

# Badges – a new word in education

Pearson Learning – unit of the innovative educational company Pearson, which, in partnership with universities, professional organizations, secondary schools and public institutions engaged in the development and provision of interactive support programs, expanding and improving education and training of students to work.

Not so long ago the company released a report, "Open Badges for Higher Education" dedicated to the badges and their place in modern education.

Source: Pearson Learning.

According to the authors of the report, today's higher educational institutions thrown an unprecedented challenge: formal degree obtained by the graduate, gradually loses its significance for employers who pay close attention to the skills possessed by one or another bidder. Employers are looking for media specific skills that meet the needs of their business and who are often deprived of the bulk of graduates. That is why the last time parents, students and legislators are questioning the return on investment in higher education. Along with this, the market is flooded with online educational resources offer a convenient, affordable, less expensive (and sometimes free) courses. These resources do not always involve getting a degree, but they offer students to acquire specific skills required to successfully compete in the market.

However, education consists of electronic badges Open Badges, which are digital mini-diplomas issued by educational institutions and other organizations to participants at the end of the course. These icons can be placed in summary, on a personal website or social network profile.

Source: Open Badges for Higher Education.

Ironically, most of the schools badges are perceived as a serious threat to higher education. The authors of the report note:

Some supporters of the hype even began to assume that the icons showing the level of learning and skills acquired outside the classroom or even in the process of studying massive open online courses (MOOCs), will soon supplant diplomas and course credits (a kind of scoring in the Western education systems – ed.). There is an assumption that soon the value of the diplomas for employers will be significantly reduced and their attention will turn to a new certification system based on badges.

The report traces the idea that the threat of such a turn of events real: the pace of change in higher education is clearly accelerating, forcing companies to constantly change and adapt to new conditions.

According to the authors, in conditions, when the success and viability of each College and University is becoming more dependent on the success of their graduates in the workplace, should try to look at the icons from a different angle and see a lot of advantages for traditional institutions and alternative learning programs:

For higher education institutions that try to keep up with the times, you need to create a digital ecosystem of badges that reflects the stages of learning in College and developing the skills of students and provided by the universities with more opportunities. Proper use of the evaluation system based on badges gives you the ability to motivate, to unite, to guide the children and make transparent the learning process.

What is the system of Open Badges?

For many people, the word "badges" associated with the scout or other children's organizations in which certain performances were given special pads or logo. This idea is also connected with video games. The original implementation of the assessment system in the game is attributed to Microsoft, which introduced the Xbox 360 Gamerscore system in 2005. But the phrase "earning badges" entrenched in the popular vocabulary after the spread of a variety of mobile applications such as Foursquare, and online games such as Farmville, where the icons are actively used for different purposes.

Source: Foursquare.

Awards (same icons) have long existed in education and employment. Colleges give out diplomas that demonstrate successful completion of the course. In the government, industries and Commerce there is a system of certificates and licenses that demonstrate competence and mastery of specific skills.

But, as the authors of the report, the achievements in this context are not standardized, rarely digital and not suitable for wide dissemination. But, according to representatives of Pearson Learning, badges can solve these problems:

Safe, proven, suitable for use in the web-space metrics in the form of icons that contain the metadata producing organizations complement traditional certificates, and make them more transparent and easier to transport, distribution and validation.

But to fully realize the potential of ecosystems based on the use of icons, it is necessary to organize the conditions in which the interaction with the badges could be open – not private. That is why in late 2011, representatives of Mozilla, HASTAC and the MacArthur Foundation came together to create an open technical standard for any organization to create, issue, manage and verify digital badges.

In March 2013 they released the first version of the open standard certificate for online training software Open Badges Infrastructure. Standard Open Badges allows any person or organization to consider the icon (or icons) as the basis of certain achievements of their owner. Each icon

represents a digital image representation of the knowledge and skills of the owner of the icon. Open Badges uses the metadata attached to the image of the icon to provide additional information; every badge tells its own story about what it means, how it was earned and which organization issued it.

Source: Mozilla Open Badges.

#### **Metadata Open Badges include:**

- Some achievements that helped earn the badge, and the conditions in which people have demonstrated their competence;
- Qualification and reliability of the training provider or the organization that issued the badge;
- The relationship of badges with primary education;
- Verify the identity of the owner of the icon and the corresponding protected information about his qualifications, competence and skills.

Program participants Open Badges can share, save, merge, and include icons from other applications. The owner of the icon it is possible to use a kind of portfolio to organize their own achievements in various fields, their learning experiences and broadcast their qualifications to employers, professional networks, etc. the Badge can be revoked if it was issued by mistake or obtained by dishonest means.

Source: Mozilla.

According to the authors of the report, Open Badges can help solve some of the problems that emerged recently in the market of professional education. Here are some of them:

- Students often choose programs of degree without taking into account the demand for appropriate skills;
- Graduates have to constantly fight for the working place, they need to be able to describe your abilities so that interested employers;
- Colleges try to demonstrate to employers and the public the value of knowledge and skills that they develop in their graduates;
- Employers are doing everything to find the qualified candidates you can trust.

Web icons that identifieret knowledge and reflect the competencies that the graduate mastered during higher education, can serve as a connecting channel between the College and work place that will eliminate these problems, reduce costs and open new opportunities for obtaining certificates.

