

VET Micro-credentialing in the Tourism Sector



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*Badge guidelines and
recommendations*

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1. Understanding digital badges

1.1 Badge origins & Brief History

Digital badges are based on the Open Badges standard, developed in 2011 by the Mozilla Foundation. The standard 1.0 was released in 2012 and at the same time the development of several technical badge platforms (such as the Open Badge Factory) started. The idea behind the badges, called open recognition, is that they help individuals to make visible all kinds of skills and competences no matter where they were acquired. The Open Badges standard has evolved over the years, adding new features and functionalities to badges. The 3.0. standard will be published soon, bringing innovations for the verification and validation of badges. In 2020, 43.3 million badges were issued worldwide ([Badge Count 2020 - Badge Count 2020 \(imglobal.org\)](#)) and the number of badges has been increasing every year.

1.2 Badge description

Open Badges are a digital proof of your skills. They contain competence objectives, assessment criteria and ways of demonstrating competence. They can be used to identify and recognize knowledge, skills and achievements acquired during studies, at work, in hobbies, projects and in many other contexts. A distinction should be made between Badges of Competence and Badges of Participation, which simply indicate participation in, for example, an event. A Badge of Competence is a modern micro-credential, i.e., a small set of competences. It is like a piece of Lego in a competence bag, allowing you to assemble different constructions of your own competence. The EU Recommendation on micro-credentials was published in December 2021 and its contents should be consulted when introducing an Open Badges ([EUR-Lex - 52021DC0770 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#))

From a technical point of view, an Open Badge is an image containing metadata. This metadata provides information such as who issued the badge, when it was issued and the criteria on what basis. The badge can also be accompanied by an application, which serves as a tool for demonstrating competence. The badge is dynamic, and the recipient can enrich its metadata and share it with others. Once the badge has been received, it can be used to add evidence of one's own, and one can also ask another person to confirm and recommend the competence. The badge can be easily shared with others, for example as a link or as a direct share on social media such as LinkedIn.



Image 1: Badge metadata

1.3 Why badges?

Open Badges have two important functions. They act as a digital proof of competence and at the same time they make visible and help to guide the learning process. Through playful elements, the completion of the badges motivates the learner and encourages further development of skills. Open Badges are agile and can be used to describe skills across organizational boundaries and educational levels. Badge constellations or systems consisting of individual badges can describe competences at many different levels simultaneously, thus scaling to the activities of many organizations.

The badge is filled with 'competence data' and supports the competence discourse of the badge earner and helps to articulate their own competences. The badge also often highlights competences that might otherwise remain hidden, and on the other hand, it shines the spotlight on specific skills. It is also possible to enrich and update the metadata of the awarded badge by adding evidence and asking for endorsements. At its best, the badge is a portfolio-like and dynamic document.

The collaborative and networking nature of the badges take many different forms. They provide opportunities for peer assessment and can also be used to demonstrate competences with others. Organizations can also collaborate in the creation of badges. Several projects are creating badge constellations with the involvement of many organizations. The openness of badges also allows for the sharing of completed badges and badge constellations between organizations, thus enabling the stackability of badges, i.e. their usefulness in multiple badge systems.

The badge is digital, which means that it can be easily shared with others through many different channels. In the future, tags and the metadata they contain can also be transferred from one technical system to another. This will allow the badge to be used more effectively for job search and learning.

2. Creating badges

2.1 Badge Platforms

There are many badge platforms around the world, both paid and free. Most of them follow the Open Badges standard, which is important to check before implementing them. The features and tools offered by the platforms vary slightly and the Open Badge Factory, for example, currently has the widest range of features for the creation of competency-based badges. Several companies offer a separate system for organisations to create and award badges and for individuals to manage and share badges. For example, the [Open Badge Factory](#) is for the organisation while the [Open Badge Passport](#) is for the badge holder. Open Badge Factory is GDPR compliant and requires its subprocessors to comply with the terms of the GDPR. Open Badge Factory maintains ongoing confidentiality, integrity, and resilience of our systems that process personal data of badge earners. While badge creation and award systems are often paid for (at least for large numbers of badges), a free badge platform can be used to manage and share the received badges. It is also possible to integrate badge platforms into LMS such as Moodle. In this way, the assessment and awarding of credits is done through Moodle courses and activities.

