Proposition of a Learning Passport

Recognition and crediting of micro-credentials

OEPASS

Authors

Mazar, Ildiko; Wiechmann, Svenja

Contributors

Ehrenreich, Jochen

Layout

Tara Drev

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The Oepass Consortium

Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg Heilbronn	DHBW	DE
Stifterverband	SV	DE
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Executive Summary

One of the main objectives of the Erasmus+ funded Open Education Passport (OEPass) project is to enhance transparency of quality credentials by creating a so-called Learning Passport, that documents the course design, learning activities and the assessment processes, that make up a credential.

This report presents the context and the process of the design, implementation and piloting of the Learning Passport, that aims to facilitate the evaluation and recognition of (micro-)credentials issued by European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The 1st draft of the Learning Passport can be found in the Annex, the final version is available online at https://oepass.eu/outputs/learningpassport/.

Key words: credential; learning passport; digitalisation; recognition; OEPass; Erasmus+

1 Introduction

The recognition and transfer of individual credits through ECTS was created for an era of physical mobility, and is optimised accordingly. EU recognition instruments, such as the diploma supplement and the EQF, support the award of qualifications in the areas of formal learning, and are supported by recognition procedures for non-formal and informal learning.

While these tools can be used to support open education and virtual mobility, a number of caveats exist to their use, including that:

- little to no guidance exists on how to document virtual mobility/open education experiences for the purposes of credit transfer;
- procedures for recognition of prior learning or of non-formal/informal learning do not scale to the massive numbers of students enrolling in open education programmes such as MOOCs;
- there is no European approach to recognising, transferring or scaling open education modules.

These problems are so pronounced, that many open education providers are creating parallel systems of credentials that are not even described in terms of ECTS – leading to a situation

where millions of students per year are enrolling in open courses offered by universities which do not necessarily award valid or recognised forms of credit.

OEPass intends to address these issues by creating a standard format for describing open education and virtual mobility experiences in terms of ECTS which:

- addresses common criticisms (lack of trust) of open education, in particular with respect to student assessment and identity;
- is scalable to hundreds or thousands of students through automatic issuing and verification of certificates;
- can capture a wide range of non-formal and formal open education experiences.

Enhance Transparency of Quality Credentials by creating a Learning Passport

By developing the Learning Passport, OEPass is proposing an instrument, utilising models and solutions already existing in the field of education, to transparently document important aspects of the learning experience, such as

- course design,
- learning activities undertaken by the learner, and
- assessment activities, which make up a credential.

This learning passport is intended to serve as a supplement to the credential and to facilitate its recognition by third parties. To this end, the OEPass partnership has been conducting a two-stage pilot to assess the tool's fitness for both purposes of *documenting* the background information on credentials issued by six Higher Education Institutions (stage 1), and their *recognition* (stage 2).

2 The Learnig Passport

2.1 Why a Learning Passport?

The purpose of the OEPass Learning Passport is to systematically collect a set of precisely defined data and information about open education experiences which were identified as

decisive factors for their recognition. The form's content is closely related to the ESCO classification of European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations.

