



Working Group on Qualification Framework and ECTS

Report of the 1st working group meeting

1. Introduction

The Working Group of the Qualification Framework and ECTS held its 1st meeting online on 27th January 2021. The meeting was chaired by Ms Jonna Korhonen.

The agenda and the list of participants are appended to this report (Appendices I and II respectively).

2. Opening remarks

In her opening remarks, the Chair welcomed all participants to the meeting and reminded them about the first get-together meeting organised in September 2020 in conjunction with the kick-off conference of the Microbol project.

The participants were briefly informed about the structure of the day, including the practicalities of the meeting.

The chair concluded that the main goal of the meeting is to look at the challenges to be tackled in the application of the Bologna tools – Qualification Framework and ECTS - to micro-credentials. This may include also proposals for solutions.

3. Session I: The current state-of-play: microcredentials and the MICROBOL-project

3.1 The state of play of Microbol-project

The project coordinator of the Microbol-project, Magalie Soenen, from the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, presented background information about the project, its current status and the main steps taken, including the working definition.

[The presentation](#)

3.2 Latest policy developments in Europe

Klara Engels-Perenyi and Koen Nomden from the European Commission presented the European Approach to Micro-credentials report¹, which was published in December 2020. The report outlines a common definition, EU standards and building blocks and sets out a roadmap for further steps. The Commission will undertake consultations covering all sectors of education and training throughout 2021, followed by Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation in December 2021.

[The presentation](#)

3.3 Survey results & QA

Chiara Finocchietti from CIMEA presented the main results of the draft survey report. The survey was conducted among members of the BFUG as well as the nominated representatives in the MICROBOL working groups between 15 October 2020 to 25 November 2020. It aimed at gaining a picture of the state-of-play on micro-credentials in different member states of the European Higher Education Area and at encouraging national discussions. 34 countries participated in the survey.

The survey will be published in February 2021.

[The presentation](#)

4. Session II: From theory to practice

In Session II, four sets of practical examples were introduced in order to help to conceptualize the challenges and opportunities related to the use of the Bologna tools (QF and ECTS) in the development of micro-credentials.

Case 1. SotePeda, Finland

Dr Outi Ahonen
Principal Lecturer
Laurea University of Applied Sciences

[Presentation](#)

Case 2. FUN-MOOC, France

Catherine Mongenet
Director
France Université Numérique

[Presentation](#)

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/a-european-approach-to-micro-credentials_en

Case 3. Irish examples, Ireland

Dr Mairead Nic Giolla Mhichil
Institutional lead, Dublin City University

[Presentation](#)

Case 4. Italian examples, Italy

Professor Ann Katherine Isaacs
University of Pisa

[Presentation](#)

5. Session III: Challenges and obstacles to be tackled

For the third session, the participants were divided into three smaller break-out groups to permit more intensive discussion and sharing of experiences based on [the preparatory note](#) delivered to the participants beforehand.

The breakout groups were facilitated by Maria Kelo, ENQA (Group 1), Elena Cirilan, EUA (Group2) and Kristel Jakobsen, ESU (Group 3). Georger Ubachs, Ann Katherine Isaacs and Jonna Korhonen acted as rapporteurs, respectively, for the three groups.

6. Reporting back from the discussions

6.1. Qualification Framework

Discussion about micro-credentials and their relationship to qualification frameworks was very lively in all working groups. The participants agreed that **a micro-credential (MC) can be described as being within a level** (1st, 2nd, 3rd cycle QF EHEA) the same way as would any single course unit/individual learning component in a full degree programme. If micro-credentials are part of a degree programme provided by a higher education institution, this would be very easy. However, there were also views that saw it important that the micro-credentials are understood also in a wider context and not only as part of a degree programme provided by a higher education institution. The way the complexity of learning fits into the idea of level may **depend on how the learner develops his/her personal learning path**. In other words, the accumulation of knowledge, skills and competences may take place vertically or horizontally within the qualification framework, and in various directions. Individual MCs may be achieved as needed or desired, in different subject areas, according to flexible paths.

The Dublin Descriptors provide a way to describe the MCs, but the co-existence of MCs and degrees at the same level **may create confusion** among learners in terms of progress between the levels.