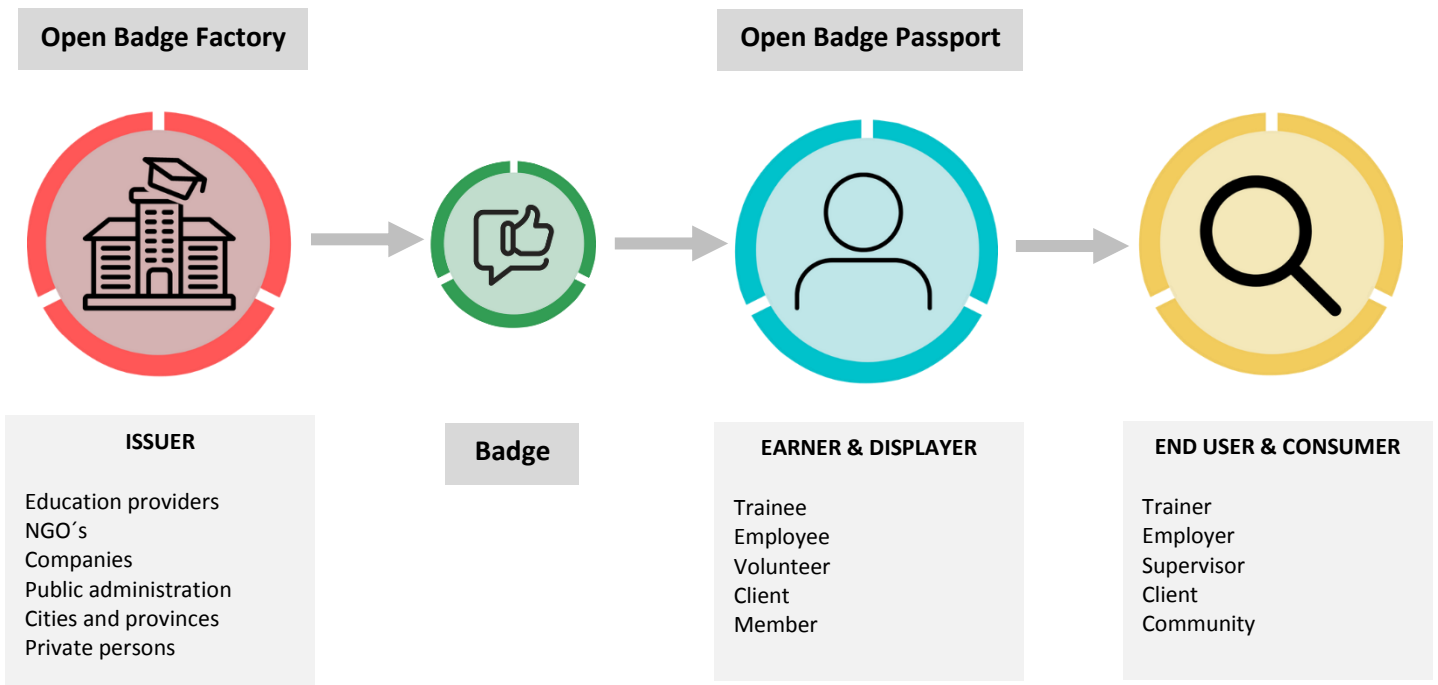


Image 2: Badge ecosystem

2.2 How to create badges

A standardized technical system is needed for the creation of Open Badges. An Open Badge consists of an image and metadata. Depending slightly on the system, the following information is required to create a badge:

Image (.png or .svg) - You can use a graphic designer to help you create the image or you can create it yourself, for example in Canva. If the badge is part of a larger set of badges, it is a good idea to consider the visual appearance of the whole set first.

Badge name - The name tells you in a few words what the badge is about.

