EDUBADGES IN DUTCH HIGHER EDUCATION

BADGE PROCESS

VERIFY

BADGE ISSUER (EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION)

ISSUE

BADGE

BADGE CONSUMER (EMPLOYER OR OTHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION)

BADGE EARNER (STUDENT)

PUBLISH

BADGE

Badges are digital indicators (images) that prove the recipient possesses certain knowledge or skills. The image contains digital information about the issuer and value of the badge. This information cannot be copied or amended.

Digital badges are a new phenomenon in higher education. Badges are digital insignia that proves a student possesses certain knowledge or skills. The badge contains digital information about the issuer, such as a higher educational institution and the value of the reward (e.g. a specific skill). If higher education institutions can award badges for small educational components, to their students, this will contribute to more flexibility in the education system and to more transparency of a student's profile. Together with Dutch higher educational institutions, SURF is experimenting with an infrastructure for awarding digital edubadges to students.

SURF and edubadges

In 2015, SURF published a white paper 'Open badges and micro-credentials'. It explains the basic principles of micro-credentials, the breakdown of accredited education into units smaller than diplomas. SURF then developed a proof of concept (PoC) from September 2017 to May 2018. In this PoC nine institutions of higher education tested an infrastructure developed by SURF to create and award edubadges. It helped institutions to gain an overview of how the introduction of badges could work in practice. The conclusions of the PoC were published in a report.

Currently, SURF is running a pilot project with 13 institutions. This project uses an upgraded version of the – fully GDPR compliant – edubadges infrastructure containing new features requested by the institutions.

Experiences from pilot-participant Rotterdam School of Management

From the very beginning, Rotterdam School of Management (RSM), part of Erasmus University Rotterdam, has been involved in this project. Project leader Marijn van den Doel: "Sometimes an employer is looking for someone who possesses specific skills or certain knowledge. If the university is able to offer education in small components, certify those components separately and in a standardised manner, the student can make these visible in their profile when looking for a job. In this way, badges could lead to a better match between graduate and labour market."

In the medium term, Van den Doel expects that full-time higher education will become more flexible. "Ultimately, we may move towards a situation in which different institutions 'accept' each other's educational components, so that students can follow a few subjects here and a few subjects at other institutions in order to eventually receive their degree."

A great deal of coordination required

But there is still a long way to go. In the proof of concept, RSM discovered that even a small project with badges takes a lot of pioneering. Fifty students not only received their final degree, but were also awarded a digital badge for completing a Master of Science programme. "It turned out to be a challenge," says Van den Doel. "Partly because we already wanted to comply with the GDPR in 2017, a great deal of coordination was necessary: with the programme director and managers, the legal and privacy officers of the university and the faculty, the examination committee, the marketing and communications department and with SURF."

A second lesson learned is that the awareness of badges among students is still small. RSM set up a web page where participants in the proof of concept gave explicit consent for the use of their private data. There was also a need for a video tutorial about adding badges to a LinkedIn profile. "In the pilot we will inform students in an earlier stage," says Van den Doel. "And we will benefit from the fact that the framework of internal coordination we set up during the PoC is in place."

Accessible road

In the pilot, a new batch of students will receive badges for completing the Master's programme. Participants in a private RSM educational programme will receive badges for individual learning components, plus an additional badge for obtaining the entire programme. At other faculties of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, the interest in edubadges is growing. "Our society is more visually oriented than before," notes Van den Doel. "A website is no longer a piece of text these days. Badges do the same for learning. It is a visualisation of your skills, which you can easily share and which others can verify. In the future, we might get a lot less calls from employers asking if an applicant really studied with us.

Added value of edubadges

Edubadges provide added value as they enable the institutions to indicate a student's skill (whether as part of or outside the curriculum) in a more transparent manner. Edubadges make it possible to accurately describe exactly which learning objectives the student achieved and the skills they acquired as part of formal, informal and non-formal education. The information displayed on a Bachelor's or Master's certificate does not go into this much detail. Edubadges thus contribute added value to a student's profile.

More information

www.surf.nl/en/edubadges