The difference between full degrees and stackable micro-credentials should be clearly communicated, and it needs to remember that MCs cannot automatically be 'stacked' into a full degree just on the basis of the numerical sum of the credits they carry. Some or all of the MCs successfully completed might be taken into account according to the subject matter and the PLOs to achieve a full degree, which would normally also require certain research and/or practical activities leading to a final thesis or dissertation.

This may relate also to the way MCs are conceptualised:

- as part of degree or as stand-alone courses
- as subject-specific knowledge, sets of transversal competences or small programmes
- as 1 MC = 1 topic or 1 MC covering many topics to achieve certain competences
- in addition, the field of study may also matter.

Regulating the size of MC was not seen as crucial, but it was noted that the bigger the MC, the easier it becomes to define the learning outcomes and the level. However, it was also noted that if the MC is too big, it would be confused with a programme. **The indication of level was seen by some participants as useful or even necessary**, to create transparency and stackability, **whilst other participants considered the description of learning outcomes sufficient**, when properly done. There was discussion also about the so called "Japanese paradox", but it was also pointed out that micro-credentials may provide competences that are applicable to various fields of study and are included as part of various degree programmes. When looking at micro-credentials they should not only be viewed as part of a programme, but also as individual, standalone credentials. The question was seen as very complex.

It was also pointed out that MCs are already offered in some countries, even though they do not necessarily indicate the QF level. This might however create problems with their recognition, especially with other countries. A level indication may matter more **for academic purposes** than for professional purposes, insofar as an employer will be interested primarily in the competences gained, as described in the learning outcomes, without specific reference to a degree level. Opening up NQFs to MCs raised questions also about the other education provision that could be at the QF level 6, 7, or 8 with different quality assurance practices, and how in this case QA would be treated.

In conclusion, it is possible that in certain cases MCs could be developed without reference to levels. Flexibility should not be sacrificed to rigidity. However, a need for transparency requires further elaboration, or even experimentation. If there is an agreed common approach it will facilitate acceptance of MCs by learners, providers and employers alike.

6.2. ECTS

The general understanding was that **ECTS should be used for micro-credentials provided by higher education institutions**. This would ensure compatibility with all other forms of HE provision in the EHEA, and facilitate a more general understanding of the credentials. It was also noted that this could be useful also for other education sectors, employers and 'other providers' as there would be an advantage in using a widely accepted language. However, there might be issues in how to ensure that ECTS is used properly in these cases. The easiest way would seem to be by agreements between 'other providers' and HEIs, that could verify that the LOs and the volume of learning are correctly described in terms of ECTS.

As regards the range, many understandings and considerations were shared. There were examples of different sizes, including also emergence of micro degrees in the lifelong learning context. The question was in general considered premature as MCs were still in their initial development phase. On the other hand, some participants thought that some range is needed to give clarity to the issue, others urged for flexibility. Many participants however considered it too confusing to introduce nano-, meso or mini- terms, and thought it **better to stick with micro-credentials**, since right now it is a terminology which is rapidly becoming accepted, and it would be confusing to add other terms.

The ECTS Users' Guide supports the development of standalone MCs including the grade and a verification of the learner, as well as procedures for recognition of prior learning (RPL). **This however requires that the ECTS Guide be better known and applied.**

7. Summary and further steps

Concerning the next steps towards a common framework for shared understanding and tools to address micro-credentials, the Chair presented the timeline for foreseen outputs and meetings in the year 2021.

The main four milestones of the project are the following

- the next Working Groups meetings in May 2021
- the preparation of the input to the COM proposal for the Council recommendations on micro-credentials by June 2021
- drafting the proposal for a framework for micro-credentials in EHEA (June – Nov 2022)
- preparing the final conference in January 2022.

In this context, the Chair informed the participants that the project partners had decided to create specific writing teams for each Working Group to ensure including wider views, experiences and expertise. The Chair invited the participants to consider this opportunity and to inform their interest to join the writing team by 5th February 2021.

The next working group meeting will be on 19 May 2021. Given the current pandemic situation, it is likely that the meeting will have to be organised online.