The Learning Passport has been created by applying a composition formula for gained individual credits or modules, which are modelled on the European Diploma Supplement. The collected information about open education experiences are made up of a number of basic components OEPass identified as essential during desk research and piloting. One way of clustering these pieces of information is by their correspondence to one of three main actors/roles in the overall process of learning provision and assessment, as proposed by the OERTest project (2012) and as it is illustrated in the figure below:
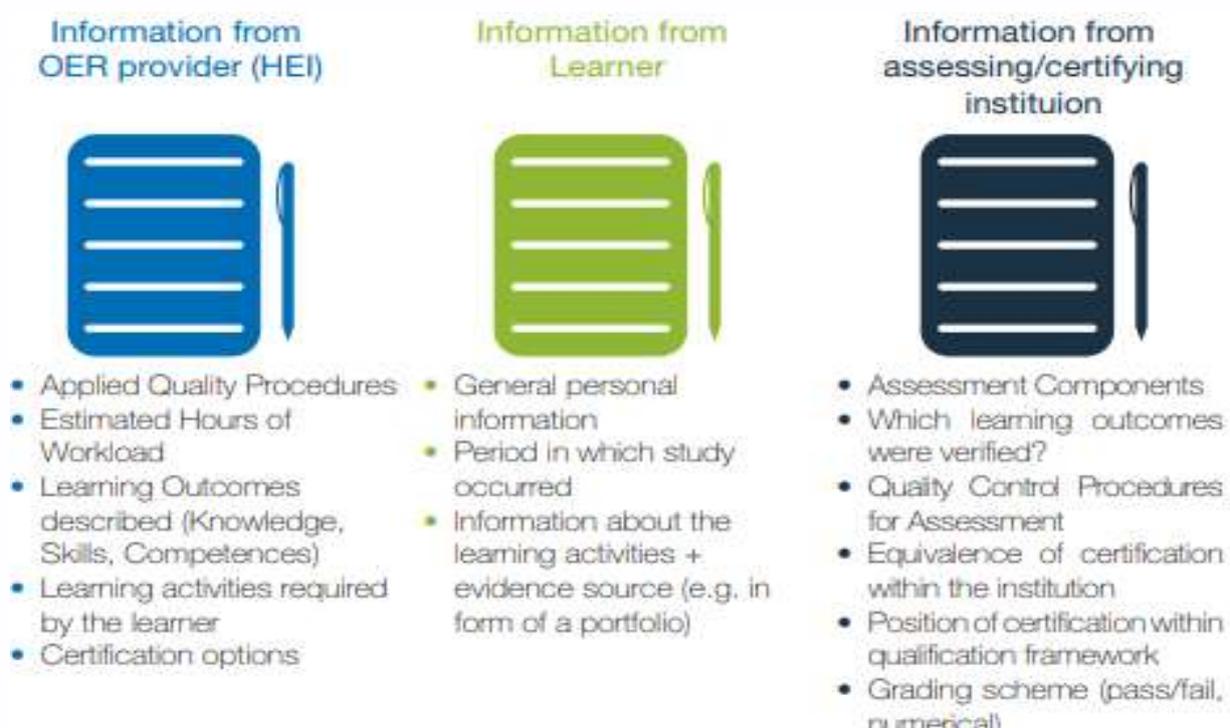
Information from OER provider (HEI)

- Applied Quality Procedures
- Estimated Hours of Workload
- Learning Outcomes described (Knowledge, Skills, Competences)
- Learning activities required by the learner
- Certification options

Information from Learner

- General personal information
- Period in which study occurred
- Information about the learning activities + evidence source (e.g. in form of a portfolio)

Information from assessing/certifying instituion

- Assessment Components
- Which learning outcomes were verified?
- Quality Control Procedures for Assessment
- Equivalence of certification within the institution
- Position of certification within qualification framework
- Grading scheme (pass/fail, numerical)

Figure 1 Outline of credential component clusters inspired by OERTest

The first cluster is the **information from the OER provider**, so a Higher Education Institution can identify and disclose, for example, the workload of a course in hours, the description of the learning outcomes and the learning activities required to be fulfilled by the learner.

The second one is the **learner information** that includes general personal information (name, date of birth, etc.), the period in which their learning took place and information about the actual learning activities completed by the learner.

The third cluster, the **information from the assessing/certifying institution**, contains components related to the assessment of the learning and describes the quality of the earned credential (e.g. certificate, credit, degree) and the grading scheme (pass/fail/scale) (Camilleri, 2012).

While the OERTest project provided an invaluable model and approach that OEPass could base its Learning Passport development on, we dug deeper into the learning provision and assessment scenarios and discovered alternative information sources and structures of data presentation that resulted in a more sophisticated, yet more user friendly tool. The OEPass Learning Passport, therefore, could be filled in by the institution offering the credential, with readily available information from – but without the active involvement of – the asessing/certifying institution.

The OEPass Learning Passport was consolidated and finalised following two stages of testing, with the aim that

- the passport is easy to fill in and
- the passport facilitates the recognition and transferability of non-traditional learning experiences.

2.2 1st Draft of the Learning Passport

This early version of our credential documentation template was intended to test with real education providers the extent to which their existing (micro-)qualifications can be transparently classified for subsequent recognition by third parties (i.e. by Higher Education Institutions and/or prospective employers).

