Cowcerts specifications Documentation

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BTC Assessors

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The **cowcerts standards** provide a specification for JSON-based data models to issue digitally verifiable credentials like educational certificates.

To do so, we leverage the work of:

- JSON as the open and widely-known data interchange format
- JSON Linked Data to define the meaning of JSON fields
- JSON Schema to ensure JSON documents fulfill the specification structure

... and other standards depending on the use case.

Note: We are now focused on **educational digital certificates** which contain the same information as the current analogic academic certificates, but providing all the advantages of digital technologies, including *digital signatures* and cutting edge *blockchain technologies* too.

CHAPTER 1

List of standards

Below you will find the specifications for the standards we're developing:

1.1 Cowcerts for Education

Cowcerts for Education provides a data model for digital certificates to prove that someone has completed their education successfully.

They aim to be a digital replacement for current educational certificates issued on paper, leveraging all digital technologies' advantages.

1.1.1 Features

Our goals with this standards are to provide:

- Security: Easy validation of the certificates using *digital signatures* and *blockchain technologies*. The identites of both the issuer and recipient are also easily and automatically validated.
- **Shareability**: The recipient of a certificate can easily share its educational achievements digitally using their preferred communication channels: social networks, email, instant messaging and much more.
- **Privacy**: The recipient is allowed to share just the information they want, as the certificate itself does not contain any personal information or any detail about the achievement like the grades obtained. Certificates' recipients can choose the amount information they share when sharing the certificate.

1.1.2 Base standards

Cowcerts for Education provides extensions to the following base standards:

- · Open Badges standard
- · Blockcerts standard

In order to get a basic comprehension of the standard, please read our abstract of the base standards:

Open Badges

Open Badges provides the JSON data model to represent achievements issued by some entity to a given recipient.

Data model

The core entities they define are:

Profile

Data model for an entity, either a recipient of an achievement, or its issuer. Provides details about them (name, description, image) and how to contact them (email, phone, URL).

Hint: For instance, a university that issues certificates like the M.I.T. or the recipient who completes a course.

Note: In practice, Profile is a data model just used for certificate issuers.

Note: Open Badges Profile Specification:

https://openbadgespec.org#Profile

Badge

Data model to represent an achievement, issued by an entity defined by the previous *Profile* data model. They provide information about the achievement obtained, the knowledge obtained, what was required to obtained the achievement and more.

Hint: For instance, a Computer Science degree by the M.I.T. could be a badge.

Note: It is also referred to as BadgeClass, but we call them Badges for short.

Note: Open Badges Badge (BadgeClass) Specification:

https://openbadgespec.org#BadgeClass

Assertion

Data model to issue a badge to a given recipient. Includes the badge issued, the recipient who receives the badge and data about the issuance, like data to verify if the assertion is valid or not.

Hint: For instance, a Computer Science degree by the M.I.T. issued to Silvio Micali could be an assertion.

Note: In previous versions it was called a **Badge** but this lead to overloaded meaning of the badge word. Please avoid using **Badge** to refer to a badge issued to a recipient and refer to it as an **Assertion**. The badge is just an achievement without any recipient.

Note: Open Badges Assertion Specification:

https://openbadgespec.org#Assertion

Endorsement

Data model to provide extra information about an *Assertion*, either to provide more information about the *Assertion*, comments about the existing information or validation information. The standard is open to receive any kind of extra information about a given assertion.

Note: Open Badges Endorsement Specification:

https://openbadgespec.org#Endorsement

Validation

In order to ensure that the certificates following this data model can be verified (to avoid fake certificates with impersonation), Open Badges provides two kinds of validations:

Hosted

The certificate is valid if is hosted on a trusted place.

Hint: For instance, a certificate issued by an issuer whose URL is https://mit.edu is valid just if the certificate can be downloaded from an URL related to the domain mit.edu

Note: Open Badges HostedVerification Specification:

https://openbadgespec.org#HostedBadge

Signed

The certificate contains an RSA signature using JWS. Therefore you can know that if the certificate signature is valid, the certificate was signed and therefore issued by the specified RSA public key.

Attention: The standard does not care about the real world[™] identity of the holder of the private key. Therefore you can know whether the certificate was issued by a public key, but not who in the real world[™] is behind the control of the signatures made by the private key matching that public key.

Using a PKI could be a solution for that, but that's not specified in the standard.

