A European Approach to Micro-credentials
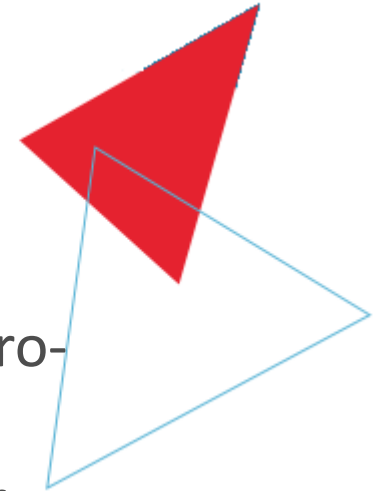
MICROBOL Working Group on Quality Assurance

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European Commission

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Reports published in December 2020

- **Final report**: A European approach to micro-credentials - output of the micro-credentials higher education consultation group (and executive summary)
- **Annex 1**: A European approach to micro-credentials - Background paper for the first meeting of the consultation group on micro-credentials
- **Annex 2**: A European approach to micro-credentials - institutional incentives to develop and offer micro-credentials in the EU

- **NESET analytical report**: Towards a European approach to micro-credentials - a study of practices and commonalities in offering micro-credentials in European higher education (and executive summary)
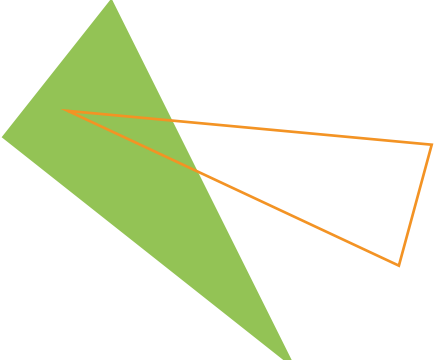
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Definition of Micro-credentials

A micro-credential is a proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards.

The proof is contained in a certified document that lists the name of the holder, the achieved learning outcomes, the assessment method, the awarding body and, where applicable, the qualifications framework level and the credits gained. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared, are portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards

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The essence of an EU Standard

- Identification of the **learner**
- **Title** of the micro-credential
- **Country/Region of the issuer**
- **Awarding body**
- Date of issuing
- **Notional workload** needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in **ECTS**, wherever possible)
- **Level** (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (EQF, QF-EHEA)
- **Learning outcomes**
- Form of participation in the learning activity
- **Type of assessment**
- **Quality assurance of the credential** and, where relevant, of the learning content

This information should offer **verifiable**, **free and secure access to data**, which is **available over time**, in order to support transparency and recognition.

- Prerequisites needed to enrol in the learning activity*
- Supervision and identity verification during assessment *
- Grade achieved*
- Integration / stackability options*
- Further information*

* Optional information

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Building blocks

➢ A common and **transparent definition**

➢ A defined list of **critical information elements** to describe micro-credentials

➢ Alignment to **National Qualifications Frameworks** (NQFs) and the **European Qualifications Framework** (EQF): defined levels, standards for describing learning outcomes

➢ **Quality assurance** standards

➢ Defined credits: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), **defined learning outcomes** and notional workload

➢ **Recognition**: for further studies and/or employment purposes

➢ Portability: **issuing, storage and sharing** of micro-credentials

➢ Platform solutions for the **provision and promotion** of courses leading to micro-credentials

➢ Incentives to **stimulate the uptake** of micro-credentials

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Quality Assurance

➢ **Trusted providers of micro-credentials** in line with the ESG, and listed in the DEQAR

➢ When delivered by **higher education institutions**, the same quality assurance principles should be applied to micro-credentials as to **higher education degrees**
  - Erasmus+ MICROBOL project to examine the role of **Bologna tools** in the uptake of micro-credentials
  - **Online micro-credentials** with the EADTU comprehensive reference tool for quality assurance and benchmarking of online learning
  - **ENQA**'s considerations for internal and external quality assurance in an online and blended learning environment

Quality Assurance

➢ The ESG could, in principle, be used to quality assure **micro-credentials issued by non-higher education providers** as there is nothing in the standards that is 'exclusive' to higher education.

