

# Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials Outcomes of desk research

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TPG C MEETING

2 JUNE 2023

**I'MINQA**

# Desk Research - Aim of the study

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- Provide an overview on the state of play of policy developments
- Present information on various activities/initiatives across the EHEA
- Identify trends and areas for development
- Provide a basis for the guidance documents for IQA, EQA and the Key considerations for non-HEI providers

# Sources of information

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- Survey to TPG C member countries (31 responses)
- Review of publicly available material on national and international initiatives and previous publications
- Interviews with representatives of HEIs (14), QA agencies (12) and alternative providers (4)

# Starting point

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- Micro-credentials are not new but have gained importance due to policy focus on upskilling/reskilling labour force
- The term 'micro-credentials' is in common use now at European level, but often not used at national level
- Many countries also do not have a formal definition for micro-credentials
- Previous work on QA of micro-credentials in HE has confirmed:
  - Applicability of Bologna Process QA tools to micro-credentials
  - Providers have primary responsibility for quality and QA of micro-credentials
  - External QA should be proportionate and focus on the institutional approach to micro-credentials and their inclusion in internal quality assurance processes

# System level development

## Group 1

Following ongoing trends, participating in national & international working groups

Conducting nation-wide research and consultations with stakeholders

Drafting position documents related to quality assurance of micro-credentials

## Group 2

Working on the implementation of a framework for micro-credentials

Strategic plan for quality assurance of micro-credentials

Developing processes and procedures to evaluate micro-credentials

Nation-wide pilots

Drafting policies & recommendations for changes to higher education law

## Group 3

Updating the national qualification framework to include micro-credentials (or have already included them)

Take (final) steps to including micro-credentials in higher education law (or already completed it if needed)

# Approaches to micro-credentials offer

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- Design & development of micro-credentials: carefully consider not only labour market needs, but also institutional purposes for offering micro-credentials and the profile of learners.
- Unbundling existing programmes
  - Developed through the institution's usual curriculum design processes
  - Requires additional reflection: suitability when offered outside the context of the study programme?
  - Usually covered by institution's internal QA processes for programmes
- Standalone micro-credentials
  - Usually part of institution's life-long learning provision
  - Could also be tailor-made and/or developed in partnership
  - Often covered by institution's QA processes for life-long learning

# Key issues for internal QA

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- Most important criteria identified by HEIs
  - Well-defined learning outcomes
  - Transparent assessment methods
  - Transparent public information
- Should be covered by existing internal QA processes, though revision and modification of existing QA processes may be necessary.
  - Micro-credentials require more agility in design, approval, delivery and review processes
- Particular attention needed for micro-credentials delivered in partnership with other organisations (within or outside education sector)

# Key issues for external QA

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- Development of a specific QA approach for micro-credentials?



- Role of external QA is to ensure that micro-credentials are adequately integrated into internal QA system of HEIs
  - Highly dependent on the context of the higher education system
  - ...on whether external QA is at programme or institutional level
  - Is lifelong learning provision included in institutional level procedures?
  - Most QA agencies do not consider evaluating each micro-credential individually.
- Concern by QA agencies about the burden of external evaluations of micro-credentials



# Delivery by alternative providers

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Most QA agencies are not planning to evaluate alternative providers nor their provision of micro-credentials

- No legal basis or mandate for it
- No resources for it

For micro-credentials offered in partnership between HEI and alternative provider, the HEI usually has responsibility for QA (it is usually the awarding body)

A few examples of QA agencies covering micro-credentials offered by non-formal education institutions, but rarely of those offered by e.g. businesses

# Concluding remarks

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- Existing QA approaches are applicable, but some areas need specific attention / adaptations
- External QA is the tool that gives confidence to recognise micro-credentials
- Balance between regulation and flexibility is vital so as not to undermine key purposes of micro-credentials
- Concept of micro-credentials is not unique to or owned by higher education
- Explore further: Report also covers NQFs, ECTS, national registers/catalogues, quality labels

# Next steps

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- Final edits, proof-reading and layout
- Publication later this month
- Content to feed in to the guidance documents

# Thank you!

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