Blockcerts

The Blockcerts standard provides extension to the Open Badges standard to store the verification information of the certificate using *blockchain technologies* to enforce the integrity and allow a distributed timestamping of the issued certificates.

Data model

The data model is the same as the Open Badges one, adding the required data so that certificates validation can be stored in a *blockchain*.

Note: Details about the data model extensions are provided in the following document:

https://github.com/blockchain-certificates/cert-schema/blob/master/docs/schemas-2.1.md

SignatureLine

The only entity extended by Blockcerts which has no relation at all with storing and validating the certificates using *blockchain technologies* is the SignatureLine. A SignatureLine allows to place a handwritten signature picture in a certificate to improve its visualization.

Note: Blockcerts SignatureLine specification:

https://github.com/blockchain-certificates/cert-schema/blob/master/docs/signatureLineExtension_schema.md

Validation

In order to enforce the security of the certificate upon validating it, Blockcerts uses *blockchain technologies* as a way to store information to validate the certificate, including in it a hash and a digital signature.

Tip: Check this document for more information about the verification process: https://github.com/blockchain-certificates/cert-verifier-js/blob/master/docs/verification-process.md

1.1.3 Specification

The specification comprehends the following documents:

JSON-LD Specifications

The following document provides a specification for the JSON-LD context names used in CowCerts JSON certificates. All specifications here extend the Blockcerts context specifications (available in a markdown document) And Blockcerts extends the Open Badges specifications

Entities

These are the extended JSON entities we define to achieve the digital granting of academic certificates. We also define the generic entities so that all the document can be understand within this single specifications document.

Assertion

Assertions are representations of an awarded badge, used to share information about a badge belonging to one earner. Assertions are packaged for transmission as JSON objects with a set of mandatory and optional properties. Fields marked in bold letters are mandatory.

Prop-	Expected	Description
erty	type	
id	IRI	Uniquely identifies the assertion. Should be an HTTPS dereferenceable IRI so verifiers can
		link to the assertion. The document behind the IRI should provide information about the
		assertion and its validation.
type	JSON-LD	JSON-LD assertion type. The type is fixed to: Assertion.
	type	
recip-	Identity(DaTheatcipient of the achievement.
ient		
badge	BadgeClas	Badge document being awarded.
verifi-	Verificat	Acollection of information allowing an inspector to verify this assertion.
cation	Object	
issue-	DateTime	Timestamp of when the achievement was awarded. ISO 8601 compliant.
dOn		
image	ImageObje	dmage representing this achievement.
recip-	Recipient	Blockcerts extension allowing additional recipient details including recipient's public key
ient-	Profile	to make a strong claim of the ownership over the key.
Profile		Name must be set if the verifier provided by Blockcerts has to display it.
signa-	MerklePro	Afile Exitension that allows an issuer to issue an Open Badge on the blockchain and provide
ture		proof of inclusion in a blockchain transaction. This uses Merkle Proof Signature Suite
		2019.
dis-	Text	HTML code to display the certificate Will be used in the blockcerts verifier to display the
play-		certificate visually. This way the certificate will always be visualized the same way even if
Html		the certificate displayer (in this case blockcerts verifier) changes.
issue-	Text	Place where the assertion was issued (the city for instance)
dAt		
offi-	Endorseme	erMandatory field if the BagdeClass being awarded has an officiality requirement. This
cial-		Endorsement has always a MinistryClaim it its claim field.
Vali-		
dation		
signa-	Array of	List of handwritten signatures that must appear in the certificate visualization
ture-	Signature	eLine
Lines		
uni-	Text	Universal identifier of the assertion. Allows to identify the assertion uniquely in the uni-
ver-		verse. Contains a UUID string.
salI-		
denti-		
fier		

IdentityObject

A collection of information about the recipient of a IdentityObject.

Note: The Open Badges standard does not allow for a recipient to have more than one field (or a document) identifying it. For this reason, we use the government's tax ID in this identify object and all extra fields will be placed in an additional assertion, referencing this identity object.

To provide optional additional privacy to the recipient, this field will be always hashed.

Prop	Ex-	Description
erty	pected	
	type	
iden-	Identi	t The bash of student email.
tity		
type	Proper	t Fixed email, as Blockcerts specifies.
	IRI	Extra fields will be placed in an additional endorsement.
hashe	d Boolea	n Always True.
salt	Text	If the recipient is hashed, this should contain the string used to salt the hash. If this value is not
		provided, it should be assumed that the hash was not salted.
		This field is mandatory, as opposite to the Open Badges specification.

