

# Quality Assurance of Micro-Credentials in the European Context

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**Chair** of the Working Group on Micro-credentials for European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, on behalf of the British Accreditation Council, UK

- offer detail regarding quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area
- highlight aspects reflected in European debate
- outline key recommendations formulated

**Lead designer** of Micro-credentials Accreditation Scheme for the British Accreditation Council, UK

- rationale of the MC Accreditation Scheme
- specificities of the external quality assurance MC Accreditation Scheme
- profile of providers who are engaging with the MC Accreditation Scheme

# SHORT COURSES ARE NOT NEW!!!

enqa.



## What is new?

- Intensifying of funding streams proposed
- Labour market emphasis on lifelong learning
- Diversifying of learner profiles and learner motivations
- Proliferation of providers, including higher education developing MCs
- Preoccupations for recognition (stackability and portability)
- Interest of governments and agencies to consider quality assurance
  - ⇒ **Safeguarding of student experience**
  - ⇒ **Public reassurance**
  - ⇒ **Comparability and consistency**

# ENQA Working Group on Micro-credentials



## Membership

Chair: Prof Anca Greere, British Accreditation Council, UK  
Members: 18 agencies from 12 countries  
Italy, Spain, Turkey, Germany, Sweden,  
Cyprus, Austria, Finland, Belgium, Latvia,  
Portugal, the Netherlands



## Objectives

- to map quality assurance approaches for micro-credentials across the EHEA (focus on the role of external QA and QA agencies);
- to determine specific external quality assurance expectations for micro-credentials;
- to consider ESG applicability in quality assuring micro-credentials;
- to develop guidance on key considerations of quality assurance for micro-credentials

<https://www.enqa.eu/events/online-dissemination-event-external-quality-assurance-of-micro-credentials-27-september-2022/>

# What are Micro-credentials?



- an umbrella concept to cover all instances of short (certified) portable learning which forms part of an educational environment and, hence, may fall under external quality assurance arrangements now or in the future
- modular, stackable, with flexible formats, support for re-skilling/up-skilling, contributor to Lifelong Learning (LLL)

... whether they are called micro-credentials or not ...

=> micro-credential-type education in all its guises

## Characteristics:

... Flexibility; Agility; Portability; Stackability; Recognition; Authenticity; Variability; Reskilling/Upskilling ...



**microbol**

## Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments

Common Framework for  
Micro-credentials in the EHEA

### > 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

### > 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

<https://microbol.microcredentials.eu/microbol-framework-published/>

## What EU standard elements should it include?

The basis for trust in micro-credentials is transparency. Micro-credentials should be clearly identified as such with elements that make it possible for learners, education and training institutions, quality assurance agencies, and

employers to understand the value and content of micro-credentials and to compare them.

The European approach to micro-credentials suggests a list of critical information elements that any micro-credential should provide:

### Mandatory elements

- 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 credits, 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 elements, where relevant

## Quality

Micro-credentials are subject to **internal and external quality assurance** by the system producing them (e.g. the education, training or labour market context in which the micro-credential is developed and delivered). Quality assurance processes must be **fit-for-purpose, be clearly documented, accessible, and meet the needs** of learners and stakeholders.

**External quality assurance** is based primarily on the **assessment of providers** (rather than individual courses) and the effectiveness of their internal quality assurance procedures.