- **Further discussion and cooperation** with non-higher education providers and stakeholders is needed to map other ways of quality assurance for all micro-credentials providers
- Some members of the consultation group pointed to the need to ensure a **level playing field** for quality assurance for all providers

➢ The **internal quality assurance arrangements of the higher education institution** should cover micro-credentials that are provided by a higher education institution, but developed by providers who are not themselves part of the formal education system.

- The quality assurance of micro-credentials provided in the secondary education, VET or adult learning sector has not been discussed by the consultation group. Quality assurance in these sectors is different, but still trusted. **Annex IV of the EQF recommendation** lists quality principles for qualifications from all sectors, which should be respected

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Roadmap of actions

2020 **2021** **2022** **2023** **2024**

A common and transparent **DEFINITION** and an **EU STANDARD** for micro-credentials

Common definition and **EU standard** in this report as a starting point for further consultations.

Wide **consultations** among the education and training community and labour market actors, involving all Member States and EHEA countries

Commission proposal for a **Council Recommendation** on **micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability**

Adoption by the Council of Ministers of the Council Recommendation on **micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability,** incl. **common definition and EU standard**.

Establish the appropriate follow-up structure for micro-credentials within the Bologna Process working structures

Definition and key features / standards for micro-credentials to be adopted within the **EHEA**, together with the **2024 Communiqué of the Bologna Process Ministerial Conference.**

Alignment to the national and European **QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

Explore the feasibility of **integrating micro-credentials in national qualifications frameworks**, which could be referenced to the European Qualifications Framework.

Regular dialogue and consultation with the European Qualification Framework Advisory Group, advisory Committee for Vocational Education and Training (VET), the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and among the education and training community and labour market actors, including social partners, youth organisations and civil society, and involving both

Progressive adaptation of **national qualifications frameworks**, where needed

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Roadmap of actions

2020 ...... **2021** ...... **2022** ...... **2023** **2024**

QUALITY ASSURANCE standards for short learning courses

In the context of the Erasmus+ MICROBOL project (2020-2022),
➢ Explore the possible adaptation of the Bologna instruments to address the internal and external quality assurance of short learning courses leading to micro-credentials in higher education
➢ **Release of guidelines on how to apply the current Bologna instruments to the internal and external quality assurance of micro-credentials** for the EHEA.

Explore how the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), ISO standards and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model could support the **quality assurance of micro-credentials for sectors beyond higher education**

Ensure that micro-credentials are included in internal and external quality assurance processes at higher education institutions and at national level.

Progressive development of a **list of trusted non higher education institution providers of micro-credentials,** building for instance on the Erasmus+ DEQAR-CONNECT project.

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Roadmap of actions

2020 · **2021** · **2022** · **2023** · **2024**

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

In the context of the Erasmus+ MICROBOL project (2020-2022), explore the. possible adaptation of the ECTS Users' Guide to emphasise **how ECTS can be used in the context of micro-credentials**

Potential **adaptation of the ECTS Users' Guide** to integrate micro-credentials.

Explore how other credit systems could be adapted to education sectors beyond higher education (for instance in VET).

RECOGNITION

In the context of the Erasmus+ projects (e.g. MICROBOL and 'Stacking credits and the future of the qualification – STACQ'), explore the possible adaptation of the recognition instruments to **address the need for a standardised approach to the recognition of micro-credentials and of prior learning**

Consultation with ENIC-NARICs to discuss how they could further support the recognition of micro-credentials.

Release of guidelines on how to ensure a **quicker process for the recognition of micro-credentials** and how to address their **stackability**.

Adaptation of existing instruments or adoption of new ones to facilitate the **validation and recognition** of micro-credentials.

