

Creating Value: Employer Insights on Using Digital Credentials and Skills Profiles

A report by UpSkill America commissioned by
Western Governors University.

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Introduction

In February and March 2025, [UpSkill America](#) held interviews with about a dozen employers to evaluate and critique WGU's Lightweight Viewer, a prototype tool that enables employers to view and use data in WGU's [Achievement Wallet](#), a learning and employment record platform that serves as a portable, secure, individualized repository for skills, credentials, experiences, and more. The team spoke at length with talent leaders from a variety of industries, including retail, health care, manufacturing, and fintech, who represent a range of organization sizes and geographies. We asked employers to assess where tools like the Lightweight Viewer could add value to their organizations, and where they might fall short.

A note: the Lightweight Viewer is a prototype. The name of the tool emerged from WGU's objective of developing a simple, easy interface between learning and employment data and end users: a means of understanding how an employer would "view" an individual's skills and credentials data. It is not designed as a marketable product but instead is intended to inform and help other organizations, including groups building LERs, human resources information systems (HRIS) and applicant tracking systems (ATS), gain insight into what employers need, which ultimately may produce better versions that will become consumer products.

This report will have specific importance for these audiences, and it is our hope that this paper will also be useful to Skills First talent management leaders and advocates, as well as anyone advancing work to recognize learning wherever it occurs. We envision this qualitative research as supporting the ongoing improvement and innovation of tools that connect high-quality Learning and Employment Records (LERs) with value creation for employers. Our hope is that using the verified credentials and validated skills within LERs to generate employment and advancement opportunities for learners and business value for employers will lead to scaled uptake and use of validated skills and verified credentials for business decisions.

About the Lightweight Viewer

Over the last year, Western Governors University (WGU) led a demonstration project to operationalize the [Learner Information Framework](#) (LIF), a set of software components and shared design principles that support the translation, organization, and presentation of learner achievements in a cohesive, consistent, and holistic manner. For a deeper understanding of the technology innovations driving WGU's efforts, visit [Appendix A](#).

LIF enables interconnectivity and interoperability of disparate systems. Using data in WGU's [Achievement Wallet](#), WGU developed the Lightweight Viewer to demonstrate LIF principles, serving as an employer-centered interface between the student data in the WGU Achievement Wallet and employers. It is, essentially, the early-stage development of a talent marketplace that will enable job seekers and employers to find each other.

The Viewer includes innovations that are not visible to end users but may be the most important factor in the ultimate success of these tools. The technology driving the Lightweight Viewer and underpinning the data in the WGU Achievement Wallet enables:

- **Discoverability** – The Lightweight Viewer enables individuals to "raise their hand," making themselves discoverable by employers who are looking for talent. Unlike a career-networking social media site, where everyone is discoverable because they are on the platform or a typical job search site that requires job seekers to proactively search and apply for positions of interest, this functionality enables job seekers to be identified based on their skills, opening them up to more roles than they might find otherwise, and expanding the talent pool available to employers.

- **Interoperability** – While the pilot reviewed by employers pulls directly from the WGU Achievement Wallet, the technology behind the project solves for interoperability and would enable data to be published “out” to other systems, including ATS and HRIS, and pulled “in” from other verifying entities. The vision is that there could ultimately be many data sources, including different institutions, employers, military, community-based organizations, and others who could issue credentials and validate skills. A comprehensive product would aggregate and enable talent searches regardless of where the skills and credential data originated.

For more information about the technology innovations driving interoperability, visit [Appendix A](#).

The Viewer has **five specific functions** that can create value for employers:

- The Lightweight Viewer includes a “**search on skills**” function that enables an employer to type the skill they are looking for into the Viewer, along with other search parameters, including location, job format (full time, part time, etc.), type (remote, hybrid, etc.), and other aspects of the job.
- The Viewer **generates a list of candidates** who have opted to have their data discoverable within the system.
- Employers can **see background information for candidates** identified by the system, viewing key resume data, including contact information and employment history.
- The Viewer includes **verified credentials** from WGU, enabling employers to understand that WGU is confirming the credential has been earned and providing information about the credential. The technology demonstrated through the Viewer can also enable verified credentials and skills from other entities to be included in an individual’s record.
- Employers can see both **self-attested skills and validated skills**. Self-attested skills, which individuals can gain from a wide variety of experiences (work, military, self-directed learning, etc.) come with existing definitions, removing guesswork on the part of the student. Validated skills are linked to a verified credential in the learner’s Achievement Wallet, where they can include additional information. For validated skills, WGU is confirming that the skill has been demonstrated.

