DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

1. Title of the practice
- 'OPEN BADGES – USING MICRO-CREDENTIALS TO RECOGNISE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT' -

2. Organisation responsible for the practice
Scottish Social Services Council, United Kingdom

3. Contact person(s)

E-mail	policy@esn-eu.org

4. Summary of the practice

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) encourages informal learning among Scotland's 200,000 social services workers using Mozilla Open Badges awarded through the SSSC Open Badges platform.

Open Badges are micro-credentials. These are digital records of achievements and skills that can be linked to assessment and evidence. Learners can share and manage them online. The adoption of micro-credentials is part of SSSC's overall social services workforce learning and development strategy.

An Open Badge is an image that contains metadata about:
- what the badge is for;
- what you had to do to earn the badge;
- who awarded you the badge;
- links to evidence of the work you did to get the badge;
- the date you were awarded the badge and whether or not it will expire.

The initiative was implemented because the SSSC required a means to help workers recognise and gather evidence of their informal and continuous learning and development.

The SSSC produces free digital learning resources to help social service workers understand the needs of people who use services. These range from websites to tablet and smartphone apps covering topics like dementia and principles of care.

One issue with self-directed online and app-based learning is that learners do not receive any recognition when they work through and complete a resource. This changes with Open Badges. It enables the learner to prove they understand what they have learned and apply it in their work.

The SSSC has rolled out Open Badges for all of its tablet apps. In the near future, they will make it possible for organisations to issue badges to their own staff through the SSSC's badge system.

Open Badges allow the SSSC to help workers capture:

- their learning cycle – by splitting the cycle up into a series of badges;
- outcomes – how their learning is put into practice;
- their abilities, values, achievements and informal learning.

Main lessons learned:

- Open Badges move from novelty to utility when they include actual evidence from the learner about how they meet the badge criteria.
- Open Badges meet the need of the SSSC and its stakeholders in being able to provide recognition for informal learning and measure the impact of SSSC's learning resources.
- When shared by workers, Open Badges can help raise awareness of learning resources available to workers to help them meet the needs of people who use their service and encourage/help workers put their learning into practice.

5. National/regional/local context of the practice

The SSSC operates at the national level in Scotland and plans for the Open Badges to be rolled out across Scotland. The SSSC is responsible for registering the workforce and making sure that they meet the standards set out in the SSSC Codes of Practice. The SSSC's role is to raise standards of practice, strengthen and support social service workers and increase the protection of people who use services. This includes developing a confident and competent social service workforce.

6. Staff involved

Staff from the Learning and Development Department of the SSSC have been responsible for developing the Open Badges. They are in contact with employers to encourage them to use the Open Badges and provide advice on how to use the Badges to their full potential.

7. Target group

The target audience for SSSC Open Badges is the 203,200 people working in social services across Scotland. This workforce includes social care workers, social workers, social work students and early years workers. They work across a range of care services in residential and day centres, community facilities and in people's homes.

8. Aims of the practice

For the social services workforce, the Open Badges:
• provide recognition for otherwise unrecognised learning
• collect evidence of learning 'as you go'
• demonstrate commitment to continuous learning
• can be shared through social media
• back up claims made on their CV, application form or at a job interview. Open

Badges allow the SSSC to:

• gather evidence about the impact of its learning materials and events;
• encourage learners to undertake activities outside of the formal learning Experience;
• support retention of learning/remediation;
• encourage people to create positive learning habits; • encourage positive cultures within organisations.

Open Badges also provide free marketing for the SSSC's learning resources. When a learner shares one, the SSSC's brand, website and subject are promoted.

Our work with Open Badges will:

- reward workers for using the SSC's digital learning resources and taking part in events;

- help workers recognise and record their informal and self-directed learning;

- gather information to assess the impact of the SSSC's learning resources against stages one to three of the Kirkpatrick evaluation model.

This helps to meet one of the SSSC's strategic outcomes: "The SSSC's resources, products and activities support the development of the workforce and increase its capacity and capability" by delivering recognition to social service workers for learning that is otherwise unrecognised.

