

Global shifts in learning – navigating the rise of micro-credentials in OECD countries

Key findings from OECD's work on micro-credentials

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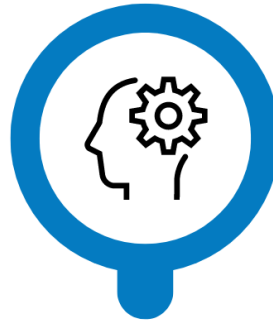
What are micro-credentials?

Compared to traditional education and training programmes,
micro-credentials are



Smaller

in volume (in study
duration or load)



More targeted

in terms of skills or
study topics



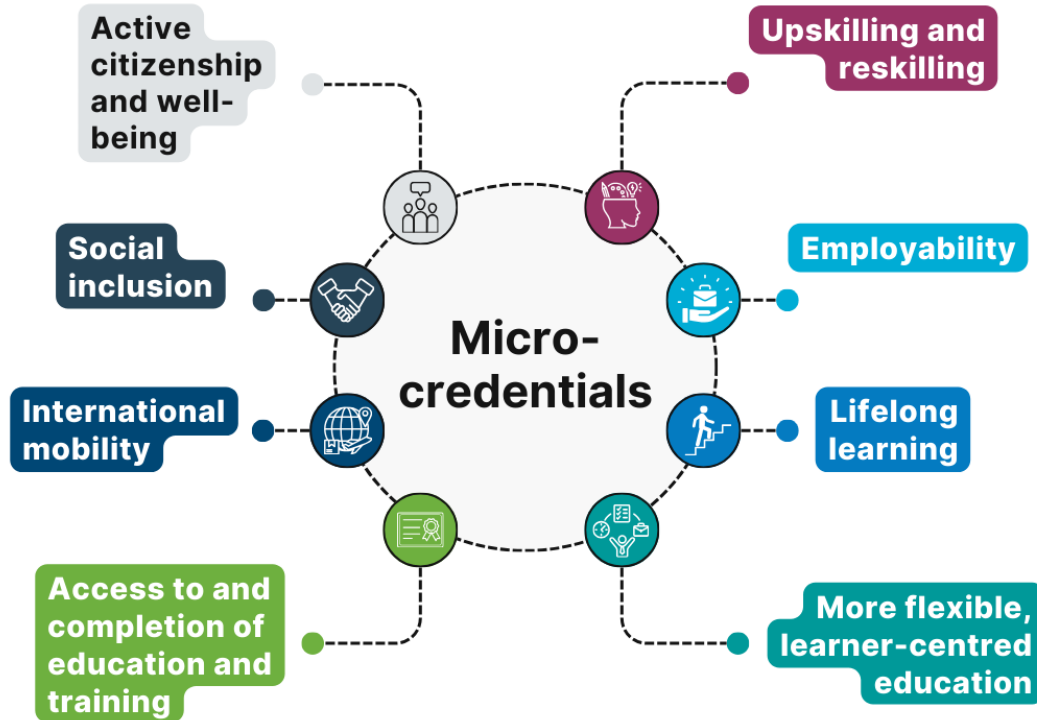
More flexible

in delivery

Source: OECD (2021), "Micro-credential innovations in higher education: Who, What and Why?", OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 39, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f14ef041-en>.



Why and in which contexts are micro-credentials on the rise?



Source: OECD (2023), "Micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability: Uses and possibilities", OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 66, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9c4b7b68-en>.



Key features of micro-credentials

How are they distinct from long-established continuing education programmes?



LABOUR MARKET ORIENTED

Responds to short, medium, and long-term skills needs of the broader socio-economic environment.



ONLINE

When micro-credentials are newly developed, they are most likely to be offered online (or hybrid) to ensure flexibility.



STACKABLE

Can be taken on their own but micro-credentials learning should be recognised, and when appropriate, be used to work towards a larger qualification.



CROSS-SECTORAL

Micro-credentials can be offered across HE, VET and adult learning providers. They are also often co-created with actors from the broader socio-economic environment.




