

Groningen Declaration Network receives 15 new members

By Tumelo Modisane

Fifteen new organisations signed the Groningen Declaration at the 5th Annual Groningen Declaration Network (GDN) Meeting that was held in Cape Town from 17th to 19th May 2016.

These 15 new signatories joined 45 others who've steadily joined the GDN since its inception in April 2012 following a seminar on 'Digital Student Data Depositories Worldwide'. The founding seminar was held in Groningen in the Netherlands. This Network has one common goal: to develop secure and complete digital platforms for student data as a response to increasing student mobility.

The GDN's work is important as it helps combat the misrepresentation of qualifications and document falsification which is becoming a serious challenge and is receiving worldwide attention. The theme for this year's meeting, "A Digital World for All: Making Skills Mobile", accurately reflects the ambitions and potential of the GDN. Skills, being a person's attainments in terms of academic training, professional experience or otherwise, are digitally articulated and exchanged and should be accepted, as a person's "legal skills tender." That would make skills truly mobile.

This year's meeting is part of SAQA's 20th birthday celebrations. It took place after the official launch of the African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN) – a network that aims to contribute to the successful implementation of the Addis Convention – on the 16th May. In the Addis Convention there is a very clear commitment to student digital information collection and sharing, as well as a very strong commitment to combating qualification fraud and digital ways of verifying qualifications.

It was a deliberate move to host the GDN Annual Meeting after the official launch of the AQVN. The GDN has been able to strategically position itself over the last three years to include some major players across Europe, China and the United States of America. Going forward, it aims to position itself to reach the large numbers of people and institutions on the African continent. "It makes sense for this strategic positioning of the GDN to host this year's annual meeting on the African continent in order to be able to tap into this largely unexplored area in the digital student data space," says SAQA CEO Mr Joe Samuels.

To this end the AQVN also established close links with the GDN and there was a cross-pollination of ideas between the meetings. The latter meeting was attended by delegates from 45 countries. "We were able to bring the latest thinking around digitising educational learner records, policy thinking and practice into the country through hosting this meeting," says Mr Samuels.

"We also showcased our National Learners' Records Database as a central digital student data repository. The meeting also stimulated our collective thinking about

how the AQVN could move ahead and build on the lessons learnt and cutting-edge technology to take its mandate forward,” concluded Mr Samuels.