Charmaine Hack**, *Vice President, The GDN Network; VP of External Relations, Enrolment, & Partnerships, Centennial College*

The GDN Network Annual Meeting continued with Charmaine introducing the morning's featured speakers, Rick Torres and Alex Kaplan, both experts on digital ecosystem and AI developments. She thanked sponsors and patrons for their support and announced plans for celebrating new signatories at lunch and presenting awards at the gala dinner. She emphasized the importance of the event's learning and shared purpose, expressing gratitude for the participants' engagement.



Go to GDN AI Feature



Alex Kaplan



## Making Best Use of People's Skills for a Better Tomorrow

- **Mamta Chauhan**, *Executive Director, VETASSESS*

A better tomorrow will be achieved when people are in roles that make best and full use of their technical and employability skills.

Such an outcome benefits everyone. People gain from doing, and getting paid for, what they are good at. Employers benefit from the improved outputs of capable and content staff. Fiscal pressures are eased through reduced welfare dependency. The economy grows from labour productivity improvements.

Currently in Australia the skills of too many are underutilised: 35% of Australian born workers and 44% of recent migrants are employed in roles below their skill levels.

Reasons why include that people's technical and/or employability skills are insufficiently recognised. The former may be due to having no, old or overseas qualifications. Regarding the latter, there may be little to evidence employability skills, particularly recent migrants, and/or there may be gaps.

VETASSESS is working with others to address these issues. It is partnering with industry to provide digital badges verifying technical skills, based either on recognised prior learning (RPL) and/or training. The organization has worked for the Australian Government to verify employability skills, and with training providers to address any gaps. VETASSESS is supporting other countries to develop their own RPL initiative.

## Presentation Highlights

### Improving Migrant Employment Outcomes

Dr. Mamta presented case studies on skills recognition and employment outcomes for migrants in Australia. Chauhan highlighted that while skilled migrants often have better employment outcomes overall, they may still work below their skill level due to factors like lack of awareness about job opportunities and the daunting experience of applying for jobs with key selection criteria. The Executive Director of VETASSESS discussed various initiatives, including an AI-driven RPL tool, digital badges, and a pilot program for employability skills, to address these challenges and improve employment outcomes for migrants.

### Australia's Migration Strategy Evolution

Chauhan discussed Australia's shift in its approach to migration, emphasizing collaboration with various stakeholders to create a seamless journey for migrants. She highlighted the need to increase Australia's attractiveness to potential migrants as it now competes with other countries for skilled workers. Dr. Mamta also mentioned a new pilot program for refugee electricians from South Africa and shared insights on the government's efforts to track the outcomes of migrants post-arrival. The discussion touched on the broader scope of skills assessment, including upskilling existing workers, and the potential to recognize skills gained through life experiences.

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## Decoding the Union of Skills: Spotlight on the Skills Portability Initiative

- **Simone Ravaioli**, *Director Global Ecosystem and Innovation, Instructure*
- **William O'Keefe**, *Policy Officer, European Commission*

A "collective reading" session clarified the European Union's recent "Union of Skills" policy, highlighting the pivotal Skills Portability Initiative. The session made sense of the policy language and outlined practical implications for the Groningen Declaration Network (GDN) community.

Participants collectively explored key policy excerpts, examining strategic alignment with GDN's objectives of

international credential recognition and portability. The discussion focused on interpreting policy implementation, interoperability challenges, stakeholder engagement, and governance required for operationalizing skills portability.

Attendees collaboratively identified opportunities for active involvement by the GDN community, aiming to effectively shape and advance this critical EU initiative.

### Presentation Highlights

#### EU Skills Portability Policy Proposal

The European Commission, led by William, presented the Union of Skills policy, which includes initiatives for skills portability and qualification recognition across the EU. William explained that the Commission is working on legislative proposals to simplify and digitize qualification systems, including the mandatory use of digital credentials and the European Digital Identity Wallet. He emphasized the need for consultation and

input from stakeholders, with a focus on reducing the time it takes to recognize qualifications in regulated professions from 3-4 months to near-instantaneous. The Commission aims to transform qualification systems by the end of next year, making it easier for EU citizens to learn, work, and move across member states.

