

# A European Approach to Micro-credentials

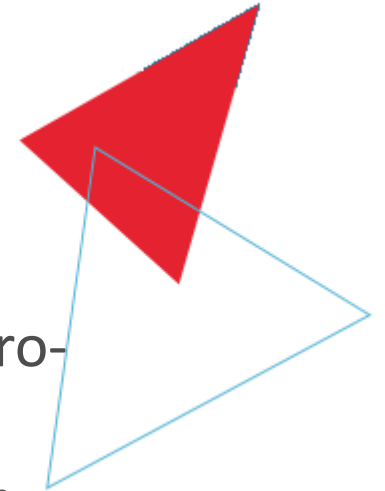


## **MICROBOL Working Group on Quality Assurance**

12 January 2021

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European Commission

# 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](#))



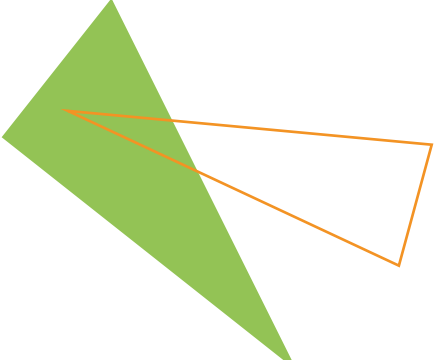
# Definition of Micro-credentials

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

# 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*

# 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



# 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

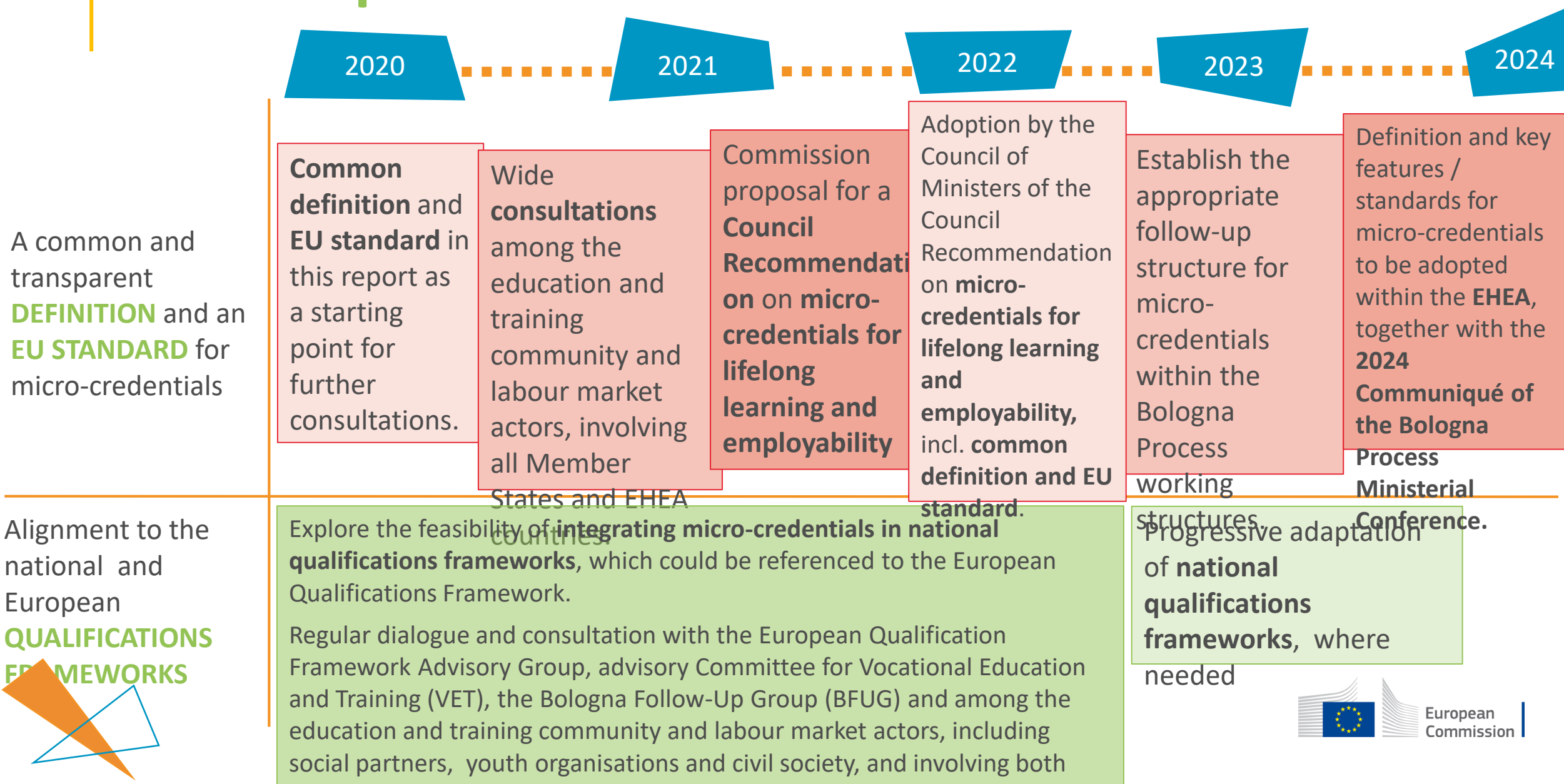


➤ The **internal quality assurance arrangements of the higher education institution** should cover micro-credentials that are provided by a higher education institution, but developed by providers who are not themselves part of the formal education system.

- 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



# Roadmap of actions





# Roadmap of actions



## QUALITY ASSURANCE

standards for short learning courses

