

A European Approach to Micro-credentials



MICROBOL Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS

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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](#))

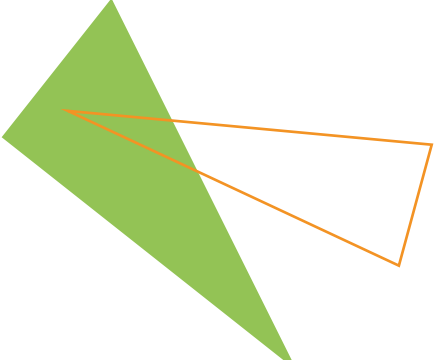
Definition of Micro-credentials

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

The role of qualifications frameworks

- European Qualifications Framework allows for the inclusion of other forms of provision than full qualifications
- The consultation group proposed that Member States could consider adapting national qualifications frameworks to enable the inclusion of micro-credentials
- QF-EHEA and Dublin descriptors? – not discussed yet

Type 1: Micro-credentials that are **issued by formal education institutions** and can be **aligned with the EQF (through NQFs) and ECTS (or other credit systems)**

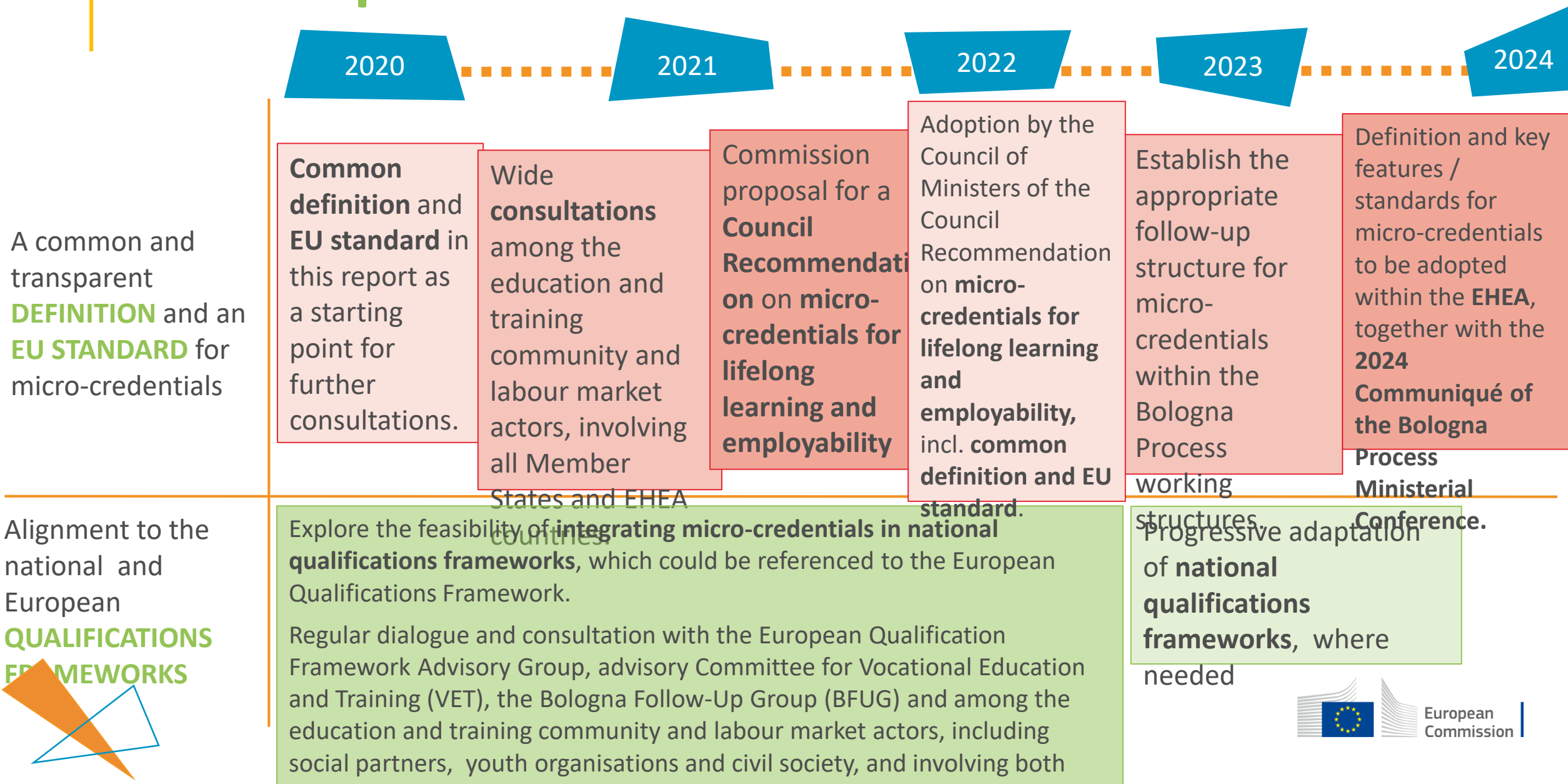
Standards can be identified more easily, using current higher education transparency tools (EQF, ECTS, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area [ESG], etc.)

