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Higher Learning's Next Era: Enabling Innovation and Interoperability through a Sector-Aligned Data Standard

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Data fragmentation is a persistent barrier to innovation, interoperability, and student mobility in the global post secondary ecosystem. This session presents the MortarCAPS Higher Learning Data Standard (MCDS) —a sector-aligned, data standard co-developed by post secondary institutions, technology leaders, and policy advocates in Australia and Canada.

Charlsey Pearce (CEO, MortarCAPS) and Greg Sawyer (CEO, CAUDIT —the Council of Australasian University Directors of Information Technology) will explore how MCDS is enabling a new paradigm of data portability and collaboration across institutions. Drawing on real-world implementations and government engagement, this session will highlight how MCDS serves as a blueprint for education data ecosystems globally —promoting efficiency, transparency, and interoperability without sacrificing institutional autonomy.

The MortarCAPS Higher Learning Data Standard (MCDS) provides a common language and structure for how data is captured, exchanged, and interpreted across the student lifecycle —from enquiry and enrolment to graduation and beyond. It simplifies system integrations, reduces duplication, and allows institutions to work more seamlessly with government agencies, pathway providers, and each other. Built with extensibility in mind, MCDS is designed to support both public and private providers, enabling scalable digital infrastructure that grows with evolving education models. At its core, MCDS is about empowering institutions to own and use their data more effectively —while reducing friction in cross-institutional collaboration and service delivery.

The session will be structured as a hybrid presentation and discussion, combining insights into the creation and architecture of the standard, use cases from leading universities, and broader implications for the global research and education data community. We will dedicate the final 25 minutes to an open discussion with attendees around adoption challenges, opportunities for cross-sector alignment, and lessons for other geographies seeking to develop or implement similar frameworks.

The conversation will connect directly to SciDataCon's themes of data policy, stewardship, and ecosystem development. By showcasing a concrete solution already adopted across a national education system, we hope to inspire practical strategies for building sustainable, interoperable data infrastructures across disciplines and borders.

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