



# Credentialing open non-formal learning in Higher Education: the MicroHE approach

Dr Ferenc Tátrai  
EDEN European Distance and e-Learning Network

EUA SP-HERE Conference, Prague, 12. December  
2019

## Questions addressed

- Trends in providing (electronic, blended or f2f) Short Learning Programmes (SLPs, like MOOCs) in higher education in Europe. Legislation vs. needs to provide such blended or fully-online courses.
- Current debate on micro-credentials. How and under what conditions are they recognised in the labour market and in higher education institutions? Can and should this agenda be advanced in Europe?
- The main methodological and operational challenges or roadblocks. How can quality assurance systems adapt micro-credentials?



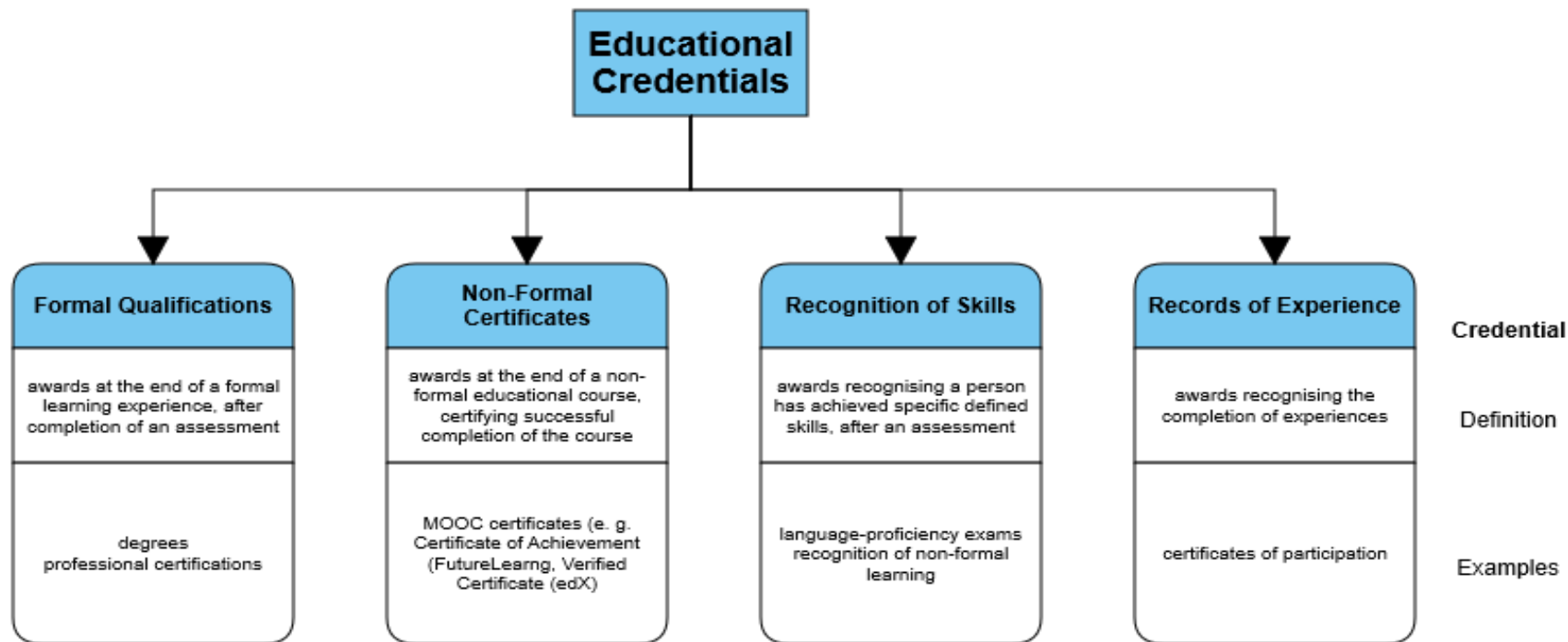
## Trends

- Delivery methods: part of the degree courses are provided in digital or blended form.
- Response to labour market needs: shorter, industry-specific courses
- Modularization: smaller, well defined „chunks” are delivered as SLP-s (electronic short learning programmes, MOOCS, etc)
- Credentialisation and recognition: need to award the SLP-s and other open learning achievements with micro-credentials. Emergence of the concept of micro-credentials

## What are **micro-credentials**?

- An educational credential is a **documented statement that acknowledges a person's learning outcomes.**
- A micro-credential is a **sub-unit of a credential that could accumulate into a larger credential or degree or be part of a portfolio.** Examples are: Verified Certificates, Digital Badges, MicroMasters, Nanodegrees.
- **a Short Learning Programme (SLPs) or short degree programme is a group of courses (*units, modules or other learning building blocks*) with a common subject focussing on specific needs of the society** which are typically part of a larger degree. A short learning programme usually has 5 to 30 ECTS.