Example: Micro-credentials in higher education developed and delivered with industry experts



MICRO CREDS EXPLORE FOR LEARNERS FOR EMPLOYERS ABOUT US

CATALOGUE / SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING / BREWING AND DISTILLING

BREWING & DISTILLING

 **Maynooth University**
National University of Ireland Maynooth

[START APPLICATION](#)

DELIVERY MODE	DURATION	NEXT INTAKE	ECTS	LEVEL	PRICE	APPLICATION DEADLINE
BLENDED	12 WEEKS	MARCH 2024	5	9	€600	-

<https://microcreds.ie/partners/maynooth-university/offerings/micro-credential-brewing-bvaz-4>

Unclassified - Non classifié

Example: Micro-credentials in vocational education and training developed by industry representatives



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Number	Title	Level	Credits	Developer	Approval Date	Review Date	
4571	Basic Construction Skills (Micro-credential)	3	39	Waihanga Ara Rau Construction and Infrastructure Workforce Development Council (6046)	03/2022	24/03/2025	⏪
4980	Core Construction of Forestry Roads (Micro-Credential)	3	40	Muka Tangata - People, Food and Fibre Workforce Development Council (6050)	01/2024	30/12/2026	⏪
4849	Extractive Industries Site Construction and Maintenance (Micro-credential)	4	13	Hanga-Aro-Rau Manufacturing, Engineering and Logistics Workforce Development Council (6049)	08/2023	30/12/2024	⏪
4974	Forestry River Crossing Construction (Micro-credential)	3	20	Muka Tangata - People, Food and Fibre Workforce Development Council (6050)	01/2024	30/12/2026	⏪
4842	Steel Fixing/Reinforcement Installation for Construction and Infrastructure (Entry Level) (Micro-Credential)	3	20	Waihanga Ara Rau Construction and Infrastructure Workforce Development Council (6046)	07/2023	30/12/2026	⏪

* Workforce Development Councils act as the voice of industry and are responsible for ensuring the vocational education system meets industry needs.



Example: Micro-credentials in non-formal sector developed by a business



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What has the OECD been doing on micro-credentials?



We have been assisting governments in their response to micro-credential innovations

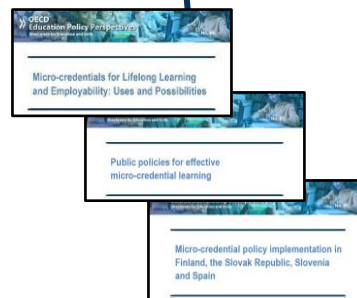
2019 - 20
Initial analysis of alternative credentials



2022 - 23
Support to implement the Council Recommendation



2021
Analysis to inform the European Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation



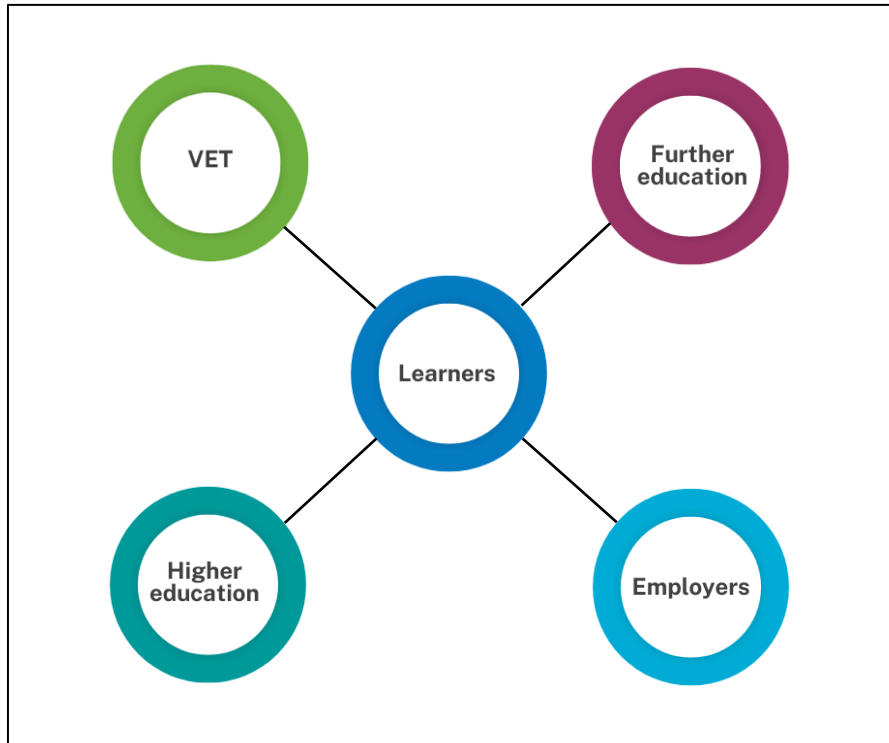
2024 -
Work continuing to support the creation of a robust ecosystem and assist in addressing skills shortages



