Skill Verified: The Power of Micro-Credentials and Digital Badges

Forum on Vocational Excellence
Kolding Denmark

9.9.2025

Co-funded by the European Union

Agenda

- Introduction to the Care about IT project
- Introduction to Micro-Credentials and Digital Badges
- Introduction to Design Thinking
- Workshop: Solving Problems related to micro-credentials and digital badges

Who we are

Sanna Paloposki
Project manager, Finland

Terje Losvik
Project manager, Estonia

Reino Tissari
Education developer, Finland

Care about IT

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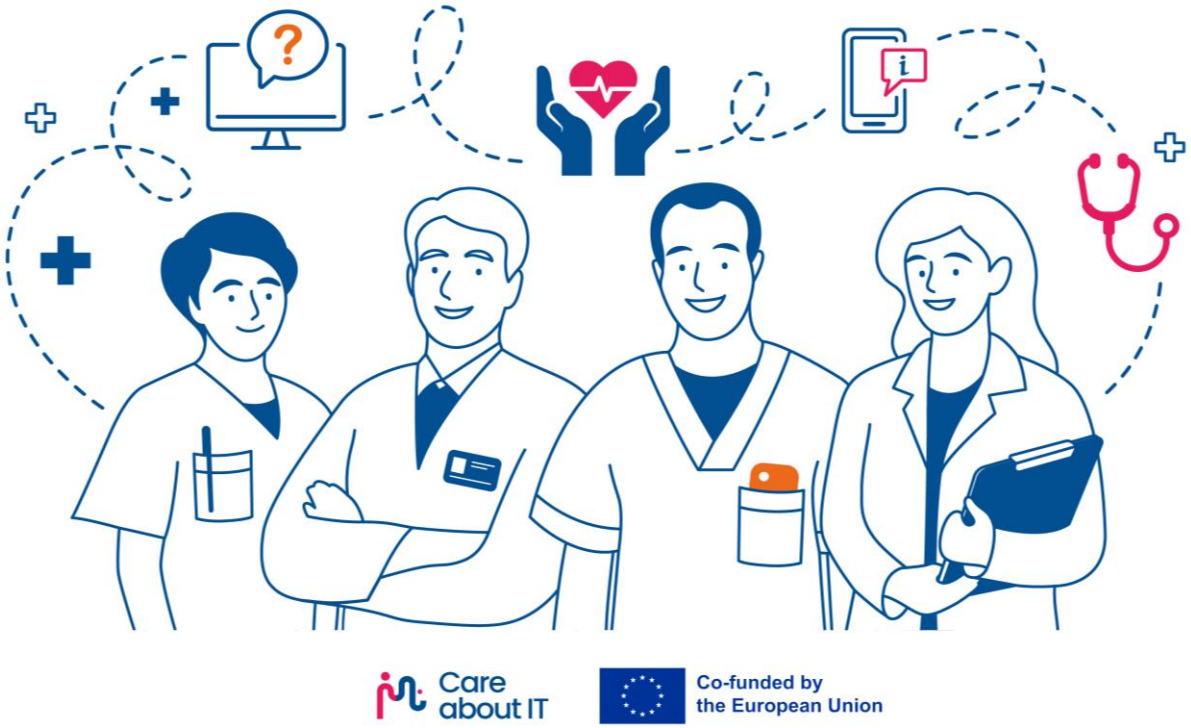
Introduction to Care about IT

By Sanna Paloposki, City of Turku, Finland

Care about IT



CoVE funded in the 2022 call

Budget ~ 4,9 M€

Project duration 06/2023 – 06/2027

~15 partners from the Netherlands, Italy, Finland and Estonia, led by the Dutch VET school Noorderpoort

We will reduce the challenges posed by growing labour shortages in the health sector by raising the profile of the HealthTech sector by developing training and recruitment