### **EU Digital Recognition of Professions**

Simone presented three actions related to regulated professions in the EU. The first action involves exploring AI to digitalize the process for mobile professionals seeking recognition in different EU countries. The second action focuses on developing a digital workflow for applicants and authorities. The third action aims to create common rules for recognizing qualifications of non-EU nationals across the EU. Simone emphasized the need for transparency and simplicity in these processes. He announced that a call for evidence and public consultation would be published before Christmas. Ravaioli also discussed the challenges of validating skills and experience, noting that only 70-80% of life experiences are currently represented in skills. He acknowledged the complexity of extending this approach to EU nationals and non-EU citizens. He concluded by inviting input on the consultation process and expressing a willingness to engage further with the GDN community.

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## Aligning Digital Credentials with Evolving Employer Demands: A Cross-Industry Analysis

- **Etan Bernstein**, *Head of Ecosystem, Velocity Network Foundation (VNF)*
- **Asif Bhana**, *Senior Partnerships, Europe, DataFlow Group*
- **Ingolf Teetz**, *Founder & CEO, milch & zucker*
- **Neil Carberry**, *Chief Executive, Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC)*
- **Marc Jansen**, *Head of People Data, Innovation and Strategy, EVP Human Resources, Rabobank*

This panel examined how evolving employer requirements across diverse industries and labor markets should shape institutional digital credentialing programs. Drawing on recent research from the World Economic Forum and Lightcast and others, combined with panelists' extensive industry experience, they analyzed macro labor market transformations and identified the emerging skills, credentials, and success indicators employers prioritized.

The discussion provided critical insights into:

- The distinctive verification requirements of compliance-driven sectors (healthcare, banking, education, oil & gas) compared to less regulated industries like IT and HR

- The convergence and divergence between temporary staffing/gig economy practices and traditional employment models
- How the adoption of skills-based organizational frameworks within leading companies is reshaping employer demands for validated competency information

Through this analysis, they challenged education institutions to reconsider their credentialing approaches to better align with employer needs. The panel brought together diverse perspectives from staffing agencies, talent acquisition technology providers, and primary source verification specialists to offer a comprehensive view of the evolving employer landscape.

## Presentation Highlights

### Employer Perspectives on Digital Credentials

The panel discussion focused on the importance of employer perspectives in digital credentialing and verification, with panelists representing various sectors including banking, recruitment, and technology. Asif Barna from DataFlow Group highlighted their work in risk mitigation and fraud prevention for healthcare and other critical sectors, while Marc Janssen from Rabobank discussed the bank's focus on regulated services and the need for secure digital credentials in the financial sector. Neil Carberry from the REC emphasized the changing nature of labor markets and the need for secure verification of both identity and qualifications in recruitment. Ingov Tietz from milch & zucker shared insights on the increasing prevalence of AI-driven fraud in job applications and the potential of verifiable credentials as a solution. The panelists agreed on the importance of collaboration between employers, governments, and technology providers to address these challenges effectively.

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**Day 3**  
**October 31, 2025**



## Changing Mobility Landscapes of Quality Assurance and Transnational Education: Perspectives from UNESCO

- **Noah Sobe**, *Chief of Section, Higher Education, UNESCO*

As the world's higher education institutions and systems adapt to a rapidly changing global landscape, new opportunities and tensions are emerging in the mobility of students, qualifications, and quality assurance mechanisms. This session explored how transnational education (TNE) and quality assurance are evolving in the context of UNESCO's normative instruments and work. The session

offered insights into how the recognition conventions and related cross-border initiatives are responding to increased demands for transparency, trust, and interoperability in digital student data. Noah Sobe shared practical examples and engaged with participants to consider the role of inclusive governance and common standards in shaping the future of academic and professional mobility.