<https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/micro-credentials>



# Situation in Europe

64 responses from QA agencies in the EHEA

≈ 1/3 YES + DEVELOPING

≈ 1/2 FOR FUTURE

## What does the YES/DEVELOPING mean?

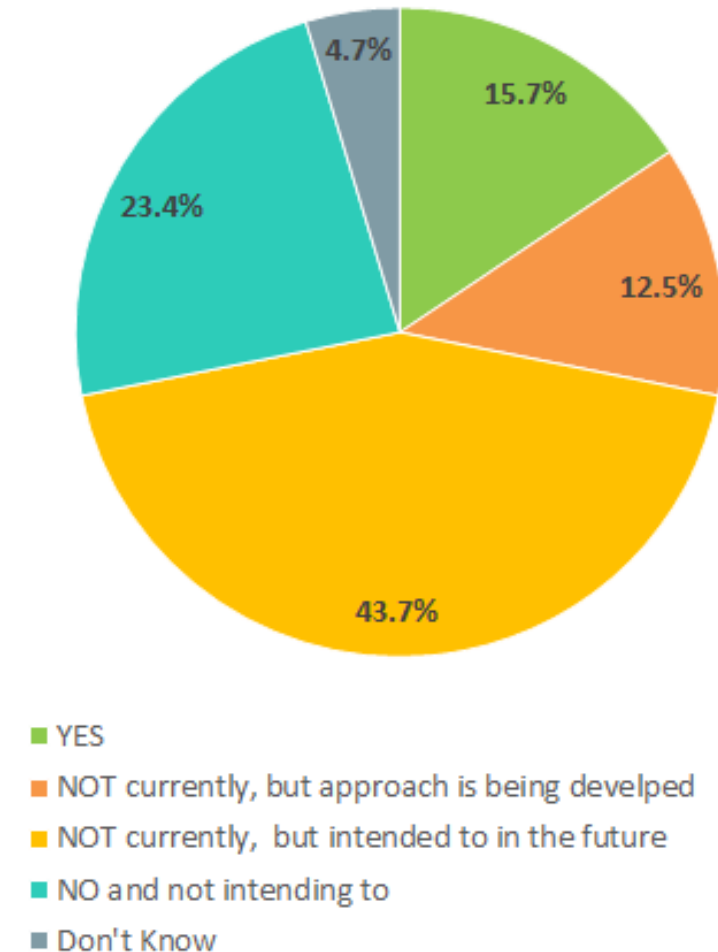
- reliance on internal QA structure
- component of institutional review (sampling)
- comparable to programme review
- specific methodology for MCs

## Why YES/DEVELOPING?

- ... regulatory

[https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2.-Survey-results\\_ENQA\\_MC\\_20220922\\_Final.pdf](https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2.-Survey-results_ENQA_MC_20220922_Final.pdf)

Does your agency/organisation currently quality assure MC?



- Reassurance for the quality of MCs is important
- How to gain reassurances can be context-dependent and will consider existing QA arrangements
- **Capturing MCs in external quality assurance processes has benefits**
- Tools for recognition must be in place
- Models for stackability must be developed
- Combination between online, blended and face-to-face modalities must be explored



<https://www.enqa.eu/events/online-dissemination-event-external-quality-assurance-of-micro-credentials-27-september-2022/>

- Mission and vision to integrate LLL (and accommodate rationale for MCs)
- Clear responsibilities to be allocated for management and review of MCs
- Policies to cover MC activities in meaningful ways
- Professional collaborations and academic partnerships to be intensified (for recognition and stackability)
- Labour market expertise to be prominent in QA processes
- Internal quality monitoring to be more frequent or take different approaches
- Ongoing agile adjustments need to maintain currency
- Closure triggers need to be explicit (“shelf-life” limited)



[https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/3.-WGFindings\\_CombinedRecPart1Part2-1.pdf](https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/3.-WGFindings_CombinedRecPart1Part2-1.pdf)

# FOR THE FUTURE



- **More** thinking on integration of LLL
- **More** effort into models for recognition and stackability
- **More** consideration of dynamics between various types of providers
- **More** agility, flexibility, personalisation and individualisation of quality assurance
- **(Maybe) more** visionary approaches for quality assurance agency collaborations
- ...



...more, more, more...

[https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/3.-WGFindings\\_CombinedRecPart1Part2-1.pdf](https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/3.-WGFindings_CombinedRecPart1Part2-1.pdf)



# DESIGNING A VOLUNTARY ACCREDITATION SCHEME FOR MICRO-CREDENTIALS

FOR MICRO-CREDENTIALS?

