



**Peer review questionnaire of
Concept Paper on Quality Assurance of Credentials**

IO 1 – Activity 2

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The O1-A1 concept paper outlined the idea of a ‘quality’ credential, and proposed indicators by which to measure the quality of a credential in open education, based on criteria of transparency, ease-of-recognition and ease-of portability.

Upon the completion of the concept paper each partner has organized a peer-review of the concept paper with three experts in the field, whose feedback was collected in a standardized manner, using templates and direct comments on the paper using google docs.

The present report is the summary of the peer review exercises realized in O1-A2. It is to be used together with the document where direct comments on the indicators and concept used in the paper were made and which can be accessed using [this link](#) and it is also annexed to this report (Annex I. Concept paper on Quality Assurance of Credentials O1 – A1).

Based on the present peer review report a re-write of the O1-A1 Concept Paper has been taking place. Changes are made based on a detailed list of statements and proposals made by the experts. The list is attached to this report (Annex II. OEPass Concept Paper Peer Review results – compilation and ranking of feedback), the link to the working document can be accessed using [this link](#).

1. Overall assessment of the paper

Document Summary provided (with adequate synopsis of contents)

The document has a proper summary with given synopsis in its Introduction, however it could be improved by connecting the micro credentials topic with the concept of quality assurance of credentials, with a slightly bit more focus on introducing micro credentials, to have the rest stand on its own.

Majority of experts were satisfied with the summary provided in introduction, however they were unhappy about the mixed terminology between the peer-review questionnaire and the paper itself (summary-introduction) as well as in the paper itself (‘Sometimes “Report”, sometimes “paper” concept is used, sometimes “workshop” appears.’). The need for more background for the report was also pointed out and one expert did not understand the summary, especially the meaning of 1.3.

Other aspects mentioned:

- Some were missing a 1 page executive summary.
- Mismatch of table of contents and page numbers.

Objectives of Description of Work covered

The vast majority of responses stated that the objectives are covered but could be developed further:

- 2.3 list is not in total coherence with the delivery.
- The OER context needs to be interwoven more strongly and present in each section. Perhaps an expanded description of why the quality issue is particularly endemic to OERs and open content.

Issue was that once again the peer review questionnaire did not follow the report in terms of terminology. It caused confusion.

Work deliverable are adequately covered

The present inquiry was not clear hence negative answers were the majority:

- What do you mean by saying “adequately covered” (it is not enough clear)? Isn’t it the same as “Comprehensiveness is acceptable” and “Usability is acceptable”. I would recommend to clarify.
- Section 3 should cover all definitional terms – trust, scalability, credentials continuum, transparency, ease of recognition, and portability. Many readers will be novices related to open education, OERs, MOOCs, etc. Be clear and concise so anyone can understand your key elements.
- The purpose of 2.3 is unclear and its rework is missing. Also it lists 8 actions, none of which are developed.

Even positive reviews pointed out that it needs rework by adding practical references and going beyond broad details as well as adding final remarks to deliver a full arc of the presentation.

Quality of text is acceptable (organisation and structure; diagrams; readability)

Many deficiencies were pointed out with main emphasis being on thorough vetting of both the grammar and the content structure, diagram numbering and sourcing.

- Discrepancy between table of contents and actual structure. Thorough proof-reading required. Harmonisation of capitals and punctuation required throughout. E.g. EVIDENCED is the only term in capitals in the table, section 7.
- The individual parts do not always fit together completely and are not all found in the matrix at the end. Here we still have to think about how everything plays into each other.

