

ARUCC Groningen and Student Mobility Task Force – Advancing student mobility through data exchange
Report to the ARUCC Executive and ARUCC 2016 Biennial and PCCAT Annual Conferences
June 21, 2016

In spring 2014, a group of interested registrarial, pathway, and application centre colleagues held a roundtable discussion at the ARUCC PCCAT biennial conference. The topic focused on paving a new way forward to more effectively support national and international student mobility with a particular focus on encouraging collaboration for secure and efficient transcript data exchange nationally and internationally. The first outcome of that meeting was the formation of the ARUCC Groningen and Student Mobility Task Force, chaired by Kathleen Massey, University Registrar and Executive Director at McGill University. In collaboration with the Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT) and the Canadian P20W Education Standards Council User Group (CanPESC), the Task Force recommended that ARUCC should become the first Canadian signatory to the international Groningen Declaration (<http://www.groningendeclaration.org/>). ARUCC signed on in May 2015.

The ARUCC executive mandated the Task Force to:

champion the engagement of Canadian institutions in the implementation of the Groningen Declaration by fostering an ethos, culture and network that removes impediments for data portability, and provides the foundation for student mobility. These benefits will be realized throughout the various educational jurisdictions across Canada by fostering provincial models and/or a pan-Canadian model of data exchange that serves Canada and the world.

The ARUCC Groningen and Student Mobility Task Force built awareness about the Groningen Declaration and the Task Force by sharing information with the broader ARUCC, CanPESC, CUCCIO, and PCCAT constituencies to raise awareness about the Groningen Declaration Network and the work of the Task Force. In pursuit of these objectives, the Task Force produced a national consultation survey that was sent to institutions and organizations across the country to develop an understanding of their readiness and willingness to establish a national data-sharing model. This paper shares the findings and recommendations of the Task Force.

Consultation and research approach

Qualitative and quantitative approaches were used for information sharing and gathering. Task Force members delivered conference presentations, participated in many discussions, and created a national online survey. Research into other international Groningen-related projects provided additional context.

During the awareness-raising phase in fall 2015 and early 2016, the Task Force members gave presentations and participated in discussions to inform colleagues about the Groningen Declaration Network and the work of the Task Force and to gather feedback regarding the interest of colleagues to pursue the project. The presentations were delivered at regional conferences and meetings across the country. Standard French and English presentations were prepared for Task Force members to use in discussions with colleagues. Communications were sent to many different organizations Canada-wide to apprise them of the initiative.

In addition to consulting with Canadian colleagues, the Task Force met with Anthony Manahan of the University of Melbourne, a representative of the Australian Group of 8 research universities' national data hub project. The purpose was to learn about the Group of 8's national consultation process and to review and discuss the development of their Request for Information (RFI). The awareness-raising phase also included other means to share information, such as articles in ARUCC's Contact newsletter and an interview with University Affairs.

The feedback garnered during the awareness-raising phase informed the development of a comprehensive national survey, launched in April 2016. This final phase was focused on determining the 'readiness and willingness' of the country to develop a national model for data sharing. Many different types of organizations were invited to participate, including postsecondary institutions, pathway organizations, standards organizations, existing provincial hubs, and government representatives. One response per organization was requested. In the case of the postsecondary institutions, registrars were asked to steward the responses. In all, ninety-seven distinct organizational responses were received, representing all provinces, types of institutions, and organizations, with postsecondary institutions comprising 91% of the respondents. The national survey captured comprehensive information about practices and perspectives regarding a national model. The consultation documents are posted at the ARUCC website. <http://arucc.ca/en/resources/task-force-groningen.html>

The Task Force used the key findings emerging from both phases of the project to inform its recommendations regarding a proposed model for national data exchange. The findings are listed below and the full survey results are posted at the ARUCC site.

