Purpose

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide information regarding the national Groningen & Student Mobility Project, a next generation initiative to facilitate national and international student mobility between post-secondary institutions and into the workforce. This national Project seeks to create a trusted Canada-wide student data exchange network. To support its efforts, ARUCC and its Project partners are seeking support, advice, and endorsement from academic vice presidents and presidents of post-secondary institutions and leadership in other allied organizations and governments from across Canada. The consortium is also seeking start up and pilot-specific funding to advance the Project goals.

Project Partners

Three national associations are partnering with ARUCC on this Project: the Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT), the Canadian University Council of Chief Information Officers (CUCCIO), and the Canadian Post-Secondary Electronic Standards Council User Group (CanPESC). Each organization has formally endorsed the Project and designated representatives to sit on the Project Steering Committee.

Benefits for Students and Institutions

Many benefits will result from this initiative. For example, one objective includes providing students ready access to their student data, transcripts and credentials in a digitized format and at a speed that supports seamless mobility into institutions and the workforce. Another objective includes establishing data exchange connections with trusted institutions, governments, and allied organizations outside of Canada to mitigate document fraud. Achieving this will benefit the entire higher education system. Furthermore, it is anticipated that institutions will benefit from the removal of onerous processes involved in verifying credentials and student records from other jurisdictions.

Opportunities to Leverage

The national Project holds the promise of combating document and credential fraud, streamlining service for students, developing capacity to support alternative forms of credentialing, and creating new support frameworks for students such as by developing online wallets to collate student's credentials earned throughout their learning journey. By accelerating connectivity to trusted international partners, the opportunities to enhance and automate the assessment processes supporting international credentials whether presented through admission or study abroad, become real possibilities. The potential for access to anonymized data with the permission of students to advance big data research and policy development becomes a tangible possibility. The national Project seeks to lay the groundwork to begin to make all this happen.

Challenges to Solve for Canadian Post-Secondary Education
Impediments preventing support for national and international student mobility are readily evident. Examples include intra-provincially focused resources and priority setting for data exchange projects which unintentionally compete with national and international data exchange initiatives and broader strategic goals for student mobility; a lack of connectivity between institutions, data hubs, and regions which is negatively impacting students and institutions; suggestions of suboptimal technological capacity within institutions which is impeding onboarding; and a lack of focused national resources and projects. It is worth noting that while there are uneven data exchange capacities and standards across the country, a shift is occurring largely because of CanPESC's efforts and the application centres operating in select parts of Canada. For example, evidence exists of a growing focus on adopting XML and JSON data exchange standards which represent progressive and flexible opportunities that position Canada well for this national Project. Having noted this, while national associations and select provinces and territories have made significant strides, more is needed to move forward assertively and as a system to support mobility and ensure preservation of the Canadian higher education brand.

Impediments impacting international mobility include a lack of connectivity to trusted international parties coupled with rising document fraud. Growing international enrolments are straining institutional resources and assessment functions and systems, a situation that is negatively impacting staff, students, and faculty who assess program specific equivalencies. Internationalization priorities whether within institutions or beyond are not easily supported given this context.

Couple these challenges with a growing interest within Canadian post-secondary institutions to explore alternative ways to represent what students have learned. Other jurisdictions with similar goals are struggling with a confusing array of new forms of credentialing, such as micro-credentialing and badging, which is creating both opportunities and additional challenges. To avoid a similar situation in Canada, it is essential that quality assured practices and secure data exchange networks are developed with all the right experts at the table to ensure consistent support for these important innovations.

Project Endorsements, Support, and Research
Project endorsements for the Project are emerging weekly. As of the end of January 2018. the Project has received formal endorsements from more than 20 organizations across Canada representing hundreds of institutions and thousands of individual members within institutions, government, and allied organizations. Examples include individual universities and colleges; post-secondary leadership organizations such as the BC Senior Academic Administrators Forum representing vice president academics/education from the 25 publicly funded BC post-secondary institutions and Yukon College, and the BC Colleges and the BC Association of Institutes and Colleges which represent presidents from more than 20 BC universities, colleges, and institutes; registrars and vice rectors from the Bureau de coopération interuniversitaire representing every university in Quebec; post-secondary associations such as the Western Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada, the Ontario University Registrars' Association (OURA), and the British Columbia Registrars' Association (BCRA); and Councils on Admissions/Articulation and Transfer (e.g., British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer; Campus Manitoba; Nova Scotia Council on Admissions and Transfer; Council on Articulations and Transfer, New Brunswick; Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer; Saskatchewan Transfer Credit and Learner Pathway Council).

An ONCAT funded research project is underway with the Ontario College Registrars, Admissions, and Liaison Officers (CRALO) committee and OURA to examine potential constraints and opportunities for data exchange related to transfer that are unique to the Ontario context. Similar projects are being explored in other jurisdictions. ARUCC and its partners are examining alternative models that could potentially flourish in the Canadian context including exploring innovative solutions such as ones that leverage blockchain.

The Project Steering Committee has sought advice from several other bodies including federal government such as Global Affairs, Canada, as well as from provincial and territorial organizations such as the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. CICIC has indicated the federal government is soon to ratify the Lisbon Recognition Convention which requires auditable adherence to best practice as these relate to assessment of international academic credentials.[1] The Project Steering Committee has also contacted both Universities Canada and Colleges and Institutes Canada and various provincial ministerial leaders. Of note, the report of the Study Group on Global Education published by the Centre for International Policy Studies (University of Ottawa) and the Munk School of Global Affairs (University of Toronto) outlines several challenges and recommendations including improving the infrastructure to enhance efficiencies.[2] The national Project aligns with the recommendations embodied in this call to action to enhance Canadian study abroad participation and supports.

In addition to the above, contact and consultation has occurred with many of the application centres and data hubs across Canada. A formal Research Information Request sent both nationally and internationally resulted in 16 formal written submissions of which eight were from Canadian data hubs, institutions and application centres. This augmented findings from a national survey to Canadian post-secondary institutions. In addition, 200+ national and international experts in the data exchange field in Canada and abroad provided advice and information.

> *This comprehensive consultation and research process validated the relevance of the national Project and highlighted both the current strengths and challenges for data exchange within Canada impacting national and international student mobility.*

Inspiration from the Groningen Declaration
Consultation outreach occurred to 1400+ members of an international consortium called the Groningen Declaration Network. In April 2015, ARUCC became the first Canadian signatory to the Groningen Declaration, a document and movement that emphasizes a commitment to student mobility through trusted and secure data exchange. Trusted organizations, associations, governments, and vendors from around the world have adopted the Groningen principles and become signatories. The Groningen Network represents a group of like minded people dedicated to facilitating student mobility and subsequent cultural mobility by creating an ecosystem of trusted data mobility. The Groningen Network is now established as a Netherlands Trust called the Groningen Declaration Network Foundation. Its mandate seeks to create a framework to improve the international mobility of people, promoting world-wide education and economic development through the secure electronic exchange of postsecondary student information. More information is available at groningendeclaration.org.

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[1] See https://www.cicic.ca/1398/An-overview-of-the-Lisbon-Recognition-Convention/index.canada
[2] See Goglobalcanada.ca