<https://www.the-bac.org/micro-credentials-pilot-scheme/>

[https://www.engu.eu/wp-content/uploads/BAC\\_Case-Study-1.pdf](https://www.engu.eu/wp-content/uploads/BAC_Case-Study-1.pdf)

Prof Anca Greere, Senior Advisor (External), British Accreditation Council (BAC)

## Why has BAC launched a MC Accreditation Scheme?

- Provider base covers independent, further and higher education in UK and internationally
- Has experience with accrediting providers of short courses (not necessarily leading to certification)

## What the Scheme is?

- Voluntary accreditation, not linked to any regulatory requirements
- Open to UK and international providers of MCs
- There are no (minimal) restrictions on the size or nature of the MC provision
- Applied at institutional level, for the whole of the MC provision
- Tests the robustness of the management and quality assurance arrangements for MCs
- Provider can apply before/during/after MC delivery
- Provider can change MC provision during accreditation cycle of 4 years

## What the Scheme is NOT?

- Not inspecting programme by programme or course by course
- Not inspecting subject/discipline content

### Where does the focus lie?

- Connection to lifelong learning
- Policy specificity for MC-related activities
- Recognition and stackability arrangements, if available
- Design and planning processes (if modules of larger degree, what adjustments)
- Agility in monitoring and review
- Closure triggers and their efficiency
- Transparency on prerequisites for enrolment
- Ability to cater for diverse groups of learners
- Arrangements for intense engagement with the labour market, for all MC stages
- Flexibility on staffing arrangements and appropriateness of appraisal procedures

### What evidence may be requested?

- Records of interaction with industry representatives
- Policy on course/programme closures
- Agreements regarding recognition, articulation, stackability and/or internal frameworks

**1.4.** The mission, goals and strategy emphasise the importance of collaborations and partnerships, that have undergone rigorous due diligence and can effectively **support the recognition and stackability aims of MCs.** (N/A)

**1.5.** The provider takes concrete steps towards **securing recognition of its MCs which may lead to articulation or stackability arrangements.** (N/A)

**1.6.** The provider has a written **risk management strategy** relating to the delivery of MCs, which includes financial planning and is effectively implemented and regularly reviewed.

**4.2.** Information on the credentials awarded is **comprehensive, accurate and up to date**, and includes details on **recognition, articulation or stackability** opportunities, as appropriate.

**8.2.** **Any decision to break a degree into standalone components is supported by a clear rationale and accompanied by any necessary adjustments** (i.e. relevant planning and design )



**6.1.** Policies for quality assurance cover MCs in an appropriate way and provide **a balance between agility and value for recognition.**

**6.2. Ongoing monitoring** arrangements are of appropriate frequency and result in relevant changes being made promptly to benefit, as far as possible, **existing MC cohorts.**

**7.2.** There are established processes that enable the provider **to verify** that the participant who is registered on the course is **the same person who attends, completes the course and receives any course credit.**

**10.2.** Trainers have a **good understanding of, and strong relationships with, the sector** related to the MC course they are teaching and a good knowledge of its specific practices.

**11.2.** Trainers are properly trained with respect to the provider's policies relating to MCs, participant needs, instructional approaches and techniques and the use of appropriate instructional technology, where necessary.

## General Requirements

- Appropriately qualified staff
- Understanding of risk and how to manage it
- Effective administrative support and staff management
- Formal quality assurance processes to encourage continuous improvement
- Focus on the quality of the student experience and achievement
- Participants are kept safe whilst studying

## MC-specific Requirements

- Explicit learning outcomes
- Clearly identified level of study
- Appropriate assessment, to demonstrate learning outcomes achievement
- Certificate issued with key characteristics
- Options for stackability and recognition
- Continuous engagement with industry representatives/labour market

## Assessment of eligibility for MC Accreditation Scheme

The MC provision is composed of courses which meet the following characteristics:

- notional workload for the MC: 100-1000 hours;
- form of participation (online, blended, face-to-face) is identified.
- learning outcomes are explicit;
- information on recognition, articulation or stackability opportunities is provided, if relevant;
- mechanisms for the identification of the participant are applied;
- assessment types are clearly outlined;
- certification is issued on achievement of the learning outcomes;

The eligibility criteria are applicable throughout the accreditation cycle and it is the responsibility of the provider to prove that it meets the eligibility criteria.

# THANK YOU!

# ENQA.

