



The certification scheme

--- GUIDELINES ---

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These guidelines are intended to provide key indications for assessing, validating and certificating competences associated to the Digital Workplace Expert profile, as described below and in the related Open Badge website.

They are addressed to professionals – trainers, HR managers, recruiters, career guidance experts, psychologists of labour etc. – wishing to make those kind of competences visible and easily recognizable for career development and personal fulfillment.

They are closely complemented by the Learning Outcomes description, available in the project I.O.5 associated documents.

Further information and indications can be found on the project website (<http://digitalworkplace.education/>) and/or can be requested to the project coordinator (p.pietrangelo@ares.cb.it).

General introduction: the European scenario

On the 20th December of 2012 the EU Council issued the RECOMMENDATION on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The main objective of the Recommendation is the request to EU Member States to:

1. have in place, no later than 2018, in accordance with national circumstances and specificities, and as they deem appropriate, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to:

- (a) have knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated, including, where applicable, through open educational resources;

(b) obtain a full qualification, or, where applicable, part qualification, on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences, without prejudice to other applicable Union law, in particular Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications.

2. include, as appropriate, the following elements in arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, whilst allowing each individual to take advantage of any of these, either separately or in combination, in accordance with his/her needs:

(a) IDENTIFICATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;

(b) DOCUMENTATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;

c) ASSESSMENT of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;

(d) CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non formal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate [...]

The European certification system

During the European Council of Lisbon of March 2000, member states decided to invest on education and training system development, aiming at improving the European global competitiveness level.

The solutions proposed after "The Copenhagen Declaration"¹ of the 30th November 2002 created a complex system composed of:

¹ Full title: Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training – available at <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/sites/default/files/copenhagen-en.pdf>

1. The European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning, with a set of reference levels (EQF);

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) acts as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning. The EQF aims to relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework. Individuals and employers will be able to use the EQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems. Since 2012, all new qualifications issued in Europe carry a reference to an appropriate EQF level (from Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Qualifications_Framework)

Ref: <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/>

2. The European transparency toolset, mainly composed of the Europass tools (European CV, diploma and certificate supplements, language portfolio) and of the Europass national contact points (EUROPASS);

Europass is a European Union (Directorate General for Education and Culture) initiative to increase transparency of qualification and mobility of citizens in Europe. It aims to make a person's skills and qualifications clearly understood throughout Europe (including the European Union, European Economic Area and EU candidate countries).

The five Europass documents are the Curriculum Vitae, Language Passport, Europass Mobility, Certificate Supplement, and Diploma Supplement, sharing a common brand name and logo.[2] Since 2012 individuals have been able to assemble all Europass documents in the European Skills Passport. (from Wikipedia, at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europass>)

Ref.: <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>

3. the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET);

The aim of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is to:

- make it easier for people to get validation and recognition of work-related skills and knowledge acquired in different systems and countries – so that they can count towards vocational qualifications
- make it more attractive to move between different countries and learning environments
- increase the compatibility between the different vocational education and training (VET) systems in place across Europe, and the qualifications they offer
- increase the employability of VET graduates and the confidence of employers that each VET qualification requires specific skills and knowledge (from ECVET official landing page).

Ref.: https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/ecvet_en

4. The European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET).

EQAVET is a community of practice bringing together Member States, Social Partners and the European Commission to promote European collaboration in developing and improving quality assurance in VET by using the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (from EQAVET official landing page).

Ref.: <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx>

Aiming at promoting the convergence of approaches and methodologies about informal and non formal learning validation, starting from 2005 the EU Commission and the CEDEFOP issued every two years the “European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning”, a survey collecting, describing and sharing regulations and approaches to validation among member states. The last version of the Inventory (2016) provides a unique record on how validation is being used at national, regional and local level in Europe. It contains a state-of-play and overview of developments for

33 European countries (including Turkey and Switzerland) since the 2014 update and is illustrated by good practice examples².

This survey highlights progresses towards the Council recommendations (European Inventory on Validation of non-formal and informal learning 2016 – Synthesis report14-19).