Care about IT

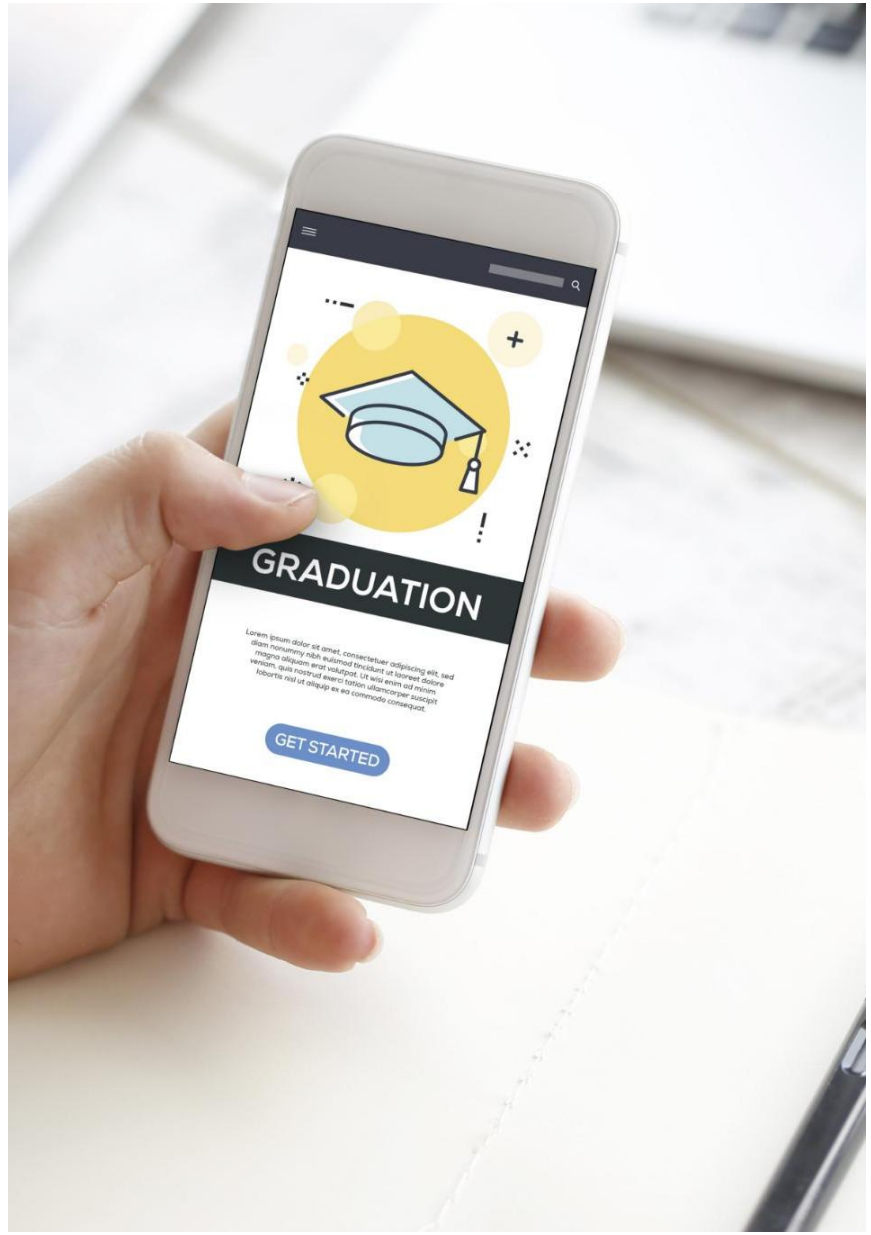
- We examine the opportunities and challenges of VET education in the care and IT sectors in our regions.
- By combining our knowledge and experiences, we aim to provide the care sector with a future-proof education.
- We hope that by providing education and applying new IT possibilities, we can decrease the pressure on healthcare, make studying and working in healthcare more attractive, and improve patient satisfaction.

Introduction to Micro-Credentials

By Reino Tissari, Turku Vocational Institute, Finland

Definition and Scope of Micro-Credentials

- Short-term learning experiences, for example a short course or training
- Shorter forms of learning opportunities than traditional qualifications
- A flexible, targeted way to help people develop the knowledge, skills and competences they need for their personal and professional development
- A way to formally recognise informal learning
- **A digital badge** is awarded as a standardized proof of competence



Importance in Vocational Education

Enhancing Employability

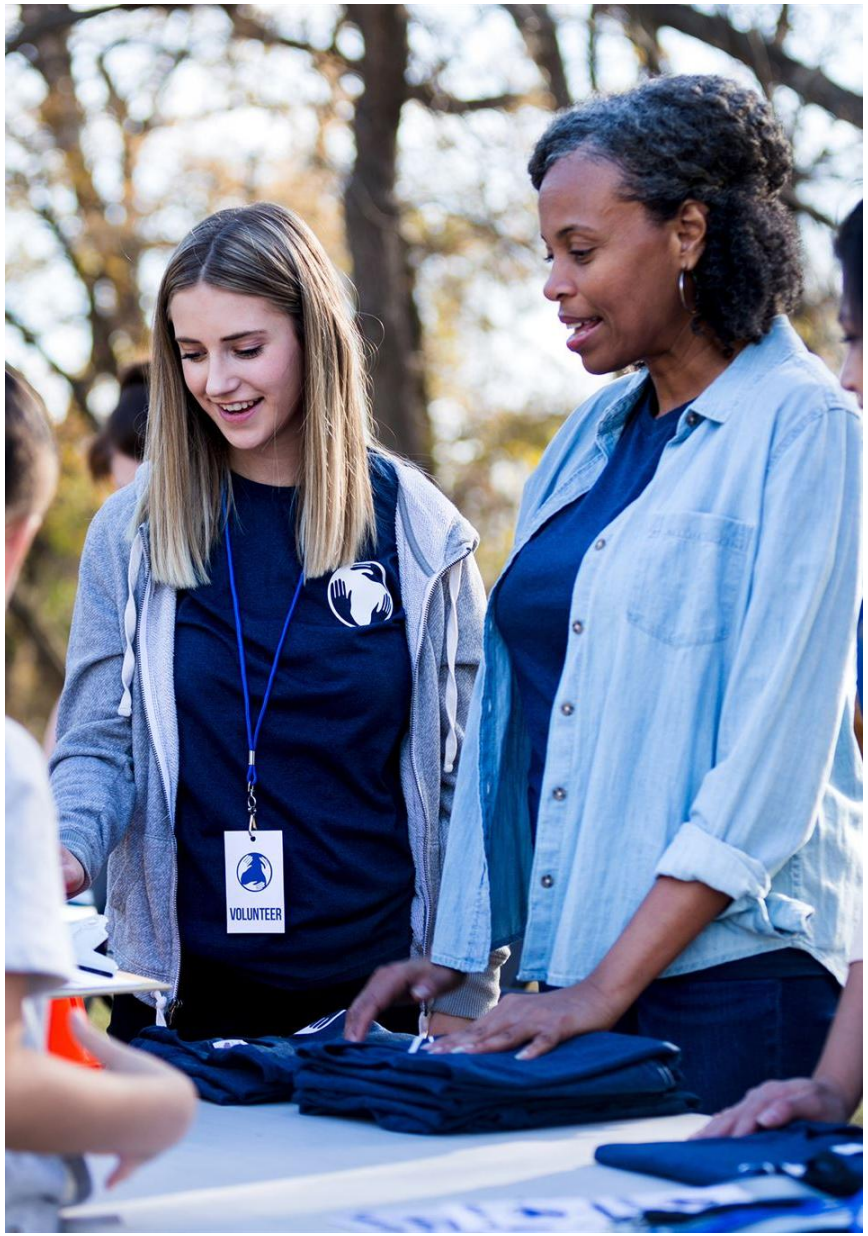
- Micro-credentials provide learners with recognized qualifications

