

The Future of Micro-credentials: Is Small Really Beautiful?



Professor Mark Brown
Dublin City University

6th November 2023

Photo by [Derril Roy](#) on [Unsplash](#)

DESIGNING A QA
MODEL FOR
MICROCREDENTIALS

SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

“Micro-credentials when done right, can be like a tiny **caterpillar** transforming into a beautiful **butterfly**.”





“However, when done wrong, all you may end up with
is a **really *fast* caterpillar**”

(adapted from Westerman; cited in [Bozkurt & Sharma, 2022](#), p. ii).



Outline

- 1** | How are QA agencies responding?
- 2** | How are leading institutions responding?
- 3** | Where are the holes keeping us from flying?

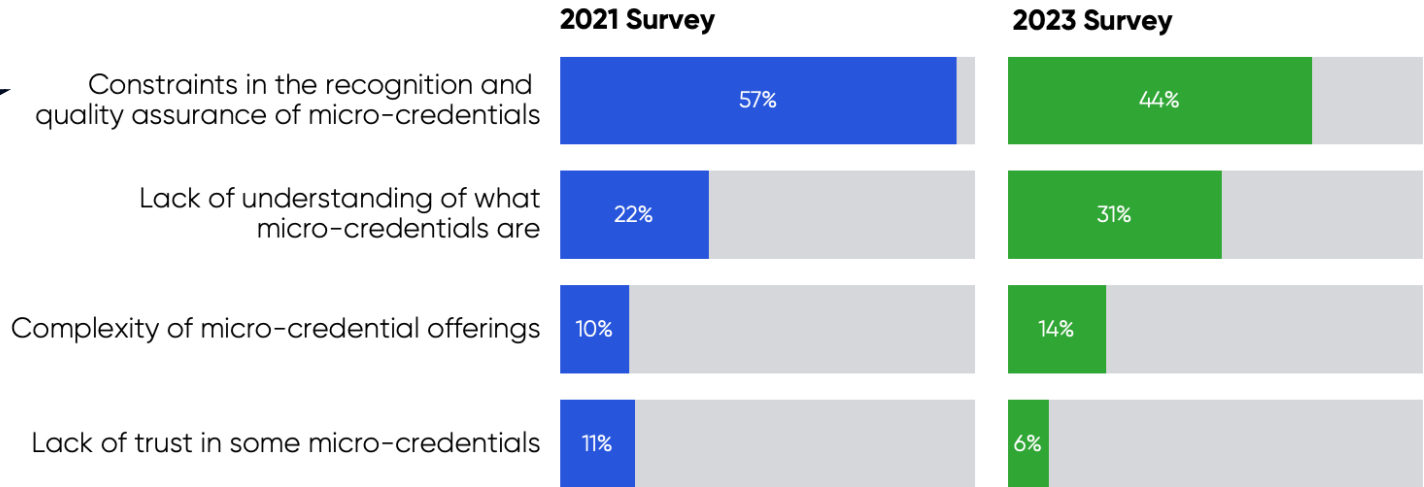


Before we start...

HOLONIQ. GLOBAL IMPACT INTELLIGENCE

Recognition and quality assurance constraints the top barrier, although less so in 2023, and now more concern regarding basic understanding.

The top barrier to the adoption of micro-credentials at scale is:



Source: HolonIQ, March 2023. n = 389 across 2021 and 2023 surveys.



1. How are QA agencies responding?



1. How are QA agencies responding?

34). Regarding the development of a quality assurance approach for micro-credentials, results from the survey for this report show that in nineteen countries quality assurance agencies have not been developing such an approach, while eleven are doing so.



Has (have) the quality assurance agency(ies) in your country been developing a quality assurance approach for micro-credentials?

Source: IMINQA • Created with Datawrapper

https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/IMINQA-MC-report_Approaches-to-Quality-Assurance-of-Micro-credentials.pdf

Figure 4: Development of a quality assurance approach for micro-credentials



Approaches to Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials

A report on policies and practices to assure the quality of micro-credentials in the European Higher Education Area

August 2023

By Elena Cirlan, Senior policy and project coordinator, ENQA



Co-funded by
the European Union



1. How are QA agencies responding?



1 No specific quality assurance standards for micro-credentials



In **25+ countries**, we found no national framework, standards or guidelines for micro-credentials. In many cases, however, there is evidence of a plan or commitment in the future to integrating quality assurance standards for micro-credentials within existing requirements.



1. How are QA agencies responding?



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2 Common standards and quality assurance processes apply for micro-credentials



In **Australia, Canada (x3), United Kingdom, Estonia, Spain (x2), Germany** and **The Netherlands** we found common standards already apply for micro-credentials, and tangible evidence of a decision to extend the application of existing standards for their quality assurance.



