How micro is micro and what does it mean in ECTS credits?

Micro-credentials ECTS ranges

Assignment of micro-credentials to NQFs

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EC Recommendation on micro-credentials: COM/2021/770 final

Definition

Micro-credential - the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a <mark>small volume of learning</mark>.

These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria.

Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with <mark>specific knowledge, skills and competences</mark> that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs.

Micro-credentials <mark>are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable</mark>. They may be stand-alone or <mark>combined into larger credentials</mark>.

They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity (European Commission, 2022).

Small

The title "Small Is Beautiful„ by EF Schumacher
 came from a principle espoused
by Schumacher's teacher Leopold Kohr
advancing small, appropriate technologies,
policies, and polities as a superior
alternative to the mainstream ethos
of "bigger is better".
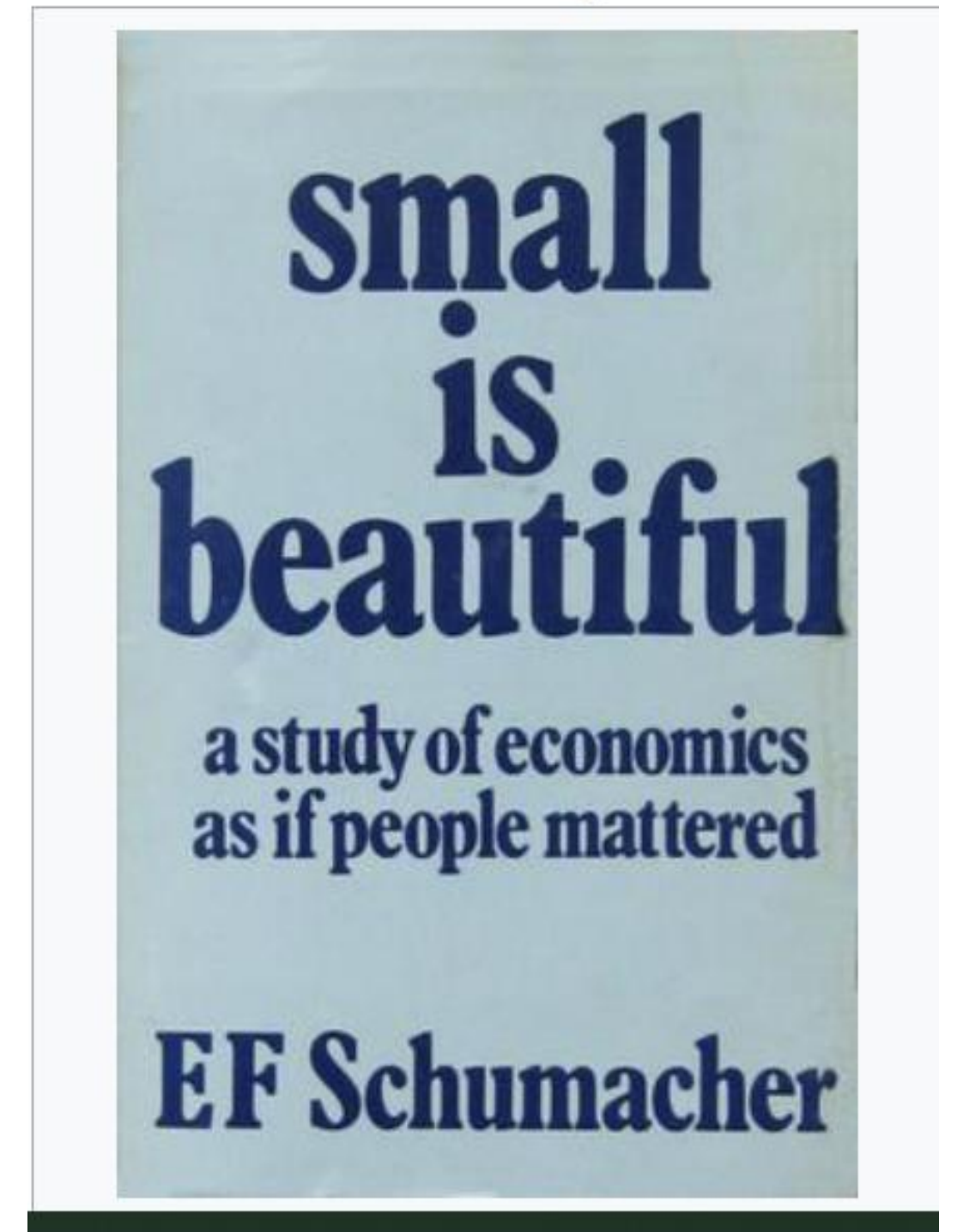
A European Approach to Micro-credentials

- Developing a European approach to micro-credentials

is a joint agenda from Commissioner Maria Gabriel responsible for innovation, research, culture, education and youth, and Commissioner Nicolas Schmit, responsible for jobs and social rights.

- Output of the micro-credentials Higher Education Consultation Group (December 2020) composed of HE experts from various European countries, estbalished by the Commission.

- The group had the mandate to jointly develop proposals for
  - Shared definition
  - Common characteristics
  - A roadmap of actions

European approach: key building blocks

> A common and transparent definition;

> A defined list of critical information elements to describe micro-credentials;

> Alignment to National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF): defined levels, standards for describing learning outcomes;

> Quality assurance standards;

> Defined credits: European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), defined learning outcomes and notional workload;

> Recognition: for further studies and/or employment purposes;

> Portability: issuing, storage and sharing of micro-credentials;

> Platform solutions for the provision and promotion of courses leading to micro-credentials;

> Incentives to stimulate the uptake of micro-credentials.