The template was presented to various educational stakeholders and could be completed either by a real or a hypothetical course/learner in mind. The aim was to identify ambiguities and fields that were difficult to fill in, to simplify and clarify the further course of the project (see further reports on the OEPass project). Depending on the course, not all fields are mandatory or applicable, and certain information can only be determined with the help of administrators or the IT department, nevertheless the form provides a useful template for the detailed quallity description of a diverse range of credentials.

For the purposes of the OEPass Learning Passport piloting exercise, we defined a credential as a certification of a qualification.

Credential: An educational credential is a documented statement that acknowledges a person's learning outcomes or achievements.

Micro-Credential: Sub-unit of a credential (macro, meso, micro, etc.) that could accumulate into a larger credentials or be part of a portfolio. "*Badges and other forms of micro-credentials provide a way to recognize the acquisition of specific skills, as opposed to traditional degrees and other certifications, which cover full programs of academic study. These alternative kinds of credentials typically point to documentation of the specific skills learned. Micro-credentials are like mini-degrees in which you would complete an activity such as taking an online test, creating a presentation, or writing a report.*" (Association Trends, 2018; e-SLP project)

Qualification: 'Qualification' means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority or body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. Qualifications from part of the European Qualification Framework. e-SLP defines qualification as "*an official completion of a course or programme of courses; any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme. A certificate or degree is a qualification*".

The first publicly released draft of the OEPass Learning Passport (see Annex) has altered its structure and composition, compared to its OERTest ancestor, and got divided into five sections, gathering information about:

- the awarding body (1),
- the educational credential (2),
- the credential type (3),
- the holder of the educational credential and their accomplishment (4),
- and evidence (5).

(1) The information identifiying the **awarding body** consits of the following fields about the institution issuing the credential:

- full name,
- public key,
- adress,

- official stamp or seal,
- accreditation and homepage.

(2) The information indentifying the **education credential** is composed of the following criterias about the educational credential

- title,
- definition,
- learning outcome description,
- subject,
- ways to acquire,
- grading scheme,
- mode of study,
- volume of learning/workload,
- assessment method,
- EQF-level (non-applicable for qualifications which are not part of national qualifications framework),
- NQF level,
- number of credit points,
- accreditation of the credential,
- homepage.

(3) The information identifying the **credential type** is comprised of

- title,
- definition,
- provide value of credit,
- creditsystem issuer,
- potential existence of sub-components.

(4) The information identifying the **holder** of the educational credential and their accomplishment exists of the following fields:

- family name(s), given name(s),
- date of birth,
- student identification number, code or public key,
- grade,
- credits awarded,
- sub-credentials contained,
- unique identifier,
- supplementary evidence.

(5) The last point, **evidence**, consits of the following four information fields:

- release/publication date,
- (potential) update/modification date,
- change note,
- additional note.

2.3 Final Version of the Learning Passport

The feedback received from the six HEIs during the pilot's 1st stage was used to develop a couple of subsequent iterations of the Learning Passport. Besides the adjustment of the questions' order and the instructions and field content examples provided to respondents completing the original draft of the form, the most substantial change in the later iterations of the Learning Passport was its format. From accessibility point of view, and considering the wide variety of types, sizes and data content of open credentials, the documentation tool had to become more agile and dynamic. Accordingly, the Learning Passport was transformed into a user-friendly, responsive online form.

The second stage of the pilot tested whether the Learning Passport can provide transparent enough information to facilitate recognition and portability of non-traditional learning experiences. The pilot feedback helped us to conclude that our intention to deploy a highly standardised open credential documentation tool was perceived as useful by the piloters, while developing a data-driven, semi-automatable credential recognition aid was a much more difficult task. Ultimately the project consortium realised that these strands of work could be further widened and deepened based on the discoveries that

- controlled vocabularies (to some extent applied in the final version of the Learning Passport) can increase comparability of different types and sizes of credentials and
- credential (or prior learning) recognition processes are context sensitive and, as such, go beyond the data content of credentials.

These discoveries, however, were beyond the original scope of OEPass and became partial objectives of a legacy project, called ECCOE.

3 Conclusion

The Learning Passport was published online after being tested through two stages at https://oepass.eu/outputs/learningpassport/.