Personalized Learning

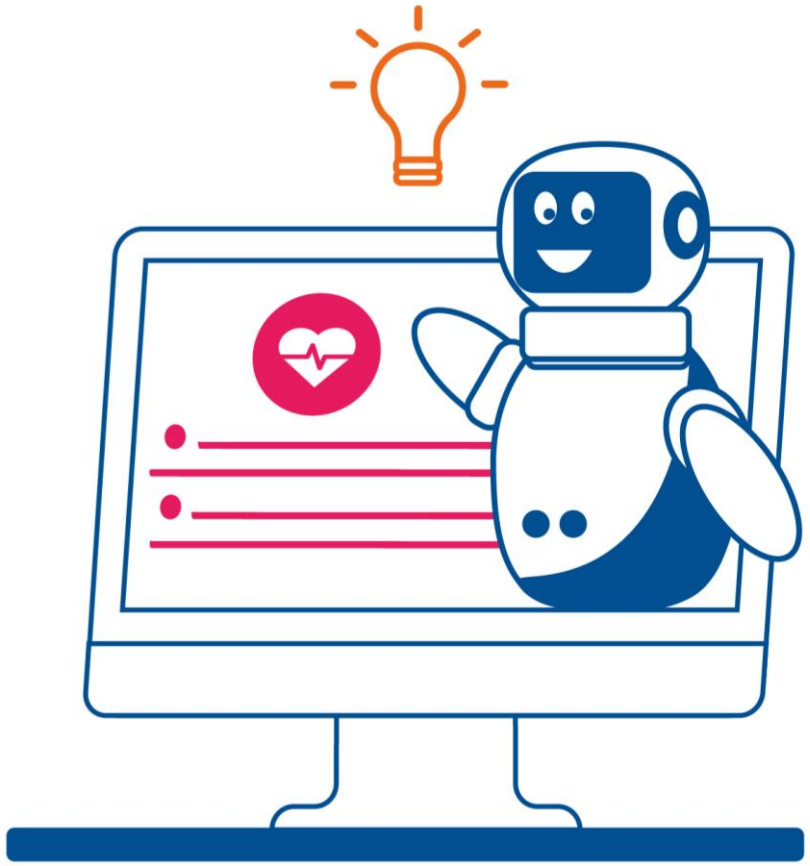
- Formal recognition of prior informal learning

Aligning with Industry Demands

- Micro-credentials can be designed to meet current industry needs, ensuring that learners acquire relevant and in-demand skills.



Micro-credentials in Care about IT



- Six micro-credentials will be created in international collaboration during the project
- Digital badges will be awarded for those who master the learning objectives of the micro-credentials
- Our micro-credentials are intended for vocational education but also for further training for those already in employment

Micro-credentials in Care about IT

Aim:

- Learn skills that are relevant in health technology, e.g. 21st century skills
- EQF-level 4, suitable for professionals and students in all fields

Multidisciplinary and multinational

- Development work involves participants from all partner countries in regular multidisciplinary workshops

Opportunities in development

Meeting the needs of each partner country

The template for the micro-credential is created at EQF Level 4.

→ Can be adjusted for each country's needs

→ Standardized learning outcomes are same in each country

Finding underlying needs that are relevant to each country

→ Needs were analyzed based on an earlier survey

Topics for micro credentials in Care about IT

Micro credential 1: Ethics in health technology

- Ethics in health care and health technology

Micro credential 2: Introduction to health technology

- Common understanding and vocabulary for health care and IT professional

Micro credential 3: Multidisciplinary skills in health technology

- IT and technology skills in the social and health sector
- Knowledge about social and health sector for those working in IT sector

Micro credential 4: 21st century skills

- Workers' problem-solving skills and abilities
- Safe and responsible use of digital technologies
- Relational skills (empathy, communication skills)

Micro credential 5: Creative and critical thinking in health technology

- Artificial intelligence (AI)
- Data analysis and its use in health care

Micro credential 6:

- Will be specified later based on the experiences gathered during the project

Care about IT

The European policy perspective on micro-credentials

By Anna Banczyk,
European Commission: DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Highlights of the speech by Ms. Anna Banczyk (1/2)

General

Ms. Banczyk emphasizes the importance of developing micro-credentials in a structured way to ensure comparability and trust across the EU.

Policy Foundations

- Council Recommendation on Micro-Credentials (2022):
  - Provides a common definition and standard elements for micro-credentials.
  - Establishes European principles for their design and issuance.
- Union of Skills Communication (March 2025):
  - Aims to expand the use of micro-credentials.
  - Connects education and skills policy to European competitiveness.
  - Promotes digital, understandable, and cross-sectoral credentials.

Collaboration & Integration

- Broader engagement with all types of providers, including private training organizations.
- Encourages linking micro-credentials to national and European qualifications frameworks (EQF).
- Supports joint credentials through networks like CoVEs, university alliances, and skills academies.

