



Badging the ULMS Graduate:

Recognition of Employability Skills through Digital Badging at the University of Liverpool Management School

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Digital badges are visual representations of an individuals' skills or achievements, taking inspiration from the Scouts, online communities and computer games to 'gamify' learning and drive engagement. Since Mozilla's 2011 'Open Badge' platform they have been heavily used by the private sector, and there is increasing evidence that they can have a positive impact within formal education as a source of motivation outside of assessment (see systematic review by Roy & Clark 2018). In addition badges can be an aid to gaining employment, for example by sharing badges on LinkedIn it gives recruiters tangible evidence of skills (Gibson et al. 2015). It appears that universities are at an early stage of considering where digital badging and micro-credentials fits within provision. Here we present a pilot that we undertook to explore the technology, beginning to think and articulate about how this tool can be used as a business school.

Rationale

In 2018 the University of Liverpool Management School received funding to explore the use of digital badges as a tool to help our students to visualise the skills and experience that they develop beyond the final grade.

Our vision was to use badges to reinforce the schools 'ULMS Graduate' concept, 11 graduates attributes that are aligned to employability skills such as those identified by the Institute of Student Employers.

We engaged with a range of stakeholders, identified applications, secured access to a digital badge platform, commissioned graphic design, and worked with staff and students on a pilot module.



Description of the system

'Open' digital badges require an issuing platform. We chose 'Credly' but others are available. Some VLE's feature rudimentary badging features (e.g. Blackboard's achievements feature) however badges are often constrained to the VLE.



Features of Credly include: Authentication of badges, bulk issuing via CSV file, badge metadata including evidence and tutor testimonial, sharing via LinkedIn or other social media, and badges analytics.



Trail with Students

ACFI151 'Business & Management' is a first-year first-semester module on BA Accounting & Finance providing a basic introduction to differing business structures and business functions.

Innovative teaching approaches are used to support students' transition into university, encouraging them to become responsible, independent learners.

- Flipped learning freeing up class time for more interaction
- Online collaborative group tasks such as a group wiki page presenting research into a company, or group attendance tracking
- Competitive element, the tutor keeps track of group progress through the module, presenting a leaderboard at lectures. At the end of the semester the teams with higher scores receive badges and prizes
- 59 badges issues, 4 badge categories; 29 LinkedIn shares; 525 badges impressions.

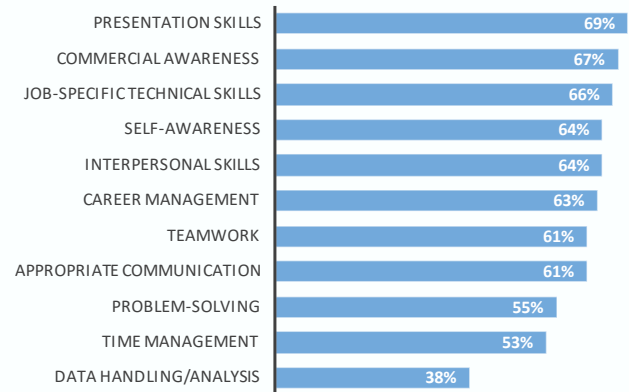
We found that the design of ACFI151 helped when implementing badges, given the range of discrete tasks. Student by-in appears low, however other institutions we spoke to also found this. We would hope to increase take-up through greater promotion of badges from the outset of the module/programme, and bringing forward sessions on employability that cover LinkedIn.

Emergent findings

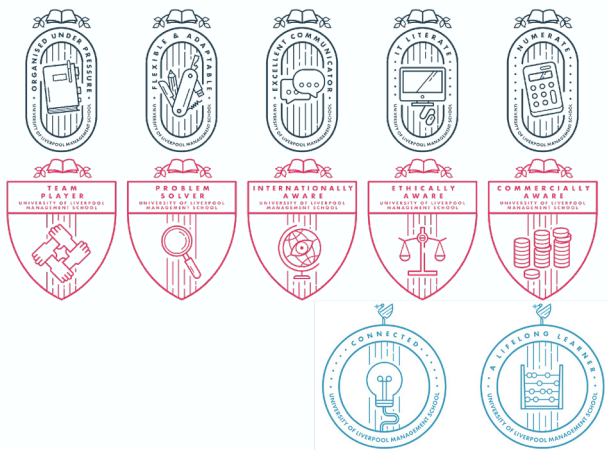
- Finding a strategy for employing digital badges requires thought. We needed to integrate our vision for the badges with all of the support that ULMS already offers. A guiding principle has been that badges have to be earned, rather than awarded for turning up, but this was incongruous with our vision of awarding badges aligned to graduate outcomes (which all students receive) and would require curriculum design. Thinking around these issues helped us to shape out understanding and approach.
- Digital badges applied to extra and co-curricular activities may be an easier nut to crack. They could be used to encourage and evidence participation, awarded for sustained participation or entry into a competition, giving opportunities to engage with local businesses on designing activities and badges. For HEAR we found digital badges to be very compatible, bringing benefits to the system such as expanding on the number of HEAR activities that can appear on transcripts, and being available immediately for use rather than at the end of studies (e.g. applying for placements). We also considered using badges to carry testimonials as part of the academic advisor process.

- Our expectation for digital badges were not met due to limitations of the technology. Things were only revealed once we have access to the software. For example, badges shared to LinkedIn have the badge graphic replaced by the icon of the institution, and only becomes visible if the viewer clicks through to see the details of the badge on the Credly site. Sadly it seems that all of the issuing platforms have this problem due to how LinkedIn works (have universities been too late to influence the technology?) on a positive we did find ways to reduce burden on staff, such as using concatenation in Excel to good effect to create personalised testimonials for students as part of bulk issuing process.

As digital badges become more prevalent and familiar to students and employers, we hope that we will be in a greater position to bring badges into programme design and taking an active role in helping to shape the technology.



Proportion of employers training entry-level hires in different skills. Institute of Stent Employers 2019.



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The future

From the outset of the project we were keen to give the school the opportunity to explore the use of digital badging, and we have been able to do this including using within a module, but most importantly it has allowed us to start thinking and discussing how they fit in with our offering.