disco VET
online badges & credentials

LESSONS LEARNT

Developing solutions for Digitally Signed Credentials and Open Badges in VET and Higher Education

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PROJECT COORDINATOR

Budapest University of Technology and Economics (Hungary)

PROJECT PARTNERS

Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania)

Ogre Technical School (Latvia)

Militos Consulting SA (Greece)

Innovation Training Center, S.L. (Spain)

Knowledge Innovation Centre LTD (Malta)

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Open and Digitalised Education

Challenges and transformations in knowledge and skills development and validation

Emerging dynamics in education, credentials, and validation of knowledge and skills: What transformations are taking place in the EU and worldwide educational eco-systems? What are the possible solutions?

Digital transformation, new and transversal skills and competences, mobility and globalisation. **Micro-credentials** is a novel but fast developing type of credentials in Europe and other parts of the world as a response to the fast changing skills needs of the labour market, as well as a possibility to recognize non-formal and informal, open learning across diverse social groups.

What different types of credentials exist?

As shown in the following figure, there are different types of credentials according to the type of settings (formal or non-formal), the type of recognition (educational, labour market), acquired competences (knowledge, skills, or attitudes) and level of achievement (participation, completion).

But what are educational credentials in the first place?

A credential, in its most essential form, is a documented statement awarded from one party to another describing the latter party's qualities. When referring to educational credentials, those are testimonials or certified documents showing that a person is entitled to credit, or has a right to exercise official power (Merrian-Webster Dictionary- Credential definition), as the holder has achieved certain learning outcomes and thus qualifies for specific function/position.

> The educational eco-system in the European Union and worldwide is undergoing vast transformations

EDUCATIONAL CREDENTIALS

| Credential	Formal Qualifications	Non-Formal Qualifications	Recognition of Skills	Records of Experience
Definition	awards at the end of a formal learning experience, after completion of an assessment	awards at the end of a non-formal educational course, certifying successful completion of the course	awards recognising a person has achieved specific defined skills, after an assessment	awards at recognising the completion of experience
Examples	degrees professional certifications	MOOC certificates (e.g. Certificate of Achievement, FutureLearning, Verified Certificate (edX))	language-proficiency exams recognition of non-formal learning	certificates of participation

Types of educational credentials (Camilleri, 2018)

And how do digital credentials and micro-credentials enter the discussion?

While educational credentials in their traditional form resulting from a formal learning experience (such as in a University or certified VET school or other formally accredited education provider) are the main "accepted currency" of knowledge and skills qualifications, **digital credentials have entered the field of education without being formally supported by a relevant education and training system at the institutional level**, as in the case of "traditional" credentials (degrees, diplomas, certifications etc. as provided by formal education actors).

Meanwhile Member States, social partners and other stakeholders have adopted a common reference to increase the transparency and comparability of qualifications despite the diverse structure of Europe's education and training systems. This resulted in the development of the **European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning - EQF** (European Commission, 2018) – a taxonomy and reference system for qualifications ranging from primary school to post-graduate degrees. One of the aims of the EQF was to contribute in the interrelationship between education, training, and employment; an aim which in the current discussion of digital credentials sounds more than relevant!