Framing: Current Challenges and Perceptions

The economy and workforce conditions are changing rapidly. Yet, employers are challenged by consistent issues:

- They struggle to **find enough talent** – For hard-to-fill and high-volume roles, employers indicate they do not have sufficient talent pipelines. Unfilled positions cost businesses money and reduce productivity, while also affecting current staff.
- They struggle to **find the right talent** – Across the talent spectrum, employers indicate they have difficulty finding people with the right skills for their various roles.
- They struggle to **retain talent** – Employers are consistently challenged by attrition, which exacerbates problems in talent attraction and hiring.
- They struggle to **find authentic talent** – Job seekers’ use of AI tools to generate resumes and cover

letters is hitting employers hard. Unable to assess whether candidates actually possess the skills they list on a resume using existing tools, employers are frustrated about wasted time and energy vetting applicants.

More broadly, employers recognize just how important hiring and talent decisions are to business priorities but are stymied by how poorly the tools and systems they rely on often work. One employer commented, “Across this process, efficient is not the right word for it. Any time there is speed involved it feels like you’re missing things. And if it feels inefficient, it might be less fair.”

“It’s a nightmare. We’re at a bad intersection. We don’t have systems that match the skills, and people who are trying to apply are highlighting skills in an archaic way. It’s not efficient and it’s not effective.”

Despite their frustration, employers indicated that it would take a lot to get them to adopt new tools, products, and processes. They are interested in new tools that would directly solve some of their challenges but want those tools to integrate seamlessly with their existing systems and to have strong evidence of impact — difficult conditions to meet at this stage.

Employers we spoke with saw how verified credentials and validated skills might help them:

- Employers are consistently looking for **evidence** that a candidate has the skills they say that they do, and that they have the skills required for the role. They recognize that validated skills may help them avoid issues with AI-generated resumes, as noted above, and provide confirmation of what individuals can do.
 - a. Employers are eager to have ways of understanding that candidates have **demonstrated and applied skills** in ways that are relevant to their businesses. One employer commented, “I am looking for competency, not knowledge alone.”
 - b. Employers are seeking means of understanding skill **proficiency** based on an industry standard or another frame of reference.
- Depending on their industry, size, and philosophies, employers may or may not view higher education as the ideal entity to validate skills. But broadly, they view **validated skills as more valuable than self-attested skills**.
- **Credentials are valued differently** by different employers. For employers that require specific credentials, including health care organizations, verified credentials are viewed as very important, and an opportunity to save time in identifying qualified talent and confirming licensure for compliance purposes. For others, verified credentials are less important than validated skills, though employers indicate they would appreciate a more efficient way to conduct an external check of a candidate’s credentials.

Assessing the Lightweight Viewer

Each employer we talked to saw a demonstration of the Lightweight Viewer. They had time to ask questions and dig deeper into functionality before we asked specific questions.

What is the Value of Lightweight Viewer Functionalities?

We assessed the five key functions of the Lightweight Viewer, asking employers to indicate whether they saw value in these functionalities for their organizations.

Search on Skills

Overall, employers rated the search on skills function as valuable, with some provisions:

- Employers would like to be able to search for multiple skills. While the Lightweight Viewer's current limitation to searching for only one skill at a time is a byproduct of its beta status, that limitation should be overcome going forward. "It's not intuitive to me right now that I'd start with one skill in finding people for roles," an employer noted.
- They would like to see automated population of skills language, rather than "freeform" skills entry. "If the search feature for skills operated like a search engine, where you start typing and options pop up, that would create a lot of options, potentially showing popular categories or groupings and helping narrow down," one employer commented.
- They want to understand how skills are referenced and organized. Employers would like to be able to include specific parameters around their skills searches, enabling them to distinguish between skills gained in particular settings, through specific credentials, or other experiences.
- Employers saw opportunity for the search function to expand to include roles. "I would want to search more on who's done something similar to the role I'm looking for, who could fit that. You could still search on skills, but employment experience is valuable here as well," commented an employer.

