



**Työväen Sivistysliitto TSL, Finland**

**Open badges valorise non-formally obtained skills**

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How does it work?

In today's working life, the continuous need for expanding one's knowledge to gain new skills and expertise is widely recognised. This lifelong need for upskilling and reskilling is also called continuous learning or constant learning. In 2012, the European Commission and the European Council issued a recommendation that EU countries make arrangements by 2018 that render it possible for anyone to get his or her non-formal and informal learning, skills, and competencies validated.

This goal has not been reached yet, but, for example, in Finland there is a serious aspiration to make non-formal and informal learning visible and to recognise, document, and validate workplace and daily-life learning. One means to this end is the open badges that were originally created for massive online courses 15–20 years ago.

Open badges can be used to certify participation in a course or training, to certify volunteer work, or to reward active participation or membership in a cause or process. Badges can also motivate someone to take part in training or to continue from a beginner- to an advanced-level course.

Open badges consist of an icon depicting the skills involved in some way and the following metadata: the name of the badge, a description and the criteria for it, issuer information, and the date of issuing.

The badge can be linked with the user's LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter account or CV. Open badges can also be used in conjunction with the Europass online CV service being developed by the European Commission and ESCO, which will match an employer and a job-seeker in accordance with the needs of the employer and the skills of the job-seeker.

In Finland, open badges have been issued by various NGOs, educational institutions, companies, and public-administration entities since 2013. The most widely used service for issuing badges is Open Badge Factory (<https://openbadgefactory.com>), used by TSL also, which uses open badges to validate the skills of the participants in its training courses. The development of issuing and use of open badges is co-ordinated by Badge Finland, a network that TSL is a part of.

The badges are digital but can be printed out. Written criteria for the issuing of the badges are attached to the badges. Open badges are 'up and coming' in Europe at the moment: their use at NGOs, companies, and education centres is spreading, as badges are an excellent way of showcasing and recognising informal learning achievements in a uniform way.

The organisation issuing open badges needs a membership in Open Badge Factory or any other digital service for open badge issuing. There is a monthly charge for the use of the platform. For



the recipients of a badge, the platform is free of charge, but they need to register as users. The user can collect badges from various organisations all in one place.

The digital icon for the open badge can be designed in visual design programs, InDesign or the like. The most important thing is a set of written criteria for the badge. Consider carefully what skills and competencies the recipient of the badge is expected to have after completing the training course or gaining the skills in another setting.

### **Catch Up with Work open badges:**

In the Catch Up with Work project, we trained tutors to lead peer groups for immigrants who wanted to enhance their employability, to apply for an adult-education place, or to look for work. The tutors we trained were issued one open badge after completing the training and another one when they had worked as a leader of a peer group. Initially, leading a peer group was volunteer work, but later we had the ability to pay hourly fees for the work.

The idea for the open badges was that the peer-group tutors could use them to showcase their tutoring skills and work experience when, for example, applying for a job or education.

The training of peer-group tutors is supplied in a non-formal training course provided by liberal adult education. To start with, we issued a written certificate of attendance for each participant in the peer tutors' training and a letter of reference when the person had tutored at least one peer group. The open badges were considered complementary to the certificate and the letter of reference. However, open badges could very well be used to replace these documents.

### **Open badge 1: The peer tutor training:**

The recipient of the open badge knows how to:

- act as a tutor in working-life-oriented peer groups for adult immigrants
- provide up-to-date information on Finnish working life, work culture, and education options
- design a plan and implementation for the peer-group activity

### **Open badge 2: Peer-group tutoring:**

The recipient of the open badge knows how to:

- apply the information and methods learned in the peer tutor training in practice
- autonomously design the plan for the peer-group activity and implement it in a goal-oriented way
- tutor working-life-oriented peer groups for adult immigrants
- motivate, activate, and empower the members of peer groups to apply for a job