### Presentation Highlights

#### **Global Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities**

Noah Sobe, Chief of Section of Higher Education at UNESCO, presented on the current state and future of higher education globally. He highlighted significant strengths, including a doubling of higher education students since 2000, increased gender parity, and growing research productivity. However, challenges such as curricular relevance, high costs, and rising protectionism were also discussed. Sobe emphasized the need for universities to adapt to changing knowledge flows, learning pathways, and public expectations. He concluded by outlining UNESCO's efforts to support academic mobility and quality assurance through international legal instruments and qualifications recognition mechanisms.

## **Global Higher Education Recognition Conventions**

The meeting discussed the global and regional conventions on higher education qualifications recognition, highlighting the shift from aligning national education systems to focusing on learners' rights. Sobe explained the features of the Global Convention, emphasizing its student-centered approach and the importance of trust in international cooperation.

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## Positioning RECOGNITION as a Human Right and Transformative Public Action

- **Dr. Julie Reddy**, *Professor of Practice, University of Johannesburg*
- **Serge Ravet**, *President, Reconnaître - Open Recognition Alliance*
- **Simone Ravaioli**, *Director Global Ecosystem and Innovation, Instructure*
- **Beka Tavartkiladze**, *Senior Director, Global Education and Knowledge, World Education Services*

Much of the discourses on recognition of lifelong learning attributes and achievements have focused on learning as the overarching destination, rather than a journey of struggles for recognition and validation within social, economic, and institutional structures. Advocates of open recognition reject the prevailing notions of recognition as either a privilege to be earned, and therefore granted by power or authority, or a commodity, a credential, of hierarchical bestowal. Instead, they seek to position recognition as something to be actively reclaimed and co-created through the agency of its owners.

Since the articulation of the Bologna Open Recognition Declaration in 2016,

which coined the term “Open Recognition,” the concept has been developed through ongoing deliberation and thought leadership. This evolving discourse has led to the formulation of the Open Recognition Manifesto—a call for a paradigm shift: from recognition as a bestowed privilege to recognition as a human rights practice grounded in reciprocity, justice, and transformation.

This panel presentation and discussion on the Open Recognition Manifesto invited collective reflection and action toward this emerging paradigm.

Resource: Open Recognition Manifesto  
<https://manifesto.openrecognition.org>

## Presentation Highlights

### **Dunning-Kruger Drift in Recognition**

Beka invited participants to reflect on recognition, emphasizing that current approaches may be limited by the Dunning-Kruger effect, where early confidence often precedes shallow understanding. They introduced the concept of "Dunning-Kruger Drift," suggesting that mastery can decline over time, prompting a need to reframe and upskill in recognition practices. The discussion explored the dual nature of recognition—both because of learning and as an enabler of it—while highlighting the importance of recognizing learning in informal contexts. Participants debated who owns recognition, with some advocating for community-based recognition and others emphasizing the role of gatekeepers and considered the purpose of recognition in a world where it is increasingly seen as a human right.

### **Lifelong Learning and Recognition Challenges**

The group discussed lifelong learning and recognition of prior learning, with Serge noting that while lifelong learning is widely supported, there are still significant barriers and transactional challenges in the informal and non-formal sectors. The session highlighted a tension between conforming to existing systems and pursuing alternative purposes, suggesting that participants should acknowledge this disconnect while continuing to engage with the current recognition processes.

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## An Academic Transcript Is Not Enough: Documenting Learning and Professional Experience for Mobility

- **Jason Tyszko**, *Senior Vice President, Policy and Programs, US Chamber of Commerce Foundation*
- **Dr. Julia To Dutka**, *Chief, Global Health Workforce Development Institute, TruMerit (formerly CGFNS International)*
- **Melanie Gottlieb**, *President, The GDN Network; Executive Director, AACRAO American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers*
- **Kathleen Massey**, *Vice Provost (Students), University of Lethbridge*
- **Amos Sydnor**, *Knowledge and Data Quality Manager, TruMerit (formerly CGFNS International)*

In recent decades, progress has been made in facilitating student mobility across borders, enabling them to transfer academic credits between institutions in different countries. Armed with a transcript that documents course titles, credits, and grades, students can begin their studies in one country and complete them elsewhere. Credit transfer is often facilitated by mutual recognition agreements or credential evaluation agencies assessing structural compatibility.