Candidate Generation

Employers appreciated the candidate generation function of the Lightweight Viewer, though they note some opportunities to improve the current functionality:

- Employers are seeking not just a list of candidates, but some kind of indication of rank ordering and ability to differentiate between candidates in the list. "If I could query skills and then get a list of the candidates with priority order by who most closely demonstrate the skills I'm looking for, that would be nirvana," one employer commented.
- Employers want to understand how the candidates generated through the query are using the platform and how relevant their presence in the candidate list really is. They only want to engage with people who are actively looking for jobs.
 - a. "The question that comes up for me is how much are these individuals engaging? How up-to-date is the information here? If they're not engaging as often as maybe LinkedIn, or a proactive job application, it would really stink if I got excited and then none of them got back to me because they already have jobs."

- b. "If these are candidates that didn't actively seek out my job, I don't know... It feels like panhandling for people who didn't ask to come and work for me."

Candidate Background

Employers had little critique or commentary on this section, noting that the information included in this segment is very similar to what is collected in a typical application or resume. This information, including contact information, professional social media, geography, etc., is necessary, but does not create any differentiated value.

Verified Credentials

Employers felt positively about including verified credentials, especially those who regularly use credentials in their hiring and talent management decisions, though they are looking for some improvements:

- They are seeking clearer indication of which credentials are verified by a granting institution. Including a highly visible checkmark or other indicator would be useful.
- Employers still struggle with the vast array of credentials on the market. "Credentials are hard. Are those credentials valued across employers? Credentials are only valuable if they mean something to employers. I like the idea, but there are so many variables and a lot of confusion," a small business leader commented.

"The market is flooded. There is a proliferation of all these skill providers and credentials. We need ways of answering: Is this reputable? Is this a real thing?"

Validated Skills

Employers value being able to see validated skills as a component of the candidate's record and generally appreciate that candidate's skills are being "vouched for" by organizations with authority and responsibility. However, while the overall value employers attributed to this part of the Lightweight Viewer was high, it was not without significant conditions:

- Importantly, employers seem to care more about the skills and competencies that are built through credentials than the credentials themselves. "If we're doing this as partners, between my company and an education provider, I would say yes, this is valuable. I'd know we have taken steps to validate the skills and it's something I would be able to easily click on and browse as I need to. I'm looking for proof that if you say you have it, you have it. You can give me a good answer in an interview, but if you can't practically apply and use the skills you say you have, I don't care where you got your credential from," one employer commented.
- Employers want these records to identify skill application, and they are skeptical about how well traditional postsecondary coursework can build demonstrable skills. "One thing that jumped out is that I can't see whether a course or credential is application based. You haven't gained a skill unless you can apply it. There is a big different between 'I've tried' and 'I've proved.' And from my perspective, trying to improve skills only by taking a class just doesn't cut it. You got some knowledge and awareness, but unless you can show me you can apply it, it will be problematic."

How Would This Compare to Other Forms of Candidate Recruitment?

We asked employers to envision how a tool like the Lightweight Viewer might provide more or better business value compared to other forms of candidate recruitment, application, and hiring systems.

Resumes and Cover Letters in Online Applications

Employers saw considerable opportunities for improved outcomes compared to traditional resumes and cover letters that are solicited through online job postings and applications.

