



Statement of Ethical Principles (the “Groningen Declaration”)

As approved by the Groningen Declaration Network’s Board on June 4, 2026. (Revision history at end of document : The principles were reviewed and revised in 2026 to reflect the evolution of transformational change in the past decade and the changing context and nomenclature surrounding technology innovations, standards, and learning and recognition.)

PURPOSE: THE NEED FOR A STATEMENT OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

From banking to travel, almost everything today is done via digital information and the Internet. One notable exception still is the world of learning credentials. While substantial advancements have occurred in the past decade, additional opportunities exist to expand the use cases, the learning recognized, and the methodology and methods by which achievement of outcomes are represented and shared. A growing number of countries have developed digital learner data platforms and depositories and/or repositories, exchange networks, personal data and verification safeguards, and validation and recognition capacities to manage and recognize educational achievements. These serve to facilitate and advance cross border mobility of learners on a global scale.

The Groningen Declaration Network (GDN) is committed to advancing the international mobility of learners to drive social and economic growth and international cooperation. Mobility also empowers people, by enabling them to study, live, and work wherever they want. Learners want all of their competencies recognized, regardless of how and where they were acquired. , T here is a growing need for the availability and acceptance of digital learner data instead of paper-based authentications and academic credentials .

For the Digital Learner Data Ecosystem to work and thrive, the 2012 GDN leadership developed a set of ethical guiding principles to which all signatories in the GDN are expected to align . , These follow the mission, vision and values below of the GDN. .

GDN MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

MISSION: TO DELIVER ON DIGITAL LEARNER DATA PORTABILITY

The GDN operates as a network of networks to bring together key stakeholders through a declaration of intent. Its signatories cooperate on a voluntary basis, seeking not standardization, but rather convergence. The primary goal of the GDN, which was established in April 2012, is to develop best practices and globally accepted standards for secure, citizen-centered consultation and portability of trustworthy and secure digital learner data.



VISION: TOWARDS A TRUSTED DIGITAL LEARNER DATA ECOSYSTEM

The GDN has grown and diversified into a global, broad, and interconnected ecosystem that includes large digital learner data depositories and/or repositories, networks, and systems, educational institutions, government bodies, and other stakeholders. Participants in this ecosystem work together to ensure the safe administration, processing, consultation, transfer exchange acceptance, and recognition of digital learner data in addition to appropriately verified and validated records. It promotes the use of the best standards, practices and technology available, in order to guarantee trust in this digital learner data ecosystem.

VALUES: SECURITY & PRIVACY

A trustworthy and secure digital learner data ecosystem can only be built if learner information is kept safely and its confidentiality and privacy are protected. Therefore, “trustworthiness”, “security”, and “privacy” are the core values of the Groningen Declaration. Different principles and standards are needed to enforce these core values, and that is what the GDN seeks to achieve through its multi-pronged initiatives. Through this work, the GDN seeks to: create consensus, innovate, and facilitate and advance understandings of learning and recognition on learner data management, systems, policies, practices, governance, and platforms and ensure protection and opportunities to catalyze access to learning, recognition, and employment. .

GDN ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

1.0 PRINCIPLE 1. LEARNER-CENTERED

Digital learner data portability aims at empowering the mobility needs of past, present, and future learners’ needs at the local, national, and global level.

2.0 PRINCIPLE 2. PRIVACY AND DATA PROTECTION

The collection, use, transfer, disclosure, and storage of learner data must comply with applicable privacy and data protection laws and regulations of nations, regions, and universal declarations. All stakeholders in the GDN community should pledge to be subject to the following privacy and data protection principles (Adopted from the OECD Privacy Principles):

2.1. COLLECTION LIMITATION PRINCIPLE



There must be justifiable limits to the collection and use of personal learner data. The data must be collected by lawful and fair means and, where appropriate, with the informed consent of the data subject, i.e. the natural person to whom a given set of data refers. The data subject must be informed prior to data collection, of how the approved personal data will be stored and used. .

2.2. DATA QUALITY PRINCIPLE

The collection of personal learner data must be specific for the purposes for which they will be used, and to that extent, be accurate, complete and maintained in a manner that is current.

2.3. PURPOSE SPECIFICATION PRINCIPLE

The purposes for which personal learner data are collected must be specified at the time of data collection and its subsequent use limited to the fulfilment of stated purposes/objectives; or such other uses that are not incompatible with those stated purposes or justifiable and approved change of purpose. The learner must be informed by the time of data collection on how their personal data will be used, subject to applicable national and international laws and regulations.

2.4. USE LIMITATION PRINCIPLE

Personal learner data must not be disclosed, made available, or otherwise used for purposes other than those specified in accordance with principle 2.3 except:

- A. with the explicit signed consent of the data subject; or,
- B. by the authority of a relevant government agency or powers that are recognized by the courts, as legitimate and binding.