Badge description - The description is a short and concise introductory text that captures the interest of the end-user of the badge. For example, the description can tell the user what the badge is awarded for.

Tags - Keywords help people to find the badge more easily.

Alignments - Alignments support the creation of a set of criteria for the badge and link the badge to a wider context. Popular alignments include ESCO and EQF.

Criteria - The criteria for a badge consist of competence objectives, assessment criteria and ways of demonstrating competence. Sometimes the criteria also include learning resources and background information on the development of the badge.

Message - A badge is always issued to the recipient's email. The message usually describes what the badge is and how it will be received.

Endorsements - Endorsement for the badge can be requested from different organisations. Generally, the organisations involved in the creation of the badge will act as recommenders.

Application - An application can be attached to the badge to demonstrate the competence. The application includes different ways of assessment and can be used to guide the process of awarding the badge.

The most important step in the creation of a badge is the construction of the criteria. For competence-based badges, it is important to describe the competence objectives, assessment criteria and ways of demonstrating competence. In this way, the applicant for the badge knows what competences are expected of him/her and the criteria by which they will be assessed. This will also serve as a basis for self-assessment and competence development if your own competence does not yet meet the criteria for the badge. The badge will also describe how to demonstrate competence, i.e. what to do and what to show when applying for the badge. Sometimes the badges come with learning resources and materials to help you develop your own skills. If there is an application for a badge, it will serve as a tool for demonstrating competence. A badge that has been successfully assessed will be issued to the

applicant's email and an application that needs to be completed will be sent back with a request for completion.