- **AI and Opportunity for Fraud** – As noted above, employers are increasingly challenged by candidates' use of AI, both in developing application materials and in video interviews. One employer commented, "This is putting everything on its head. Even with assessments, you can pay bots or agents to do the assessments for you! Having verified information, that someone actually has the experience — there is a lot of value there, and likely even more than we recognize now given the emergence of new tools."
- **Streamlining Information** - Employers like the opportunity to streamline their reviews of application materials. "We work through minutiae to get the skills we need. This might allow you to understand who has the skills you need without having to read through all the details. And of course, I'll find out exactly what I need to know in the interview," commented an employer.
- **Candidate Experience** – Employers think frequently about challenges that potential candidates go through. They like that the tool might help job seekers submit applications more easily and comprehensively. "Why do candidates have to put their information into 20 different formats to apply? This might make it easier to get information into the hiring side. You know the Common App for colleges; this could be similar to that," an employer said.

Professional Social Media

Most employers we talked to use professional social media sites like LinkedIn, Glassdoor, and others to post jobs and find candidates, and they don't appear to have any plans to reduce reliance on these tools. In considering how the Lightweight Viewer compares, employers indicated they might view the tool as a complement to professional social media tools:

- Employers see specific value in the validated and verified data in the Lightweight Viewer. "It can be hard to rely on all the information in social media. It is another form of self-attestation," an employer commented.
- Employers see "less network-reliant" platforms like the Lightweight Viewer as potentially counteracting the network effect. "The networking piece is daunting for some candidates. Not everyone has thousands of contacts, and people don't necessarily know how to get jobs. Schools don't often teach that skill and it's hard to learn. This tool [the Lightweight Viewer] would be a nice supplement. Are you relying on data about the candidate or the ability to schmooze? If you support people in the right way, that absolutely helps the employer."

Digital Credentials/Skills Wallets that Require Access Permission

While employers are significantly less familiar with credential/skills wallets as a hiring and talent tool than they

are with other hiring tools, they uniformly agree that these wallets on their own are not particularly useful in serving business objectives; employers require some form of functionality that would enable easy interaction and prioritization of data and information in the wallet, or integration with an existing system (ATS, HRIS, etc.).

Employers need the data and information housed in skills wallets to come to them. Employers indicate they do not have time or the inclination to look inside of individual skills wallets to find information they need, even if an individual shares access. An employer commented, “I operate with a lot of firewalls. So, the ability for the data to come to me efficiently is a huge benefit for a hiring manager or anyone who sits in a talent acquisition seat.”

Another employer said, “Please don’t make me chase things down. Make this easy if you can. If you expect me to go chasing after things, the more I have to chase, the less likely I am to see it as valuable. Or honestly, it’s more likely that I don’t bother.”

Could the Lightweight Viewer Create Business Value?

We asked employers to speculate on where a tool with the functionalities of the Lightweight Viewer could add specific business value — saving time, human resources, and money.

Increasing Confidence that We’ve Found the Best Talent

A benefit of adopting Skills First practices is expanding talent pools to include as many candidates as possible who can do the job. A product that accomplishes what the Lightweight Viewer does appears poised to help employers who are implementing Skills First practices.

“That is the most important thing, to ensure that you have the increased talent pool. In a skills-based environment, you don’t care where people acquire the skills, but you want the best people with the skills. If this could open the aperture and give me the opportunity to have cream rise to the top, I’d definitely feel more confident. I will never be 100% confident with anything, but if I can get 80% of people moving on all cylinders, we can really start to evaluate different things.”

Another employer indicated that validated skills could help bring hiring managers along: “This might help me to articulate to hiring managers why these folks are different or better talent. They don’t own the recruiting process, and there is always a level of skepticism. With this, I could show them — here are validated skills, and we could use them to work things out: how does this make you feel? What do you think about that?”

“We have a laborious interview process, and I could see this accelerating that. Rather than multiple people digging in on picking the candidate, I could see that this might build people’s confidence that they’re not going to screw up choosing talent. The biggest killer is choosing the wrong people, and the biggest accelerator of business is choosing the right people.”

Another employer indicated that the tool might be especially valuable for early career roles. “For early career talent, they might not be great at interviews or have enough work experience to have an answer for ‘tell me about a time’ questions. If I have more data in that realm, that is probably where I’d see the most value. This is likely a better data set for people who don’t have a lot of experience.”

