1. Target Audience

Higher Education Institution staff, such as

- Legal Representative or the LR's Personal Assistant
- Examination Office Staff
- Learning Technologist or Academic Support Staff
- Programme Director
- Administrator

2. Summary

Europass Digital Credentials for Learning are standardized electronic documents, which use an encrypted key called an eSeal to ensure the authenticity of the issuer and to prevent tampering. This short guide explains how you go about obtaining such an eSeal.

3. Expectations

1. Your organisation wants to issue European Digital Credentials for Learning.
2. To authenticate the credentials on behalf of your organisation, your organisation needs to acquire an eSeal.
3. Understand why you need an eSeal for authenticating ECCOE digital credentials.
4. Know where to look to find a Trusted Service Provider in your country who can issue your organisation with an eSeal.
5. Learn from other organisations about the process they went through.
6. Obtain your own eSeal so that you can issue authenticated digital credentials clearly showing your organisation's name and legal identity.

4. Prior Knowledge

1. Your organisation should have a concrete plan to issue digital credentials, which recognise learners' achievements. These digital credentials could be for a whole course (such as a Bachelors or Master's degree) or for short courses and learning paths such as MOOCs.
2. Someone in your organisation should be aware of the steps required to issue and authenticate a digital credential. Examples of such roles are learning technologist, programme director, academic support staff.

5. Onboard

1. As the obtention of an eSeal requires documentation, which engages the responsibility of the legal representative of your organisation (e.g. President, Rector, Chief Executive Officer…) this person needs to be fully informed, as well as authorised and willing to provide the documentation. This legal representative and/or the finance officer also needs to know that there is a cost for the eSeal - often a one off cost for obtaining the physical encrypted USB key, and then an annual cost based on the number of documents to be sealed. Remember that, like a rubber stamp, the eSeal can be used for much more than authenticating digital credentials, so the investment can be worthwhile.
2. The actual steps of obtaining the eSeal may of course be delegated to a trusted staff member, such as the legal representative's Personal Assistant. This is the role chosen for the explanation of the activity.

6. Description of the Activity

You are the Personal Assistant to the legal representative of your organisation, charged with obtaining an eSeal. The difference between an electronic signature and an eSeal is this: An electronic signature is personal - it engages the person signing. An eSeal is the digital equivalent of the rubber stamp of your organisation - it engages the responsibility of the organisation as a legal entity.

These are the steps you need to follow:

1. Try and find out the exact term in your own language, which will help you in the next steps. See section 11 below for selected translations.
2. Once this is clear in your mind, you need to look for a Trusted Service Provider in your country. See the official European Commission approved list and select your country.
3. Look at the list of Trusted Service Providers (TSP for short) for your country and identify those which issue a QCert for eSeal. You may already deal with a particular TSP for electronic signatures (which, remember, are not the same thing). If this TSP also issues QCerts for eSeal it is well worth contacting them first as they will know your organisation.
4. Select the TSP or TSPs you want to contact. Sometimes it is not easy to find the contact information so be prepared to spend some time on this. And from experience it is advisable to make contact by phone in order to explain what you need and why. eSeals are quite new, and some providers may try to sell you something which isn't what you need.
5. You may need to contact several TSPs before you find the one who can meet your needs, and it's always advisable to compare costs.
6. Once you have made your decision, the TSP will explain to you the process and the documentation you need to provide. The following sections provide examples from different EU member states.

7. Possible Barriers

Example: UNED
The main barrier to the use of the E-seal in Spain is that there is already an official digital certificate for all academic purposes produced by the Spanish National Agency FNMT (Fábrica Nacional de Moneda y Timbre), part of the Ministry of Finance and Public Function. This certificate is used by all Spanish universities, and public administration, and has been used for several years.

8. Useful Links

EU approved list of trust service providers
https://esignature.ec.europa.eu/efda/tl-browser/#/screen/home

Example page of Trust Service Providers for Ireland
https://esignature.ec.europa.eu/efda/tl-browser/#/screen/tl/IE

EDCI Europass Digital Credentials for Learning - instructions for issuers
https://webgate.acceptance.ec.europa.eu/europass/edci-issuer/#/home

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www.eccoe.eu

1   All ECCOE Guidelines are available at https://eccoe.eu/outputs/io5/

ECCOE
European Credit
Clearinghouse for
Opening up Education

**How to obtain an eSeal
in order to authenticate a digital credential on behalf of your organisation**
July 2022
A Practical Guideline developed by the ECCOE project team.
Alessandra Antonaci, Deborah Arnold, Jochen Ehrenreich, Ada Giannatelli, Mykolė Lukošienė, Ildiko Mazar, Carmen Padrón Nápoles, Timothy Read, Beatriz Sedano, Airina Volungevičienė. For more details, see https://eccoe.eu/partners/.

Explanation of the difference between advanced and qualified eSeal

https://europa.eu/europass/en/preparing-credentials-european-digital-credentials-learning#3243

9. Example A: Obtaining an eSeal in France

AUNEGe, the French Digital University for Economics and Management, and coordinator of the ECCOE project, decided to obtain an advanced eSeal to be able to issue and sign Europass Digital Credentials for Learning on behalf of its members, who are largely Higher Education Institutions themselves.

Cost:
- Year 1: 480€+50€ for the physical encrypted key
- then: 480€ per year

To obtain an eSeal, AUNEGE took the following steps:
1. The financial and administrative officer checked the list of TSPs for France.
2. She selected four TSPs, which were listed as issuing QCert for eSeal.
3. The first contacts were unfruitful, but one TSP (ChamberSign) understood the context and was able to meet our needs.
4. The process entailed collecting and sending a series of documents to prove the legal identity of AUNEGe (a non-governmental association), including the national ID cards of the legal representative (the President of AUNEGe), the finance officer as recipient of the physical key, and of the ECCOE project coordinator as delegated user.
5. The delivery of the encrypted USB key could only be done in person at the Chamber of Commerce in Lyon. As the legal representative was not able to go in person, an official letter of delegation was signed in order to authorise the financial and administrative officer to go and collect the key.
6. The financial and administrative officer then sent the physical key to the ECCOE project coordinator by registered post to ensure safe delivery into the hands of the person who would actually be using the key to authenticate the digital credentials.

10. Example B: Obtaining an eSeal in Lithuania

Vytautas Magnus University, being a partner of the ECCOE project, decided to obtain a qualified eSeal to be able to issue and sign Europass Digital Credentials for Learning.

1. The study department officer checked the list of TSPs for Lithuania.
2. From the provided list of TSPs there was only one institution - State Enterprise Centre of Registers - which would issue QCert for eSeal (others only could issue QCert for eSignature or validate qualified eSeal).
3. After contacting the selected TSP (State Enterprise Centre of Registers) it was found that there are several options for a university to have an eSeal. The first option was to have an encrypted USB key; the other option was to have an eSeal which is integrated.

11. Terminology Translations

English	Qcert for eSeal (qualified certificate for electronic seal)
French	"cachet numérique" (support cryptographique de type EuroComercio NG avec clé oberthur v7)
Lithuanian	Kvalifikuotas elektroninio spaudo sertifikatas
German	Qualifiziertes elektronisches Siegel
Italian	sigillo elettronico qualificato
Dutch	Elektronisch zegel
Spanish	Certificado digital "eSeal"

2   All ECCOE Guidelines are available at https://eccoe.eu/outputs/io5/