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## IO3 - THE DIGITAL LEARNING ROUTE-SUITE

DIGITAL COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK, TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIAL,  
ASSESSMENT AND VALIDATION THROUGH THE OPEN BADGES

IO3-A4: VALIDATION OF THE DIGITAL COMPETENCES

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## 1. Background

During the three-year KA2 Strategic Partnership, partner organisations brought together the concept of Connected Learning with a series of digital tools, including digital badges. The product of this synergy was an online tool: an interactive and dynamic portal backed up by a mobile app which maps out learning opportunities for young people, showing both formal and non-formal / informal learning opportunities.

These diverse learning opportunities, both online and offline, are then recognised through the integration of the Open Badges framework to the Connected Learning platform.

The consortium worked to promote accessible, quality, digital youth work, through the mapping of connected learning routes across Europe, and used these innovative tools to reach out to marginalised young people. With the help of these tools, digital badges are issued for the completion of certain modules and tasks, and the improvement of the chosen competences.

Through the Connected Learning Map platform, young people can “navigate” through the learning opportunities, based on their needs, interests and passions across the wide spectrum of learning. Acting as a youth friendly way to present and deliver diverse learning content online and offline, and to engage young people in identifying their learning opportunities and their needs, interests and passions. All of this learning is then recognised through an integration of Open Badges.

The integration of the Open Badges framework allows:

- Learners to get recognition for the things they learn through the Connected Learning Platform,
- Educators to give recognition for the things they teach,
- For the skills gained to be verified through the framework and organisations involved,
- Holders to display their badges across the web, and indicate their competences and development.



## 2. About Open Badges

Digital Badges stand as a challenge and supplement to the dominant model of accrediting education through formal educational institutions.

Using digital tools to bring decentralisation and flexibility to accreditations, the digital badges ecosystem enables learners and educators to communicate skills and accomplishments, in the form of a digital badge issued to the learner.

*As an example of the ecosystem in action:*

A learner is building their Marketing competences, and is issued a series of badges after demonstrating a series of skills and accomplishments within the Marketing module on the Connected-Learning platform. Once they have been issued all the badges in the series, the educator issues a final badge indicating the educational accomplishment of the learner in that area.

The badges are then verified through the metadata attached to them, which links the badge to the educators issuing them. This enables the educators (be they a university, an NGO, or a school) to use their reputation as a means of accrediting the value of these badges.

Open Badges are digital representations of achievements or skills described the framework and outcomes of a learning procedure based on specific criteria. The Open Badges' system can be used as a virtual CV of skills and qualifications. The practice of development, issue, and use of badges is connected with gamification elements, as badges are seen as incentives towards positive behaviour and are influential pedagogical tools.

It is a technology which promotes open access and participation of all stakeholders involved in badges process, while allowing the creation of synergies between the learners, the issuers and the badge consumers. This will lead to the endorsement process leading to a transparent, transferable, valid and credible validation of a body of skills and knowledge related to a set of competences, such as coding skills for VET students and teachers.

Open Badges is a very inclusive solution: it enables anyone to get actively involved in designing, testing, implementing and promoting the learning outcomes and achievements. This is what major European documents on

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Recognition are calling for, as well as Erasmus+ in emphasizing the “transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications to facilitate learning, employability and labour mobility: priority will be given to actions promoting permeability across education, training and youth fields as well as the simplification and rationalisation of tools for transparency, validation and recognition of learning outcomes. This includes promoting innovative solutions for the recognition and validation of competences acquired through informal, non-formal, digital and open learning” (Horizontal Priorities).

Open Badge is a visual verified evidence of achievement. It has visual part (image) and meta-data, which is encoded in the image. Each digital badge must comply with the required standard data fields, such as: issuer, date of issue, description of the badge, link to assessment criteria, link to evidence of what badge owner is claiming, link to specific competence framework and tags, which puts an Open Badge in relation to specific context. Furthermore, the use of Open Badges could become an alternative certification system for skills and knowledge acquired in online, blended and other informal learning environments and systems.



### 3. Benefits of Open Badges

The following are some of the benefits of Open Badges:

1. Open badges can motivate employees to learn.
2. The badges work highly motivate a lot of people. Once they have earned one badge they want to earn another, and so forth.
3. Open badges can credential in-house training.
4. Open badges are visually pleasing and the learner can collect them in their online backpack and show them off on a website or blog – or their intranet profile.
5. Open badges are portable.
6. Currently, if you undertake training at one organisation and then leave to join another, you leave your completion records behind. However, when the badges were earned through that training, their openness and centralisation in the cloud means that you can continue to “wear” them when you move to your next employer.
7. Open badges are task oriented.
8. Open badges can recognise the execution of specific actions, and therefore the mastery of skills. That gives employers confidence in learners’ capability to perform on the job.
9. Open badges can formally recognise informal learning.
10. In a sense the vast majority of learning in the workplace is informal. Employees learn in all kinds of ways – from reading a newsfeed or watching a video clip, to playing with new software or chatting with colleagues over lunch. Badges come in and recognise these skills and make them official.

