Micro-credentials:
From HEI's up- and reskilling provisions to a council recommendation and its implementation

PLA, 12 December 2022, Innsbruck

Why micro-credentials?

Policymakers' perspective

- increasing need for upskilling and reskilling
- need for flexible and inclusive learning paths

Higher education institutions' perspective

- a way to provide more targeted and specialised training
- increase their visibility and reputation
- increase their responsiveness to students' and labour markets' demands
- experiment with new pedagogies and technologies

Learners' perspective

- an entry mechanism to a degree programme
- a way to acquire interdisciplinary knowledge and skills
- a way to more flexibility in planning their studies

Employers' perspective

- may help them to better understand specific skills of a prospective employee
- may serve as on-job training

European Higher Education Area: MICROBOL project

- Title: Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments

- Erasmus+ KA3: Initiatives to support the implementation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) reforms, 2019

- Partners: Belgium – Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, Finland – Ministry of Education and Culture, Italy – CIMEA, EUA, ENQA + experts

- Period: March 2020 – March 2022

Aim project:

- Raise awareness among national governments

- Encourage and guide national governments to include micro-credentials on the policy agenda

- Check whether existing Bologna tools are fit for micro-credentials and/or propose changes for adaptations on European level

- Formulate recommendations

- Create a European Framework for micro-credentials

Structure, timeline & outcomes:

- Desk research (April-Aug '20)

- Kick-off conference (Aug-Sept '20)

- Working groups (Sept '20–May '21)
  - Quality Assurance: 70 participants, 34 countries, 7 stakeholder organisations
  - Recognition: 60 participants, 33 countries, 5 stakeholder organisations
  - Qualification Frameworks: 60 participants, 32 countries, 7 stakeholder organisations

- Survey among EHEA countries (Okt '20-Feb '21)

- Recommendations on QA, Recognition & QF&ECTS (May-June '21)

- European Framework for Micro-credentials (July'21-March'22)

- Final Conference (March '22)

MICROBOL survey:

- Aim of the survey: gain a picture on the state-of-play on micro-credentials in different member states of the European Higher Education Area and encouraging national discussion

- Target: members of the Bologna Follow Up Group as well as the nominated representatives in the MICROBOL working groups

- Respondents: 35 countries participated in the survey

- Reference point in time, end 2020

- First time EHEA members were questioned

⇒ Way forward in common understanding

Download: https://microcredentials.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2021/02/Microbol_State-of-play-of-MCs-in-the-EHEA.pdf

MICROBOL recommendations:

- Based on survey results & discussions in the working groups

- Joint publication of 34 recommendations on QA, recognition & QF & ECTS

- Target: EHEA countries and stakeholder organisations, but also European Commission -> Consultation

Download: https://microcredentials.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2021/07/MICROBOL-Recommendations-1.pdf

MICROBOL recommendations:

Transversal themes:
1. An opportunity to rethink higher education's role in lifelong learning
2. Awareness of and common agreement on what a micro-credential is
3. A common format
4. Legislation
5. Digitalisation

Peer exchange and support, involvement of all actors, guidelines

Bologna key commitments

Common framework for Micro-credentials in the European Higher Education Area

Common definition

A micro-credential is a certified small volume of learning.

Purpose

Micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills, and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs.

- A way to increase and diversify lifelong learning provision to support individual learning pathways and widen access to higher education.

- They provide a timely and relevant response to learners' and labour market needs.

- Collaboration is an important aspect for the provision of micro-credentials.

Use

Credentials are owned by the learner, are portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications.

- Micro-credentials can be earned before, during and after higher education degree programmes and as a new way to certify competences acquired earlier in life.

- Learners are at the heart of micro-credentials.

- Catalogues of existing micro-credentials can be an important source of information for learners.

- Certificates for micro-credentials can be awarded in many formats.

Use

- Stackability: different micro-credentials can be combined into a degree or other type of certification.

- Funding mechanisms: it will be necessary to consider the costs of developing and delivering micro-credentials across different disciplines and how they are linked to higher education funding structures.

- Link between education and research: micro-credentials can facilitate a smooth knowledge transfer, translating the latest research results quickly into learning opportunities for the benefit of society.

=> Micro-credentials can be seen as a way to tailor the learning offer and to make visible the knowledge, skills and competences acquired.

Constitutive elements

- **Information on the learner:** identification of the learner

- **Information on the provider:** information on the provider, including country; information on the awarding body institution, including country (if different), including a signature or seal of the provider and/or awarding body institution

- **Information on the micro-credential:** title, date of issuance or date of assessment, verification of authenticity

- **Information on the learning experience:** learning outcomes, workload (in ECTS, when possible), assessment and form of quality assurance

- **Information on the QF level:** NQF level (when possible), QF-EHEA and EQF level (if self-certified/referenced), ISCED level & subject area code, SQF level (if needed)

- **Form of participation** in the learning activity

- **Access requirements**

Quality assurance of micro-credentials

Basic idea => The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) apply to all higher education offered in the EHEA, in whatever format, duration or mode of delivery. The primary responsibility for the quality of provision lies with the higher education institutions (ESG, 2015)

- **All micro-credentials should be subject to internal QA, independently of the external QA approach. The institutional evaluation approach is better fit to cover also micro-credentials. Consider that stand-alone micro-credentials may require more elaborate QA procedures**

- **Design a set of "key considerations" for (internal) QA of micro-credentials in collaboration with various stakeholders and providers.**

- **Explore in collaboration with alternative providers (including companies) if and how QA procedures should be adapted for the provision of micro-credentials in partnerships.**

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Quality assurance of micro-credentials

- Include learners in all steps of development and implementation of micro-credentials.

