

SUMMARY

TAM event – HERE Regional Seminar “A Framework for Effective Microcredential Design: Best Practices and Guidelines for Developing High-Quality Credentials” (11-12.03.2024, online)

Keynote speaker-expert Chiara FINOCCHIETTI, the Director of CIMEA – NARIC Italia, demonstrated a high level of competence in the issues of developing and implementing micro-credentials as well as in global trends and best practices in microcredentialing.

The Seminar is relevant for the participants, HEREs, because they understood the policy implications of developing microcredentials on the national level, existing regulations and quality assurance instruments to implement its in frame of the national framework and make necessary changing in regulations.

The most important lessons learnt and good practices deriving from this event are:

- Publication on [Micro-credentials within the TPG-LRC CoRE project](#); [CIMEA](#)
- CBHE projects outcomes: [Micro-GEAR](#) – Micro-credentials for higher education systems of Georgia and Armenia: South Caucasus lighthouse project; [MICROCASA](#) – MICRO-credentials for life-long learning and employability: Building Capacities for developing Agile educational interventions in Southeast Asian Universities
- Annex I of the [EU Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability](#) outlines common European standard elements for describing micro-credentials
- Materials and resources: [EHEA website](#); [ENIC-NARIC website](#)
- Catalogue examples: Ireland <https://microcreds.ie/>; Canada <https://microlearnontario.ca/>; New Zealand <https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/>; Australia: <https://search.studyaustralia.gov.au/>
- Data from classcentral, an aggregator of online courses, referring to 6 platforms: Coursera, edX, Udacity, FutureLearn, Kadenze, LinkedIn Learning: <https://www.classcentral.com/report/list-of-mooc-based-microcredentials/>

Some results and recommendations of the TAM event and the future developments of the topic (based on TAM event presentations of Chiara FINOCCHIETTI, the Director of CIMEA – NARIC Italia).

National legislation allows for the provision of micro-credentials in 22 countries out of 34 in EHEA. Among them, 8 reported that there are specific regulations concerning micro-credentials and 14 that there is no such national legislation (*State of play of micro-credentials in the EHEA (survey 2021)*).

The majority of the countries were already offering and/or developing micro-credentials, and that the understanding of what constitutes a micro-credential varies greatly across the countries surveyed.

There were very different approaches to micro-credentials on the regulatory side. While in the majority of the countries the national regulatory framework allows for the provision of micro-credentials, only in a few cases they are explicitly regulated or mentioned in legislation. Countries expressed confidence in their efforts at integrating micro-credentials in national legislation.

The vast majority of countries do not have policies on digitalisation of credentials in general. A small group of countries have such policies, and in a few cases micro-credentials are part of them (MICROBOL, 2021).

Inclusion of micro-credentials in the EQF/NQF or QF-EHEA can support transparency, comparability and recognition (however, legal frameworks should be carefully balanced not to overregulate micro-credentials because it might discourage their use and further development.)

Learning outcomes: micro-credentials should be defined as small units of learning described in terms of learning outcomes

QF level: Describing small units of learning leading to micro-credentials in terms of learning outcomes would make it possible to assign an NQF level

ECTS can support the development and description of micro-credentials. Learning outcome approach (MICROBOL 2022), but not always used. Two possible factors:

- 1) most higher education systems in the EHEA countries still have to decide on the optimal range of ECTS/ECVET for micro-credentials;
- 2) not all micro-credentials that are part of the lifelong learning provision are considered to require expression in ECTS/ECVET at the moment (IMINQA, 2023).

General trend for ECTS number: optimal range to be 5 to 15 or 19 ECTS (understanding of micro-credentials between 1 and 59 ECTS credits).

A micro-credential can be recognized on basis of a proof of the learning outcomes achieved by a learner, according to transparent requirements and after assessment. Transparency of information is key for fair assessment of micro-credentials. Digitalization of credentials supports recognition, as it enables portability, transparency and reliability of information and verification of authenticity.

Recognition in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention:

- Consider provide information on all the constitutive elements of the micro-credentials in line with the European approach to MC.
- Use methodology available to assess robustness of information on micro-credentials (e.g. Evaluate methodology, looking into 1. Quality of the course 2. Verification of the certificate 3. Level of the course 4. Learning outcomes 5. Workload 6. The way study results are tested 7. Identification of the participant).
- Keep information accessible, also in a historical perspective.
- Explore the possibility of recognition agreements on micro-credentials among education providers.

Quality assurance bodies review the internal quality assurance mechanisms that institutions put in place for micro-credential learning, rather than undertaking programme-level reviews of micro-credentials.

Reliance upon existing quality assurance schemes (there can be adaptations).

Some jurisdictions are including alternative providers in the scope of external quality assurance of micro-credentials.

The focus of external quality assurance should be on the institutional approach to micro-credentials and their explicit inclusion in existing or new internal quality assurance processes. This is in line with one of the core principles of the ESG, which states that the primary responsibility for the quality of provision lies with the HEIs (ESG, 2015, p. 7).

The quality assurance of micro-credentials is or can be embedded in the existing external quality assurance procedures (institutional or programme accreditation); thus, no specific approach to micro-credentials is needed.

In almost all EHEA countries the approach to external quality assurance is a combination of institutional evaluation and programme evaluation. In both case micro-credentials are 'covered' by QA approach. In many case, QA arrangements do also cover lifelong learning provision.

Recommendations:

- Providers are expected to put in place explicit quality assurance policies and processes corresponding to the expectations set out in Part I of the ESG, to provide transparent information about these and to include learners in all steps of the development, implementation and evaluation of micro-credentials (MICROBOL, 2022).

- MCs that are the result of unbundling existing programmes: covered by internal QA, no additional procedure (and if any, very light).
- But need to define target groups, need to which they respond, etc.
- Standalone MC: part of lifelong provision, usually covered by internal QA, but more focus and discussion on this could be needed.

Recommendations for external QA:

- arrangements for the quality assurance of micro-credentials are explicitly made and communicated to education providers and other stakeholders.
- where external quality assurance procedures are proposed, these are flexible and rely, where appropriate, on already existing arrangements.
- any external quality assurance approach has to consider how micro-credentials achieve their specific objectives for upskilling, reskilling, and lifelong learning.
- information sharing is intensified for more diverse models of future collaboration between stakeholders, allowing for more agile safeguarding of such provision while reducing the burden on providers (ENQA, 2023).

Recommendations for internal QA:

- labour market expertise contributes to all stages of the micro-credential life cycle, including quality assurance processes.
- internal quality monitoring for micro-credential activity is more frequent or takes different approaches than procedures for traditional degrees.
- lifelong learning is integrated in a provider's mission and vision, allowing for micro-credentials to be anchored in the broader educational offer.
- information is provided on mandatory elements and, where relevant, optional elements, as highlighted by 'A European Approach to Micro-credentials' (ENQA, 2023).

In 2025 NEO – Ukraine planned to conduct follow up event on microcredentials issues with participation of policymakers, academics, employers.