Highlights of the speech by Ms. Anna Banczyk (2/2)

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Quality & Recognition

- Plans to improve quality assurance guidance for both providers and users.
- Seeks to raise employer awareness on how to use micro-credentials effectively.
- Recognizes the need for lifelong learning due to rapid changes in the job market.

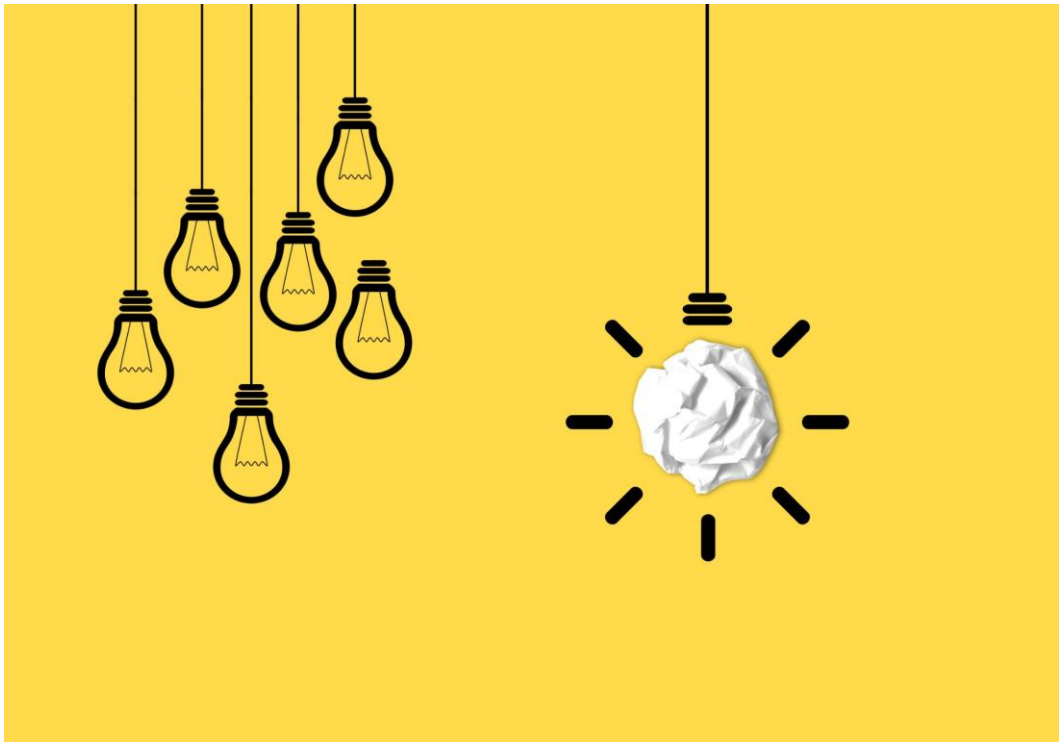
Digital & Strategic Initiatives

- Development of information tools and websites to promote understanding.
- Upcoming report on how member states are implementing the council's recommendation.
- Funding through Erasmus+ CoVE projects (17 projects in total).
- Promotion of the European Learning Model for digital credential standards.
- Integration with the upcoming Skills Portability Initiative.

Introduction to Design Thinking Framework

By Terje Losvik, Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences, Estonia

What is Design Thinking



- Design thinking is a non-linear, iterative process that teams use to understand users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions to prototype and test (*What Is Design Thinking (DT)?*, 2016).
- Stakeholders are engaged as active participants in the process, contributing their knowledge and experiences to design process.

Design Thinking Process Stages

Image: Double Diamond, by Design Council (2012)

1. Empathize

Understand the user's needs, behaviors, and pain points through research, observation, and interviews.

2. Define

Identify the specific problem or challenge that the design is trying to address

3. Ideate

Brainstorm a wide range of potential solutions.

4. Prototype

Create a physical or digital representation of the proposed solution.

5. Test

Test the prototype with users to gather feedback and identify areas for improvement.

6. Iterate

Refine the design based on user feedback and repeat the testing process.

Applications in Educational Contexts

Curriculum Development

Design thinking facilitates innovative approaches to curriculum development, ensuring it meets the needs of diverse learners.

Enhancing Student Engagement

By applying design thinking, educators can create more engaging learning experiences that motivate students to participate actively.

Collaborative Teaching Strategies

Design thinking promotes collaboration among educators, allowing them to share and experiment with new teaching methods.

Workshop: Solving problems related to micro-credentials and digital badges

By Terje Losvik and Reino Tissari

Challenges

1. How can micro-credentials and digital badges be made credible and valuable to employers and educational institutions?
2. Specific vs. generic skills – what should micro-credentials aim to develop?
3. Mapping the learner journey – how can micro-credentials be structured into coherent educational or professional pathways?
4. Designing a micro-credential – how can targeted skill development be effectively structured in your field of expertise?
5. Discovery and motivation – how can learners be guided and encouraged to engage with micro-credentials?
6. How short is “short”? interpreting the duration of micro-credentials in the context of workplace learning

Timing

Group work: 35 min, including feedback

- ideation
- prioritization of ideas

Finalizing group work: 5 min

Presentations: 10 min

- Short presentations, 2 min per group

🎯 Problem Framing

💡 Rapid ideation	⭐ Prioritization	📌 Short presentation
• **Brainstorm Zone** (generate as many ideas as possible)	(dot-vote 2–3 ideas)	2 min

Conclusion

Workshop Appreciation

Thank you for participating in this workshop, fostering a collaborative learning environment focused on innovation.

Practical Insights

We hope you leave with practical insights that you can apply in your vocational education practices.