EU standard for constitutive elements

- Alingments to NQFs and EQF
  - Type 1: issued by formal education institutions and can be aligned with EQF via NQFss and ECTS
  - Type 2 : issued by non-formal education providers (further discussion needed to identify standards for these micro-credentials
- QA of the credential and learning content (ESG) and provider
- Notional work load and learning outcomes (in ECTS, if possible)

ECTS use

- ECTS makes learning measurable
- ECTS contributes to the credentials transparency
- ECTS, basic element to make mico-credentials stackable
- ECTS can facilitate recognition of short courses as independent modules or a part of full qualification

- Range of ECTS? Notional volume of learning required? Is there a need to set a fixed level of volume in terms of range of ECTS credits?
  - Not set to allow for flexibility for issuers rather than to make it easier to compare.
  - Thus: 1 ECTS credit minimum with an upper limit of less than a full degree
  - Typical range would be between 1 and 6 ECTS for a single microcredential

MICROBOL project Working Group on QF and ECTS

- Output document and recommendations – June 2021

- How the existing EHEA tools can be used and /or be adapted to be applicable to micro-credentials

- NQFs, QF-EHEA and ECTS are one of the key bases for transparency in Higher Education
  - Regulating the size of MC is not crucial, but the bigger the MC the easier is to define the learning outcomes and the level, if the MC is too big it could be confused with a programme

Qualifications Frameworks (NQF & QF for EHEA)

- A micro-credential can be described as being at level 1st, 2nd, 3rd cycle of QF EHEA, as any component in full degree programme,

- If a MC is a part of a degree programme by HEI this would be easy,

- The accumulation of knowledge, skills and competences may take place vertically or horizontally within the QFs, and in various directions (how the learner develops his/her learning path)

- The coexistence of MCs and degrees at the same level may create confusion in terms of progress between the levels,

- The distinction between MCs and full degrees should be clearly communicated,

- MCs should not be automatically stacked into a full degree.

The size and level of micro-credentials

- Regulating the size of MC is not crucial, but
  - The bigger the MC, the easier it becomes to define the learning outcomes and the level
  - If the MC is too big, it could be confused with a programme,
- The indication of level may be useful to create transparency and stackability, but the description of learning outcomes might be also sufficient,
- If there is no level indicated there might be problems with MC recognition, in particular in counries other than that of the provider,

ECTS and other than HE providers

ECTS should be used for micro-credentials provided by higher education institutions.
• This could be useful also for other education sectors, employers and 'other providers' as there would be an advantage in using a widely accepted language, particularly the translation of ECTS into workload.
• However, there might be issues regarding how to ensure that ECTS is used properly in these cases.
• The easiest way would seem to be by agreements between 'other providers' and HEIs, that could verify that the LOs and the volume of learning are correctly described in terms of ECTS.

To consider:

• Views on whether to define a possible range of credits for MCs vary: how to ensure clarity without sacrificing flexibility?

• The ECTS Users' Guide supports the development of stand-alone MCs but it should be better known and applied, with regard to this and other aspects.

Micro-credentials in Poland

- HE centrally regulated.

- Minister's advisory group established.

- To amend the Law on HE with regard to micro-credentials or not?

- Ministry reluctant to overregulate or „limit HEIs' autonomy and sacrifice flexibility of provision".

- MCs developed by private HEIs and those linked to the labour market.

- Research-intensive public HEIs uninterested, unless

- Motivated by European University alliances.

ECIU University Micro-credentials: a vision for European learners, values and priorities

- European University Alliances are key stakeholders in the design and implementation of the European approach to micro-credentials as cross-cutting networks of institutions committed to innovation. European Universities and Higher Education Institutions must be positioned as key drivers of change.

- ECIU University Micro-modules are a short learning opportunity that are formally assessed and support learners to fill their knowledge gaps and boost their capabilities in order to successfully engage in ECIU University challenge-based activities.

- The criteria for micro-modules emphasise online and hybrid learning, **small size (1-3 ECTS)** and provision in English whilst meeting the current definition and standards for micro-credentials.

Politechnika Łódzka

UNA EUROPA

- Una Europa's joint micro-credentials target postgraduate students and professionals. The micro-credentials scheme will consist of a special courses of four or more MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). Courses are designed to build a bridge between a Bachelor's and Master's degree or to provide an initiation to candidates switching fields of study. Candidates gain **20 ECTS** on successful completion.

4 EU+ position paper on MCs

- In the interest of providing short-term programming for professional, lifelong learning, 4EU+ is interested in keeping the volume and certification of learning **as open as possible** to give the Alliance room for various models and provision of **flexible learning opportunities**. To remain true to the notion of micro-credentials being short and of a small volume, Alliance will work with micro-credentials in the range between **1 and 15 ECTS** in volume. However, recognising that ECTS may not carry the same relevance outside of higher education and that national regulation may limit the awarding of additional ECTS beyond those required for completion of a degree programme, it is within each institutions decision-making power to award or not award ECTS for completion of a micro-credential.

ENHANCE approach to microcredentials

- MC should be connected with **meaningful** learning experience

  No strict minimum limit of ECTS credits (whether 3 – 5 has not been decided)

  - ES – less than 15 ECTS
  - NO – all courses in degree programmes at least 7.5 ECTS, smaller workload allowed in non-degree courses
  - DE – an MC programme composed of several modules – at least 10 ECTS; a single course 3 -9 ECTS, a certificate programme of up to 30 ECTS

Survey conducted by Julian Irlenkaeuser TU Berlin

ENHANCE

Thank you for your attention!

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