# Types of educational credentials




## Relation of micro-credentials and SLP-s

- The successful completion of the SLP might or might not be awarded with a micro credential.
- If it is awarded, it is called credentialed SLP.
- In some literature sources, however, SLP-s are meant to be micro-credentials. This implies that these sources speak only about SLP-s awarded by micro-credentials.
- Relation of micro-credentials and digital badges: Many micro-credentials offer a visual digital representation, often referred to as a badge. Sharing platforms include Mozilla Backpack, LinkedIn or Facebook (Purdue University 2018)

## Current debate on micro-credentials : How and under what conditions are they recognised in the labor market and in HE institutions?



- *Flexibility, personalization and recognition* are critical when using SLPs to respond to the needs of the labour market
- For both the labour market and the higher education institute: should allow to *explore the micro-credential's requirements and evidence of learning*:  should have certain technical value and should have the necessary meta data.
- For HE institutions: To let an SLP be part of a degree programme, it *has to be accredited and measured in (ECTS) credit values*, and necessarily has to have *the same assessment and identity verification* as the other parts of the respective (accredited) degree programme.
- Recognition by the *same HE institution* providing the micro-credentialed course is straightforward, *by other HE institutions* might be based either *on mutual agreement or at a system level (not yet developed)*

# Technical Value of a (micro)-credential



<b>measurable</b>	it represents a specific, identifiable and measurable experience or skill;
<b>secure</b>	not falsifiable, and verifiable
<b>personal</b>	attributable to a single, identifiable person;
<b>stackable</b>	credentials of the same type can be added together to form a greater whole;
<b>transferable</b>	it can be converted into different credentials;
<b>collectable</b>	the person to whom it is issued can own, control and physically possess the credential;
<b>standardised</b>	standards ensure that the same set of conditions will always lead to the award of the same credential;
<b>transparent</b>	the value represented by the credential, as well as all processes that lead to its award are published;
<b>recognisable</b>	the credential is available in a language and format that allows for wide use and acceptance;
<b>traceable</b>	the conditions which led to the issue of the credential can be audited;
<b>easy to use:</b>	third parties using the credential can do so easily;



# Quality



To reach a high quality score, the credential statement has to be

- **Distinct:** represent a specific, identifiable and measurable experience, skill or fact and be attributable to a single, identifiable person
- **Authentic:** contain enough information to verify when, where and by whom it was issued, trace and reproduce the conditions under which it was issued, be able to be issued for a limited period and be revocable
- **Accessible:** be issued in a widely-spoken language or in an easy to read graphical format and in a standardised form,
- **Exchangeable:** be modular, allowing for the credential to be subdivided into smaller credentials or stacked into larger credentials, be convertible into other types of credentials
- **Portable:** be owned by the learner

# Current debate on Micro-credentials : Can and should this agenda be advanced in Europe?



- It is already on the agenda at European level:
- Standards on Digital Credentials are being developed, see the [European Digital Credential Infrastructure of the European Commission](#) (European Commission, 2018)
- [Action three of the Digital Education Action plan](#) proposes the integration of digitally-signed qualifications in Europass.
- The [EU Decision 2018/ 646](#) takes it further in Article 4(6) by specifying that the " Europass shall support authentication services for any digital documents or representations of information on skills and qualifications“
- The decentralized credentials clearinghouse “Credentify” was created: [Credentify](#) ensures that micro-credentials are certified and mapped to European qualifications frameworks.

# The New Europass



- The new Europass will offer tools and information for learners, workers and job-seekers across the EU to manage their careers and studies. **The new Europass will include:**
- the Europass e-Portfolio: an online tool for users to describe their skills, find interesting job and learning opportunities, to manage their applications, and create CVs and cover letters
- Information on working and studying in different EU countries
- ***Digital credentials: free tools and software for institutions to issue digital, tamper-proof qualifications and other learning credentials***
- Interoperability: Europass can connect with employment and learning services to allow users connect and make applications.

## The main methodological and operational challenges or roadblocks:



The MicroHE project ([www.microcredentials.eu](http://www.microcredentials.eu)) run a *survey on the use of micro-credentials* asking about 100 HE teachers, students, decision makers and employers about their opinion on micro-credentials.

The survey on micro-credentials in HE concluded that

- 1) Institutions *lack understanding* of SLPs and Micro-credentials
- 2) Adoption is prevented by the *lack of a Common Recognition Mechanism* even within a country and by inadequate resource allocation for SLP adoption.
- 3) SLP enabled *profitability coincides with SLP adoption*
- 4) *Flexibility, personalization and recognition* are critical when using SLPs to respond to the demands of the labour market

## Summary

- The concept of (digital) micro-credentials emerged to recognise learning outcomes
- MC-s should allow to *explore the requirements and evidence of learning*
- In HE the micro-credential is a **sub-unit of a credential**
- *It has to be accredited and measured in (ECTS) credit values*
- *Flexibility, personalization and recognition are crucial for the labour market*

On the **agenda at European level**

- [European Digital Credential Infrastructure](#) being developed
- [Action 3 of the Digital Education Action plan](#) proposes the integration of digitally-signed qualifications in Europass
- Article 4(6) of [EU Decision 2018/ 646](#): Europass shall support authentication services for any digital documents or representations of information on skills and qualifications

Thanks for your attention!

Contact: [tatrai@eden-online.org](mailto:tatrai@eden-online.org)

<https://microcredentials.eu/>

<https://oepass.eu/>

<https://credentify.eu/>