Badges?!? We ain't got no stinkin badges!  

The art of creative education

A badge is a digital icon that indicates the knowledge or skills a person has acquired in a particular field. A badge contains metadata with links to information on acquired knowledge or skills as well as the underlying evidence and details of the body that issues the badge. Employers, educational institutions, professional organisations and other stakeholders can verify the claim online. They can therefore be sure that the claim made by the badgeholder (a student or professional who is undertaking further learning) is genuine. The student owns the badge and decides how and where on the web he wants to display it. By using an open framework, students can collect their badges in a ‘backpack’ (similar to an e-portfolio). They can then make their badges available to third parties.

Badges pave the way for a potentially radical change in education: the introduction of micro-credentials. At present, students who follow accredited higher education programmes obtain only a single formal confirmation of the knowledge and skills that they have acquired during the course of their studies, i.e. a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree. With micro-credentials, however, educational institutions break their programmes down into smaller units to which they link an assessment or recognition. They can offer these individual units not only to their own students, but also to other new target groups such as professionals and other lifelong learners.

What is the potential of badges and micro-credentials for higher education?

The use of badges and micro-credentials will allow the higher education sector to reach new target groups, particularly professionals. People in this target group often do not want to follow an entire degree programme, but only specific parts of it. They then want to be able to demonstrate that they have completed this additional learning.

For (potential) employers, badges help clarify the courses a person has completed: badges make the individual skills more transparent. Badges and micro-credentialing can also solve the barrier in student mobility by the recognition of credits, experience and qualifications between institutions. Finally, micro-credentials and badges help align formal and non-formal learning.

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1 A widely quoted paraphrase of a line of dialogue from the 1948 film *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*
What is the potential role of NRENs?
<preacher mode on> While technology influences education, education also influences technology. The NREN and all affiliated educational institutions are at the heart of this issue. This is why we must all work together to create an educational future that combines the best of technology and education. </preacher mode on>

During 2016 SURFnet investigated the subject of open badges and micro-credentialing and spoke with different stakeholders such as institutions, teachers, students, employers and government. The resulting whitepaper was published at the end of 2016. During 2017 we will continue the project by building a Proof of Concept badge infrastructure which institutions can use for issuing badges. Together we will explore and evaluate different possibilities and use cases in anticipation for potential service delivery of a national open badge delivery infrastructure. An interesting scenario would be if this development could lead to a pan-European open badge infrastructure used by GÉANT and its NREN partners, aimed at further accelerating the adoption of micro-credentialing by education institutions.

In this presentation we will focus and elaborate on the open badge Proof of Concept and would like to hear about similar initiatives to learn if there might be a common interest in building a pan-European open badge infrastructure.

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Keywords
Open Badges, Micro-credentialing, education, best practice, strategy, the art of creative education

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Author Biographies
Frans Ward is a Senior Technical Product Manager at SURFnet and has been responsible for innovation projects in the area of Trust and Identity, Service Delivery and Educational Services. The Open Badges and Micro-credentialing project is part of the SURF innovation programme 'Customised education'. Many education institutions are seeking to offer flexible and personalised education that matches the learning needs of individual students as closely as possible, and this programme aims to help them achieve their goal. Frans studied Business Information Technology at Rotterdam University. After working at the Erasmus University IT department for more than 12 years he joined SURFnet in 1999.

Alexander Blanc is Senior Product Manager at SURFnet. He studied Communication Science at the University of Amsterdam. After graduation Alexander joined the international secretariat of the Internet 1996 World Exposition. In the years that followed he took part in setting up an Internet production company, which, among many other projects, became partner of SURFnet on online video services. In 2004 Alexander joined SURFnet to become Product Manager of its online video services. From 2010 on Alexander is involved in many different projects and services concerning SURFnet’s Collaboration Infrastructure, Security, Privacy & Trust, and Educational Services.