

Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments

Recommendations from the
Microbol project

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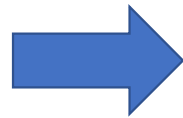




Quality assurance of micro-credentials, recommendations from the Microbol project

Elena Cirlan, Policy and Project officer, EUA

The ESG



apply to all higher education offered in the EHEA, in whatever format, duration or mode of delivery



Internal quality assurance

- The primary responsibility for the quality of provision lies with the higher education institutions (ESG, 2015)
 - put in place quality assurance processes corresponding to the expectations laid down in Part 1 of the ESG
 - consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle” (ESG standard 1.4)
- All micro-credentials should be subject to internal QA with well-built system to monitor their quality internally. Consider that stand-alone micro-credentials may require more elaborate QA procedures
- HEIs’ to publish clear policy and information on how they approach the quality of micro-credentials
- Include learners in all steps of the development, implementation and QA process of micro-credentials



External quality assurance

- QA agencies' role is to support higher education institutions in developing policies and processes for QA
- To ensure the public and stakeholders about the effectiveness of these
- To explicitly address internal QA of micro-credentials
- The application of programme level evaluation procedures should not be encouraged for each micro-credential course
- The institutional evaluation approach is better fit to cover also micro-credentials
- Different types of micro-credentials might require different evaluation approaches → stand-alone micro-credential vs micro-credential that is part of a bigger degree programme; online mode vs the face-to-face



Legal aspects

- National governments should explore whether a change in legislation is needed, and if this is the case:
 - plan the relevant changes
 - exchange information with other countries
 - explore good practices and experiences at international
 - provide support to HEIs
 - and consider institutional autonomy to allow for diversity and creativity.
- Support the development of a clear policy framework with transparent standards, while at the same time supporting the increased development of micro-credentials in cocreation with all stakeholders.



Way forward

- Support the development of a shared vision of what a micro-credential is
- Design a set of "key considerations" for QA of micro-credentials. Further explore in collaboration with alternative providers if and how QA procedures should be adapted for the provision of micro-credentials in partnerships
- Further investigate employers' acceptance of micro-credentials
- Develop a guidebook including a set of guidelines, good practices and recommendations for HEIs
- 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



Way forward

- Promote the development of clear and transparent catalogues of existing micro-credentials, offered by registered providers
- Encourage digitally awarded and user-controlled credentials, as a means to support portability, transparency and reliability of information and verification of authenticity
- Explore if and how additional aspects need to be considered in the quality assurance of digitally-delivered micro-credentials
- Create opportunities for peer support and exchange of practices among stakeholders at national and international level





Recognition of micro-credentials, recommendations from the Microbol project

Chiara Finocchietti, CIMEA

MICROBOL recommendations

Bologna Key Commitments:

- Recognition
 1. Coverage/link with Lisbon Recognition Convention
 2. Recognition of prior learning



1. Coverage/link with Lisbon Recognition Convention / 1

As far as possible, micro-credentials should be assessed according to the principles and procedures of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC).

It is still important to make explicit to what extent micro-credentials awarded by HEIs can fall under the Lisbon Recognition Convention definitions:

- Period of study: “Any component of a higher education programme which has been evaluated and documented and, while not a complete programme of study in itself, represents a significant acquisition of knowledge or skill”.
- Higher education qualification: “Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme” (LRC section I - Definitions).



1. Coverage/link with Lisbon Recognition Convention / 2

- For qualifications awarded by non-formal providers, the lack of legal instruments could leave the question of admission/recognition predictability open.
- Recognition agreements on micro-credentials among education providers, at regional and cross-regional level, may be relevant for recognition purposes.
- Topic of a possible “substantial difference” between micro-credentials.
- It is relevant to streamline the procedure in line with the LRC principles and have a flexible approach.
- There are a number of initiatives in the field in the framework of the ENIC-NARIC networks that could constitute a background for recognition of micro-credentials, and that could be looked at to explore synergies, integration, or to take inspiration from for principles and practices already used.



1. Coverage/link with Lisbon Recognition Convention / 3

- 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.



2. Recognition of Prior Learning / 1

- A generalised use of micro-credentials offers the opportunity to enhance the use of recognition of prior learning in higher education.
- Beneficial for the more standardised and more easily accessible recognition of small volumes of formal or non-formal (including industry types of) learning certified by a credential (based on the principles of the LRC).
- Possibilities to issue micro-credentials as the result of procedures to recognise informal (experiential) learning and non-formal learning that does not meet the micro-credential standard (need to define procedures and training).
- International approaches and good practices in recognition of qualifications of refugees with partial or missing documentation could be seen as an example from which to learn and take inspiration from, also for micro-credentials.



2. Recognition of Prior Learning / 2

- Use **validation of learning outcomes** from non-formal and informal learning only in cases where a (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 validation of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning.

Way forward

- Transparency of information is key for fair assessment of micro-credentials.
- If all the constitutive elements are properly displayed, it is possible for HEIs or other entities within or outside of the higher education sector to assess such micro-credentials in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles.
- Digitalization of credentials supports recognition, as it enables portability, transparency and reliability of information and verification of authenticity.
- The main objective would be to work towards recognition of micro-credentials that is as “automatic” as possible, starting from cases where all the elements and information are available to conduct a fair assessment.





Micro-credentials in Qualification Frameworks, recommendations from the Microbol project

Jonna Korhonen, Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture

Qualification Frameworks

- The QF-EHEA is in principle fit for purpose also when addressing micro-credentials
- It is important to make very clear how micro-credentials are represented within QF-EHEA as they rarely mark the completion of a cycle.
- This links also to the way the NQFs are developed, used and implemented at the national level
- The learning outcomes approach may help to include micro-credentials into NQFs



Qualification Frameworks

- The decision whether to include all micro-credentials or only some of them in an NQF is made on a national level
- If included, the criteria for inclusion in the NQF should be decided (such as naming, size...)
- In some cases, a description of learning outcomes could also be sufficient
- There needs to be enough information about European and national qualifications frameworks



Qualification Frameworks

Recommendation: **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 on European level.

Recommendation: **Micro-credentials should be included in the NQF, when possible.** The decision on including micro-credentials within 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.

Recommendation: **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.



ECTS

- The ECTS was developed to permit the description of a piece of learning in a form that was transparent and understandable for others
- Nowadays, it comprises
 - **learning outcomes**, which are descriptions of what competences the learner is able to demonstrate at the end of a learning experience,
 - **and volume of learning**, understood as the amount of time a normal learner will need to form those competences
- In addition to credits themselves, another key element of ECTS is the production of **the Course Catalogue** in standard format
- The micro-credentials should not be developed separately from the existing higher education system



ECTS

- ECTS should be used for micro-credentials provided by HEIs
- Whether micro-credentials should have a specific number of credits, or a broader or narrower range of credits is still an open question
- Employers may also be interested in having competences described using the widely known and accepted language of ECTS.
- Here cooperation agreements between HEIs and alternative providers could be beneficial
- ECTS needs to be implemented correctly, and its many facets better known not only to academics, but also to other stakeholders.



ECTS

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

Recommendation: 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.

Recommendation: **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