Key Findings

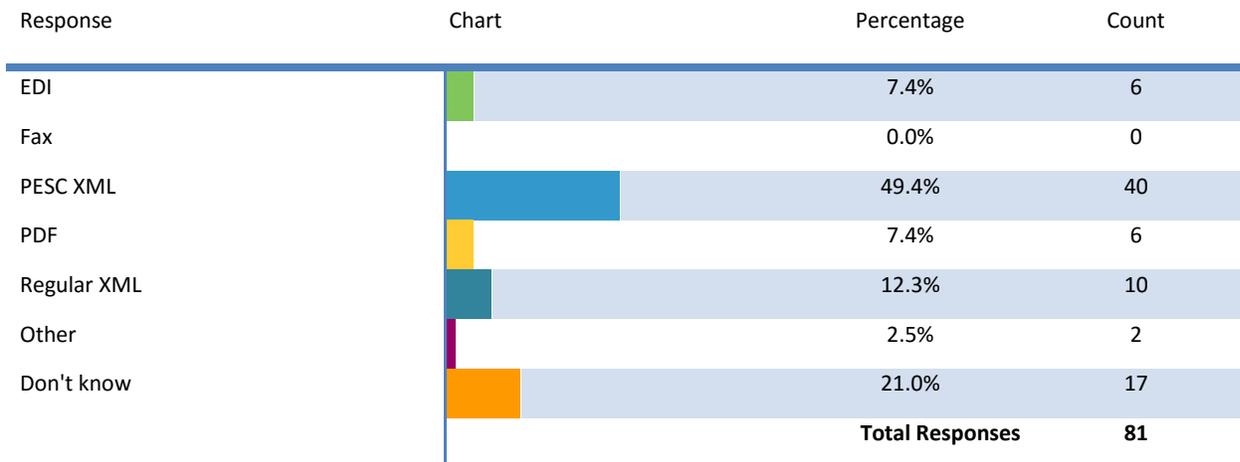
The survey provided valuable information to the Task Force about the current baseline student information systems in use, the current status of the electronic data exchange environment, and the willingness to engage further on electronic data exchange initiatives. Additionally, the respondents provided valuable feedback on the proposed foundational principles for a possible pan-Canadian data exchange network, the benefits of such a network, and valuable narrative insights on the initiative. The survey produced a wealth of information that has not only helped inform the current phase of this initiative, but will also be valuable as we continue to explore the possibilities of pan-Canadian data exchange. Here are some of the key findings:

There is strong support to further explore a pan-Canadian data exchange network model. In response to one of the key questions of "would your organization be interested in a pan-Canadian data exchange network to improve student mobility?" 70% of respondents said 'yes' and 30% responded 'possibly'. Understandably there is a need to have a deeper understanding of what this project could mean in terms of cost, IT infrastructure, resource implications and governance to further inform answers to this question. However, the numbers indicate the willingness to continue to explore a pan-Canadian data exchange model.

Established electronic data exchange infrastructure exists that can be leveraged in furthering this initiative. For example, in response to the question "does your organization send transcript data electronically to other organizations?" almost 70% of respondents indicated that they were already trading electronically. There were a wide variety of organizations with which partners were trading including BCcampus, ApplyAlberta, OCAS, OUAC, and federal/provincial governments to name a few. Canada is well-positioned to leverage existing infrastructure and progress on data standards. This will serve us well as we explore international electronic

exchange. This is supported by the increasing prevalence of PESC XML as noted in the chart below, excerpted from the survey results:

Which of the following represents the most preferred method of transfer for RECEIVING this data should you establish a trading relationship with any of the above organizations?



A pan-Canadian model would need to respond to the variability and complexity that exists in the sector. While there is a desire for data standardization and the incorporation of existing infrastructure, there is also a strong need to acknowledge sector variability and complexity. Any proposed and feasible solution must allow for managing the different needs and technical states of the various institutions and organizations that may participate. The solution must balance the flexibility required to build upon existing data centers (specifically, allowing existing application and data centers to manage and maintain exchange partnerships) while providing a unifying national presence.

Data security and privacy are paramount in any data exchange project. Given the sensitivity, volume, and nature of the data to be traded, data security and privacy will be critical components of any data exchange model that is chosen.

The key principles strongly resonated with survey respondents. Survey respondents supported the foundational principles espoused by the Task Force for the development of the model. As indicated above, any proposed model will need to respond to principles that may be in tension, for example, developing a model that is both flexible and cohesive.

From the survey results:

If a pan-Canadian data exchange network model was possible, identify your level of agreement with each of the following foundational principles.