In addition, badges can also be shared:

- On blogs, websites, e-Portfolios, and professional networks
- In job applications
- On social media sites - Twitter, Google+, Facebook, LinkedIn
- In an e-mail signature



## 4. Key elements

Any individual or organization can create an Issuer profile and begin defining and issuing Open Badges. To issue Open Badges you need a technology platform that supports the Open Badges Specification.

The range of organizations and communities that issue the badges include:

- After-school programs
- Communities of practice
- Educational institutions
- Employers
- Event organizers
- Government agencies
- International credential assessment agencies
- Informal learning organizations
- Online courses and open courseware initiatives
- Professional associations
- Teachers, tutors, coaches
- Companies and groups focused on professional development (such as the CONNECTED LEARNING consortium)

## 5. Design of Open Badges

The process of creating a badge typically involves three tasks:

- Offering a learning or other experience (often with an associated assessment)
- Creating a badge to represent that experience within the Open Badges framework
- Awarding the badge on successful completion of badge criteria



Open Badges: Peeled by [Bryan Mathers](#)

## 6. Technical Aspects

The technical specifications of the Open Badges system define the meta data required for system interoperability. The main meta data are: name, description, criteria, publisher, proof, date of issue, specifications and labels. According to Klein (2013), “90% of the badges system is not visualized”. Visual representation of achievements is a core element for students’ motivation—hence the OBI system could play an important role towards that.



The Open Badges Ecosystem (Erik Knutson, Concentric Sky)

An earnable badge is defined as a badge class, using a variety of data items including descriptions, criteria and information about the issuing organization. When an issuer decides to award that badge to a specific earner, he or she creates a badge assertion. A badge assertion describes the data for an awarded badge. It includes the earner’s identity and a link to the generic badge class, which in turn is linked to information about the badge issuer. All the data for the badge is defined using JSON structures. To award a badge to an earner the issuer creates a badge assertion in JSON.

The image for a badge should be a square PNG (or SVG). The file size should be a maximum of 256KB and should not be smaller than 90 px square.

Things you can verify and explore in a badge:

- Details about the organization issuing the badge
- What the individual has done to earn the badge
- The criteria that the badge has been assessed against
- That the badge was issued to the expected recipient
- The badge earner’s unique evidence (optionally included)
- When the badge was issued and whether it expires

## 7. Open Badges for the Connected Learning Map

Accessible as both a website and a mobile app, the Connected Learning Map platform hosts courses and also sorts the courses based on topic, provider and locations. An individual can browse various seminars and training programmes (formal and non-formal learning), based on specific filters, such as language, subject and age, which are offered in various areas, by specific organisations.

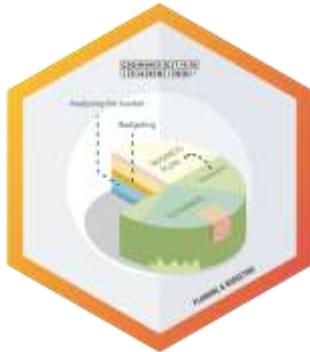
The Connected Learning project was developed to support young people by providing easy access to information regarding participation in various programmes, so they can develop their skills and enhance their employability. The project and the platform emphasises opportunities for young people with less opportunities, such as early school leavers, youth that live in remote areas, refugees, immigrants, people who speak another language, etc.

Through the Connected Learning Map platform, young people can “navigate” through the learning opportunities, based on their needs, interests and passions across the wide spectrum of learning. Acting as a youth friendly way to present and deliver diverse learning content online and offline, and to engage young people in identifying their learning opportunities and their needs, interests and passions. All of this learning is then recognised through an integration of Open Badges.

Below is depicted the system of Open Badges for the Connected Learning Map platform. Let’s take a look at each badge at the time.



## Budgeting



This badge indicates learners have a foundation in the principles of planning and budgeting a business.

Learners have an understanding of the **Basics of Budgeting**, and can employ this knowledge and skill set for starting-up new business and maintain stable finances. Learners can engage in Pre-Start-up Planning, including setting out a **Monthly and Annual Income Analysis**, and **Expected financial flow**. The skills of **Financial and human resources analysis** and the contents of Business Planning

(Description, Budgeting plan, SWOT, Strategy & Action plan: research of product/potential users/planning and managing) are also understood and able to be used within a social enterprise environment.

## Business Principles



This badge indicates that learners have explored the foundational principles of business, from its environment, to critically engaging with change.

→ **The Business Environment:** Learners understand the nuances of the environment in which a business operates. Both the external and internal environments can be assessed and the importance is understood of continuous scanning in these areas to anticipate potential changes.

→ **Business Strategy and Planning:** Learners recognise the importance of planning and setting

organisational goals, as fundamental components for the overall success of a business

→ **Organisational Structure and Design:** Learners understand the importance of organisation's structure being set on goal achievement

→ **Managing Change and Innovation:** Learners recognise the importance of innovation and how this is closely aligned with organisational change.