1. How are QA agencies responding?



Characteristics Statement

Micro-credentials

May 2022



7 Quality management of micro-credentials

As with all other aspects of micro-credentials, there is an expectation that a higher education provider will implement quality management policies and processes to safeguard the academic standard and quality of the award of academic credit. Approaches to the quality management of micro-credentials will need to accommodate the facts that:

- they do not follow the usual pattern of the academic year
- they have a distinctive relationship with a learner's employment profile, which has implications for RPL and 'shelf-life' of credit
- a learner's journey is unlikely to follow the traditional route through levels.

Key areas for consideration will be:

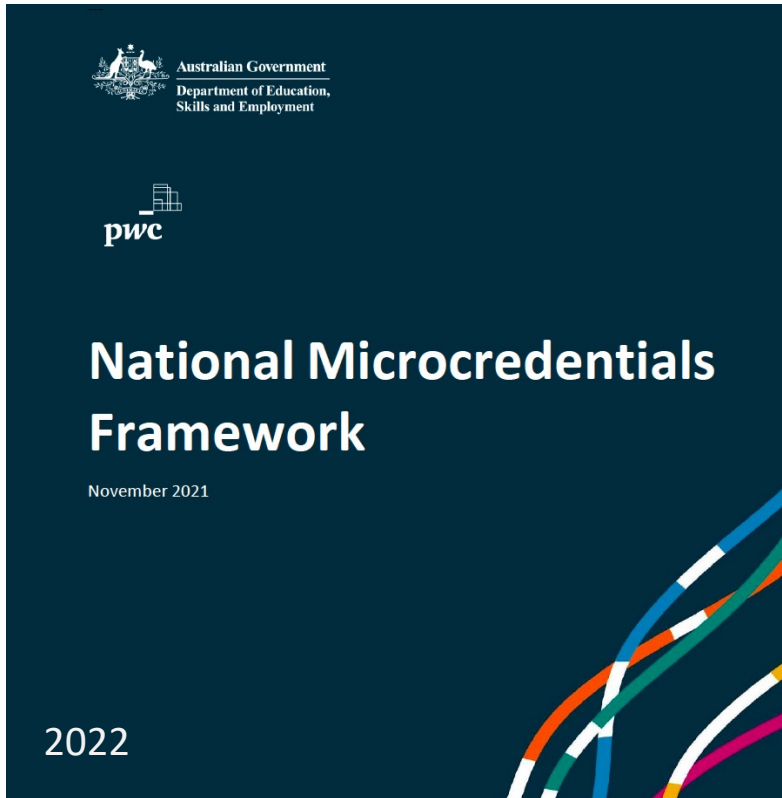
- admissions decisions, and the role of Recognition of Prior Learning
- approaches to course design and approval that are agile and not overly-burdensome while still being robust
- swift confirmation of outcome and award following completion of assessment
- effective monitoring and review
- student engagement in quality management.

7.1 What does the term 'standard quality assurance mechanisms' mean?

The definition of micro-credentials notes that they should be 'subject to standard quality assurance mechanisms'. As they carry academic credit, higher education providers should ensure that requirements of their regulatory or funding bodies are met in terms of quality management - there should be an effective quality management approach that meets the sector-agreed standards. It is important to note, however, that the nature of micro-credentials means that a higher education provider may need to reconsider some aspects of its approach to quality management for this area of provision to ensure it is appropriate and proportionate.



1. How are QA agencies responding?



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

5.6 Quality Assurance

Quality assurance protects the integrity of the microcredentials ecosystem, by giving employers and recognising bodies confidence in the microcredentials being delivered by an issuing authority, and by protecting learners. While most microcredentials are unaccredited, a strong feature of stakeholder consultations is the need to ensure this framework is minimalist.

Quality assurance measures are important and have been captured in various parts of this framework - the requirement for clearly stipulated learning outcomes in **5.1**, evidence of attainment in **5.2**, and critical information requirements (such as issuing institution, provider or CRICOS codes, relevant regulator, and approach to academic integrity and assessment) in **Section 4**.

Microcredentials should be reviewed regularly (and as appropriate) by providers to ensure that microcredentials remain relevant and updated. Providers are encouraged to stipulate quality assurance processes on the Marketplace.

5.6.1. Where an issuing authority has not applied a regulated standard (i.e. the standards and academic integrity processes applied to award courses or components within a training package) to a microcredential, they must provide a statement of assurance of quality on the Marketplace - e.g. a profile of the provider/ institution, a description of the quality assurance processes undertaken, and the process for review/ updating the microcredential.



Enabling



1. How are QA agencies responding?

QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK



Flip through the Quality Assurance Framework using the arrows, or click from links in the Table of Contents.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Part One: Quality Assurance Principles for Ontario Universities and the Quality Council

Responsibilities of the Quality Council

Responsibilities of Institutions

1. The Elements of Quality Assurance



ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES
COUNCIL ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

Micro-credentials

A designation of achievement of a coherent set of skills and knowledge, specified by a statement of purpose, learning outcomes, and strong evidence of need by industry, employers, and/or the community. They have fewer requirements and are of shorter duration than a qualification and focus on learning outcomes that are distinct from diploma/degree programs. While requiring recognition in the IQAP, proposals for the introduction or modification of a micro-credential do not require reference to the Quality Council unless they are part of a New Program.