Motivation for Implementation

Our goal is to inspire you to implement innovative approaches like micro-credentials and design thinking in your work.

Wish to connect?

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Read more

www.careaboutit.eu

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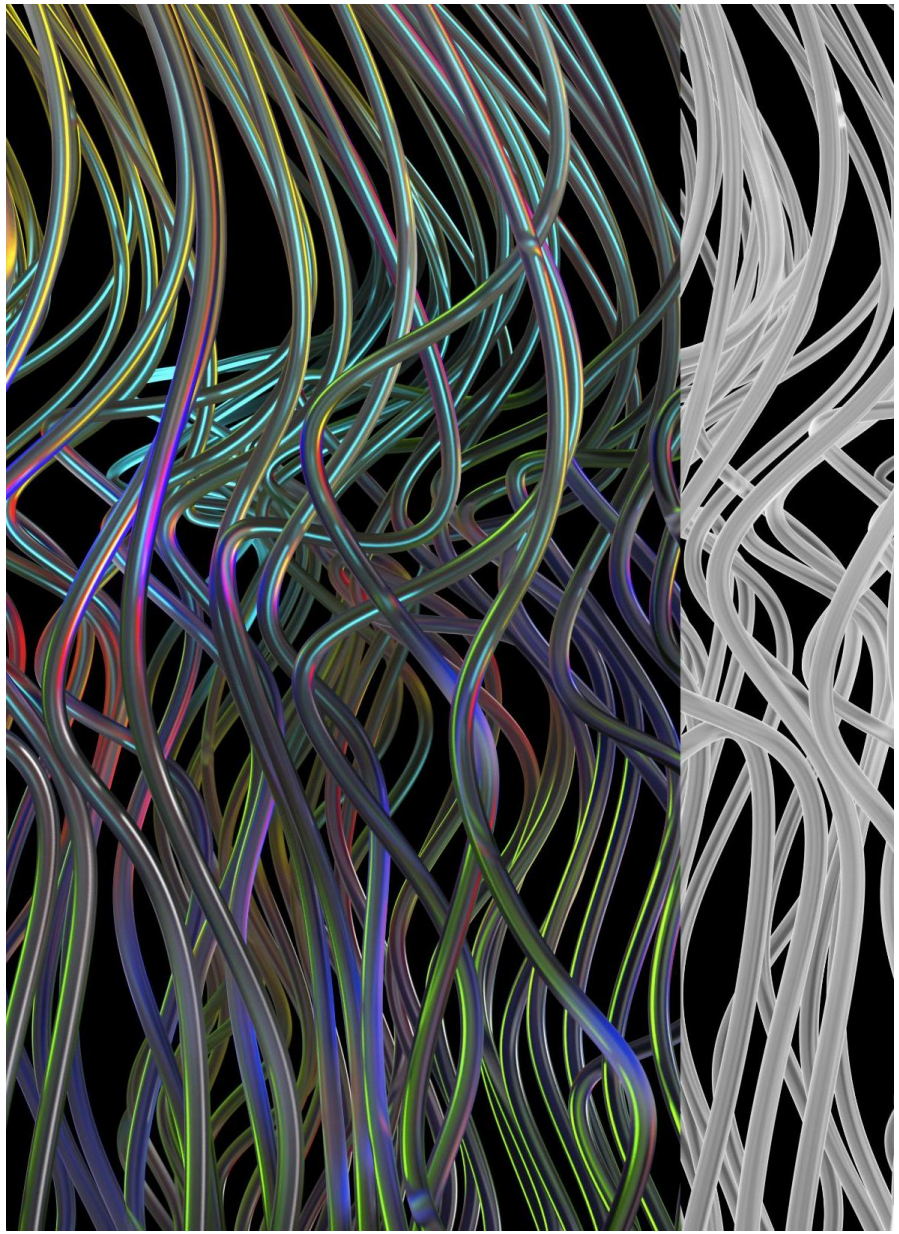