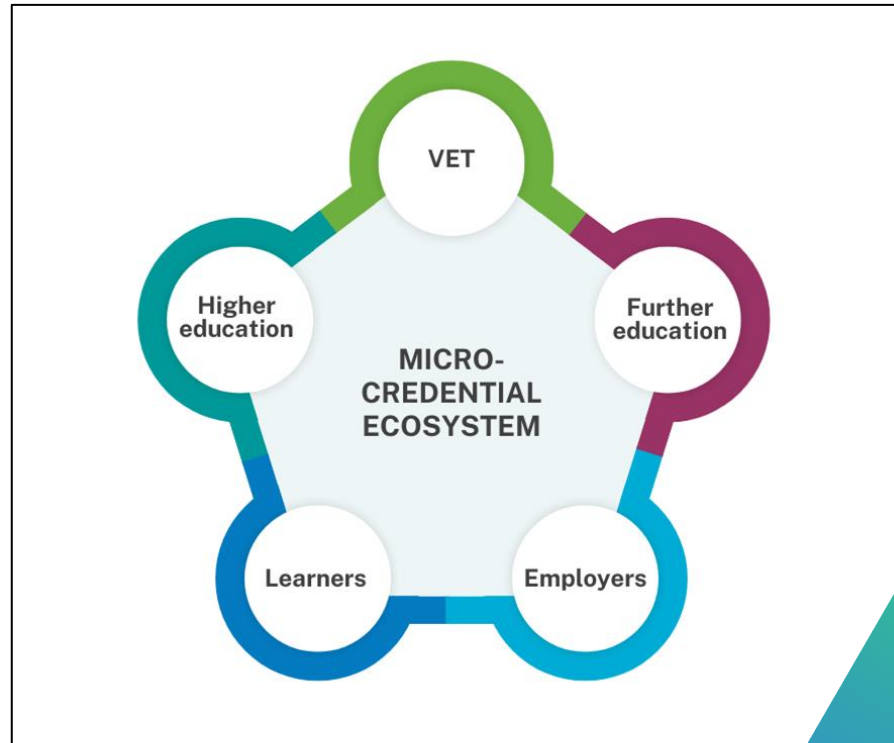


Our most recent work is centred on supporting the development of a harmonised, single micro-credential framework

Present



The desired future





Our 2023 papers examined the role of governments in micro-credential development



<https://doi.org/10.1787/a41f148b-en>



<https://doi.org/10.1787/c3daa488-en>

How are governments responding to micro-credential development?



Public policies can help micro-credential providers and learners

Examples of policy levers used in OECD countries

A. Regulations and guidelines

- Create a framework providers can follow when offering and recognising micro-credentials
- Enforce or make changes to legislation under which providers operate

B. Public funding for providers and learners

- Use targeted funding
- Include in core public funding and/or extend student loan schemes
- Adopt individual learning accounts

C. Quality assurance mechanisms

- Integrate micro-credentials in an existing quality assurance system
- Develop a quality assurance system dedicated to micro-credentials

D. Information systems

- Create a nationwide information portal to assist learners in making informed choices



A. Regulations and guidelines – example uses

Harder approach



Ministry of Universities issued Royal Decree in 2021, defining micro-credentials as one of five types of unofficial credentials universities may offer.

