

Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments

TPG B on Recognition

9 June 2022



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Details 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
- Period: March 2020 – March 2022



Partners:

- Belgium – Flemish Ministry of Education and Training
 - Finland – Ministry of Education and Culture
 - Italy – CIMEA
 - EUA
 - ENQA
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- Experts: Anthony F. Camilleri, Frederik De Decker, Ann Katherine Isaacs, George Ubachs, Peter Van der Hijden

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 (Belgium – Flemish Community, Peter van der Hijden, Anthony Camilleri)
 - 70 participants, 34 countries, 7 stakeholder organisations
 - Recognition (Italy, Frederik De Decker, Peter van der Hijden)
 - 60 participants, 33 countries, 5 stakeholder organisations
 - Qualification Frameworks (Finland, George Ubachs, Ann Katherine Isaacs)
 - 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
 - First time EHEA members were questioned
- => Way forward in common understanding



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 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.

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.

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.

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.
- Create opportunities for peer support and exchange of practices among stakeholders at national and international level (among which the Bologna Thematic Peer Groups).
- Have a national discussion on the terminology and how MCs should be taken up in national legislation.
- Develop a guidebook including a set of guidelines, good practices and recommendations for HEIs.
- 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:

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Or contact us:

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