9. Issues for social services

Service Integration/ Cooperation across Services		Service Planning		Contracting	
Technology	x	Skills development (of the workforce)	x	Quality of services	
Prevention and rehabilitation		Participation of service users		Volunteering	

ANALYSIS OF THE PRACTICE

10. Status

Pilot project (ongoing)		Project (ongoing)		Implemented practice (restricted areas)	x
Pilot project (terminated)		Project (terminated)		Widely spread practice/rolled out	

11. Scope of the practice
Describe the setting of the practice, considering the following criteria:
- *Micro-level practice: a practice that involves individuals at the local level*
- *Meso-level practice: a practice that involves organisations or communities*
- *Macro level practice: a practice that involves large population groups*

Meso-level practice: SSSC's work with Open Badges is ongoing and involves a wide range of social service employers, workers and public sector peers. As an example, the SSSC is working with a large private care provider to help them issue Open Badges to staff who attend workshops on leadership, innovation and technology that enables people who use services to stay in their own homes longer.

12. Leadership and management of the practice
Description of the leadership of the practice, considering the following criteria:

- *Collaborative management*: shared between large partnerships, often of central, regional and local representation
- *Organisational management*: by one organisation
- *Professional management*: managed by a single person
- *Shared management*: shared with no defined leadership

Organisational management: by the SSSC

In 2014/15, the SSSC piloted awarding badges for selected events and learning resources using freely available software. Most of the information available on the internet about badges was not applicable to continuous professional development within social services. Therefore, the SSSC built a badge website to explain what they were and help learners understand how they can use them.

The pilot identified several technical obstacles to the adoption of Open Badges in the sector, and it became clear that we needed to build a custom platform to help overcome these. In 2015/16, the SSSC commissioned the development of an easy-to-use website through which we can award badges and individuals can view and manage badges awarded to them: http://badges.sssc.uk.com.

SSSC officers provide interested organisations within the sector with hands-on advice about badges and how they can exploit their full potential. The SSSC is viewed by the sector and other public bodies as a Scottish leader in terms of Open Badges and micro-credentials.

13. Engaging stakeholders in the practice
Description of the engagement of stakeholders, considering the following criteria:

- *Individual practice*: individuals have sought practice change
- *Network approach*: one or more organisations develop a network
- *Collaborative approach*: large collaboration with relevant stakeholders

Employers and social service workers are encouraged to submit ideas for new SSSC Open Badges. The SSSC is working with five employers in the sector to pilot Open Badges within their organisations and providing the technical platform they require to do this.

Once the concept of badges becomes more familiar within these organisations, the next step will be to involve people who use services in the design of new badges. This will allow people who use services and their carers to identify the abilities, attributes and values (beyond formal qualifications) they want workers to be able to evidence.

14. Involvement of service users and their families

Description of the involvement of service users, considering the following criteria:

- *Team involvement: service users and carers were part of the practice team*
- *Consultative: a consultative body of users was set up for an ongoing dialogue and feedback • Involvement in care: person-centred approaches to care/support*

At this stage in the programme, the SSSC is still laying the foundations that will allow people who use services to provide direct input into the design and delivery of Open Badges and micro-credentials. We are doing this by working with employers to put the required technology, knowledge and processes into place at a local level.

15. Costs and resources needed for implementation

Description of how the practice is financed, considering the following criteria:

- *Within existing resources: staff time and other resources are provided 'in-house'*
- *Staffing costs: costs for staff investment*
- *Joint/Pooled budgets: two or more agencies pool budgets to fund services*
- *Funded project: external investment*

Year one 2014/15	GBP 1500	Setup of Open Badges pilot, scope interest, and identify opportunities/challenges. Printing of postcards to promote badges.
Year two 2015/16	GBP 35,000	Commission of a custom-built Open Badges platform and a short video to explain badges.
Year three 2016/17	GBP 21,000	Enhancements to the platform asked for by stakeholders and to continue to stick to emerging best practices for badges use.

The projected cost for year four is £10,000 to apply further enhancements.

Subsequent year's costs fall to £1,500 per annum for hosting and maintenance. One Learning and Development Adviser has spent a third of their time working on the project since 2014/15 at an estimated salary cost of £50,000 to date.

Several training sessions were held within the SSSC to help the Learning and Development Department exploit Open Badges to their potential. SSSC officers are now working with employers in the sector to help them do the same. Webinars, presentations, papers, briefing sheets and blog posts are routinely delivered to help workers, employers and others make the best use of Open Badges.