Topic #1

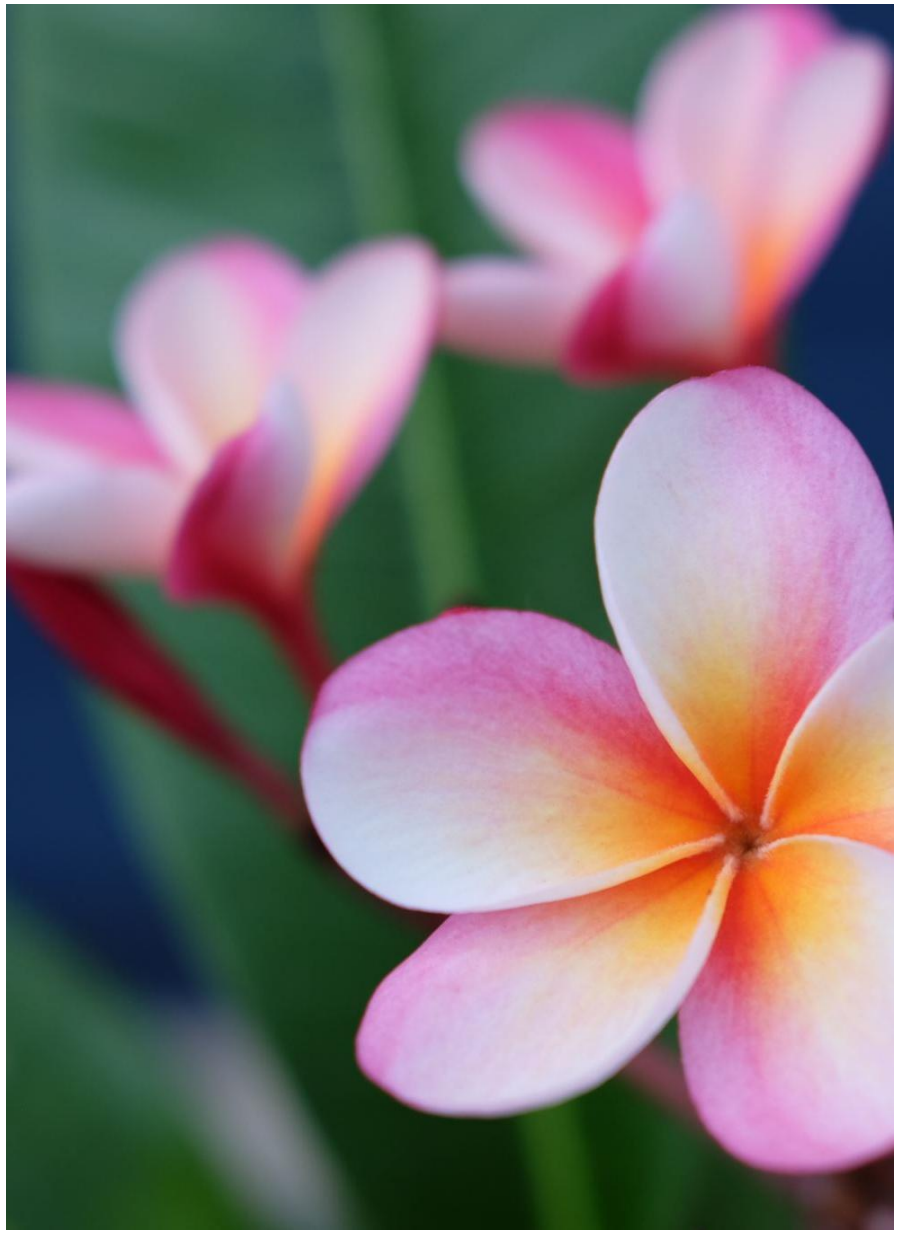
How can micro-credentials and digital badges be made credible and valuable to employers and educational institutions?

The problem

Although micro-credentials and digital badges offer a flexible way to demonstrate skills and competencies, their value is not always recognized in the labor market or educational settings. Employers and educators may question their reliability, comparability, and relevance.

Key Question

What are the essential elements that make micro-credentials and digital badges trustworthy and valuable from the perspective of employers and educational institutions?



Topic #2

Specific vs. generic skills – what should micro-credentials aim to develop?

The problem

Micro-credentials are increasingly used to certify skills in both educational and professional contexts. They are often praised for their ability to target highly specific competencies, such as operating a particular machine or using a specific software tool. However, there is growing recognition that broader, transferable 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability, are essential for long-term success in dynamic work environments.

Key question

Should micro-credentials prioritize the development of specific technical skills or focus more on generic, transferable competencies? What are the implications of each approach for learners, educators, and employers?

Topic #3

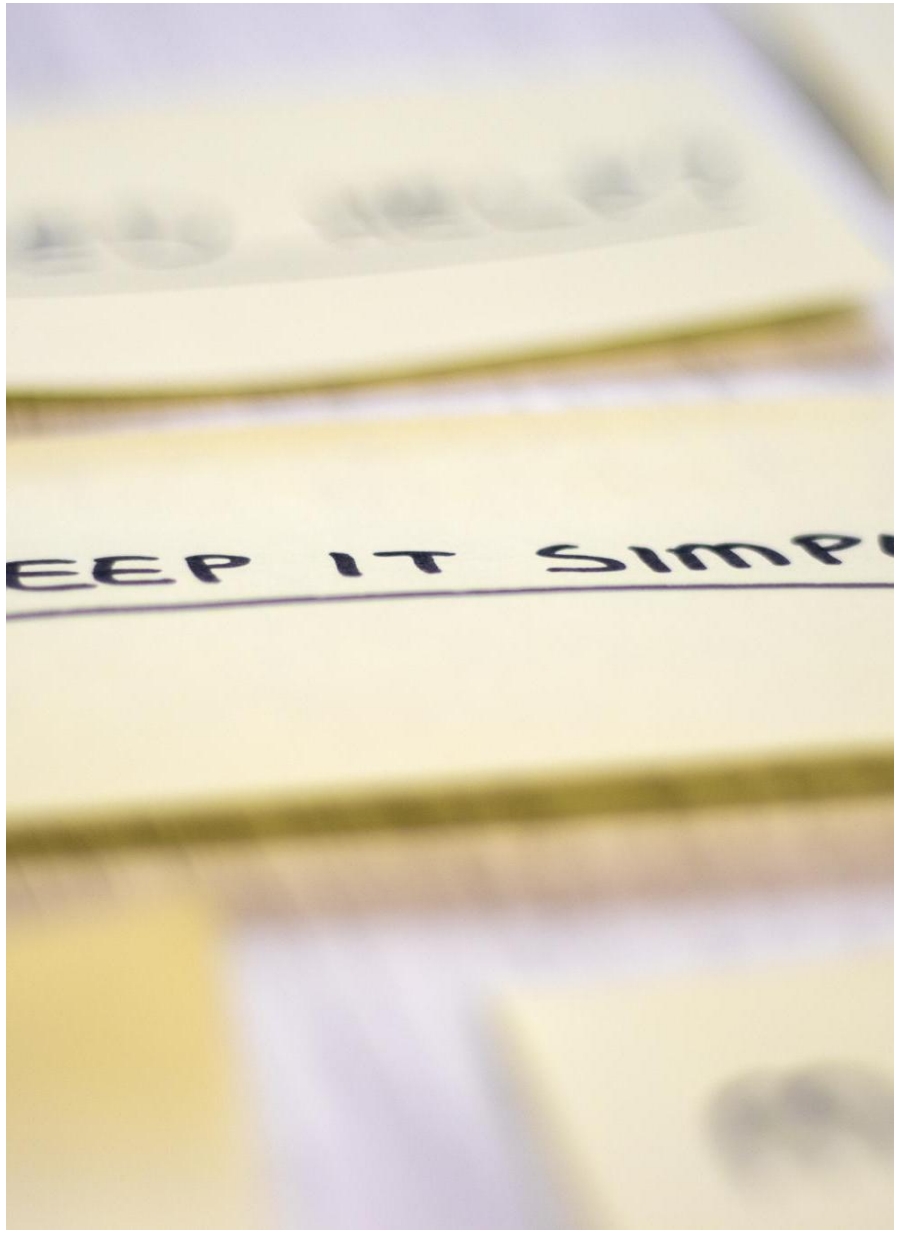
Mapping the learner journey – how can micro-credentials be structured into coherent educational or professional pathways?