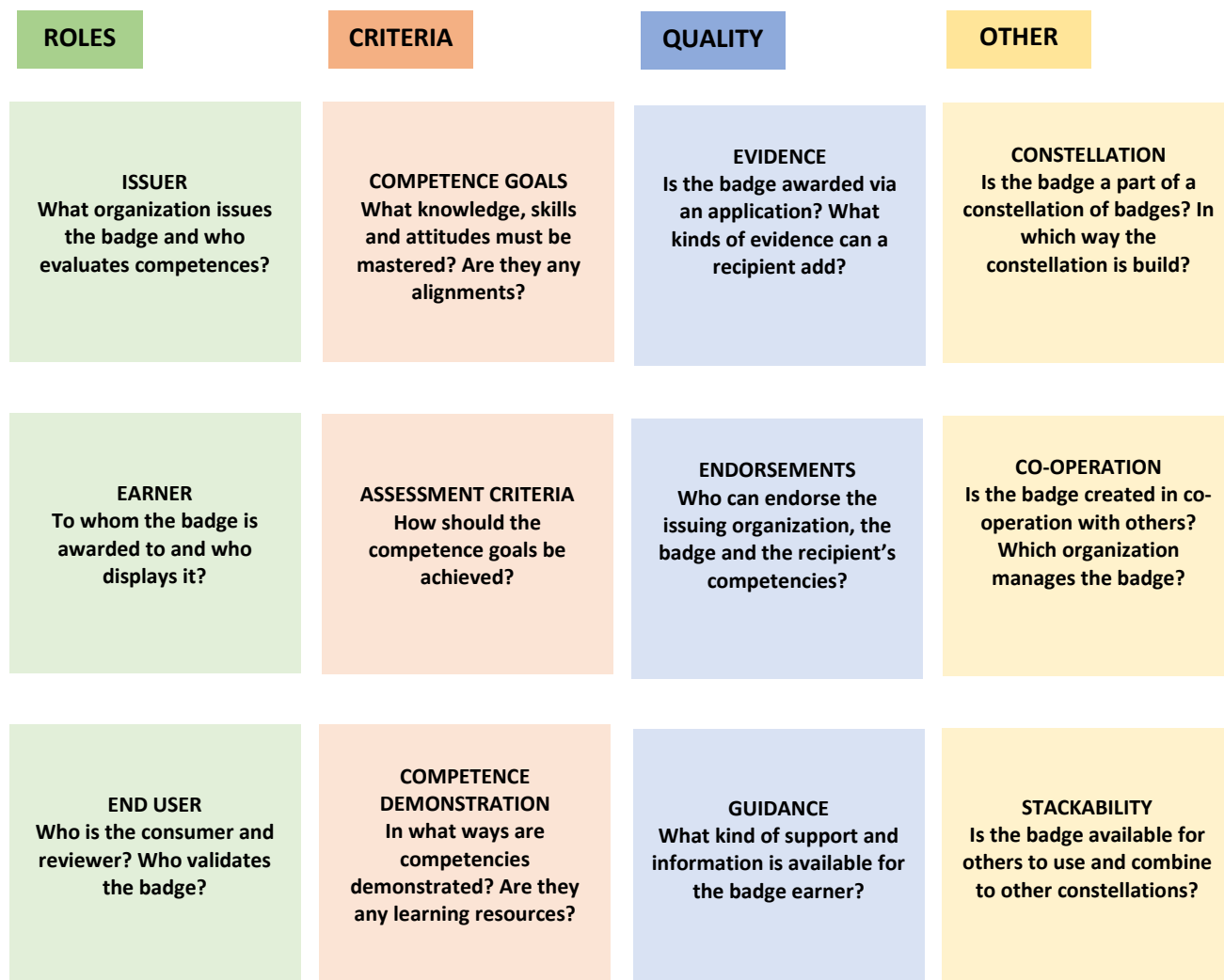


Image 3: Badge creation canvas

Different alignments and frameworks can be used to help create the criteria for the badge. In this way, the competences are linked to a broader context and it is easier for the end-user of the badge to find the connections between the competences. As a good example in vocational education and training, the criteria can be linked to the basics of the degrees. In terms of continuous learning, it is worth noting that the badges can also be linked, for example, to the competences required by future working life or to the objectives of sustainable development.

It is also useful to consider the different roles in the creation of a badge: who is the earner/recipient of the badge, who assesses the competence and who is the end-user of the badge, i.e. the person who

opens the shared badge. The badge should be meaningful and motivating, especially for the earned, and it is great if the badge can also describe the possibilities of its use.

2.3 How to create constellations

Competence-based badges can be used as individual badges or to build sets of badges, i.e. badge constellations. Badges can be used to concretise and split competence sets into practical and concrete activities. In this way, they can be used to guide the learning process. [Open badge driven learning](#) is a digital pedagogical model comprising badges, learning materials, guidance and peer support.

Individual badges can be grouped into sets or constellations by competence area or competence level. The badges can be completed according to individual proficiency and interest, and the individual completing the badges can receive a metabadge at the end. In this way, a badge guides and encourages the learner towards a goal. The scalability of badges supports smooth transitions in line with the objective of continuous learning. The different badges of the same constellation can thus be linked to different levels of education and create learning pathways to support transitions.

A badge constellation grouped by competence area can include different competences, roles or actions. I.e a Skilled trainer metabadge can include individual badges that are linked to giving feedback, guidance and assessing skills. One has to accomplish all or some of the individual badges to be awarded the metabadge. A badge constellation grouped by competence level usually does not have a metabadge and the badge earner can decide in which level i.e. bronze, silver or gold he/she wants to demonstrate skills.



Image 4: Two ways of creating a badge constellation

Badge constellations can be built to meet the needs of a single organisation, or they can be created jointly with other organisations. Several projects have also produced both national and EU-level badge constellations, which are freely available to all organisations. In the case of collaborative badges, it is important to establish a 'governance model' to ensure consistency in the use and evaluation of the badges and to agree on their further development and updating. Large badge constellations also often have training of trainers to support the work of the assessors of the badges in the constellation.

3. Using badges

3.1 Achieving badges

There are many ways to earn badges. Sometimes the way in which skills are acquired is well-defined, but increasingly, skills can be demonstrated through knowledge and skills acquired in different areas of life. In educational institutions, badges can be used as part of courses and to recognise skills related to a qualification. Such badges often relate to substance competences, but can also identify and recognise soft, generic competences. In workplaces, badges are often part of staff competencies and role clarification, and are used to create development pathways within the organisation. In the NGO-field, volunteering is a typical subject for badges, which act as a document of skills and experience in the form of job certificates. Competences can also be developed through networks and workgroups, but mere participation in a seminar or conference, for example, does not in itself fulfil the criteria for a competence badge. There are also competences that can be freely acquired through self-learning. In this case, for example, it is an open online website where learning material is collected. The award of a badge is automatic, for example after completion of a multiple-choice questionnaire.