The screenshot shows the BOE website interface. At the top, it says 'Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado' with the logo 'U 23'. Below that, there's a search bar and navigation options. The main content area is titled 'Legislación consolidada' and displays the text of 'Real Decreto 822/2021, de 28 de septiembre, por el que se establece la organización de las enseñanzas universitarias y del procedimiento de aseguramiento de su calidad.' Below the text, there are details: 'Publicado en: «BOE» núm. 233, de 29/09/2021.', 'Entrada en vigor: 19/10/2021', 'Departamento: Ministerio de Universidades', 'Referencia: BOE-A-2021-15781', and 'Permalink ELI: https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/2021/09/28/822/con'. At the bottom, there are options to download the document as PDF or ePUB.

<https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2021-15781>

Types of unofficial (*títulos propios*) credentials universities may offer

Micro-credentials	less than 15 ECTS
Certificates	15 or more ECTS
Expert diplomas	15-29 ECTS
Specialist diplomas	30-59 ECTS
Unofficial master's degrees	60 or more ECTS



A. Regulations and guidelines – example uses

Harder approach



Ministry of Universities issued Royal Decree in 2021, defining micro-credentials as one of five types of unofficial credentials universities may offer.

The screenshot shows the official website of the Spanish Ministry of Universities. The header includes the Spanish coat of arms and the text 'GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA' and 'MINISTERIO DE LA PRESIDENCIA, RELACIONES CON LAS CORTES Y POLÍTICA SENCIOALÓGICA'. The main content area displays the title 'Real Decreto 822/2021, de 28 de septiembre, por el que se establece la organización de las enseñanzas universitarias y del procedimiento de aseguramiento de su calidad.' Below this, it provides publication details: 'Publicado en: «BOE» núm. 233, de 29/09/2021. Entrada en vigor: 19/10/2021. Departamento: Ministerio de Universidades. Referencia: BOE-A-2021-15781. Permalink ELI: https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/2021/09/28/822/con'. At the bottom, there are options to download the document as a PDF or ePUB.

<https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2021-15781>

Softer approach



The Department of Education, Skills and Employment published a non-binding national guideline in 2021.



<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-publications/resources/national-microcredentials-framework>



A. Regulations and guidelines – example uses

How “micro” should micro-credentials be?

Country	Approach	Workload	Provider coverage
Spain	Royal Decree 822/2021	Less than 15 ECTS	Universities
Australia	Non-binding guidelines developed by national authorities	A minimum volume of learning of one hour and less than an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) award qualification (equivalent to up to 30 ECTS)	All types of education and training providers (including alternative providers)
Canada (British Columbia)		Shorter than other formal post-secondary credentials (under 288 hours - equivalent to approx. 9-11 ECTS)	Public post-secondary institutions
New Zealand		1-40 credits in size (equivalent to 0.5-20 ECTS)	Accredited education providers (including some alternative providers)
Ireland	Non-binding guidelines developed by other bodies	1-30 ECTS	Seven public universities (led by IUA)
		5-30 ECTS	Private independent providers (led by QQI)

B. Public funding for providers and learners – example uses

Targeted funding



The first round of the micro-credential pilot in the HE sector ran from 2021 to 2023, with the second round commencing in 2024. In the VET sector, the pilot also began in 2024.

<https://npuls.nl/en/microcredentials-in-higher-education-and-research-universities/>

Include in core public funding



From 2021, the core funding allocation model for HEIs considers the number of credits gained through open studies (5% for universities and 9% for universities of applied sciences).

<https://doi.org/10.1787/61ad64b9-en>

Extend student loan schemes



England plans to extend its income-contingent loan scheme for degree programmes to smaller units of learning, such as modules, starting in 2025.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/lifelong-loan-entitlement>

Individual learning accounts



Since 2015, Singapore has provided all citizens aged 25 and above with a credit of SGD 500 as part of the MySkillsFuture initiative.