Key findings in fact include that:

- ✓ Validation arrangements are planned or in place in all 36 EU countries
- ✓ Greater attention has been paid to ensuring coordinating institutions are in place at national level.

On the other side, several weaknesses points and critical areas reduce the actual progress:

- ✓ Validation is mostly used for awarding parts of qualification, credits, gaining exemptions and accessing educational programmes – this means that the whole system is unbalanced in favour of the education sectors and subsectors
- ✓ Data on take-up remain limited – there is no comprehensive monitoring system
- ✓ Validation arrangements use a combination of methods – this means that the use of standardized tools is not wide spread. At the same time, the four phases of validation (identification, documentation, assessment and certification, as for the 2012 Council Recommendation, see above) are used in all sectors but in different combinations
- ✓ Professionalism of staff involved in validation is still limited, and in many countries there are no mandatory requirements for staff.

Actually, the situation is strongly varied as there is still considerable diversity and fragmentation of practices, in terms of coordinating institutions (national and/or local), value of validation (to obtain part of qualifications,

² The Inventory can be found at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>

credits, exemptions) but most of all in terms of validation methods, especially in “neglected” sectors such as VET, adult education and labour market. For all these reasons, the survey ends saying that “decisive action is still required to meet the 2012 Council recommendation principles in a number of areas” (ibid.: 19).

Our proposal

Our proposal is about the of validation of competences acquired in informal and non formal learning, as well as acquired in previous learning (formal too).

The competences to be validated are those described in the Intellectual Output n. 3 and 4 and developed as Learning Outcomes in two supporting document of these guidelines. They are mainly transversal competences and soft skills, that can be equally learnt on the job, within a formal or non formal programme, or in a non formal environment. Even if they are divided into two different professional figures or roles within the company – employer and employee – they are very similar and they compose, from a slight different point of view, the same profile of Digital Workplace Expert.

The following table contains, first, the competences associated to the two target group profiles (employer/employee) and then summarizes the main competences associated to the Digital Workplace Expert. The latter are a synthesis of the first two ones.

EMPLOYERS		EMPLOYEE	
MODULES/COMPETENCE AREAS	COMEPETENCES	MODULES/COMPETENCE AREAS	COMEPETENCES
DIGITAL WORKPLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • technology • lifelong learning • personal attributes & trust building 	SELF-MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-knowledge • company knowledge • self-organization
WORKING TOGETHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problem solving & 	COMMUNICATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interaction

	decision making • written & verbal communication		management • information process • media management
DIGITAL WORKPLACE CULTURE	• entrepreneurial networking & marketing	TEAMWORK	• teamwork
INNOVATION	• creativity • time management	CHANGE MANAGEMENT & CREATIVE THINKING	• change management • creative thinking
COMPETENCES ASSOCIATED TO THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE EXPERT PROFILE			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SELF-MANAGEMENT • COMMUNICATION • TEAMWORK • CONFLICT PREVENTION AND SOLVING • CHANGE MANAGEMENT • CREATIVITY WITHIN A REMOTE/DIGITAL WORKING FRAMEWORK. 			

Our project includes a training programme focused on these competences. In this case validation can be the last part of the programme, conceived as the outcome of an a more or less traditional assessment phase.

But our target groups are employers on one side and employees on the other side. This means that we are dealing with adults in a working environment: therefore our reference sectors are adult education, VET and labour market, all together. Furthermore, as data and reports tell us (see above), they are the less standardized and homogeneous sectors in terms of policies, arrangements and methods applied.

So, our validation proposal it is at the crossroads of several dimensions of great intrinsic diversity: starting conditions, pre-requisites, learning environments or programmes, assessment and validation methods vary from one situation to another. In addition, in countries like Italy, where the coordinating institution is not centralized (it is at local level) administrative and operational support can be very difficult to obtain, so that the whole

procedure, from the preliminary design to the possible post-intervention follow up, is in charge of single organizations.

Taking into consideration all these aspects, the project validation process is based on the following principles:

- a. Flexibility of methods and tools, depending on the learning environment and prior knowledge/competences
- b. Personalization of approaches, depending on personal needs and constraints
- c. Open Badges, to enhance visibility and immediate recognition of competences.