The first stage included the piloting of the first draft – that was a static word document – with six higher education institutions to exchange information, with the aim of determining the level of ease of completing the passport form with readily available information about programmes. The feedback from the first stage of piloting was fed back to the consortium, who made changes, improvements and clarifications in line with the input received.

The most substantial change in the final iteration of the Learning Passport was its format, i.e. it became a responsive online form.

The pilot feedback received during the second stage of the pilot proved that our highly standardised open credential documentation tool is useful from transparency and comparability poits of view, however the developement of a data-driven, semi-automatable credential recognition aid is more of a challenge.

In summary, the pilot activities concluded that:
- the open educational passport improves information provision about open educational credentials, and institutions find it feasible to documenting credentials using the format;
- from a perspective of accepting learning passports for the purpose of recognition, while they have the potential to improve the efficiency of recognition processes by streamlining information delivery, they can only facilitate recognition as part of a larger set of initiatives including recognition agreements between institutions and an overarching EU recognition framework for micro-credentialling.

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e-SLP project https://e-slp.eadtu.eu/

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5 Annex

Learning Passport Template Form

The purpose of the OEPass Learning Passport is to systematically collect a set of precisely defined data and information about open education experiences which were identified as decisive factors for their recognition. The form's content is closely related to the [ESCO classification](#) of European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations.

This draft template is intended to test with real education providers as to what extent their existing (micro-)qualifications can be transparently classified for subsequent recognition by third parties (i.e. by Higher Education Institutions and/or prospective employers). For the purposes of this piloting exercise, a credential is defined as a certification of a qualification.

You are kindly requested to fill in the form below to the best of your knowledge (for the piloting purpose you are free to issue the credential to a hypothetical learner) and identify any issues of unclarity, as well as fields that you may find more difficult to complete. Please bear in mind that not all fields are mandatory, or even applicable to some credentials, and you may need to retrieve some of the information from your institution's administration or IT department.

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1.   Information identifying the awarding body

1.1*   Provide the full name of the institution issuing the credential

Please note that this is the institution giving the recognition of the achievement and not necessarily the institution offering the learning experience.

| |
| |

1.2   Provide public key of the institution

| |
| |

1.3   Indicate address of the institution

<div style="border: 1px solid black; min-height: 140px;"></div>

1.4 Provide the official stamp or seal of the institution

This stamp/seal (often featuring the institution's official logo) provides authentication of the awarding body. Please specify whether there is only a physical version available or also a digital equivalent.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; min-height: 220px;"></div>

1.5 Accreditation of the institution

Information related to the accreditation, quality assurance and regulation of the institution, the date when the accreditation was formally approved, the review- and/or expiry date and additional information about the accreditation and used standards in the assessment and quality assurance procedure. (See a German example here: http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/index.php?id=akkreditierungsdaten&L=1)

<div style="border: 1px solid black; min-height: 240px;"></div>

1.6 Homepage:

The evidence (a public web document) of the currency/up-to-dateness of the institution's accreditation. There can be only one particular web page. (Here is a Finnish example from the Tampere University of Technology https://karvi.fi/publication/tampereen-teknillisen-yliopiston-auditointi-2014/)

<div style="border: 1px solid black; min-height: 80px;"></div>

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2. Information identifying the educational credential

2.1* Title

The exact and official title of the credential if available.

| |
| |

2.2 Definition

Short and abstract description of the qualification.

| |
| |

2.3 Learning outcome description

The full learning outcome description of the qualification.

| |
| |

2.4 Subject

This property indicates the thematic area/subject code (ISCED-F code) of the learning experience (See the ISCED list at http://www.ung.si/public/doc/mednarodni/ISCED_Code.pdf).

| |
| |

2.5* Ways to acquire

This property indicates whether the credential can be acquired by validation of a formal and/or non-formal learning process.

2.6* Grading Scheme

Description of the grading scheme, and what the grade means (e.g. a 0% to 100%, an A+ to F-, a 0 to 5 or 0 to 10 grade scale).

2.7* Mode of study

Online / Face to Face / Practice / Workplace / informal learning.

2.8 Volume of learning/Workload

Explain the official duration of the learning experience in weeks or years and the actual workload - that includes information on any major sub-components i.e. practical training - in real hours (i.e. 60 minutes, as opposed to academic hours that are 45 minutes). Preferably, the workload should be expressed in terms of total student effort required.