The problem

Micro-credentials and digital badges offer a modular approach to learning, allowing individuals to accumulate and stack credentials over time. This stackability can form a structured learning pathway, where each badge represents a milestone, from foundational to advanced competencies. However, designing such pathways in a meaningful, motivating, and industry-relevant way remains a challenge.

Key question

How can micro-credentials be effectively designed and sequenced to form a coherent learner journey within a specific educational or professional domain (e.g., nursing, IT, social work)?



Topic #4

Designing a micro-credential – how can targeted skill development be effectively structured in your field of expertise?

The problem

Micro-credentials and digital badges offer a flexible, modular approach to learning that can be tailored to specific industry needs. Designing a meaningful micro-credential requires a deep understanding of the skills that are in demand, how they are best taught and assessed, and how they can be recognized by employers or institutions.

Key question

How can a micro-credential be designed to effectively develop and validate a specific, relevant skill in your area of expertise?

Topic #5

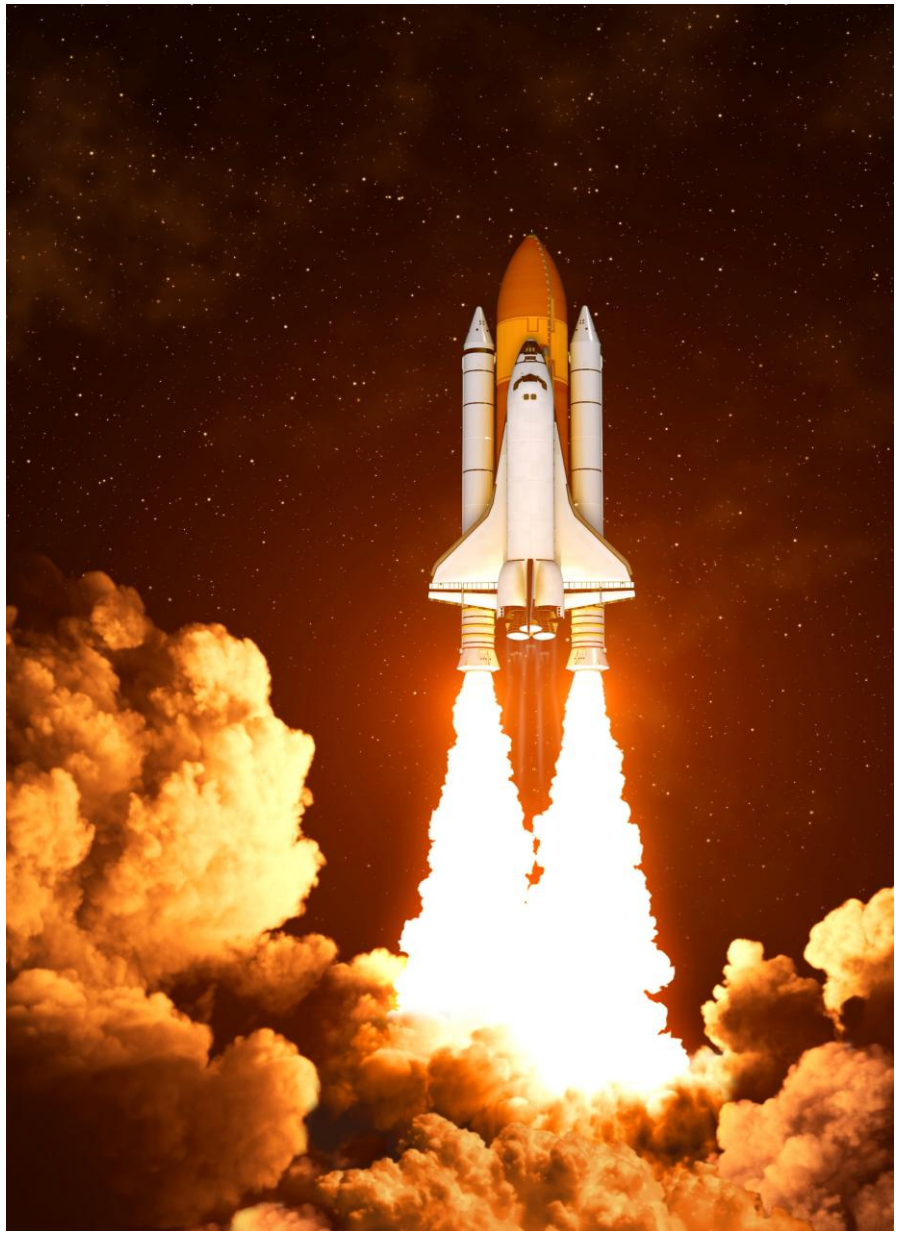
Discovery and motivation – how can learners be guided and encouraged to engage with micro-credentials?