Increasing Efficiency in the Hiring Process

The employers we talked to saw promise in tools like this supporting key metrics such as time to hire, as well as potentially streamlining interview and candidate assessment processes. Anything that saves time for HR and talent acquisition leaders is viewed as a positive opportunity.

One employer commented, “This would help. Yes. Emphatically. As a hiring manager, time to hire is something we look at. The talent acquisition team measures days to hire. Anything that offers efficiency from the recruiting perspective would be valuable.”

Another employer indicated value in improving the candidate experience, while also creating savings. “I think this would help. If your time to hire gets faster, the candidate experience gets better. We’re not going to waste your time, and you’re not wasting mine. Being able to access and unlock talent pools is hugely beneficial to time to fill. And I think where we would optimize the most is if we really come to trust it. If that happens, we can think about getting rid of different parts of the process. What if you no longer have to prescreen? Maybe we can hire differently. Maybe we could go straight to offer. If this could ultimately start to mess with the ecosystem we all work in, all of these protections you put into that system could come into question whether they’re needed or not.”

Improving Productivity Once on the Job

Overall, employers were optimistic about how directly using validated skills and verified credentials in hiring would result in improved productivity once workers were hired.

“This might reduce the learning curve and give leaders the confidence that we don’t have to do a trial and error with people.”

They could envision this happening, but most noted that the early days in any role are devoted to learning the company context, culture, and specific expectations. An employer commented, “That really depends on the company culture and what new hires need to go through. Even if someone has all the skill sets, they’re still orienting the company, figuring out who they need to know, workflows, day-to-day stuff that you’d never know unless you worked there. You still have to learn how to operate, and that is always going to be there.”

That said, one employer was bullish. “Having skills records could be great. Now you have the competencies at the end of the road. You can do assessments, figure out what their skill sets are, where they need help. You may shrink time to competency in half. If they show you they understand, don’t train that. There’s no point in training them on stuff they already know.”

How Would the Lightweight Viewer Work in Business Environments?

We asked employers what this tool would need to do in their environments to create value: whether they would ever consider using the Lightweight Viewer or something like it, how it would have to operate, and what they need it to accomplish.

Interoperable

As noted above, employers are highly unwilling to consider new tools and products that are standalone and

separate from their existing systems. Not all employers use ATS and HRIS platforms, but for those who do, tools that use the functionalities of the Lightweight Viewer must interact with those systems.

“From a talent perspective, this would have to go into our mobility plan. That would be the way we would amplify it. It would have to integrate into our systems seamlessly,” shared one employer. But other employers are also realistic about just how far integration can go. “The days of thinking that one system will solve every HR dilemma — whatever sector or industry — is just not where we are yet in the world,” one employer commented.

For those organizations that don’t have large systems, enabling them to participate with web-based platforms that are easy-to-use and easily navigable will be important.

Generate Useful Insights with Transparent Data

Employers indicate that they are drowning in data, but much of it is not useful or used in a way that creates real business value. For tools like the Lightweight Viewer to stand out, they need to solve business problems and generate insights to help employers make decisions.

One of the biggest opportunities for creating that value appears to be enabling compare-and-contrast or enhanced “tiering” of candidates. This is where the great time savings will happen, at the point of candidate generation, with additional benefits accruing from there.

“I’d want this to enable us to parse between people who do have the right skills and people who don’t. Ideally, it would create tiers: here’s an ideal pool based on skills, here’s second tier, based on guidelines you set. This could save time upfront, and with this kind of information, take a typical interview and improve it by 10% or more with that greater specificity; that gets you to the details.”

“If you’re at an organization that cares about data, then yes, data really matters, and having the right data may be the thing that gets you there. Show me how you’re getting skills, what you’ve seen. That could really be an unlock.”

Data and information that enables employers to make clearer assessments of candidates, vendors, partners, and outcomes is vital.