2.9* Assessment method

Description of the form of assessment (e.g. level of attendance, taking an exam on site, online exam, peer-assessment, evaluation of homework/project, etc.).

[ ]

2.10   EQF level (non-applicable for qualifications which are not part of national qualifications framework).

This property relates the qualification to the level as specified by the European Qualification Framework.

[ ]

2.11   NQF Level

This property relates the qualification to the National or Regional Qualification Framework level.

[ ]

2.12   Number of Credit Points

This property contains the credit points assigned to the credential, where applicable.

[ ]

2.13   Accreditation of the credential

Provide a link to the evidence of accreditation, or information related to the accreditation, quality assurance and regulation of a credential, such as the agent that was primarily responsible for the accreditation. Please also specify the date when the accreditation was formally approved, the review- and/or expiry date and additional information about the accreditation and used standards in the assessment and quality assurance of the credential.

[ ]

2.14 Homepage

The homepage (a public web document) of a credential. There can be only one credential that has a particular homepage (here is an illustrative example of a credential issues for a Lithuanian course titled "Innovations in Education" https://openstudies.vdu.lt/dalykai/socialiniai-mokslai/svietimo-inovacijos/).

3. Information identifying the credential type

3.1 Title

The exact and official title of the credential-type/credit-system (e.g. ECTS, degrees, etc.) if available

Filled in initially and if there is a new credential type.

3.2 Definition

Short and abstract description about the credential-type/credit-system.

3.3 Provide value of credit

Described in terms of hours, certificates, accomplishments or other measure used for the

credential-type/credit-system

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3.4   Creditsystem Issuer

Which organization / consortium / law regulates who can issue this credential-type/credit-system (e.g. Finnish National Agency for Education http://www.cimo.fi/)

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3.5   Can Consist of...

Which other credential-type/credit-system can be used to build this credential-type/credit-system

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4.   Information identifying the holder of the educational credential and their accomplishment

4.1   Family name(s)

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4.2   Given name(s)

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4.3   Date of birth

Day/Month/Year

4.4   Student identification number or code or public key

Provide a sample number if such code/key is available for all learners

4.5   Grade

Grade achieved (e.g. on a 0% to 100%, an A+ to F-, a 0 to 5 or 0 to 10 grade scale)

4.6   Credits awarded

Number of credits awarded

4.7   Sub-Credentials contained

Other credentials which may make up this credential, by ID number

4.8   Unique Identifier

Automatically generated for each credential

4.9   Supplementary evidence

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A public web document containing additional documentation about the credential awarded to the user, such as a diploma or certificate supplement, or a doctoral dissertation

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5. Evidence

5.1 Release/publication date

Date of formal publication. The date the credential was published and the metadata about the credential was made available.

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5.2 Update/modification date

Date when the credential was last updated since it was published (please note that this information is not applicable if the credential has not changed).

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5.3 Change note

A property to record information about fine grained changes of the credential.

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5.4 Additional note

A property to record any further information about a credential.This property contains a free-text.

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The **OEPass Learning Passport** was created by applying a composition formula for gained individual credits or modules, which are modelled on the European Diploma Supplement. It is important to highlight that when an institution is issuing an individual credential, they record information and data about:

- the **awarding body**, that is the institution giving the *recognition* of the achievement and not necessarily the institution offering the *learning experience*.
- the **credential**, a documented statement that acknowledges a person's learning outcomes or achievements. The term credential can be used to refer to a qualification, that is an official completion of a course or programme of courses (e.g. any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme). The Learning Passport allows the detailed and transparent documentation of sub-units of such credentials, i.e. micro-, meso-, mini-, etc. credentials, that could accumulate into larger credentials or be part of a portfolio. Each credential, therefore, has a thoroughly documented **credential type** that can be a degree or diploma on the top level of qualifications or ECTS, ECVET on micro-level.
- the **holder** of the educational credential and their individual accomplishment (this includes data about the learner's identity and the grade they achieved).
- the **evidence** of the achievement, both in terms of administration (i.e. publication date of the credential) and – optionally – outputs of the learning experience, such as published papers, essays, projects, etc., test results or links to public discussion fora.

Anybody is welcome to experiment with the Learning Passport and determine its usefulness by filling in the online form.

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