- I would suggest unifying the concepts of this document: paper or report (Introduction part, 4 p.). I'd recommend taking a closer look to the diagrams. It would be beneficial to use a larger font and resolution in diagrams.
- Each chapter in itself is clear (although more smoothing of the text would help, as inclusion of references), but a guide to the reader for the flow of the chapters and its interdependences is missing
- Background is missing: What is quality of credentials; -Process of QA: How are the credential quality assured (who gathers data, who decides which value on attributes)

Comprehensiveness is acceptable (no missing sections; missing references; unexplained arguments)

The paper is comprehensive, the discussed credentials, state of the art definitions, the users, values and criteria for quality, standardization and technological aspects are discussed in deep details. However it was pointed out several times that references presented are quite limited and that there are a number of aspects where points need clarifying or assertions supported by reasons.

Detailed suggestions were also given:

- On page 4 and in total I lack some references and background to existing research (page 4: more exact, e.g. which literatures have you analyzed, etc...? Or is that how you want to proceed in the future to continue working?)
- Page 5: Figure 1: Here a reference would be helpful, or self invented/developed? I like working with examples.
- Page 6: Stakeholder analysis is important. Should be a bit more detailed (Personas/e.g. with Design Thinking). Also on that page it can be read that 'In the literature we find...' but with no reference to the literature is added.
- Page 8: Good list of criteria, but must be made more specific and operational (measurable)
- Sections 4 and 5 can be linked more directly to the OER context. Presently, the text could be referring to traditional higher education institutions.
- Section 2.3. needs to be further developed. It was quite understandable, but it would be good to use references, e.g. where was figure 1 derived from – literature or internal workshop?
- List of references on page 14 needs to be harmonised and detailed to enable the reader to find them. Suggest using APA rules and ensure references are actually cited in the text itself, otherwise they are 'Further reading'.
- Table in part 7 contains 19 elements, whereas the diagram on p.13 only contains 18. Missing from the table but included in the diagram = Recognisable.
- Missing from the diagram but included in the table = Widely-usable, Evidenced
- Background and basic literature missing. The higher the values, the fitter of purpose, this assumption is wrong. Not for every purpose all characteristics are needed.

Usability is acceptable (deliverable provides clear information in a form that is useful to the reader)

There are no explicitly negative answers but all reviewers pointed out parts that could be improved:

- Adding practical examples would be helpful.
- Information is in some cases clear, but background is missing. E.g. there is no rationale to judge completeness of the characteristics or on what criteria a characteristic is value or technical because of poor description of both categories
- Focus is fragmented: OER and open content should be made explicitly related to context clear and linked through each section.
- Section 2.3 is not clearly related to the previous ones
- Section 8 with the diagram on 'Levers to improve quality credentials' might need a bit of verbal explanation. In particular, the connections and interplay of the various components of the system. The logic of the relationships and links between object is not clear and what an arrow might mean in this context.
- Target audience(s) of the deliverable could be made more explicit.
- The chapters are not explained. For eg. it is unclear how the characteristics were elaborated (literature?)

The table format of the criteria was pointed out as very helpful.

2. General Comments & Feedback

Experts were given a short description on the extent they think the Concept Paper met the defined aim of measuring the quality of a credential in open education, based on criteria of transparency, ease-of-recognition and ease-of portability. Their answers are the following:

- The paper introduces proper and clear understanding of the concept. It meets the identified purposes and introduces the overall understanding of the concept. I think the Concept paper will be helpful for open education creating a standard format for describing open education and virtual mobility experiences in terms of ECTS.
- Different aspects of the quality of a credential were covered adequately.
- The paper outlined and well explained the idea of a 'quality' credential, and proposed indicators. The volume of paper 15 pages gave a good frame for the presentation the content. The credentials in open education are suitable for supporting the introduction of the OER in practical applications and to enhance trust among the stakeholders.
- The paper provides a synthesis of issues around credentials. Importantly, it gives a meaningful list of characteristics that influence the quality of credentials. The definitions of these characteristics are clear and help the reader to understand the suggested scheme of credentials. Additionally, the rubric with suggestions for standardisation and technology aspects is detailed enough.
- Terminology needs to be clear and defined. The paper assumes that the reader is an expert in open education/OERs/MOOCs and that is not the case. Educate the reader and you educate institutions about the importance and necessity of sustainable quality.
- The paper clearly reflects considerable thought and insights by its authors. Overall, it is definitely on the right track. Conversely, as in all process/procedural constructs embedded in theory and in this case linked to quality indicators, one must ask the pivotal question for practice which is how do we make the proposed indicators:
- The number of indicators is impressive and yet in practice will this be bureaucratically and procedurally unworkable? Although the authors mention 'minimally accept standards of quality' this needs to be considered more carefully. If we have to adapt all these indicators based on the type of credential this entire process could become very confusing and cumbersome. This is less a criticism than a realistic recognition that in practice things can get very complex very fast despite looking easily workable on paper.
- Criteria are redundant or not well explained. It is unclear who will gather, assign and interpret values of the characteristics. This needs to be explained in a QA process.