User-Friendly

Hiring and candidate skills assessment responsibilities are often spread across roles and organizations. While efficiencies and improvements may be most apparent within talent acquisition or HR departments, access to profiles and skills records will likely need to be distributed across organizations. This creates particular importance for user-friendly and intuitive design. “My first reaction is that if a hiring manager is looking at this, you really want this to be visually user-friendly. Use checkmarks, badges, all without me having to take special training. Let me learn it on the go, because you’re working at the speed of business, so reduce that time to train. And especially, build this with the least amount of clicks possible — use that hover function to help us see things.”

Evidence-Based

Prior to investing in or adopting any product, employers need evidence that it works and will produce positive outcomes. Business implementation pilots that support detailed measurement of talent management outcomes will hasten uptake, adoption, and trust. Lack of evidence will only dampen the movement. “It would be great if we could run something like this as a trial vs. our current methods. I only hear the bad news about our systems now, but it would take a lot to make a change,” one employer commented.

Another said, “Quality of hire is definitely a marker of success. If we hire someone and they can come in and start and they’re able to do the work, we’ll know it’s a success. If it comes with easy integration, that makes validating our success easier. We’ll see this gave our people more time to focus on some other thing. It becomes more of an ‘and’ than an ‘or.’ It’s about the efficiency of the process. That is the most important thing.”

Fair Hiring Outcomes

Employers, especially those who have adopted Skills First practices, want their tools and products to result in outcomes that enhance fairness in hiring, while creating business value.

“No system will ever take bias away completely, but the ideal system would make it hard for anyone to ever say, ‘you got this job because...’. That system would enable people to identify the best person for the job. So, the best tool will create the belief and evidence that the candidate you’re getting is the best person for the job. When they can pull the rhetoric away from it, showing validated skills would allow for less subjectivity and create more fairness.”

“The way I’d sell this is as a tool that will expand your initial pool of people. But if you get more resumes to filter through, that is not a big win for the company. If you can say, the resumes you get through this are better than what we get through the current process, show that. Or if this process filters with more credibility than a human scanning applications, show that. Show us how this can get to a short list, who rises to the top. You are never going to get someone to add on to their daily jobs. Take away tasks or make those tasks better, and that is an incentive.”

Support Talent Management

As currently formatted, the Lightweight Viewer prioritizes recruitment and hiring. However, as tools like the Lightweight Viewer move out of development and into broad use, the opportunities for creating value across the entire talent management process will become more important. The employers we talked to had difficulty seeing exactly how the platform would translate into improvements in employee retention and advancement, and how it could address upskilling and reskilling priorities.

The economy is changing quickly. In the short term, it is feasible that employers will focus more on retaining and training their existing employees, rather than pursuing numerous new hires. This is likely even more important for small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) that often do not use HRIS tools, and who do not have the people, time, or financial resources to invest in bespoke programs. [Recent UpSkill America research](#) indicates that about half of SMB leaders surveyed would find value in having validated skills data available in their upskilling, reskilling, and advancement work with incumbent employees.

Conclusion

The Lightweight Viewer is a valuable response to [employer feedback](#) indicating they desire a tool that can help them evaluate candidates' skills. Designed with employer use in mind, it starts to address the employers' priorities:

- **They want tools and products that help them save time and resources.** There was broad agreement among the employers we talked to that the functionalities of the Lightweight Viewer would be particularly helpful in improving talent attraction and hiring challenges, particularly in reducing time to hire.
- **They want platforms and data that prioritize their interests and context in talent decision-making.** The Lightweight Viewer uses the Learner Information Framework to translate applicant data into information that employers can use to better understand job candidates' skills and backgrounds.
- **They want products that are easy to use, and that can integrate seamlessly with existing tools and systems.** The Lightweight Viewer's innovative technology enables both downstream platforms like ATS and HRIS to "pull" data from WGU's Achievement Wallet and demonstrates how data from other LERs and sources may be "pushed" into technologies like the Lightweight Viewer.
- **They want to understand what candidates know and can do on the job.** The Lightweight Viewer increases the transparency into what students and job seekers have learned and better describes their educational experiences.

We are making progress, but there is still much to learn about how employers will ultimately use and benefit from innovations designed to better connect verified credential and skills data with employment opportunities.