IdentityHash

A hash string preceded by a dollar sign ("\$") and the algorithm used to generate the hash. The supported algorithms are MD5 and SHA-256, identified by the strings md5 and sha256 respectively.

Hint: For example:

sha256\$28d50415252ab6c689a54413da15b083034b66e5

represents the result of calculating a SHA-256 hash on the string "mayze".

For more information, see how to hash & salt in various languages.

BadgeClass

A collection of information about a badge.

Property	Expected type	Description
id	Text	Unique IRI for the BadgeClass.
type	JSON-LD type	JSON-LD assertion type. The type is fixed to: BadgeClass.
name	Text	Name of the badge defined in the syllabus.
descrip-	Text	Description of the knowledge acquired by a recipient of this badge.
tion		
image	ImageObject	Image representing the badge.
criteria	@id:Criteria	URI or embedded criteria document describing how to earn the achievement.
issuer	Profile	IRI or document describing the individual, entity, or organization that issued
		the badge.
signature-	Array of	List of visual signatures to display.
Lines	SignatureLine	
tags	Array of Text	An array containing tags that
legalText	Text	Additional information to the title that refers to its legality (legal text). de-
		scribes the type of achievement.
official	Boolean	True if requires an official validation. Defaults to False if field is not
		present.

ImageObject

Metadata about images that represent Assertions, BadgeClasses or Profile.

These properties can typically be represented as just the id string of the image, but using a fleshed-out document allows for including captions and other applicable metadata. https://schema.org/ImageObject

Property	Expected type	Description
type	JSON-LD type	Type of the image object. Default is schema: ImageObject.
id	IRI	Data URI of the image.
caption	Text	Caption of the image, if any.

Criteria

Descriptive metadata about the achievements necessary to be recognized with an Assertion of a particular BadgeClass.

Prop-	Expected	Description
erty	type	
type	JSON-LD	Type of the image object. Fixed: Criteria.
	type	
narra-	Text	A narrative of what is needed to earn the badge.
tive		
id	IRI	The URI of a webpage that describes in a human-readable format the criteria for the
		BadgeClass.

Profile

A Profile is a collection of information that describes the entity or organization using Open Badges.

Prop-	Ex-	Description
erty	pected	
	type	
id	IRI	Issuer blockchain address IRI, defined in issuerSchema by blockcerts.
type	JSON-	Fixed: Profile.
	LD	
	type	
name	Text	The name of the entity or organization.
url	IRI	The homepage or social media profile of the entity, accessible via HTTP.
tele-	Text	A phone number for the entity (E.164 format).
phone		
de-	Text	A short description of the issuer, public or private and year of creation
scrip-		
tion		
image	ImageOb	jAn image representing the issuer.
email	Text	Contact address for the individual or organization.
revo-	URI	HTTP URI of the Badge Revocation List used for marking revocation of signed badges. The
cation-		revocation list is published as a JSON-LD document with type RevocationList.
List		

RevocationList

Property	Expected	Description
	type	
id	IRI	The id of the RevocationList.
type	JSON-LD	Fixed Profile.
	type	
issuer	IRI:	The id of the Issuer.
	Profile	
re-	IRI	A string id identification of a badge object that has been revoked. And a string
vokedAsser-		revocationReason indicate the reason for revocation.
tions		

List of assertions revoked by the issuer of the degree.

VerificationObject

Defined by verification property of https://w3id.org/openbadges#Assertion, with Blockcerts extensions for verification of badges on a blockchain.

Prop	- Ex-	Description.
erty	pectee	t the second
	type	
type	Array	Y Fixed: MerkleProofVerification2017, Extension
pub-	Text	Blockcerts extension: the expected blockchain address for the signer of the transaction contain-
licKe	y	ing the merkle proof. In Blockcerts publicKeys are typically represented with a <scheme>:</scheme>
		prefix. For Bitcoin transactions, this would be the issuer public Bitcoin address prefixed with
		ecdsa-koblitz-pubkey:.

MerkleProof2019

Extends the Merkle Proof 2017 verification allowing to contain additional information about the assertion: a set of endorsements. They also contain extra information to verify the certificates in other blockchains other than the ones accepted by Blockcerts (for instance, the BlockValley ones).

Some endorsements are completely optional and are signed by their issuers independently so they cannot be included inside the assertion as when signing it the signature would contain the endorsements, which as we said are optional and may appear in the future.