Less often, the available badges have been brought together in a way that allows one to see the badge opportunities offered by different organisations immediately. However, in several countries there are informal and formal networks that bring together nationally the development of the badges and presents new badges, for example in webinars. Some badge platforms (such as the Open Badge Passport) also have a badge gallery accessible to users, through which they can explore what badges have been created and issued.

3.2 Sharing badges

The badges accumulate in the badge earner's own badge backpack, such as the Open Badge Passport. The badges are intended to be shared with others, but it is up to the badge earner or displayer to decide whether they want to keep them private or share them with others. The organisation issuing the badges

should be familiar with the features of the OBP and similar systems so that they can support and guide for example their own trainees in receiving and sharing badges.

Badges can be distributed as individual badges or as pages containing a collection of badges related, for example, to the same theme. The pages can also be used to build an ePortfolio of badges. Badges and pages can be shared on social media and, for individual badges, LinkedIn offers good opportunities to link a badge to your profile. Sharing can also be done as a link, which is perhaps the most versatile option. A .pdf file, an embed code and a QR code are also possible sharing methods. In the future, it will be possible to transfer badges from one system to another.

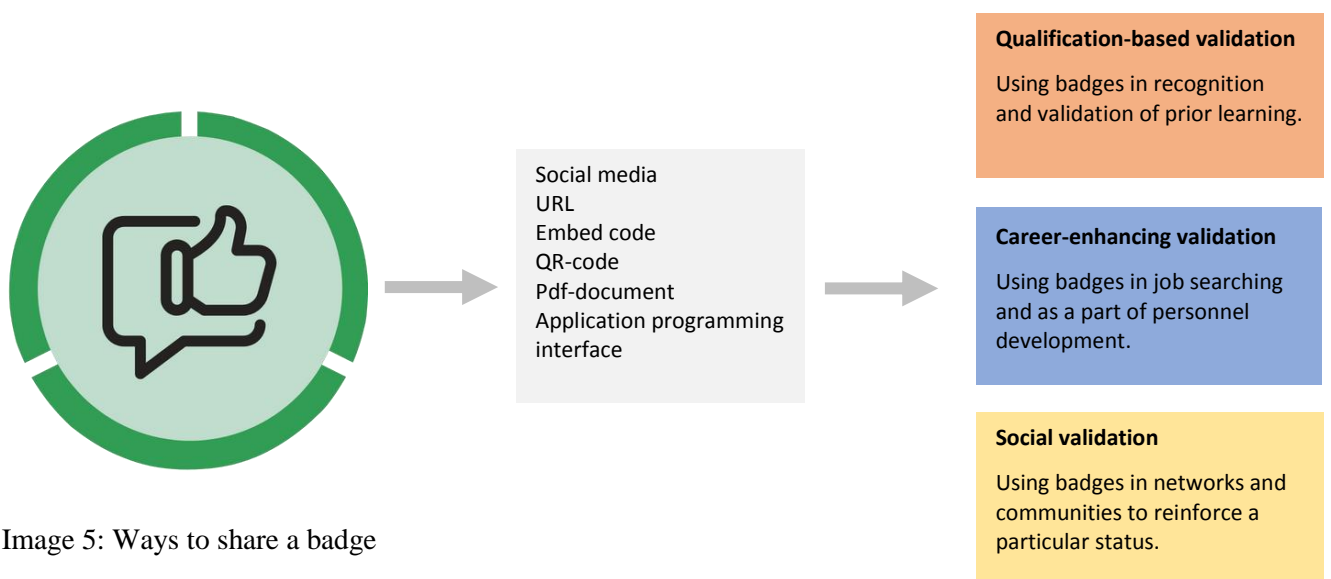


Image 5: Ways to share a badge

For example, the Open Badge Passport allows the earners of the badges to network with each other. People who have received the same badge can find each other and form informal community if they wish. The community can also support the completion of the badges. The Open Badge Passport offers the possibility to build different competence pathways and minimaps from the badges and to track one's own progress.