This report is based on research funded by the Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Gates Foundation.

UpSkill America is grateful to WGU for the opportunity to keep asking questions, centering employers in these efforts to build a Skills First future.

About UpSkill America

UpSkill America, an initiative of the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program, supports employers and workforce organizations to expand and improve high-quality educational and career advancement opportunities for America's frontline workers. We seek to create a movement of employers, civic organizations, workforce intermediaries, higher education institutions, and policymakers working collaboratively to implement education, training, and development strategies that result in better jobs and opportunities for frontline workers, more competitive businesses, and stronger communities. Learn more at www.upskillamerica.org. Follow UpSkill America on [LinkedIn](#).

About Western Governors University

Western Governors University, the nation's leading nonprofit, online university, is transforming higher education to be more student-centric, affordable, accessible to all and relevant to the workforce. Established in 1997 by 19 visionary U.S. governors, WGU creates life-changing pathways to opportunity for those underserved by traditional institutions — working adults, historically underrepresented communities and a diverse, growing number of learners looking for a flexible, online model that better suits their life circumstances. WGU's competency-based education model allows students to demonstrate mastery as they progress through programs at their own pace. Accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, WGU operates in all 50 states and offers more than 80 degrees in health, education, technology, and business. Additionally, WGU provide individual courses and certificates for students preparing to pursue a degree. WGU serves more than 190,000 students nationwide, with more than 377,300 alumni, and has awarded more than 429,874 degrees. Learn more at wgu.edu. Follow WGU on X at [@wgu](#) and on [LinkedIn](#).

Appendix A: About Achievement and Credential Data

WGU supported a year-long demonstration project that included collaborators through the [Learner Information Framework](#) (LIF), an initiative to “explore how technology can be used to describe and connect dispersed information from various points along a learner's education and employment journey so learners' rich experiences and achievements can be more fully represented.” The Lightweight Viewer marks the next stage in enabling data to move seamlessly between individual learners, institutions and other validating entities, and end-users like employers.

The emerging Learning & Employment Record (LER) ecosystem has introduced several challenges that WGU looks to address through credentialing and Achievement Wallet innovations that leverage the capabilities of LIF translation software.

- **Disconnect in the Ecosystem** – The emerging LER ecosystem is somewhat siloed, lacking the connective tissue for self-asserted and issued credential data to flow freely and accurately across systems to best serve the student. WGU's LIF demonstration project provided an opportunity to translate learner data from the Achievement Wallet and be leveraged in a downstream consuming system, the Lightweight Viewer, solving the disconnect.
- **Inconsistencies in data formats** - Interoperable data standards serve as languages for engagement between distinct but interdependent systems. These standards are critical to the overall value and success of the LER ecosystem, enabling systems to serve learners and connect talent with opportunity. The LIF translation software used by WGU in the demonstration project allowed the team to publish

three distinct data formats (Open Badges 2, Open Badges 3, and LER-RS1) from the Achievement Wallet, translate them into a common data format, store for use, and present in the Lightweight Viewer that plays the role of a talent marketplace. This solution serves as an example of multiple formats of standards-based data arriving to a service that manages their translation, providing easier consumption for a downstream system.

- **Minimized self-assertions** – Standards-based LER credentials primarily represent an issuer's claim of a recipient's achievement. These issuers include educational institutions, certifying organizations, and employers. While these claims are important and deliver credibility, a substantial portion of an individual's achievements and even credentials may be self-asserted in nature, including jobs held, degrees earned, and skills obtained. Until recently, there has been no industry data standard available to represent self-asserted claims like these. In 2024, HR Open Standards published LER-RS1, providing a new, holistic format to represent both self-asserted claims and verified credentials received from multiple issuers. WGU leveraged LER-RS1 in the Achievement Wallet and designed new functionality around its capabilities, allowing individuals to deliver a more complete picture of their work and education history, skills profile, communication preferences, and career goals and preferences. To facilitate this, the WGU team extended the LIF translation service by mapping properties of LER-RS1 into the LIF Normative Data model.