Note: The *signature* field is the only field in an assertion that is not signed (because it contains the signature itself) therefore is the only place where these endorsements fit. They may be present or not to provide extra information about the assertion, but without them the assertion is valid.

This way we can package all information about the assertion, including its endorsements in a single portable document.

Prop-	Expected type	Description
erty		
type	Array	Composed type of Extension and MerkleProofVerification2019.
merkle-	Text	Batch identifier (SHA256).
Root		
targetH-	Text	Current document's SHA256 hash.
ash		
anchors	Array of An-	Array containing a list of anchor objects that define how the merkleRoot has
	chor objects	been registered in one or more <i>blockchains</i> .
proof	Text	See Merkle Proof 2017 for more.
endorse-	Array of	Endorsements containing additional information about the current document.
ments	Endorsement	

Anchor

Specifies how the merkleRoot in a Merkle Proof 2019 signature has been registered on a *blockchain*.

Prop-	Expected	Description
erty	type	
type	JSON-LD	BTCOpReturn or ETHData defined in https://chainpoint.org/.
	type	
sour-	Text	Identifier, such as a transaction id, used to locate anchored data.
ceId		
chain	Text	Chain is an optional field introduced by Blockcerts to help during verification.
		Check Merkle Proof Signature 2017 specifications document to see a list of accepted
		chains.
oth-	Array of	Allows to verify the certificate in other chains other than the accepted by Blockcerts. This
er-	Other chain	way Blockcerts can verify with a chain they consider valid and other verifiers may supply
Chains	objects	other <i>blockchains</i> to verify this on too.

Other chain

Allows to define another chain where an anchor may be placed other than the accepted by the Blockcerts standard to be used by validators that both understand Blockcerts and Cowcerts standards.

Prop-	Ex-	Description
erty	pected	
	type	
id	IRI	Chain id. Should be able to be dereferrenced so the document behind provides more infor-
		mation about the chain and how to connect to it.
name	Text	Commonly used name to identify the chain.
proto-	Text	Protocol the <i>blockchain</i> uses. Valid values are ETH for <i>Ethereum</i> .
col		
gene-	Text	Hexadecimal string representing the genesis block hash for the network.
sis		
con-	IRI	Consortium where the chain belongs (if any).
sor-		
tium		

Note: If the id is urn:example:local, the verifier of the certificate will connect against a local development *blockchain* so that *blockchain* checks can be triggered against a dummy *blockchain*.

In the case of protocol ETH, checks will be performed against a local *Ethereum* node using the web3 JSON-RPC at default port 8545 against the same host where the verifier is running.

A note will alert the user that the *blockchain* checks are performed against a dummy blockchain and must not be taken seriously.

Endorsement

The endorsement class is very similar to an Assertion, except that there is no defined badge property. Instead, a claim property allows endorsers to make specific claims about other Profiles, BadgeClasses, or Assertions.

Prop-	Expected type	Description
erty		
id	Text	Unique IRI for the endorsement instance. If using hosted verification, this
		should be the URI where the assertion of endorsement is accessible.
type	JSON-LD type	Endorsement type; Fixed: Endorsement.
claim	RecipientClaim	An entity, identified by an id and additional properties that the endorser would
	EDSClaim or	like to claim about that entity. Three claim entities have been defined based on
	MinistryClaim	the attached information.
issuer	Profile	The profile of the endorsement's issuer.
issue-	DateTime	Timestamp of when the endorsement was published (ISO8601 compliant).
dOn		
veri-	Verification	Instructions for third parties to verify this endorsement.
fica-	Object	
tion		
sig-	SignatureObject	An extension that allows an issuer to issue an Open Badge on the blockchain
na-		and provide proof of inclusion in a blockchain transaction. This uses Merkle
ture		Proof 2017 Signature Suite.
signa-	Array of	List of handwritten signatures that must appear in the certificate visualization
ture-	SignatureLine	
Lines		

Claims

MinistryClaim

Appends the information of the assertion's registry by the Education Ministry.

Property	Expected	Description
	type	
type Array		Composed type of MinistryClaim and Extension.
id	IRI	Id of the Assertion that endorsement is giving extra info.
ministrySig-	SignatureL	Handwritten signature that gave validity to academic certificates analogically.
nature		
registryCode	Text	Alphanumeric code that represents the unique identifier of the official title record
		of the government of Andorra.

