



Report of the Working Group on Qualification Framework and ECTS

The second meeting of the Working Group on the Qualification Framework and ECTS was held online on 19th May 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).

The meeting started with **an update on the current state of play** of the MICROBOL project, followed by **the presentation of the input document** prepared by the writing team. After that the participants were divided in the two break out groups to discuss the concept and definition of the micro-credentials with the following outcomes:

- There is a preference to **a single definition** at European level to support higher education institutions in identifying and developing micro-credentials at the national level. This definition should be clear and generic, and could be then contextualized with more specific description to higher education sector and to the various national contexts.
- Some participants felt that **the ambiguity of the term micro-credentials**, referring both to certificate and/ or learning process, is confusing and may even have also some legal implications.
- In general, many participants reported that they are still **in preliminary stages** in exploring the concept of micro-credentials at the national level, for example by establishing specific working groups.
- Concerning the number of ECTS a MC should have, **the views vary a lot**, even at the national level in different countries. Defining certain ranges of credits, may be too limiting as regards the needs of providers, further education and labour market.
- The recommendations 1 to 4 were welcomed with the following remarks:
 - **Recommendation 1:** facilitate the exploration of the concept of micro-credentials in supporting engagement of higher education institutions in lifelong learning by reaching out and providing access to education to diverse learners before, during and after studies that lead a degree.
 - **Recommendation 2:** support a learner-centred approach and foster various forms of collaboration in developing micro-credentials with relevant stakeholders. Collaboration with other providers or employers could be encouraged, as this might increase the relevance of the micro-credentials for the labour market.
 - the formulation regarding **the collaboration with employers** should be more explicit.
 - **Recommendation 3:** explore the applicability of micro-credentials in evidencing knowledge, skills and competences acquired at work, alongside RPL, and accelerating the transfer of latest research to lifelong learning opportunities.
 - The recommendation should be **split in two** to make it clearer.



- **Recommendation 4:** support flexibility in definition, to stimulate innovation and support adaptability of the MCs to various needs of individuals, labor market and society, in general.
 - Flexibility is needed in different formats and sizes, but at the same time there should be some fixed elements in the definition, such as quality assurance, to ensure transparency and value of MCs.

After a short health break, the meeting was continued by presentation of three national examples of how micro-credentials relate to the NQF. The presentation can be found on the [Microbol website](#). After presentations the participants continued their discussion on recommendations 5-9 concerning qualification frameworks and ECTS in break out groups with the following remarks:

- **Recommendation 5.** The European discussion and national solutions should be taken forward simultaneously. European discussion on MCs has an impact on national solutions. At the same time, it is important that the national solutions and their consequences be considered and discussed on European level.
 - The added value of European level discussion is to support national level developments by providing shared, generic definition to avoid diversity of interpretations but at the same time to ensure room for different approaches.
- **Recommendation 6.** Micro-credentials should be included in the NQF, when possible. The decision on including the MCs within the national frameworks is to be made at national level. MCs as qualifications are included within an NQF which is then self-certified as compatible with the QF-EHEA.
 - The recommendation raised lot of discussion and **there was no consensus** in whether MCs should always have an indication of NQF level and/or be always referenced to the NQF.
 - Some participants saw it important that providers themselves could allocate the NQF level to MC to ensure stackability, whilst other reminded that the purpose and the rights to allocate a MC to a NQF are not evident and universal. There are national solutions, sometimes legislation, which cover how qualifications, including MC are included into NQFs. European levels can be indicated only via inclusion to the NQF and agreed self-certification/referencing procedures.
 - It should be also remembered that the NQFs are a tool for transparency and the link to the QF-EHEA and EQF should be ensured based on agreed procedures.
- **Recommendation 7.** Guidelines and common principles for including MCs within the national qualifications frameworks should be developed, optimally after consensus has been reached on their definition.
 - Guidelines should be a one document encompassing the content of all three working groups.
 - The target level where guidelines should be set (at European level and/ or national level) needs to be clarified, preferably including both levels.
- **Recommendation 8:** ensure that the existing ECTS Users' Guide (2015 edition) is well known and correctly followed by HEIs and its elements clarified for other stakeholders.



Particularly important is that ECTS credits represent two elements, learning outcomes as well as volume of learning in student time.

- It is important to clarify the concept of ECTS to those providers who are not aware of it. This might encourage cooperation between HEIS and other providers, and may get the companies more aware and involved in the EHEA. In addition, companies may get interested in developing MCs which are useful for their own interests and thus promote employability.
- **Recommendation 9.** Encourage cooperation between HEIs and other providers in order to facilitate the correct definition of learning outcomes and indication of workload, as well as co-creation of learning activities.
 - Reference to private providers and other education sectors is not clear, especially in using ECTS. However, it is impossible in all countries to broaden the use of ECTS to providers other than recognized HEIs due to legislation. Here, the solution could be that HE institutions engage and cooperate actively with other providers to award ECTS for the MCs in collaboration.
 - A coherent approach is needed also to support lifelong learning taking into account the learner perspective. MCs could give a formalisation to different learning elements a learner has gained earlier, also in terms of validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- **Recommendation 9bis.** If deemed useful, formulate a simple guide to the relevant existing ECTS principles and features, to facilitate the correct understanding and application of ECTS to MCs.

The last part of the meeting, after the lunch, focused on addressing other important aspects that need to be taken into consideration when building a European common framework. As regards the common format for certification, there was a proposal to structure the information the following way (in bold):

1.- Compulsory

1.1.- **Information on the learner:** identification on the learner

1.2.- **Information on MC:** Title, information on the provider (including country), information on the awarding body institution, if different (including country), date of issuance or date of assessment.

1.3.- **Information on learning experience:** learning outcomes, workload (in ECTS, whenever possible), assessment and form of quality assurance

2.- Optional

NQF level (whenever possible, and if self-certified /referenced QF-EHEA and EQF level), form of participation in the learning activity, prerequisites needed to enrol, **field(s)** of learning or subject area, **ISCED level, expiration date**



Council of Europe informed that the topic of micro-credentials will be also discussed in the meeting of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks in September 2021.

The meeting ended with presentation of the next steps and brief conclusions. Based on the reporting of the break out groups, the proposed recommendations were in general welcomed by the participants with above-mentioned remarks. There is a willingness to find a constructive approach to achieve progress. This means flexibility with limits in defining the framework at European level.