- HEIs should provide information on the quality assurance mechanism for awarded micro-credentials.

- Develop official registers of micro-credential providers at national/regional levels or incorporate them into existing registers.

- Ensure the inclusion of micro-credential providers in DEQAR, based on quality assurance in line with the ESG.

- Promote the development of clear and transparent catalogues of existing micro-credentials, offered by registered providers.

Recognition of micro-credentials

Coverage/link with Lisbon Recognition Convention:

- Make explicit to what extent micro-credentials can fall within the scope of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, clarify what could be legal ground for the academic recognition of micro-credentials and explore the need for a subsidiary text to the LRC to support their fast and fair recognition.

- Explore the possibility of recognition agreements on micro-credentials among education providers, at regional and cross-regional level.

- Consider the possibility to include a chapter on micro-credentials in the revised version of the European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual and of the EAR HEI manual, to support the development of day-to-day recognition practices.

Recognition of micro-credentials

Recognition of prior learning:

- **Use validation of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning only in cases where a formal (micro-)credential is absent or it does not provide enough, reliable evidence on the learning outcomes.**

- **Develop procedures for the validation of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning that are fit-for-purpose and appropriate for higher education institutions and learners.**

- **Explore the possibility of defining opportunities for training and experience sharing on the recognition of non-formal and informal qualifications validation of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning.**

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Micro-credentials in Qualification Frameworks

Qualification framework:

- **The European discussion and national solutions should be taken forward simultaneously. The European discussion on micro-credentials can have an impact on national solutions. At the same time, it is important that the national solutions and their consequences be considered and discussed at European level.**

- **Micro-credentials should be included in the NQF, when possible. The decision on including the micro-credentials within the national frameworks is to be made at national level. Micro-credentials as qualifications are included within an NQF which is then self-certified as compatible with the QF-EHEA.**

- **Guidelines and common principles for implementing micro-credentials should be developed at national and European level, optimally after consensus has been reached on their definition.**

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Micro-credentials in Qualification Frameworks

ECTS:

- **Ensure that the existing ECTS Users' Guide (2015 edition) is well known and correctly followed by HEIs and its elements clarified for other stakeholders.**

- **If deemed useful, formulate a simple guide to the relevant existing ECTS principles and features, to facilitate the correct understanding and application of ECTS to micro-credentials.**

- **Encourage cooperation between HEIs and other education sectors as well as private providers in order to facilitate the correct definition of learning outcomes and indication of workload, as well as co-creation of learning activities.**

Way forward

- **Take up the recommendations on the 3 key commitments in the Bologna process on international, national and institutional level.**

- **Have a national discussion on the terminology and how MCs should be taken up in national legislation.**

- **Create opportunities for peer support and exchange of practices among stakeholders at national and international level. Topic is taken up by three Bologna Thematic Peer Groups in their work plans for 2020-2024.**

- **Develop a guidebook including a set of guidelines, good practices and recommendations for HEIs through Bologna Thematic Peer Groups and new umbrella projects.**

- **Support the development of a clear policy framework with transparent standards, while at the same time supporting the increased development of micro-credentials in co-creation with all stakeholders.**

For more information on the microbol project:

www.microcredentials.eu/

Or contact us:

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European Union: Council recommendation

A European Approach to Micro-Credentials

An initiative of European Commissioners Mariya Gabriel and Nicolas Schmit

European Skills Agenda

European Education Area

Digital Education Action Plan

European Commission

Evidence gathering and analysis

Open Public Consultation
(April to July 2020)

> 500 replies
> 90 position papers

Empirical evidence
NESET, OECD, Cedefop, Erasmus+ projects such MICROBOL

Wide, targeted consultation with education, training, lifelong learning, labour market stakeholders

Social Partners Hearing

European Commission

Scope

- Covers micro-credentials and policies that can support their effective design and use

- MCs can be used to complement & enhance education, training, LLL and employability ecosystems

- Does not seek to replace or disrupt existing sytems of qualifications

- Established a common European approach to the ongoing and emerging provision of MCs

- Sets out a definition and guidance for the design, issuance and description of MCs to facilitate their quality, transparency and uptake

Outline of the proposal

'Building Blocks'

Recommendations

Focus

Common definition of micro-credentials

Standard elements

Principles for the design and Issuance of micro-credentials

Development of ecosystems for micro-credentials

Deliver on the potential of micro-credentials

Commission Support

Education, training and skills policies

Active Labour Market Policies

European Commission

Common **definition** for micro-credentials

Micro-credential means the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined standards.