RecipientClaim

Property	Expected	Description		
	type			
type	Array	Composed type of RecipientClaim and Extension.		
id	IRI	Id of the Assertion that endorsement is giving extra info.		
givenName	Text	The name of the recipient		
family- Text The surnames of		The surnames of the recipient		
Name				
birthplace	Text	The place where the person was born.		
birthdate	Text	The date when the person was born.		
nationality Text Nationality of the person ISO 3166-1-		Nationality of the person ISO 3166-1- alpha2.		
nationalId	Text	The national ID person of their country, e.g. the CIF/NIF in Spain or NPI in		
		Andorra.		

An extension of the information about the recipient of the assertion. Mainly uses fields from a Person

EDSClaim

Adds additional information to the Assertion so it can be a valid European Diploma Supplement (EDS).

Language codes must be compatible with BCP47. Think "en" or "es-MX". JSON-LD allows much more expressive combinations of multiple languages in one document. It is likely that you may be able to produce Badge Objects taking advantage of these features that will not be understood by some or all validators or display tools. It is recommended to keep implementations as simple as possible and communicate with the standards group when you want to move beyond the example techniques expressed here.

It provides additional information to that included in the official degrees / diplomas and/or transcript, making it more easily understood, especially by employers or institutions outside the issuing country. (explicacio numero)

Property	Expected type		Description
type	Array		Composed type of EDSClaim and Extension.
id	IRI		Id of the Assertion that endorsement is giving extra info.
mainField	Text		2.2 Main field(s) of study for the qualification.
awardingInstitu-	Text		2.3 Name (in original language) and status of awarding insti-
tion			tution.
administeringInsti-	Text		2.4 Name (in original language) and status of institution ad-
tution			ministering studies.
language	Text		2.5 Language(s) of instruction / examination.
studiesLevel	Text		3.1 Level of qualification.
studiesLength	Text		3.2 Official length of programme.
access	ccess Text		3.3 Access requirements.
mode	mode Text		4.1 Mode of study.
requirements	Text		4.2 Programme requirements.
grades	Array	of	4.3 Programme details.
	EDSSubject items		
gradingScheme	Text		4.4 Grading scheme.
qualification	Text		4.5 Overall classification of the qualification.
further	Text		5.1 Access to further study.
competences	Array of Text		5.2 Professional status and competences.
extraInfo	Array of Text		6 Additional information.
educationSystem	ImageObject		8 Information on the national higher education system Badge.
rectorSignature	ImageObject		7 Certification of the Supplement, image of the rector signature
managerSignature	ImageObject		7 Certification of the Supplement, image of the manager sig-
			nature

EDSSubject

This object includes all the information related to one subject that will be included in the European Diploma Supplement (EDS).

Prop-	Expected	Description	
erty	type		
name	Text	Name of subject	
choice	Text	Type of the subject, it could be one of the following: OB: Obligatory; OP: Optional; LL:	
		Free Choice	
semester	Text	Semester during which the studies were taken	
year	Number	Year when the subject was taken.	
mobil-	Text	International academic mobility M if was studied abroad, – if not.	
ity			
grade	Text	Grade (CO: if convalidated) Otherwise, the grade obtained as a float. (ie: 8.4). Using a	
		dot . as decimal separator.	
credits	Number	Amount of ECTS credits the subject took.	

JSON Schemas

We provide a series of JSON Schema documents to allow implementors of the standard ensure their documents follow the structure specified by the standard.

https://gitlab.com/cowcerts/schemas/tree/master/cowcerts/

> In that folder, choose a version folder, and you'll find the schemas inside > the jsonschema folder

You can use our Python script to check a document against our schema.

Just run

python -m validator.py

For more information.

Validation

To validate the educational digital certificates' JSON documents, the process described in the following document must be performed.

Tools

This process is automatically performed by this JavaScript library:

https://gitlab.com/cowcerts/libverifier-js

And a visual verification can be triggered using a WebComponent:

https://gitlab.com/cowcerts/verifier

Process

Blockcerts Validation

The first validation step is to perform all validation steps as specified by the Blockcerts validation process.

This validation has to be performed for all documents included in the certificate, including the endorsements included in the signature field.

Cowcerts Validation

TODO

1.2 Contributions

Please, feel free to contact us with your ideas and feedback to the following email address:

1.3 Indices and tables

- genindex
- modindex
- search