The correspondent proposal for a European approach in the case of micro-credentials was published only recently, in December 2020 (Higher education consultation group, 2020) promoting a holistic definition for micro-credentials and recommending the inclusion of micro-credentials within national qualification frameworks, and subsequent alignment with the EQF (as mentioned above).
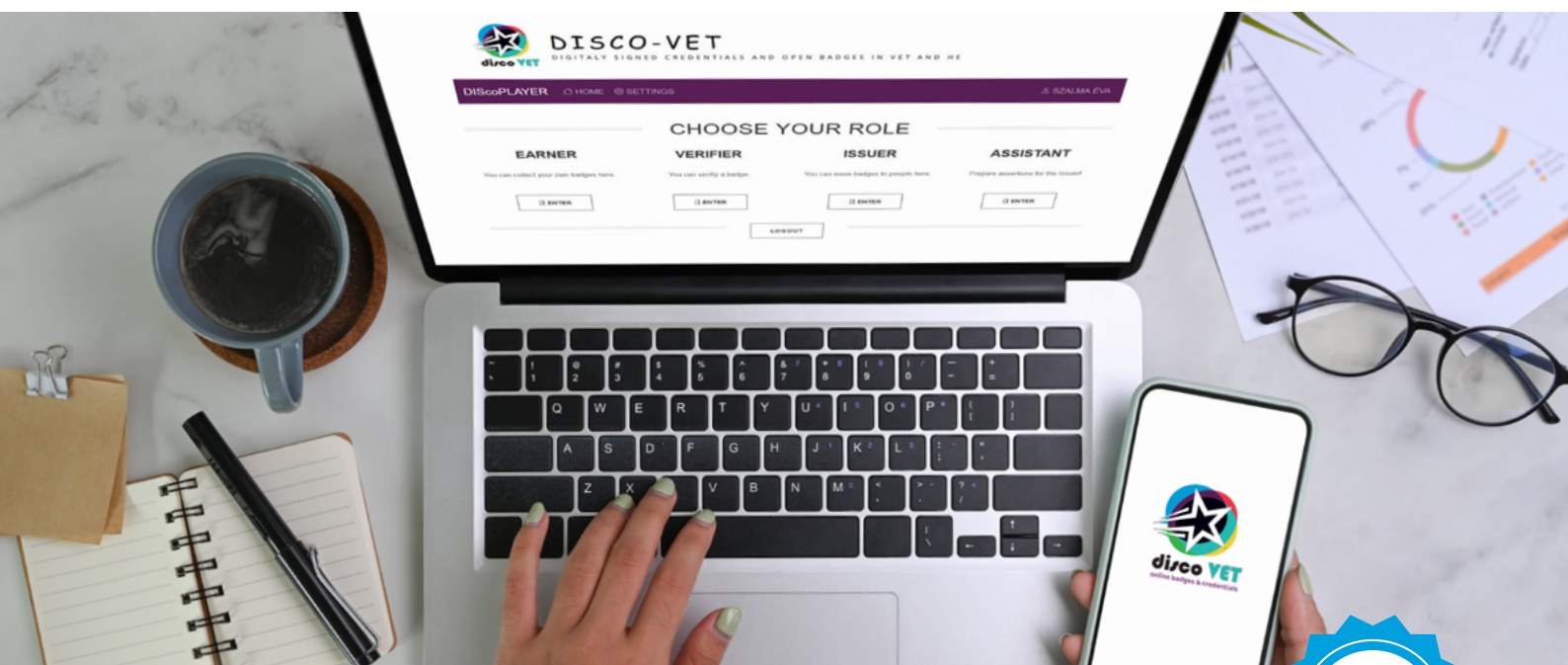
How The European Commission defines micro-credentials?

A proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards. The proof is contained in a certified document that lists the name of the holder, the achieved learning outcomes, the assessment method, the awarding body and, where applicable, the qualifications framework level and the credits gained. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared, are portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications. They are under-pinned by quality assurance following agreed standard.

Launching the European Digital Credentials Infrastructure (EDCI)

The EU has launched the EDCI (based on the existing Europass CV) to register micro-credentials as well as digital badges. Intense discussions take place to **create a unified system to recognize micro-credentials**. The European Commission appointed a consultation group "European Approach to Micro-credentials" which has produced its final report in the end of 2020 and different forefront innovation projects continue to work in creating an applicable and harmonized system to issue and uptake micro-credentials, including digital badges across the EU.

Where can you learn how to use EDCI as a learner (Earner) or organisation issuing digital certificates (Issuer)?

In the DISCO VET project we have developed informal online course about Open Badges and Digitally Signed Credentials. It will provide you with the knowledge and tools to familiarise yourself with this area, the theoretical context as well as easy to follow step-by-step guides to create, issue and manage your own digital badges and certificates on different platforms, including a detailed guide on EDCI.