However, for professionals migrating for employment, particularly in highly

regulated fields like healthcare, a transcript may be insufficient to document learning outcomes, which characterize subject matter mastery. Migrating healthcare professionals may find themselves restarting their careers due to inadequate recognition of their competencies in the absence of such documentation. Beyond the transcript, developing profiles that provide a comprehensive overview of candidates' competencies achieved through not only their education but also their work experience is essential to professional mobility.

Panelists explored why an academic transcript alone is not enough, and how it can be enhanced as a comprehensive record of learning beyond credits and grades. They also discussed strategies for proposing a professional transcript

to validate knowledge, skills, work experiences, and career achievements to support mobility, ensuring that professionals received appropriate recognition for employment across borders.

## Presentation Highlights

### Challenges in Healthcare Professional Mobility

The meeting focused on the challenges faced by healthcare professionals who have completed their education and gained work experience in their home countries but are unable to fully utilize their skills and qualifications when relocating to other countries. Dr. Julia presented three case studies highlighting the issue, while Kathleen shared an example of a digital tool developed at the University of Lethbridge to record professional competencies and skills. Amos, representing TruMerit, discussed the need for professional transcripts to complement academic transcripts and the challenges of obtaining employer participation in this process. The group explored solutions to address these challenges and the importance of recognizing both academic and professional experiences for fair recognition and mobility of healthcare professionals.

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## Describing the World's Credentials: Advancing Global Portability and Comparability

- **Phil Barker**, *Metadata Consultant, Cetus LLP*

Global transparency and mobility depend on the ability to clearly describe, compare, and align the many types of credentials and qualifications used around the world.

(Aside: some countries refer to credentials, others to qualifications; while we acknowledge various nuanced differences between the terms, we are treating them as being approximately synonymous.) Many countries have qualification systems in which different types of credentials are defined, issued, and recognized. Understanding these different credential types is critically important for interoperability, learner mobility, and the portability of prior learning.

The Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL) already supports describing numerous credential classes—such as degrees, micro-credentials, certificates, and licenses. However, many national and regional systems define credential types through public authorities or qualification frameworks that reflect

unique structures, policies, and purposes. To support comparability across systems, CTDL is now evolving to better describe both provider-issued and government-defined credential and qualification types—through deeply embedded community input processes.

Attendees gained insights into how this expanded approach built on and combined outcomes of two key developments: the recently completed Qualifications Frameworks as Data Global Task Group, which advanced CTDL to support the description and discovery of qualifications frameworks and level alignments, and the recent effort to extend CTDL to accommodate diverse credential types defined around the world.

Real-world examples showed how structured credential data empowers systems, supports decisions, and improves global learn-and-work ecosystems.

## Presentation Highlights

### Credential Frameworks and Data Modeling

Phil presented on qualification frameworks and credential types, explaining how Credential Engine models these data structures using CTDL (Credential Transparency Description Language). He demonstrated how qualification frameworks from different countries can be represented as linked open data, allowing for comparisons and equivalencies between different systems. The discussion highlighted the importance of making qualification information transparent and accessible, particularly for cross-border credential recognition.

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## Digital Transformation in Foreign Qualification Recognition – The SAQA Automation System

- **Mavis Mpogeng**, *Specialist: Authentication Services, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)*

The SAQA launched an automation project to streamline the evaluation of foreign qualifications, reinforcing SAQA's commitment to promoting access, mobility, and lifelong learning across education, training, and career pathways. This digital transformation initiative strengthened the implementation of the South African NQF, the SADCQF and the ACQF by streamlining the verification process and ensuring greater transparency and comparability of qualifications and facilitating the mobility of learners and workers across Africa and beyond.