[Presentation](#)

8. Closing remarks

The Chair concluded the meeting by thanking all participants for their time and valuable insights. Each contribution has shed more clarity on the complexity providing food for thought also in the national contexts.

Working Group on Qualifications Framework and ECTS

Programme

Wednesday 27 January

9.00 Online platform is open for everyone to connect

9.30 Opening remarks

9.45 Session I: The current state-of-play: microcredentials and the MICROBOL-project

- Latest policy developments in Europe
- Survey results & QA

10.45 Health Break

11.00 Session II: From theory to practice

- Presentation of real-life examples of microcredentials

12.30 Lunch Break

13.15 Session III: Challenges and obstacles to be tackled

- Discussion in smaller groups (break-out rooms)

15.00 Reporting back from the discussions

15.30 Summary and further steps

16.00 Closing remarks

ANNEX II

List of participants

First name	Family name	Ministry/ Organisation/ Institution	Country
Jordi	Llombart	Ministry	Andorra
Stephan	De Pasqualin	Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research	Austria
Carmen	Heidenwolf	Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research	Austria
Arielle	Bouchez	French Community of Belgium	Belgique
Elena	Cirlan	EUA	Belgium
Maria	Kelo	ENQA	Belgium
Koen	Nomden	European Commission	Belgium
Magalie	Soenen	Flemish Ministry of Education and Training	Belgium/ Flemish Community
Patrick	Van den Bosch	VLUHR QA (external evaluator)	Belgium
Nina	Mares	Departement Onderwijs en Vorming	Belgium / Flemish Community
Klara	ENGELS- PERENYI	European Commission	Belgium/ EC
Tess	Van den Brink	European Commission	Belgium/ EC
Dora	Scott	Ministry Education & Training	Belgium/ Flemish Community
Leonardo	Marušić	University of Zadar	Croatia
Ana	Tecilazić Goršić	Ministry of Science and Education	Croatia
Kyriacos	Charalambous	Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth	Cyprus
Lenka	Skrabalova	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic	Czech Republic
Janne	Pukk	Ministry of Education and Research	Eesti
Michal	Karpisek	EURASHE	EURASHE
Kristel	Jakobson	ESU	Europe
Carita	Blomqvist	Finnish National Agency for Education	Finland
Jonna	Korhonen	MINEDU	Finland
Eliane	Kotler	Université de Nice	France
Sabine	Menu	EM Strasbourg business school	France
Lali	Giorgidze	NCEQE	Georgia
Ketevan	Panchulidze	NCEQE	Georgia
Alexandra	Karvouni	Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs	Greece
Yiannis	Katsanevakis	Ministry	Greece

Karolina	Kasperaviciute	Congregation for Catholic Education	Holy See
Orsolya	Heuer	Hungarian Rectors' Conference	Hungary
Nora	Trench Bowles	Irish Universities Association	Ireland
Barbara	Kelly	QQI	Ireland
Chiara	Finocchietti	CIMEA-NARIC Italy	Italy
Ann Katherine	Isaacs	University of Pisa	Italy
Elisa	Petrucci	CIMEA	Italy
Vincenzo	Zara	Ministry of University and Research	Italy
Assel	Nurmagambetov	Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan
Madonna	Maroun	National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE)	Malta
Martina	Vella	National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE)	Malta
George	Ubachs	EADTU	Nederland
Ole Espen	Rakkestad	Union of Education Norway	Norway
Jacek	Lewicki	SGH	Poland
Tiberiu Gabriel	Dobrescu	National Authority for Qualifications	Romania
Virgil	Ion	National Qualifications Authority	Romania
Nicolae	Postavaru	National Qualifications Authority	Romania
Marija	Stamenkovic	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development	Serbia
Peter	Ondreicka	Ministry	Slovak Republic
Ildikó	Pathóová	Ministry	Slovak Republic
Duša	Marjetič	Ministry of Education, Science and Sport	Slovenia
Aurélia	Robert-Tissot	State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI	Switzerland
Antoine	MARET	Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities	Switzerland
Oleksandr	Smyrnov	Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine	Ukraine
Kateryna	Suprun	Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine	Ukraine
Catherine	Mongenot	FUN-MOOC	France