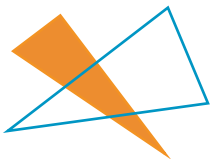
In the context of the Erasmus+ MICROBOL project (2020-2022),

- 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.



# 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.

# Roadmap of actions



## 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.

# Roadmap of actions



## NATIONAL LEVEL ACTIONS

2020

**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.

2021

2022

2023

2024

**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.

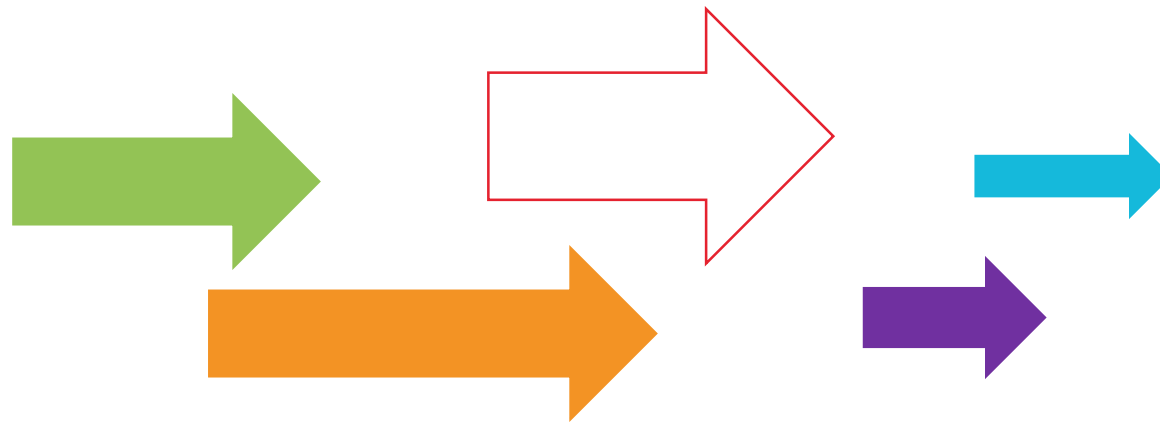
Support the development of **sustainable business models** for the provision of quality assured micro-credentials by **regular consultation with Public Employment Services, social partners, private partners and industry representatives**.

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

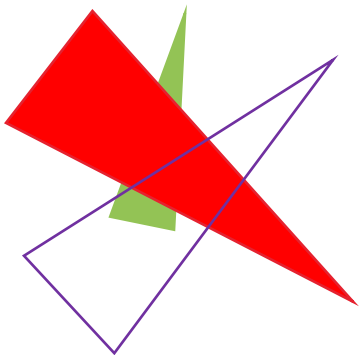
# Way forward

Consultations  
covering all  
sectors of  
education and  
training

throughout 2021



Commission  
proposal for a  
Council  
Recommendation  
in December 2021



# Questions?