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Roadmap of actions

2020 ···· **2021** ···· **2022** ···· **2023** ···· **2024**

STORAGE and **PORTABILITY**

Further development of EUROPASS, in particular the **Europass Digital Credentials Infrastructure**, for the issuing, sharing and storage of micro-credentials.

Foster the availability of metadata in open formats and the interoperability between various infrastructures, including between the **European Student Card** initiative and Europass.

LIFELONG LEARNING

Ensuring better **permeability between education and training sectors** through the application of micro-credentials.

Fostering the **availability of recognition of prior learning** and **validation of informal and non-formal learning** options, which are **scalable** to higher numbers of applicants.

Enhance **comprehensive guidance services**, including online access, which are underpinned by real-time labour market data to ensure informed learner choice.

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Roadmap of actions

2020 .... 2021 .... 2022 .... 2023 2024

NATIONAL LEVEL ACTIONS

Consultations at national level about the above-mentioned aspects of micro-credentials, **involving all relevant national stakeholders.**

Preparing or adjusting the **national regulatory framework**.

Piloting of actions based on national/regional needs. Exploring and ensuring the availability of **adequate funding**, including by EU funding schemes.

UPTAKE by higher education institutions, VET and other education and training institutions

EU support through the **Erasmus+ programme** and **Structural Funds** for higher education, VET and other education and training institutions and training providers for the uptake of micro-credentials, with a special focus on academia-business cooperation in their development.

Support the development of **sustainable business models** for the provision of quality assured micro-credentials by **regular consultation with Public Employment Services, social partners, private partners and industry representatives**.

Peer learning activities at European and national levels, within education and training sectors, across sectors and with the world of work.
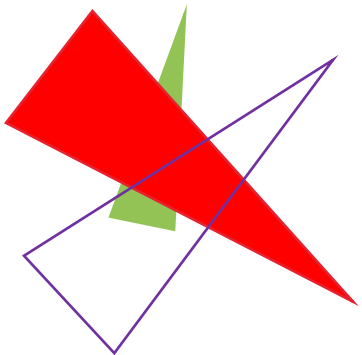
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Way forward

Consultations covering all sectors of education and training throughout 2021
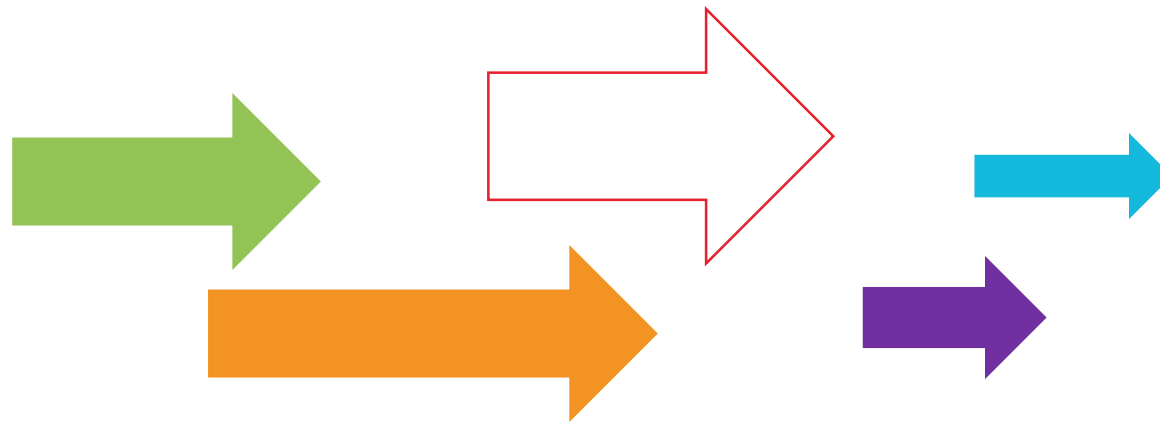
Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation in December 2021

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Questions?