- The interdependence between characteristics are not explained. Also it is not explained how to combine values of characteristics to a value for overall quality.
- It would be clearer if the recommendations (or levers for improving credential quality, section 8) were explained in more detail rather than just in a diagram. Implications for different stakeholders might make this clearer for the reader.
- The aim of the paper was met only partly. Firstly this comes down to language. Your question here talks about 'measuring' the quality of a credential and yet the concept note focuses on 'assuring' the quality of a credential. Measurement suggests that it is the product that is being 'validated' while assurance suggests that it is the process by which the product was gained that is 'validated'. Secondly, you assume that most of the valuing a credential is a two way transaction and yet value is also assured by third parties and the earner may value the endorser's assurance more than the issuer's assurance. Thirdly, you need to be clearer about what is being covered in open education and by non-formal and formal education/training. Does this apply to a traditional 'open university' degree as well as statements of participation from an open online course? In other words what does open mean in this context? Lastly you just note three criteria in your question and yet you cover many more in the concept note. Further, while the technical characteristics/criteria are all reasonable and sound I am not so sure about the inherent value characteristics. Why should the credential only cover experience or skills in high demand and how is the latter measured? Is it a volume demand or a scarcity demand? And why does either influence actual or perceived quality? While issuer identity and reputations seem to rule out new issuers/credentials from ever being acceptable.
- The concept paper presents a sound approach to the topic. The basic definition of credentials presented is a bit generic and not backed in references. Some concepts need further development (ex: degree, consumers of credentials). Also, some other concepts should be included, as competences. In fact, micro credentials are mostly competence-based. This might have impact in the how the aim of the research is met. But, overall the concept paper meets the objectives.
- The building blocks are present, but as said before, details to judge its value are missing.

3. Suggestions to improve the paper

Some additional comments are listed here regarding the improvement of the Concept paper:

- According to the usability for consideration, I suggest that a few practical examples of the application could be helpful. The literature should include items that are publicly available and their contents are known. Numbering of the Content requires correction.
- The table of contents is not following exactly the chapter/subchapter format and is not refreshed for the final form of the paper.
- At “State of the art” definition, three credential types are described in text format, and there is five credential types defined in the diagram below. If character/word count limit allows, it would be better to shortly describe all five types to have a consequential description arc.
- The diagrams may need larger texts, e.g. both Credentials figures could have larger texts in the diagram boxes, as space would enable this for the sake of increasing readability. Also an import of vector graphic style would enable better readability.
- Literature: If there is a direct link to a material, it would be recommended to include it to every reference. Also it is recommended to highlight the access date of the link.
- Some parts of the text could be refined slightly to have better flow or stronger emphasis of the meaning:
 - (P6) "The question is, who are the "stakeholders", who will investigate and use the micro credentials in the light of their special point of view, interest and context?"
 - (P6) "as viewers and consumers can be considered aligning to a very similar principle"
 - (P8) "The more the credential is met by these quality characteristics, the higher the credential's fitness for purpose"
- The rubric in Section 7 should also provide a concrete example from HE setting and introduce the measurement procedure suggested by the paper. The diagram in Section 8 should also have a brief explanation in which the particular interplay and connects of the various elements and components of the ‘system’ are outlined.
- As many of the non-formal credentials will be skill-based the area of competency-based education may be useful for the group to review. CBE is predicated on establishing ‘minimum standards of performance’ that the individual must demonstrate to pass or earn a skill (e.g., micro-credential). It might be worth the time to at least do a cursory review of literature or talk with some CBE institutions about ‘lessons learned’ around this area. References: Western Governors University (USA); Open University UK.