The Certification Scheme

The variability of the initial conditions can be summarized by the following three possible scenarios:

1. TRAINING PROGRAMME

There is a group of people wishing to become expert in managing a digital workplace as employer or employee.

The training programme offered is articulated, according to project I.O. 3 and 4, into 4 modules. It can be developed in presence, online as a MOOC or in a blended modality, with a variable duration. Learners do not have previous knowledge and competences - otherwise they fall in the case 2 or 3. The assessment can be made in itinere and/or ex post, via one or more methods and tools:

- portfolios
- observations
- simulations
- interviews
- tests and examinations.

The assessment is mainly conducted by the trainer. If necessary/appropriate, a commission can be formed, including external experts.

The assessment is designed and developed starting from the definition of the learning objectives, corresponding to the learning outcomes as defined in the supporting documents. Learning outcomes develop the main contents of each of the four modules composing the training programmes of the project³. Depending on the concrete purposes of the training and on the existing constraints and resources available, the learning outcomes list can vary, for example excluding some of them while including some other new outcomes. Once the acquisition of the competences at issue has been assessed, their validation is made via the awarding of the project Open Badge (see below).

2. LITTLE SCALE TRAINING INTERVENTIONS (seminars, workshops, crash courses etc.) for people already in possession of some of the competences composing the profile of Digital Workplace Expert and therefore needing to get the certification - Open Badge.

This scenario is intermediate between the first and the third. With the first it shares the possibility to assess and validate, via a combination of methods, competences acquired during the training intervention. With the third it shares the possibility to assess and validate, via a combination of methods, the competences already acquired (see the following point).

3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND VALIDATION OF COMPETENCES ALREADY ACQUIRED

³ Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning.

Their description has been made following the matrix provided in ... and the indications provided in general by the 2nd generation of ECVET pilot projects (see e.g. <http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/ToolBox/ToolBoxList.aspx?id=23&type=2>)

In this case we have people already in possession of all the needed competences and wishing to see them recognized and made visible.

For the assessment, depending on single situations and on the available resources, one of more methods and tools can be adopted.

The Open Badge

What is an Open Badge? The idea of a badge is not new: think for example about badges given to scouts and put on their uniforms. The innovativeness of Open Badge is in their electronic format and in their recognizability.

An Open Badge is a digital reward which can be stored inside a student's 'digital backpack'. The badges can be achieved by completing tasks and goals set by an issuer, such as a learning provider (awarding badges for achieving soft skills) or a website (for completing an online task), basically anyone who wants to keep a user motivated and interested. The issuer creates the criteria needed for the user to achieve the badge. This is embedded inside the badge in the form of metadata, along with who issued the badge, when it was issued and an expiry date if relevant.

The Open Badges Infrastructure (OBI) - which is being developed by the non-profit Mozilla Foundation and shaped by an international community of developers - can be used to issue, display and earn the digital awards. If you want to look at some examples of badges in action a number of organisations, educational providers and communities such as NASA, the Clinton Global Initiative, De Paul University, DigitalMe and the City of Chicago are actually already using Open Badges to reward and recognise a variety of skills and achievements⁴.

About their visibility and portability, the Mozilla Foundation adds:

Organizations create and issue Open Badges for you to earn, enabling you to build up your own unique collection and share them across the web. Each badge you earn contains data about your skills and the issuing organization within a portable image file. This data can be viewed when you display and share your badges, helping people find out more about you.

You can share your badges in:

- Blogs, websites, ePortfolios, and professional networks

⁴ Ref.: JISC at <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/so-what-are-open-badges-28-aug-2013>