## Innovative Learning



This badge indicates learners have explored new approaches to thinking, learning and marketing, having engaged with the

- **Ideation - Design Thinking:** Learners can employ Design Thinking Skills, such as creativity, problem solving, self-confidence and collaboration, in an entrepreneurial setting. Further, participants can use these skills as a new way of approaching problems, where problems are visualised in a more holistic way and are tackled with an open problem solving process requiring critical thinking; creativity; divergent and convergent thinking; communication and presentation skills and visual storytelling.
- **Promotion - Branding in Social Media:** Learners can use the skills required for brand development on social media, enabling them to reach out to and engage with a vast audience. Learners are able to apply these skills in a social entrepreneurial setting, and can make good use of the social media to communicate their story and gather support for their initiatives in enabling social enterprises to market their “products”, but also in generating awareness about their cause.
- **Implementation - Digital Tool in Project Management:** Learners can take on the role of project manager for certain projects, having explored the various PM roles, such as strategic advisor, innovator, communicator, big thinker and versatile manager. Learners can use Digital Tools to aid their Project management, and can anticipate and plan around matrix organisations where many people are responsible for output, and managing a project.

## Marketing

This badge indicates the holder has an understanding of the multifaceted nature of marketing, how it can be strategised, and how it is valuable to a business in many ways.

- **Introduction to Marketing:** Learners comprehend that marketing doesn't only cover the sales act itself, but also many other areas. It addresses

consumer needs, product development, paths between the consumer and the Brand, creates campaigns and else.



→ **Critical success factors:** Learners can understand and undertake market research, why choosing the right target groups, how to create a unique value proposition and take a look at the reasons why branding is so important.

→ **The 8 P's of Marketing:** Learners can employ the 8 P's method, in order to determine product strategy and product portfolio (namely Product, Price, Placement, Promotion, People, Processes, Physical Evidence and Productivity).

→ **Developing our own Marketing strategy:**

Learners can build an elevator pitch, and break down what the different digital marketing channels are, how to create relationships with customers and last, but not least, finally start preparing their own marketing strategy.

## Soft Skills



This badge indicates that the holder has foundational soft-skills necessary for contemporary professional and educational life, such as the craft of rhetoric, planning personal development, and structuring personal learning.

→ **Rhetoric:** Learners have the capacity to critically engage with rhetoric and to evaluate the sender's meaning and will in the debate, and to participate in the rhetoric themselves. As well as developing the sub-skills of autonomous learning, working, and critical thinking.

→ **Personal Development:** Learners can draw up a targeted resume and personal letter. They can manage sleep and health to support study results and health, and they can collaborate in groups and act in social contexts.

→ **Learning & Development:** Learners can plan and structure learning, understand how to engage with academic literature and how notes should be taken at a lecture.

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## Thinking Ahead



This badge indicates the holder has the necessary knowledge and tools for domestic expansion of their business, for international expansion, and for operating a business sustainably.

- **Sustainability:** Learners have explored the multifaceted landscape of sustainability policy, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the three pillars of Sustainability, and the Circular economy, and can integrate the demands and opportunities of sustainability into their business operations.
- **Domestic Growth:** Learners have identified the need for a custom business plan, and can analyse the spaces for growth in their own unique context, and then capitalize on those opportunities.
- **Internationalisation:** Learners have a comprehension of internationalisation strategies, and the demands on capacity which internationalisation entails, and how to stop the opportunities for internationalisation through adopting a growth mindset.



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## 8. Badges Awarding Criteria

The Connected Learning Open Badges Ecosystem offers 6 badges in total. The criterion for earning the badges is the same for each module:

- to obtain the Budgeting badge the learner needs to complete the course and obtain 70% in the final assessment.
- to obtain the Business Principles badge the learner needs to complete the course and obtain 70% in the final assessment.
- to obtain the Innovative Learning badge the learner needs to complete the course and obtain 70% in the final assessment.
- to obtain the Marketing badge the learner needs to complete the course and obtain 70% in the final assessment.
- to obtain the Soft Skills badge the learner needs to complete the course and obtain 70% in the final assessment.
- to obtain the Thinking Ahead badge the learner needs to complete the course and obtain 70% in the final assessment.



## 9. eTwinning Network

The European eTwinning network is part of the Erasmus+ project and promotes the use of ICT and cooperation between European schools. This is evidenced by the strong participation of teachers in the action and the awards/distinctions of Greek schools at European level. The Hellenic National Support Service (HNSS) has organized eleven National eTwinning Contests (eTwinning,nd) in order to recognize the best eTwinning projects for Greek school units. The evaluation of the projects is based on the same criteria set for the European Awards by a committee of the members of the National Support Service (NSS).

The National Quality Label is awarded in eTwinning projects that have managed to reach a high level of quality by fulfilling a number of criteria set by the Central Support Service, in cooperation with the respective National Support Services of the action. The Quality Label is the tangible recognition for teachers, students and schools of the high level of eTwinning activities, offering a public affirmation of their commitment to quality and 'confidence' in European cooperation. The National Support Service evaluates teachers' requests for the National Quality Label.



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## References

1. Badgr: - <https://info.badgr.com/>
2. Connected Learning Map: <https://connectedlearningmap.com/map/>
3. Open Badges: <https://openbadges.org/>