Courses leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be standalone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.

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Union **Standard elements** to describe a micro-credential

- Identification of the **learner**
- **Title** of the micro-credential
- **Country/Region of the issuer**
- **Awarding body**
- Date of issuing
- **Learning outcomes**
- **Notional workload** needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in **ECTS**, wherever possible)
- **Level** (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (EQF, QF-EHEA), if applicable
- **Type of assessment**
- Form of participation in the learning activity
- Type of **quality assurance** used to underpin the micro-credential

Optional Information
- Prerequisites needed to enrol in the learning activity
- Supervision and identity verification during assessment
- Grade achieved
- Integration / stackability options
- Further information

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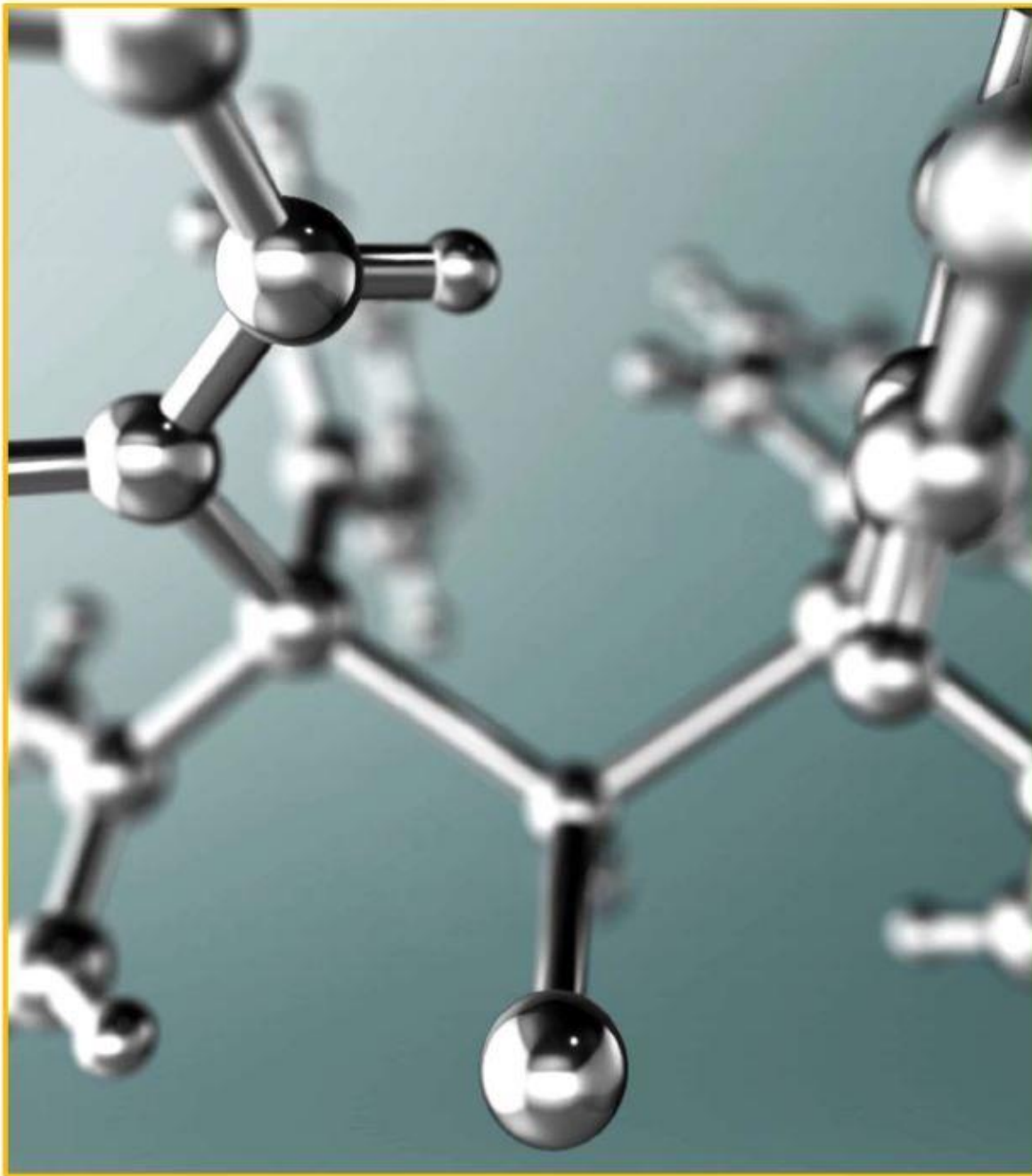
Union **principles for design and issuance** of micro-credentials

1. Quality
2. Transparency
3. Relevance
4. Valid assessment
5. Learning Pathways
6. Recognition
7. Portable
8. Learner Centred
9. Authentic
10. Information and Guidance

European Commission

Thank you for your attention