Source: Mozilla.

This begs the question: why? After all, the colleges already have their own confirmation system experience graduates: diploma. However, the report's authors believe that diplomas are much less opportunities than badges:

Of course, the degree and the diploma granted by an accredited College, command respect from employers and the public in General, but these tools also have significant limitations.

1. Diplomas lack transparency and granularity. That is, the same degree may be awarded to students who have completely different courses with different subjects and number of hours. The diplomas are reflected, not all the information about the student experience that gives employers understand what knowledge and skills graduates.
2. Assessment College are often subjective and do not always reflect the real picture of the quality of education and the actual competencies of the students. In the best case score of the subjects can give a General idea about the abilities of the student. Badges, based on the development of competencies that could effectively complement the picture obtained in the College assessments and to give more information to employers who are evaluating candidates.
3. For diplomas valued institutional reputation and not the relevance of the work. In the current system the value of education is directly related to the reputation of the institution. Today, graduates of elite colleges and universities extract the maximum benefit from the prestige of their educational institutions. However, not every graduate of these universities has a real advantage over a graduate of other schools in terms of proficiency in certain skills.
4. Diplomas reflect an incomplete picture. They have no information about the skills or knowledge acquired during education outside the classroom. Here we are talking about the fact that many students find a part time internship, attend additional courses or seminars, etc. moreover, extra-curricular activities associated with student's creativity, sports clubs or research work of the student also has no reflection in the diplomas.
5. New learning providers challenge the status quo of old. Today's students have more learning opportunities than students of other times. In addition to traditional education, they are available in a variety of MOOCs. Despite this, still not all of these courses are designed confirming the training certificates that would reflect the acquired student skills and would be useful for employers.
6. Traditional accreditation processes must evolve. Now if the accreditation organization does not appreciate the individual experience of students, and are based on contact hours, not taking into account the competence and other outcomes in the future such an approach simply will not work. Open Badges is a solution that allows any organization to issue badges and confirm the new experience of any other person. Transparency of criteria and the real proof will allow employers to better understand the data supplied.

7. Students are not able to control their qualification documents. Usually a person has a confirmation of acquired skills from several suppliers. But not everyone knows how to collect, classify and store similar documents.

Source: Wikimedia.

Of course, this is not the whole list of traditional certification systems and certification, but it clearly demonstrates that the development of a certain single solution to reflect achievement in different areas – the idea is very relevant. But this decision was popular and trust, it must be absolutely protected, as the authors of the report:

Rating system based on badges needs to address issues of identity, authentication and ongoing management icon set, that is, to be safe and proven ecosystem.

**To achieve this, it is necessary to control the following aspects:**

1. Enter the identity management. Any companies that will proceed to the issuing of digital badges, have to use the verification system of individuals receiving tokens, and to protect the integrity of the data.
2. Ongoing management of account information of the student. While many companies do not have the necessary resources to maintain the portfolio accounting records of each student, but in the future it will be a necessary component.
3. To ensure the relevance of the data. Set of badges over time, and organizations should follow a regular updating of data.
4. Employers should trust the validity of credentials provided by the candidate. Today to check on the competence of the candidate, employers assess his diploma, consider recommendations and review the other documents [english essay help online](#), but these procedures typically take a long time.
5. Security. As in other areas, the issue of the web badges need to care about data privacy. To protect your digital data, you need to constantly check and control which networks have access to them and who can view that data.

According to the authors of the report, the ecosystem Open Bages built in a secure manner and complies with all these requirements. But to get to the system access you need to meet certain requirements. While to access significant benefits is only accredited educational institutions, so it is easier just to join the Open Bages. The creators of the report believe that the transition to such a system of proficiency necessary to begin with the development of criteria for evaluating students, which now must include not only knowledge but also skills and experience:

When will identify specific outcomes of the course and developed a system for evaluating student progress, the student will know in advance what to expect from the course and what he must do to be closer to the targets of his career. Students, parents and employers can easily compare the results of their child with the requirements of employers and educational institutions will be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their training programs.

Source: Mozilla Open Badges.

According to representatives of Pearson Learning, the implementation of achievements associated with the introduction of a system of Open Badges, presents new opportunities for colleges and employers, for example, the creation of new partnerships and closer cooperation between organizations. The colleges, which will be introduced the system of badges will be able to control the process of obtaining the relevant skills students, and students can improve their employment prospects while still a College.

Other important advantages of the system of Open Badges is that the new system will be able to consider the skills that students gain in extracurricular activities (critical thinking, research, oral and written communication, cooperation, leadership, teamwork, etc.), as well as to develop students' responsibility. According to the creators of the report, the ecosystem Open Bages is not just a system of orderly web certificates. It is also a way of structuring the process of education. Students will have the opportunity to determine their learning goals within the broader curriculum, to witness the link between their achievements and displays them in the metadata icons. Thus, students will not only earn badges, they will get the necessary experience in the process of continuous learning:

Purchase icons that are a testimony of performance and in high school, becomes the basis on which students develop their capabilities throughout professional life.

Want to learn more about using badges in online learning? Read our article "Taxonomy of engagement" for MOOCs.

According to the materials: Pearson Learning.