2.5. SECURITY SAFEGUARDS PRINCIPLE

Personal learner data must be protected by reasonable security safeguards against such risks as loss or unauthorised access, destruction, use, modification, or unapproved disclosure. .

2.6. OPENNESS PRINCIPLE

There should be a general policy of openness about developments, practices, and policies with respect to personal learner data. Evidence should be readily provided for establishing the existence and nature of personal learner data, and the main purposes of their use, as well as the identity and usual residence of the data controller, i.e. the organization responsible for the compliance with these principles and the applicable laws.



2.7. INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION PRINCIPLE

An individual must have the right to:

- A. obtain confirmation from a data controller regarding whether or not the data controller has data relating to that individual;
- B. receive timely communication regarding that individual and the data relating to that individual
 - I. within reasonable timeframes;
 - II. at a reasonable charge, if any ;
 - III. in a reasonable manner; and,
 - IV. in a form that is readily intelligible to that individual.
- C. be given reasons if a request made under subparagraphs (2.7 A) and (2.7 B) is denied, and to be able to appeal such denial; and,
- D. challenge the accuracy of data relating to that individual and, if the challenge is successful, to have the data erased, rectified, completed, or amended.

2.8. ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLE

A data controller should be accountable for complying with measures which give effect to the principles stated above.

3.0 PRINCIPLE 3. TRANSPARENCY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Data administration and the exchange of learner data should be conducted in a transparent manner that recognizes the shared responsibility of all parties.

4.0 PRINCIPLE 4. INTEROPERABILITY

Digital learner data depositories and/or repositories, networks, service providers, and all other relevant stakeholders in the GDN should seek to assure maximum interoperability between their systems. They should undertake to use open data standards and services that create efficiencies and optimize the capabilities of electronic records exchange and learner digital data portability. For this, the GDN will commit to continue to promote open source electronic data exchange standards, as well as any future open source standards.

5.0 PRINCIPLE 5. OPENNESS



All services provided by digital learner data depositories and/or repositories, networks, and by other relevant stakeholders in the GDN should be available regardless of the electronic record solutions in use, as long as the appropriate agreements are signed and that technical, legal, and financial requirements are adhered to.

6.0 PRINCIPLE 6. FREEDOM TO CHOOSE DELIVERY OPTIONS

Learners, educational institutions, and digital learner data depositories and/or repositories, networks, and other relevant stakeholders shall be free to evaluate their own needs and select a preferred delivery option of learner records or digital learner data portability method that best meets their interests. This includes issuing credentials directly or through trusted third parties that provide this service.

7.0 PRINCIPLE 7. INTEGRITY

Stakeholders of the GDN must act with the highest level of integrity in all their professional undertakings, by dealing with others honestly and fairly. They are expected to abide by their commitments, always act in a manner that merits the trust and confidence of other parties.

8.0 PRINCIPLE 8. DIVERSITY

In the planning, development, and implementation of actions, projects, programs, and services, stakeholders of the GDN must engage respectfully and inclusively with the diversity of peoples, perspectives, systems, standards, and any other relevant aspects involving digital learner data portability.

9.0 PRINCIPLE 9. RESPECT FOR THE LAW

GDN signatories must adhere to all applicable laws and regulations. Appropriate guidance and advice may be requested when regulations appear contradictory, ambiguous, or confusing or when a situation is beyond the GDN's role or competencies.

10.0 PRINCIPLE 10. AUDITABILITY

Digital learner data depositories, and/or repositories, and networks must be auditable by the relevant authorities of countries in order to assure the compliance of legal and regulatory obligations that are applicable to the administration and exchange of learner records and data.

11.0 PRINCIPLE 11. GOOD FELLOWSHIP

Stakeholders of the GDN will, to the greatest extent possible, avoid engaging in any activity or communication that creates a conflict or appears to create a conflict with the interests of the GDN



and/or with any organization in which they have a personal, business, or financial interest. GDN stakeholders must not abuse/misuse any of the information or contacts made through their association for personal or economic interests.

12.0 PRINCIPLE 12. ACCESS

GDN signatories are expected to cooperate as a community of practice to provide digital learner data portability to all interested parties, preferably offering access to primary stakeholders – institutions and learners – at no cost or a cost recovery fee.

Revision Calendar:

2012 - Signatory principles created by original 2012 GDN board.

2015 – Revisions occurred with board approval

2020 - Slight revisions to text adopted by 2020 GDN board.

2026 - Full review and revisions to text to include modern technology and learner context and to align with the principles of the UNESCO Global and regional conventions, with approval by the 2026 GDN board September 17, 2026.

Review Calendar: Next review to occur during 2030 to align with strategic planning exercise for the GDN and every five years thereafter.