MICROBOL Working Group on Quality Assurance

12 January 2021, 09.00 – 16.00h, Central European Time (CET)

[Link to the meeting](#)

Preparatory note

The main aim of the meeting is to look at the challenges to be tackled in the application of the Bologna tools to the quality assurance of micro-credentials. This also includes challenges linked to certain possible solutions.

WHAT TO PREPARE?

Micro-credentials in national QA systems (plenary discussion)
Some countries will be asked to briefly share their national situation/challenges/ opportunities regarding the quality assurance of micro-credentials.
The floor will be open to all countries to comment and complement from their national perspective. The discussion will be based on the results of the survey. Countries that did not participate in the survey are asked to prepare and give a short input from their side.

1st Round of discussion in groups
The first round of discussions will tackle the quality assurance of the learning experience.

Please be prepared to answer the following questions:
- What are the challenges in Internal Quality Assurance of Micro-Credentials as expressed by the ESG Part 1?
- What are the challenges in External Quality Assurance of Micro-Credentials as expressed by the ESG Part 2?
- In addition to the ESG, what standards and guidelines should apply to micro-credentials within HE?
  - The ENQA Considerations for internal and external quality assurance in an online and blended learning environment
  - The EADTU Comprehensive tool for quality assurance and benchmarking of online learning
  - A combination of the above or a selection of elements from both (which ones?)
- Is programme accreditation, where applicable, scalable in a context of micro-credentials?
- What kind of standardisation/guidance material (if any) is needed to be able to assure integration of micro-credentials into your existing quality systems?

2nd Round of discussion in groups
The second round of discussions will tackle the quality assurance of the certificate/credential.

Please be prepared to answer the following questions:
- Should the recognition-level of a programme be an element of quality assurance? (e.g. should a QA system care that a MOOC awards a certificate with no official standing within a university)?
- Should short learning certificates/credentials in future include all elements listed in the emerging European Standards for micro-credentials? Which elements would you delete, add or alter? See the Annex to this preparatory note.
- Would a model certificate be helpful? Short explanations for each element? Examples of how other institutions deal with each of the elements in practice?
- Should micro-credentials be digital by default?
- Should we require, as part of QA for institutions, the creation of ways to track how widely credentials are accepted and by whom?

WHERE WERE WE?

Reporting of the QA Working Group – 1st of September 2020
The discussion started with a focus and discussion on the definition of micro-credential that has been developed within the project and inserted in the draft publication "Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments". That is "A micro-credential is a small volume of learning certified by a credential. In the EHEA context, it can be offered by higher education institutions or recognised by them using recognition procedures in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention or recognition of prior learning, where applicable. A micro-credential is designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills or competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials have explicitly defined learning outcomes at a QF-EHEA/NQF level, an indication of associated workload in ECTS credits, assessment methods and criteria, and are subject to quality assurance in line with the ESG".

After the definition the discussion focused on the following three questions:
1. What would give you confidence in a MC?
2. What should be the role of external QA?
3. What are the reasons why you would not recognize a MC?

The discussion that was generated from the polls and the questions touched a lot of topics all linked to the theme of quality assurance:

- Quality assurance deals with **establishing trust**, by providing the infrastructure to recognise a quality micro-credential. For micro-credentials issued/offered by HEIs, a well-known QA system, based on the ESG, is in place. For other providers this infrastructure is often based on the reputation of the issuer, although how the reputation of quality is established and who decides on this reputation is not always clear.
- **A register of trusted issuers**, including non HEI-providers, might be useful and addresses the issue of trust in different providers. For HEI providers, DEQAR provides a basis of such a reference at the European level and is based on the ESG. For non-HEI providers further discussion is required. The important point is to have transparency on the processes and criteria used, as this adds to the value and usability of a credential.
- **The overall quality of a credential cannot be detached from its recognition and portability**. It is therefore not ideal to stake the quality of a micro-credential only on the statement of quality, without the correct processes to verify it.
- The key concerns on micro-credentials offered by HEIs is considered to be related to **recognition**. Other important challenges included cost and (lack of) quality assurance or accreditation.
- The key concerns for micro-credentials offered by other providers include the possibly **limited use of the credential**, the (lack of) possibilities to integrate the credential into a study programme, and the fact that the provider is not a HEI, which may all make the credential less trustworthy and usable.
- Trust in micro-credentials may be increased if the micro-credential is associated with or **offered by an accredited HEI**, and/or recognised by an appropriate body as valuable and trustworthy. The reputation of the institution contributes to the perception of quality associated with a credential. The awarded certificates need to be **visible in and relevant to the labour market**.
- As to the role of external quality assurance in this context, the key point made was that for a micro-credential to be of comparable value to a similar 'traditional' qualification, the **QA requirements/criteria should also be the same**. The procedure itself can be different to accommodate the different nature of the different providers, and the future framework should allow for this diversity and be applicable to all providers. Quality assurance and accreditation have an important role to plan in increasing trust and facilitating recognition.

The following questions and challenges were specifically indicated as important for the future work of the working group:

- Determining objective criteria for the framework applicable to all providers of micro-credentials. The quality of a credential should not only be based on the reputation of the provider but should be objectively measurable and transparent.
- Consider how the tools that have been developed for degrees from recognised HEI's also apply to smaller qualifications such as micro-credentials.
- Address issues of trust. It is challenging to connect other providers with national educational legislation. This means that the trust in the quality of micro-credentials falls on the shoulders of local HEIs that are already recognised.

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

European Commission, Final Report "A European approach to Micro-credentials. Output of the micro-credentials Higher Education consultation group", December 2020.

MICROBOL Desk Research Report "Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments", 14th September 2020.

MICROBOL Report Kick-off conference, 31st August – 1st September 2020

MICROBOL Draft of the survey results

Annex

Proposed EU standard for constitutive elements of micro-credentials:

1.   Identification of the learner

2.   Title of the micro-credential

3.   Country/region of the issue

4.   Awarding body

5.   Date of issuing

6.   Notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in ECTS whenever possible)

7.   Level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience (EQF, EHEA Framework, and/or national qualifications framework)

8.   Learning outcomes

9.   Form of participation in the learning experience (online, onsite or blended, volunteering work experience etc.)

10.   Prerequisites needed to enroll in the learning activity

11.   Type of assessment (testing, application of a skill, portfolio recognition of prior learning etc.)

12.   Supervision and identity verification during assessment

13.   Quality assurance of the credential and – where relevant – of the learning content

14.   Grade achieved

15.   Integration/stackability options

16.   Further information