Developed as an in-house African automation project, this project allowed SAQA to develop systems specifically tailored to the needs of the Southern African Development Community region and the broader African continent, while

emphasizing interoperability with member countries' systems through API integration. Cross-border recognition of qualifications strengthens the mutual recognition of qualifications across Africa, leading to a more integrated continent. This reinforced Africa's commitment to the Addis Convention, which emphasized a fair and transparent legal framework, facilitating mobility and cooperation within the continent.

This digital transformation not only benefited individuals, educational institutions, employers and educational authorities, but also supported national planning efforts by providing critical data insights, such as generating data on how many applications were processed for critical work visa applications.

## Presentation Highlights

### AI for Foreign Qualification Evaluation

Mavis Mpogeng from the South African Qualifications Authority introduced ASFQ, a new automated system launched in 2025 to improve the evaluation of foreign qualifications. ASFQ has enhanced data collection and reporting but still faces challenges, particularly with non-compliant applications and cases needing manual intervention. The team is exploring how AI could further streamline document verification and case management.

### Verification Process Challenges and Solutions

Mavis described ongoing verification hurdles, such as language barriers and institutional policies against clicking external links, which limit full automation. While improvements have been made, significant manual work remains—especially when correspondence is by email. Solutions discussed included leveraging AI for document analysis and enlisting professional translators. Participants from Norway, the United States, and other regions shared similar experiences and suggested potential solutions, including the use of professional translators and exploring AI tools for document verification.

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## GDN Network Annual Meeting

- **Melanie Gottlieb**, *President, The GDN Network; Executive Director, AACRAO American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers*
- **Jelger de Boer**, *Immediate Past-President, The GDN Network; Account manager Registers, DUO, Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs.*
- **Charmaine Hack**, *Vice President, The GDN Network; VP of External Relations, Enrolment, & Partnerships, Centennial College*
- **Anthony Manahan**, *Board Secretary, The GDN Network; Director Student Mobility & My eQuals, HES (Higher Ed Services)*
- **Meg Wenger**, *Board Treasurer, The GDN Network; Senior Director of Information and Knowledge, ECE, Educational Credential Evaluators.*
- **Joanne Duklas**, *Executive Director, The GDN Network; Lead Consultant, Duklas Cornerstone Consulting Inc.*

The GDN Network Annual Meeting was a pivotal moment to celebrate progress, strengthen connections, and look ahead with purpose. During this session, the GDN Board shared highlights from the past year—key achievements, lessons learned, and milestones reached—while outlining bold plans and priorities for the coming year. The session also provided and opportunity for Network members

to contribute their perspectives, offer insights, and help shape the future of GDN’s global impact.

Attendees reflected, reconnected, and contributed to charting the course forward.

[GDN Strategic plan 2025 - 2030](#)

## Presentation Highlights

### GDN Annual Meeting Highlights

The annual business meeting highlighted the GDN's achievements, including a record 170 registrants from 31 countries, over 80 sessions, and growth in MOUs, patrons, and signatories. Key updates included a new strategic plan with four goals: delivering thought leadership, expanding network participation, enabling research, and ensuring sustainability. Regional events were discussed, with successful convenings in Canada and plans for future events. Board and Strategic Advisory Council changes were announced, with new members joining to provide expert input and support. The meeting emphasized the importance of volunteer work and collaboration in advancing the GDN's mission.

### Organizational Updates and Future Planning

The meeting covered several key updates and discussions. The board reported on minor alignments and procedural updates to the statutes and bylaws, which are now available on the GDN website. The organization has been active in outreach, hosting webinars and collaborating with various global organizations. They have also revamped their website and expanded their digital hub with case studies and research. The board discussed plans for next year's conference, including the possibility of having a student session and exploring partnerships with other networks. They emphasized the importance of including diverse voices in their discussions and agreed to consider ways to make their events more accessible to participants from different regions and sectors.

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