	1 (strongly agree)	2 (agree)	3 (no opinion)	4 (disagree)	5 (strongly disagree)	Not applicable	Total Responses
Student service: The model should result in better service to students	82 (84.5%)	14 (14.4%)	1 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	97
Capacity: The model should support building capacity to allow reporting on national student mobility	44 (45.8%)	39 (40.6%)	11 (11.5%)	1 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.0%)	96
Sustainable: The model should be environmentally responsible and facilitate paperless transmission	66 (68.0%)	25 (25.8%)	6 (6.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	97
Fairness and Equity: The model should introduce consistent service support and delivery for students and provinces and territories that lack provincial student data exchange centres	55 (56.7%)	33 (34.0%)	7 (7.2%)	1 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.0%)	97

Key Benefits. The expected benefits also resonated strongly with survey respondents. Of note, there was a strong perception that a pan-Canadian data exchange network would result in key benefits for students in terms of student service and mobility.

From the survey results:

Identify the degree of benefit for each of the following endings to the statement, "A Pan-Canadian data exchange network model will..."

	1 (strongly agree)	2 (agree)	3 (no opinion)	4 (disagree)	5 (strongly disagree)	Not applicable	Total Responses
Student service: The model should result in better service to students	82 (84.5%)	14 (14.4%)	1 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	97
Capacity: The model should support building capacity to allow reporting on national student mobility	44 (45.8%)	39 (40.6%)	11 (11.5%)	1 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.0%)	96
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Survey participants requested more information and/or development regarding costs, resource implications, system maintenance or sustainment, and governance. Given the infancy of this initiative, more discussion and development is needed as we consider and move towards a pan-Canadian data exchange network. Furthermore, an initiative of this importance and scale requires dedicated resources to ensure that steady progress is made toward the creation of a Canadian model.

Recommendations

It is clear from the survey findings that it would be prudent and beneficial to progress toward creating a Canadian model for postsecondary data-exchange. There is strong support for the initiative. In light of this, the Task Force offers four recommendations that, if approved, will pave the way toward that goal.

1. Continue the exploration and development of a Canadian data-exchange model that:
 - a. is accessible in both French and English;
 - b. builds on and complements the successes and expertise of provincial models;
 - c. is scalable and will fill the gaps in service to students in each region;
 - d. provides a cohesive and well-organized point of contact to international data exchange networks, positioning Canada to compete well in international markets; and
 - e. provides for the exchange of authentic, reliable data in a secure and standard manner.
2. Guide the development of a Canadian data-exchange model according to the following principles: flexible, cohesive, and scalable, with a single, secure point of contact for international partners.
3. Embed the following core benefits within the model: improve service to students, improve student mobility through efficient data-sharing, encourage national dialogue in support of student mobility and success, and align with the national and international goals of other Canadian postsecondary and pathway organizations.
4. With ARUCC taking the lead, create a governance model including a national joint steering committee to provide oversight to the project, with appropriate representation, such as postsecondary institutions, provincial data-sharing hubs, CanPESC, PCCAT, and CUCCIO. We recommend that one of the first tasks of the joint steering committee should be to:
 - a. Hire a resource person who will:
 - i. Mine the survey results and other research to further inform the project
 - ii. Gather detailed requirements to prepare a blueprint for the new model and a request for information (RFI), and
 - iii. Use the results of the RFI to build a business case to support the initiative.

Conclusion

Extraordinary progress has been made thus far. A year of awareness raising and consultation has revealed strong support for creating a Canadian model for data-sharing. Excellent opportunities exist to leverage existing Canadian expertise, technologies, and networks to create a national model that would position Canada well to exchange data securely with other organizations, nationally and internationally. The benefits to our students will be considerable,

not the least of which will be faster, more effective, more secure exchange of their postsecondary information to support their mobility, whether for further education or career-development.

The Task Force thanks everyone who has participated to this point for providing valuable insight. The community's interest and engagement in this project is telling. The Groningen initiative and a made-in-Canada solution for data exchange represent exciting possibilities for our students. Together, we remain poised to enhance student mobility. The Task Force members share our excitement as we mark a new way forward for Canadian postsecondary institutions and their partners.