<https://www.skillsfuture.gov.sg/credit>



C. Quality assurance mechanisms – example uses

Institutional level



An emerging global trend in the external quality assurance of micro-credentials is for quality assurance bodies to review the internal quality assurance mechanisms that institutions put in place for micro-credential learning.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/09504222221132129>

Programme level



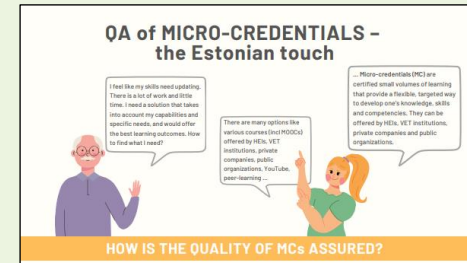
Some countries have implemented program-level quality assurance systems for micro-credentials, though this level of scrutiny is reserved for some institutions.

<https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/tertiary/approval-accreditation-and-registration/micro-credentials/>

Study programme group level



Another way used to ensure the quality of micro-credentials while balancing risk against burden is assessment by study programme groups.



<https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/EKKA-2.pdf>



D. Information systems – example uses

Hoch & Weit



The German Rectors Conference launched an online portal that lists further education programmes offered by public and government-recognised higher education institutions in 2022.

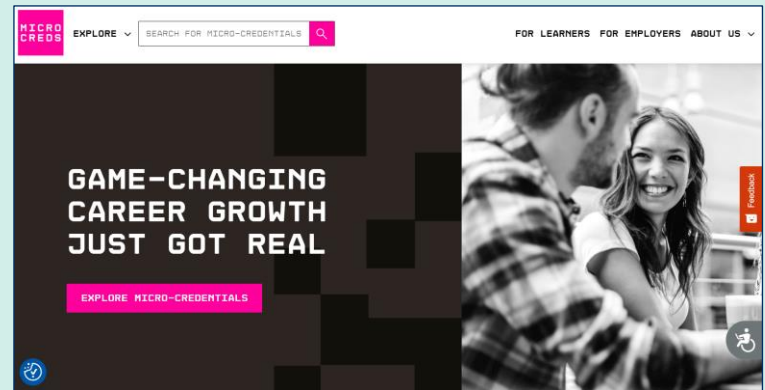


<https://hoch-und-weit.de/>

IUA MicroCreds



The Irish Universities Association launched an online portal that lists programmes offered by seven public universities that participate in the MicroCreds project in 2023.



<https://microcreds.ie/>



Questions for discussion

- How “micro” should micro-credentials be?
- How do micro-credentials relate to existing adult learning programmes?
- What measures can be taken to ensure that micro-credentials are closely aligned with the evolving skill demands of the labour market?
- How can we ensure that all learners, especially disadvantaged ones, benefit from micro-credentials?
- How can we promote the transferability of micro-credential learning across different providers and sectors (and across countries)?



Links to relevant OECD publications

- OECD (2024), Bridging Talent Shortages in Tech: Skills-first Hiring, Micro-credentials and Inclusive Outreach, Getting Skills Right, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f35da44f-en>.
- OECD (2023), "Public policies for effective micro-credential learning", OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 85, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a41f148b-en>.
- OECD (2023), "Micro-credential policy implementation in Finland, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Spain", OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 86, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c3daa488-en>.
- OECD (2023), "Micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability: Uses and possibilities", OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 66, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9c4b7b68-en>.
- OECD (2023), Flexible adult learning provision: What it is, why it matters, and how to make it work, <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/topic/policy-sub-issues/adult-learning/booklet-flexibility-2023.pdf>.
- OECD (2021), "Micro-credential innovations in higher education: Who, What and Why?", OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 39, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f14ef041-en>.
- OECD (2021), "Quality and value of micro-credentials in higher education: Preparing for the future", OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 40, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9c4ad26d-en>.
- Kato, S., V. Galán-Muros and T. Weko (2020), "The emergence of alternative credentials", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 216, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b741f39e-en>.



Thank you!

- Contact: Shizuka.KATO@oecd.org
- OECD Education Website: www.oecd.org/education
- Higher Education Policy Website: <https://www.oecd.org/education/higher-education-policy>
- Digital platform with all data and analytical results from OECD's work on education:



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