- Linking it to the Portfolio concept currently in use today in education. Basically it is an aggregate documentation of all the credentials/skills/experiences of the individual. We have seen discussions around this relevant to the Bologna Process about portability of credentials across the EHEA. Perhaps linking quality to this 'CREDENTIAL PORTFOLIO' would be a nice addition to keeping quality front and centre in your work.
- TRANSFER OF CREDIT – ECTS: This is a critical issue given the current variability of OERs across the profession. Institutions today are very receptive to accepting formal degrees and certificates in terms of transfer credit, application to masters'/doctoral programmes, etc. Conversely, because open micro-credentials is new there is no track record for accepting these; and even more important standards for applying and awarding credit upon entry. The authors and partners can do the field a great service by advocating for dialogue on transfer-articulation now rather than later. In sum, the work here is impressive and vitally important. I applaud the work of the authors and partners to date.
- It would be worth to discuss possible relation credentials with ECTS as this is important due to recognition to formal university programmes.
- There is a fundamental problem with the definition on page 5 "From an OEPASS perspective, "Open Education Credentials" might be said to incorporate the first three types of credentials insofar as they are issued by an educational institution", as in the third type "Records of experience" you have included 'curriculum vitae' as an example, which does not fit this definition.
- The concepts of characteristics chosen, i.e. "immutable", "self-sovereign", "collectable", "secure", "stackable" and even "robust" are not adequately chosen, to my understanding, and not clear in their stand – by meaning. My recommendation would be to work on the concepts and also on their clarification statements – definitions, trying to be as user – friendly, as possible, instead of trying to be sophisticated. Clarity and simplicity would be preferred and appreciated by the users.
- The rhetorical question asking about shared values. Why have you distinguished those shared values for credentials: Identity, Trust, Transparency, and Stability. How you decided that those values are the most commonly shared values in relation to credentials? Also my recommendation would be to work on the concepts and definitions in order to make them clear and understandable, especially in part 5. Criteria for Quality.
- It would be good to use more references in the text and explain how the tables were pieced together, was it straight from the literature or were they derived by analysing workshop material, or something else?


- Write a real state of the art section and explain chapters and underlying concepts (Eg. Chapter 7 is only a diagram). Also include an explanation of the full QA approach and relate concepts to each other
- Providing a better diagrammatic representation(s) of the assumed/desired system of quality assurance. The existing diagram show no closing of reinforcing loops that indicates that quality assurance is an ongoing process or recognising value in credentials.
- The definitions need further improvement (ex: degree, consumer). The concept of competencies should be introduced in the paper as it is critical for the operationalisation of the scheme. In addition, references need to be extended both in number and variety.

Annex I.

**[Concept paper on Quality Assurance of Credentials
O1 – A1](#)**

Annex II.

**[OEPass Concept Paper Peer Review results –
compilation and ranking of feedback](#)**



Accreditation for online learning provides challenges for universities to accept and acknowledge learning as credited coursework. Awarding credit for different types of educational coursework disrupts higher education's traditional, formal educational processes for financial and educational accountability. The challenge for post-secondary institutions is to look at online learning opportunities through a lens of reform and innovation and equally, as an opportunity to increase higher education participation.

Within the framework of the OEPASS project, this publication intends to address these caveats by establishing a concept of a 'quality credential' whereby the quality of the certificate offered for an open educational experience is measured, based on factors such as the



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