16. Evaluation approaches
Description of the evaluation method of the practice, considering the following criteria: • *Multi-method:* use of both a qualitative and a quantitative approach   • *Single method: a* qualitative or quantitative approach   • *Audit:* looks at data sources such as existing medical records and/or other routinely collected service data.   • *Informal:* refers to in-house service evaluation using locally designed tools and/or collecting opportunistic feedback   • *No evaluation*   • *An evaluation is planned*

Informal: Ongoing evaluation takes place through feedback during meetings with stakeholders and the evidence submitted within badge applications. Formal surveys of people using the Open Badges platform will begin in 2017.

A reflective account is provided by the learner when they apply for a Badge using the SSSC Open Badges platform. These accounts are then visible to relevant officers within the SSSC or a pilot organisation who is responsible for facilitating the learning experience. Learners can share their badges online, and anyone they show their badge will be able to see their reflective account, e.g., managers, future employers etc. These reflective accounts can also be useful for reflecting on how a learning resource can influence practice.

The data is analysed by the SSSC officers responsible for providing the learning experience or by the worker's employer if the employer is one of the organisations piloting the Open Badges platform.

17. **Measurable** effects of the practice and what it has achieved for…

Service users	n. a.

Formal caregivers	Formal care givers are able to get recognition for their informal learning and better evidence of their abilities, skills and attributes.
Informal carers	Informal caregivers are able to apply for the SSSC's badges in the same way as formal caregivers. Providing recognition of the transferable skills, values and abilities they have.
Organisations	n. a.
Other	n. a.

18. **Anticipated or 'aspirational'** effects of the practice and what it has achieved for…

This category can include outcomes which are not documented, quantified or properly evaluated. They can include such elements as improved knowledge, quality, workforce, etc.

Service users	People who use services will soon be able to work with employers and workers to create badges based on the values and attributes they would like people who work with them to be able to demonstrate.
Formal caregivers	n. a.
Informal carers	n. a.
Organisations	Organisations are starting to be able to see what their workers are learning from resources produced by the SSSC. They will soon be able to use Open Badges to encourage learning cultures within their own organisations and target specific topics or values.
Other	n. a.

19. How the practice has changed the way the service is provided (lessons learned)

What worked well:

- Early research by the SSSC showed that badges move from novelty to utility when you integrate the learner's unique experience. With this in mind, the SSSC built a badge platform where learners can receive badges in return for short reflective accounts of their own learning.

What did not work well:

- Initial challenges included social service workers' and employers' limited awareness of badges and the lack of a suitable technical solution to deliver badges the way the SSSC intended. Current challenges include scaling up the delivery of badges to 200,000 workers. The SSSC is working in collaboration with employers in the sector so they can eventually award SSSC badges on the SSSC's behalf and raise awareness.

20. Sustainability of the practice

Description of whether the practice is sustainable, considering the following criteria:

- *Potential for sustainability: practice was newly started or is ongoing/not yet mainstreamed. How could the practice be sustained (in terms of resources)?*

- *Organic sustainability: service users have been empowered to take the practice forward •*
  Established: the project has been operational for several years

Established: The Open Badges website, where badges can be awarded and managed, was commissioned in 2015/16. As of March 2017, nearly 800 badges have been awarded, and over 100 different badges are available for employees to attain. Interest in Open Badges within the social services sector in Scotland is very high, with demand for advice exceeding the SSSC's current ability to provide it.

21. Transferability of the practice

Description of whether the practice has been transferred, considering the following criteria:

- *Transferred:* transfer to other regions, countries, service user groups, etc.
- *Potential for transferability:* there is interest from the outside; elements of the practice have been taken up and used elsewhere; material for transferability (for ex. training material) has been developed

Transferred: In Scotland, Open Badges are being explored and implemented within higher and further education institutions as well as within social services the SSSC is working with. The Scottish Qualifications Authority, the Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland are encouraging the adoption of badges by organisations, institutions and the public sector.

Learners own their Open Badges and can take them with them when they move from education and from employer to employer. This allows learners and workers to build up a full picture of their learning and development over a wide period of time. The advantages for an individual, combined with the benefits of using Open Badges from the organisation's point of view, are driving their adoption.

All material published by the SSSC about Open Badges is released in a Creative Commons Attribution license which allows the Open Badges to be adopted by others, and we know that other organisations are using this to help them get started.

22. Further information

The SSSC Open Badges platform is available at: https://badges.sssc.uk.com

The SSSC's approach to Open Badges features as a case study in chapter 11 of Foundation of Digital Badges and Micro-Credentials (Springer Publishing). The author called it 'one of the most mature programs in workplace badging at this time.'