The problem

Despite the growing availability of micro-credentials and digital badges, many learners remain unaware of what they are, where to find them, or how they can benefit from them. This lack of awareness and motivation presents a major barrier to adoption and impact.

Key Question

How can learners be effectively informed, guided, and motivated to discover, pursue, and complete micro-credentials?



Topic #6

How short is “short”? interpreting the duration of micro-credentials in the context of workplace learning

The problem

The duration of micro-credentials is not universally defined. While some view them as short learning experiences that can be completed in a few hours—ideal for flexible, on-the-job learning—others argue that such brevity may not allow for meaningful skill acquisition. The European Union defines micro-credentials as “short courses,” but this leaves room for interpretation, especially in the context of continuous professional development.

Key question

What is an appropriate duration for micro-credentials to ensure both flexibility and meaningful learning in workplace settings, in line with the EU’s definition?

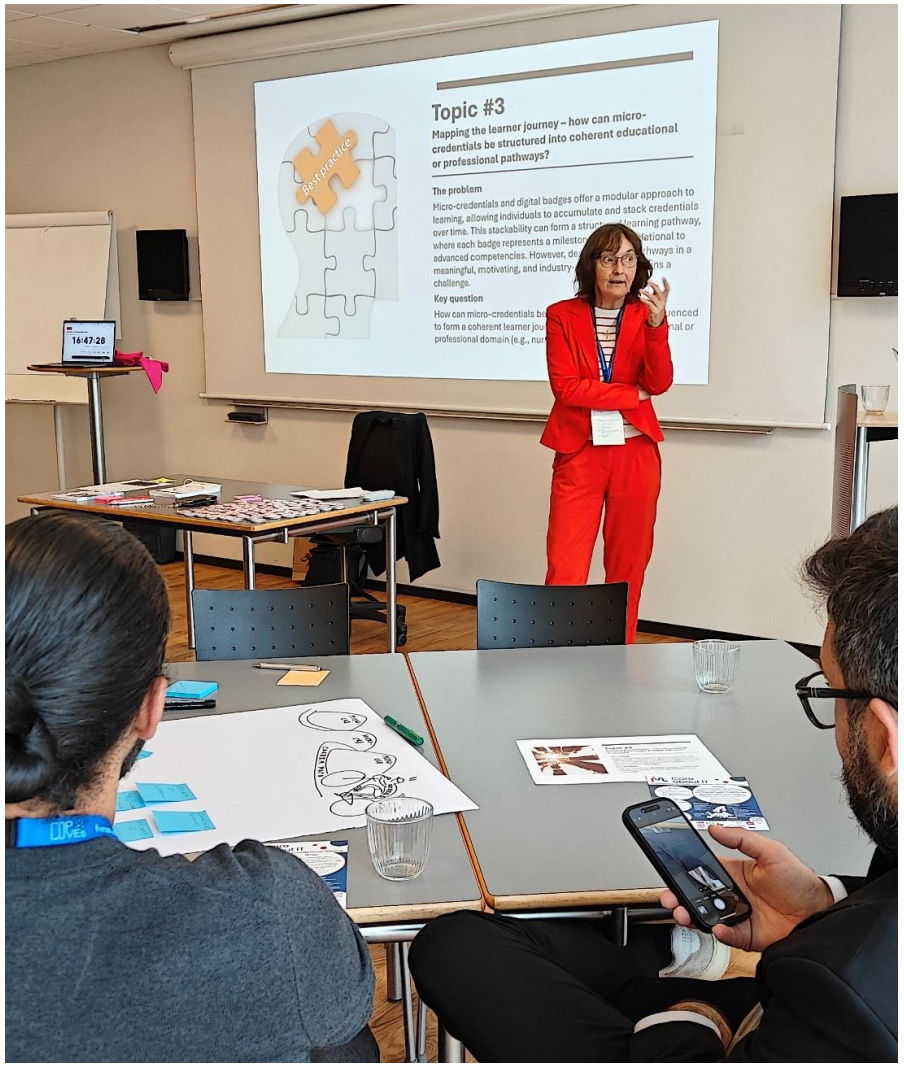
Results

By Sanna Paloposki

Highlights from group work

Things to consider when creating MCs

- Recognition of prior and current learning
- Upskilling and reskilling, MC should cover a skills gap
- Taking working life needs into account
- Short = adaptable to industry needs
- Evaluation process (test, case to solve, work-based assignment)
- International platform needed
- Stackability of MCs
- Mutual recognition & official validation



Highlights from group work

Open questions about MCs

- What is a micro-credential? → Clear definition needed
- Terminology is a problem
- Definition of competences
  - knowledge
  - skills
  - attitude
- Can they be obtained by practical work?
- Who validates them? An expert panel?
- How can stakeholders be included?

Highlights from group work

How to promote micro-credentials:

- New career path with standardized knowledge
- Promote them as a career pathway from the HR perspective
- Integration to VET and higher education curricula
- New career paths: flexibility, standards
- Security of learning
- Trustfulness of learning
- Flexibility of learning
- Efficiency of learning

Big thanks to all participants of the workshop for the active and insightful discussions!