



Digital Badges, Open Badges: what are they?

Introduction to digital badges or open badges

This guide has been prepared for an audience who may never have heard of digital or open badges. It will be followed up with more awareness-raising initiatives.

Badges are not a new phenomenon in learning. The Girl Guides and the Scout Association, and many other organisations, have used badges to reward achievement or to recognise skills development for many years.

To earn a badge the recipient has to meet a certain level of competence or demonstrate a specific attribute.

Digital badges are really just a simple extension of this philosophy into the digital age. Digital badges, rather than being physical artefacts that are handed out and then attached to clothing, are issued digitally and are designed to be displayed on the web.

The advantage that a digital badge has over a cloth badge is that a digital badge can contain a lot of additional information (called 'metadata'). This might include details of the organisation and individual who awarded the badge, the specific competences the learner has demonstrated, and even contain links to some of the learners' work to illustrate their competence.

So a digital badge becomes an online way for a learner to show evidence of their learning. The badge could be called a 'data-rich digital icon'.

This illustration captures the idea of how metadata can be embedded in a digital open badge.

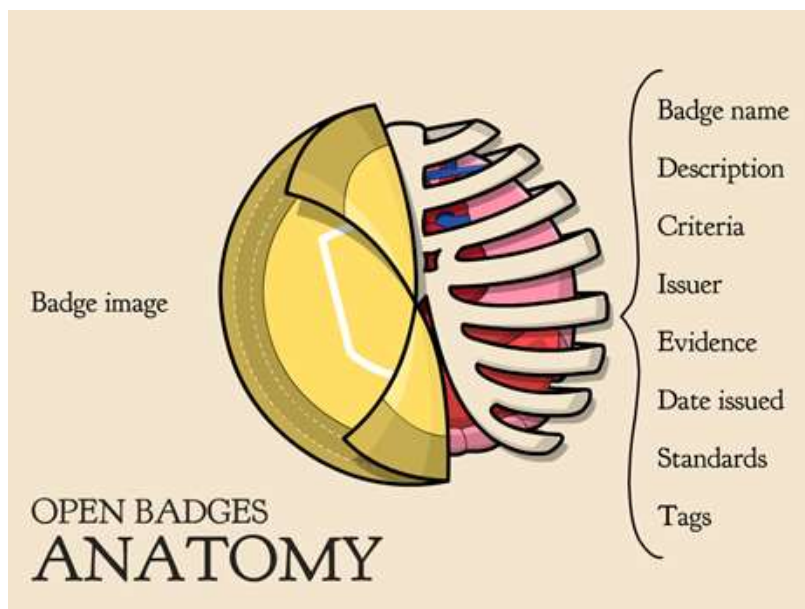


Figure 1: 'Badge Anatomy' by Class Hack. Creative Commons license CC BY-SA

The 'open' part of 'open badge' comes from the technology that has been used to support the creation of digital badges. The Mozilla Foundation has created some open-source systems that allow any organisation to build, design and issue an open digital badge. There is now an open community established around the initial products, and they are developing

the software further. The tools to build open digital badges are freely available to any individual or organisation. There are links to some of these in the reference section at the end of this document.

Badges could be suitable for everyone whatever their age or previous accomplishments. Badges can recognise and communicate an individual's skills and achievements and display them in online environments, such as a social media profile, in ways that may help with future career and education opportunities.

Employers, organisations, schools, colleges and universities could gain a richer picture of an individual's learning by exploring the metadata behind a badge.

The philosophy of open badges in the recognition of achievements sits well with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence.

In October 2013 the Scottish Qualifications Authority issued some guidance to colleges, community and work-based learning providers, encouraging them to consider the adoption of open badges. A number of colleges and work-based learning organisations in Scotland are now issuing and using badges, and a number of case studies are now available.

Institutions globally are seeing the potential benefits of issuing badges. These include NASA, the Girl Scouts, New York Education Authority, Khan Academy, Google News, MIT, Harvard University, the Open University, and City and Guilds.

Why think about using open badges?

- ◆ To recognise small steps in learning — smaller than SCQF — and/or steps towards a qualification.
- ◆ To create a culture of learning and achievement and support innovative ways of recognising learning and achievement.
- ◆ To motivate learners to come aboard and take advantage of the opportunities on offer.
- ◆ To build the confidence and self-esteem of current non-participants in learning.
- ◆ To support profiling of learners.
- ◆ To motivate staff to develop skills and accumulate learning which will improve practice.
- ◆ To be recognised as early adopter of new approaches.

What are the current challenges?

- ◆ To use a digital badge, a learner needs to have a digital place to put it. Not all learners, especially in early years and primary sectors, may have a suitable place to position an open digital badge.
- ◆ The technology is new and still undergoing development. In some cases, it demands a level of technical skill to design and build badges, or to create a badge-issuing system. However, there are a number of organisations who can support you through the process.
- ◆ While some large employers are pursuing their own badging schemes for staff development purposes, many employers still lack awareness and understanding of open badges.

Find out more

- ◆ JISC Regional Support Centre Scotland co-ordinating Scottish Open Badges Group; http://www.rsc-scotland.org/?page_id=3068
- ◆ The JISC Regional Support Centre have a range of case studies showing open badges in operation http://www.rsc-scotland.org/?page_id=2223
- ◆ Across the UK there is growing interest in badges <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/so-what-are-open-badges-28-aug-2013>.
- ◆ Mozilla Open Badges: <http://openbadges.org/>
- ◆ Mozilla Backpack: <https://backpack.openbadges.org/backpack>
- ◆ Badge Widget Hack (to display badges on a webpage): <http://badgewidgethack.org/>
- ◆ Badge issuing platforms http://wiki.badgealliance.org/index.php/Badge_Issuing_Platforms
- ◆ Badge platforms: <https://docs.google.com/a/umich.edu/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AsHml-k4XnX7dHJQSDBrdUphYlprc1N0N09KMzFzckE&usp=sharing#gid=0>
- ◆ The SQA Academy are building badges linked to General Teaching Council Teacher Standards.
- ◆ A template for thinking about badge design <http://www.digitalme.co.uk/badgecanvas/>
<http://www.digitalme.co.uk/assets/pdf/DigitalMe-Badge-Design-Canvas.pdf> A platform for building and awarding badges <https://credly.com/>
- ◆ Look out for further support from the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Scottish Government and Education Scotland, who are taking an active interest.
- ◆ Universities are looking at range of models; the Open University in Scotland are currently working in a specific initiative (see <http://oepscotland.org/>).
- ◆ There is a lot of interest from industry and businesses, who are using badging for their internal CPD.
- ◆ Look out for Digital Design days run by a range of agencies. These will raise awareness and understanding, and where required help folks figure out how to design, create, and issue badges.