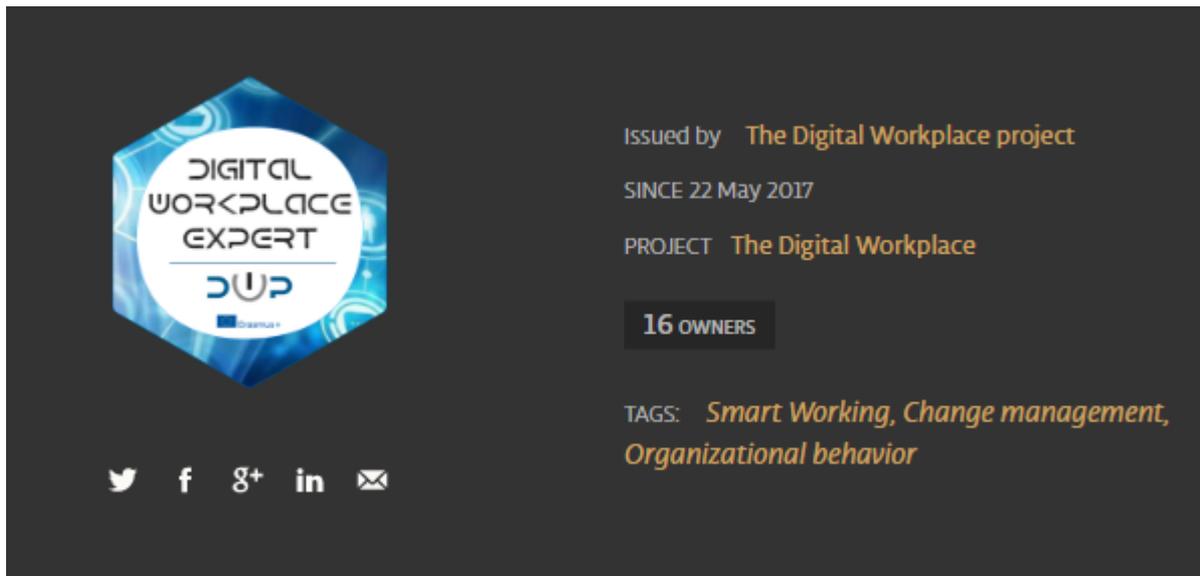
- Job applications
- Social media sites - Twitter, Google+, Facebook, LinkedIn
- Even in your email signature!⁵

Open badge are currently at the forefront of a global trend trying to find the most innovative and effective solutions for making immediately recognizable and readable competences acquired in a variety of forms – from university courses to non formal experiences. Their digital format allows them to be integrated, as described above, in a wide range of tools, both digital and paper-based, both on the job and if we are in search of a job, both in education and in training or in a non formal and informal environment. For all those characteristics, we thought that badges could be the best solution to prove the possession of a set of competences that can be acquired in diverse ways and times.

We chose the Italian Bestr platform to issue the badge, as it is the most relevant Italian badge issuer and it is connected to CINECA, the main Italian interuniversity consortium, giving the entire process an added value of reliability.

Together with the Bestr staff we created the badge and identified its main access and awarding criteria. The badge is the following.

⁵ Ref.: MOZILLA FOUNDATION at <https://openbadges.org/get-started/earning-badges/>



In its dedicated page there is the brief description of the entire award process. According to the Bestr standards of descriptions, competences are described as follows:

The owner of this Badge has demonstrated and strengthened the following ATTITUDES:

- self-management;
- communication;
- teamwork;
- conflict prevention and solving;
- change management;
- creativity within a remote/digital working framework.

The owner of this Badge has demonstrated to possess and master the following SOFT SKILL:

- communication;
- flexibility;
- responsibility;
- teamwork;
- work ethics.

While the badge design's cost has been covered by the project, the single award of a badge costs 5 euros each. The first badges – those for who attended the project training programme – have been paid by the project too, but all new badge issues will be in charge of the badge owner.

Other key information can be found at the following Bestr page:
<https://bestr.it/badge/show/451>.

Conclusions

This document is intended to provide some key information and indications for those who wish to validate their or others' competences related to the Digital Workplace profile. We provided some key scenario information about the general European framework and then described the certification (assessment and validation) process, as defined by "The Digital Workplace" project. Finally, we illustrated how the Open Badge awarding system works.

As previously highlighted, flexibility and personalization are core principles of this scheme. We tried to take into consideration the main different situations and conditions that can be faced, but other possibilities are possible as well. The scheme is structured so that it can be adapted, integrated and changed. In this respect, practitioners and organizations are free to use the indications the way they prefer. The only fixed points are those related to the awarding of the Open Badge, as it can be given only to those who do satisfy all the listed conditions.