> → Visit https://lms.discovet.eu to sign up to the course.
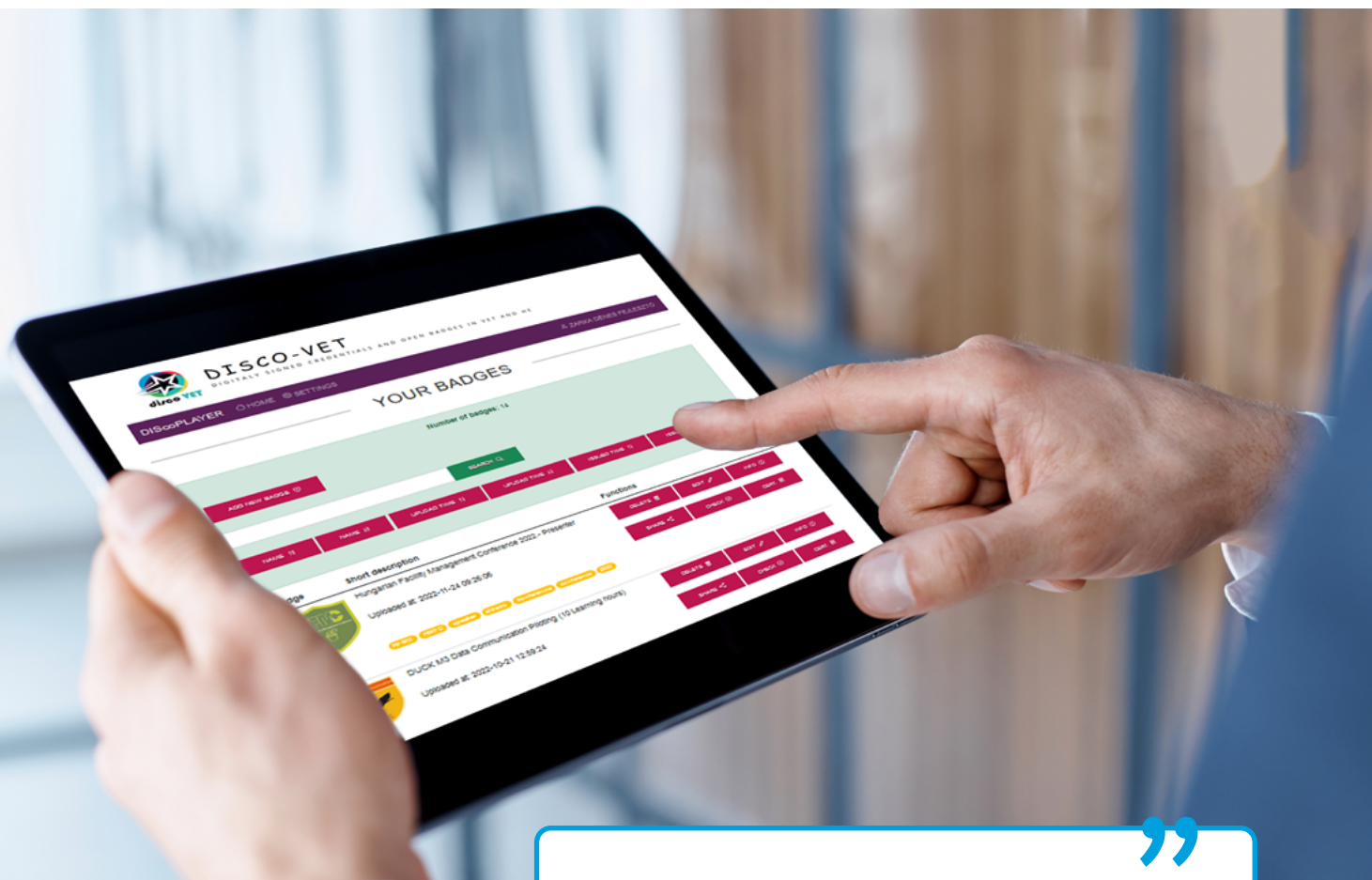
Echoing the changing labour-market needs in upskilling and reskilling beyond the qualifications acquired in the traditional, formal education system, the European Union is stressing that:

→ **EC - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion**

Flexible opportunities for learning and re-training (...) should be available at all times throughout a person's life and working career" while "innovative instruments like micro-credentials can facilitate flexible learning pathways and support workers on their job or during professional transitions.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

✓ The changing needs of the labour-market require constant updating of knowledge and skills, as well as the acquisition of new ones.

✓ The traditional education and qualification system in its institutional form cannot effectively respond to this need with the tools at hand.

✓ New, alternative pathways for acquiring and validating knowledge and skills – such as digital credentials and micro-credentials - support targeted, specialised, and customised learning and competence acquisition or development.

✓ Digital credentials and micro-credentials, having already gained a great momentum worldwide, lay at the center of discussions at EU level (across the educational sector, the labour-market community, citizens and professionals at large) , with respect to their formal recognition, as they facilitate the much sought after flexible learning pathways to support workers on their job or during professional transitions in a lifelong learning fashion.

Taking a cue from the above points, and also the short introduction into the dynamics, the discussion, the anticipated changes in the knowledge validation and credentialisation within the European Union, the educational world, and the labour-market, in the second instalment of the DiscoVET Lessons Learned Kit, we are delving into the demonstration of the specifics of the DiscoVET own **open-source sample displayer platform (repository), where educational providers and learners alike could collect (issue, earn, store, view) their badges** with more meaningful and comprehensive searching possibilities than internal repositories (like Moodle or Canvas), or third-party products (like Badgr) are offering now, as well as the introduction of the accompanying online course about all you need to know if you enter the world of digital credentials.

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