



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: The Role of Open Badges in Supporting Student Representatives' Transitions, University of Edinburgh

Transition(s) the practice supports: Through and out

Student(s) the practice supports: Class and School Representatives

Abstract: Developed in 2011 as an open-source system for digitally representing skills, Open Badges are being increasingly explored and discussed in the world of higher education. The Open Badges are integrated into Edinburgh University Students' Association's (EUSA's) Student Rep Forum on Learn, the virtual learning environment which is used across The University of Edinburgh. Class Reps and School Reps who reflect on and share their work through blog posts have their posts reviewed by a member of EUSA staff and then receive Open Badges to digitally recognise and accredit their work.

Description: The Class Rep Open Badge framework includes twenty-two different badges grouped into three categories relating to the role of Class Reps – student development (of the Rep themselves), research and communication, and student representation. Based on demand, School Rep Open Badges were created in two categories: School-based student representation and leadership. Open Badges have proved beneficial for helping Reps transition into their role by learning about the different aspects of their work, transition through their role by reflecting on and documenting their work, and transition out of the role by highlighting Open Badges to potential employers. In turn, the blog posts help the Students' Association to learn more about the local work of student representatives across the University's Schools, and anonymised blog posts shared on the EUSA website help all students and staff to learn about Reps' successes.

For Reps, the benefits of using Open Badges include reflecting on their work, sharing their successes, and gaining additional accreditation. Class Reps and School Reps already receive recognition through their Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), and a small percentage of Reps earn the Edinburgh Award for Representing Students when they contribute over fifty hours of work as a Rep during the academic year and reflect on their personal and professional development. The new Open Badge scheme is aimed to be more accessible to all Reps, and it can be used as a stepping stone for those participating in the Edinburgh Award so that they have a better idea of the different activities which are part of

their role as a Rep. By writing blog posts, Reps are sharing their work with the community and others can learn from their work.

For EUSA, there are also benefits of using Open Badges. Since there were over 1,200 reps representing students in over 1,700 courses, programmes, and year groups across the University of Edinburgh in 2014-15, the Open Badges helped EUSA learn more about the work that Reps are doing and the impact of student representation on a local level across the University.

During the Class Rep Open Badge pilot project which took place at the end of the 2014-15 academic year, the impact has been that 699 Reps have earned the Training badge (awarded manually after attendance was documented) and 14 wrote 48 blog posts and earned a total of 43 Open Badges. The most popular strands that Reps wrote blog posts about to earn Open Badges were: Student-Staff Liaison Committee meetings, Implementing Change, Events, and Career Development.

During the 2015-16 academic year, EUSA fully embedded the Open Badges into its Class Rep and School Rep systems, including information about the badges in the Class Rep online training and the School Rep in-person training. The figures have increased dramatically now.

Overall, since the start of the project:

- 76 Reps have written a total of 154 blog posts, earning a total of a 147 Open Badges for blogging about their work
- 2,050 Reps have earned Open Badges for completing basic Rep training
- 294 Reps have earned Open Badges for completing intermediate Rep Training

It is likely that this increase in participation is in part due to the implementation of EUSA's Class Rep online training, and also in part due to integrating the Open Badges in the process of students working towards the Edinburgh Award for Representing Students. In addition, EUSA has done a lot of outreach to increase students' awareness of the Open Badges through stronger communication with the Reps and running specific training tailored to equip the Reps to write for the Open Badges (including the 'Introduction to Blogging' training and 'Blogging for Reps' workshop). Furthermore, Reps who earn a Gold-Level Class Rep or School Rep Open Badge also earn an automatic nomination for one of EUSA's Impact Awards.

The Open Badges offer a qualitative way of finding out more about what Reps are doing and working on. Whilst a relatively small percentage of the 1,700 Reps at the University of Edinburgh are writing blog posts to earn Open Badges, the blog posts received thus far come from across all Schools of the University and across all levels of study. These blog posts offer a great insight into the way Reps work and consider their role. Despite the minimum requirement of writing a short paragraph-long blog post to earn a badge, the majority of Reps take the time to write long, extensive, and informative blog posts. In these in-depth accounts, Reps present their projects and reflect on their approach, successes, failures, attitude, relationship with staff, etc. which is powerful to read.

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All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website with the intention of including them in the National Transitions map.