3.3 Validation

Badges can support the validation of competences in a degree-oriented, career-enhancing and social context. Qualification-based validation means that a badge can serve as evidence and proof of skills that can be recognised and issued as part of qualifications. Career-enhancing validation means that badges can help people find employment and progress in their careers. Many organisations are already using badges to support staff development by building pathways and identifying roles within the

organisation. Badges can also be used to highlight specific skills needed in a particular sector. This can be a decisive factor in the job search. Social validation is about gaining value within your community and networks. For example, a badge can be used to achieve and reinforce a particular status.

The recognition and validation of badges is facilitated by EU and national policies on the identification and recognition of competences and the role and development of micro-credentials. Awareness of badges is growing with their use and many countries already have national badge constellations, which facilitate the comparison and recognition of competences with common alignments. However, the validation of badges requires building a climate of mutual trust. This can be achieved by raising awareness of the badges, by increasing cooperation in their creation and by establishing quality criteria for the badges.

4. Process

4.1 Badge process in education institutes

One way of using badges is linking them to existing or planned courses. The process of creating and issuing badges in an education institute as a part of courses involves both trainers and trainees. Competence badge strategy leads the process in an organisational level, trainers create the badges and evaluate competences and trainees participate in learning activities and demonstrate competences in badge application forms.

- 1) Creating a competence badge strategy in the organisation - deciding on the use of badges
- 2) Selection and deployment of a competence badge platform - comparison of features
- 3) Defining the uses of the badges - for what purpose and for whom are badges created
- 4) Exploring existing badges - whether there is scope for collaboration and use of existing badges
- 5) Networking with others - whether to develop alone or with others
- 6) Designing a badge constellation - how many badges/levels

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- 7) Creation of individual competence badges - use of competency-based templates
- 8) Creation of applications for a badge - agreeing on assessment responsibilities

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- 9) Participation in activities & competence building
- 10) Completion of the application for a badge

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- 11) Evaluation of the application for a badge - guidelines for the evaluator
- 12) Awarding the badge

- 13) Receiving the badge by e-mail
- 14) Placing the badge in a badge passport
- 15) Adding evidence and requesting endorsements
- 16) Sharing the badge with others

- 17) Recognition and validation of the badge

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Image 6: Badge process

4.2. Guidelines and governance model

When building a wide badge constellation in co-operation with other organisations it's useful to agree on how the constellation is meant to be used in the future. Many constellations are published with guidelines and governance models which increase the quality of constellation by ensuring the same ground rules for everyone. Badge constellation needs to be kept up to date and it's recommendable to settle rights and obligations for further development. Sometimes training for evaluators and other roles in constellation is needed to enhance uniformity.

EXAMPLE INDEX

1. The process of developing a badge constellation
2. How to access the constellation
3. Training for trainers/evaluators
4. Networking with partners
5. Multiple ways to earn badges
6. Tips for evaluators
7. Consideration of special groups

5. Further reading

Brauer, S. (2019). Digital Open Badge-Driven Learning –Competence-based Professional Development for Vocational Teachers (doctoral dissertation). Acta Universitatis Lapponiensis 380. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-337-110-1>

Badge Wiki: [What Are Open Badges? - Badge Wiki](#)

atingi eAcademy Tourism and Hospitality: [eAcademy_OnePager.pdf \(atingi.org\)](#)

Virtual Badge Guide: [The Definitive Guide to Digital Badges \(virtualbadge.io\)](#)

Accredible's guide to Digital Badges: [Download Accredible's Comprehensive Guide to Digital Badges | Accredible](#)

eCampusOntario's Micro-credential Toolkit: [eCampusOntario's Micro-credential Toolkit](#)



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