Type 2: Micro-credentials **issued by non-formal education providers**. The consultation group did not have sufficient time to discuss this type in depth. Further discussion is needed, across education sectors, to identify standards for these micro-credentials

ECTS

- Wherever possible, micro-credentials should use ECTS
- No set range for ECTS credits
 - **Maximum flexibility:** minimum of 1 ECTS credit, upper limit of 'less than a full degree'
 - Typical range 1 ECTS – 6 ECTS credits
 - **Micro-credential → macro-credential**
- ECTS as a basic element that could allow micro-credentials to become **stackable** in a transparent way

Roadmap of actions



Roadmap of actions



QUALITY ASSURANCE

standards for short learning courses

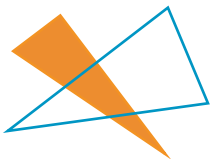
In the context of the Erasmus+ MICROBOL project (2020-2022),

- 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

2021

2022

2023

2024

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.

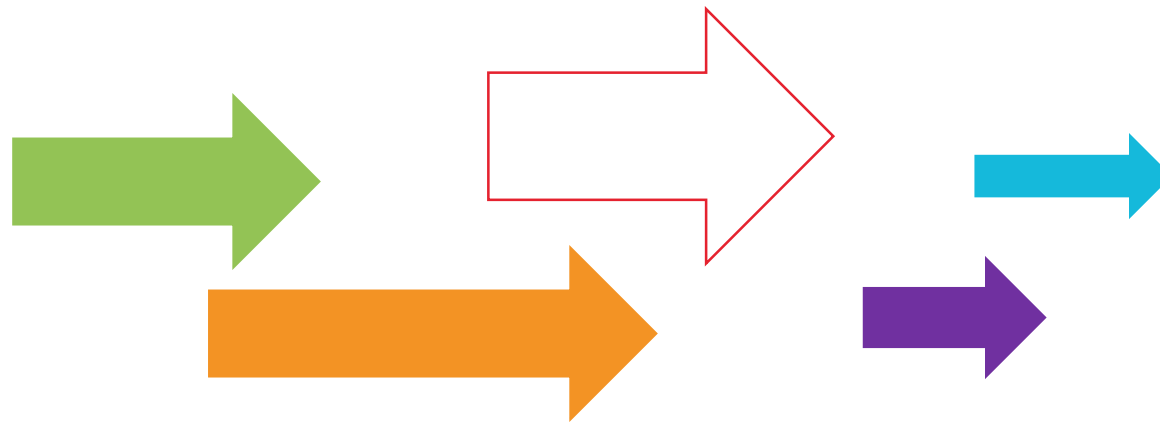
Support the development of **sustainable business models** for the provision of quality assured micro-credentials by **regular consultation with Public Employment Services, social partners, private partners and industry representatives**.

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

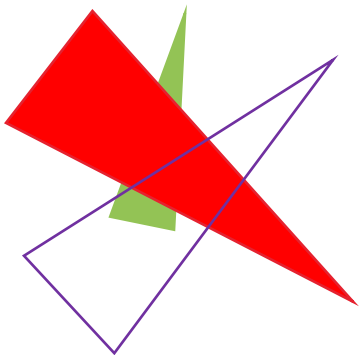
Way forward

Consultations
covering all
sectors of
education and
training

throughout 2021



Commission
proposal for a
Council
Recommendation
in December 2021



Questions?