Institutional QA
Processes

<https://oucqa.ca/framework/definitions/>



1. How are QA agencies responding?



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2 Common standards and quality assurance processes apply for micro-credentials



In **Australia, Canada (x3), United Kingdom, Estonia, Spain (x2)** and **The Netherlands** we found common standards already apply for micro-credentials, and tangible evidence of a decision to extend the application of existing standards for their quality assurance.

3 Specific guidelines and quality assurance processes developed for micro-credentials



In **Malaysia, New Zealand, and Ireland** we identified a framework or specific standards or guidelines for micro-credentials to address particular issues related to their quality assurance.



1. How are QA agencies responding?

Blended and Fully Online Learning Programmes

Topic Specific

QAI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Callochtá agus Callochtair Éireann

Inclusive of
Micro-credentials

Blended and Fully Online Learning Programmes

Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines
For Providers of Blended and Fully Online Learning Programmes

September 2023/V3 © QQI

2023 October

Therefore, the revised guidelines build on the previous widely accepted definition of blended learning taken from Garrison and Kanuka (2004)¹¹, where, at its simplistic, this concept refers to the blending of online and face-to-face learning. Such blending involves online components of teaching and learning taking place synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination. No ratio of blending is specified given an array of possible learning designs. This so-called “big bucket”, which importantly makes no distinction between blended and hybrid forms of learning, contrasts with two other big buckets—namely: i) traditional on-site, in-person¹² teaching and learning; and ii) fully online learning where learners are usually at a distance from the teacher and have no on-site or on-campus requirements. Set against these broad study modes, the following definitions apply to these guidelines.


Key definitions

- *Blended Learning* refers to a type of programme where teaching occurs using a mix of online and on-site learning, with the online components taking place synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination.
- *Fully Online Learning* refers to a type of programme where all teaching occurs entirely online, either synchronously or asynchronously, or in combination. Importantly, learners can complete their programme of study from a distance with no in-person or on-site requirements.

While not every programme fits neatly into these definitions, as learners can study offline at a distance with no digital technology, and some programmes are taught through more than one study mode, a key distinction appears throughout the guidelines. This distinction recognises that blended learning programmes *always* include an on-site or face-to-face component. In contrast, fully online learning programmes can be completed entirely online and from a distance, including in some cases from outside of Ireland. The term *fully* is adopted in the definition of online learning to help amplify this important distinction.



1. How are QA agencies responding?

4. Staff Training, Professional Development and Institutional Support	
Good Practice Statement	The availability of staff training and professional development and the level of institutional support for teachers, and for those who support teaching and provide crucial administrative services, builds capacity, and enables good practice for blended and/or fully online learning provision.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	4.1 The strategies and processes for the appointment, induction, training, professional development, and appraisal arrangements for teachers and for those who support teaching are appropriate and specific to blended and/or fully online learning contexts.
	4.2 There is a planned approach to the appointment of (or access to) specialist staff to support the provider's blended and/or fully online learning strategy, including people with teaching, technical and professional expertise appropriate to integrating new digital technologies in the learning experience.
	4.3 Subject expertise and academic qualifications remain important criteria in recruiting appropriate staff but also include competencies required, for example, in designing and facilitating programmes supported by online learning, with an understanding of the pedagogical differences between study modes.
	4.4 The provider has a specialist unit or access to dedicated staffing capable of designing, facilitating, and evaluating appropriate online or on-site training and professional development opportunities to develop digital skills and the capacity to design good quality blended and/or online learning programmes.
	4.5 Staff engaged in teaching programmes supported by digital technologies should participate in appropriate training and professional development and have access to mentoring from more experienced colleagues.
 Fully Online Programmes	For fully online learning programmes, staff must either demonstrate previous experience of teaching online or participate in appropriate induction, training and professional development before they facilitate courses, and have access to ongoing support from more experienced colleagues.



1. How are QA agencies responding?



DESIGNING A VOLUNTARY INSPECTION SCHEME FOR MICRO-CREDENTIALS

Standards and Indicators

- Management, Staffing and Administration
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- Participant support
- Facilities
- Premises and facilities in the case of face-to-face delivery




2. How are leading institutions responding?





2. How are leading institutions responding?

FR


Micro-Credential Filters

Clear Filters ×

Industries

Areas of Focus

Start Date

Deliveries 

Languages

Duration

Hybrid (115)

In person (77)

Online (1,459)


Fast, affordable, flexible training opportunities.

Find a micro-credential and unlock your potential with in-demand skills employers need. Your future starts with a search.

🔍 Topic, industry, institution...

SEARCH

or browse all 1795 micro-credentials from institutions across Ontario. >



88% Online

<https://microlearnontario.ca>

20/03/2023



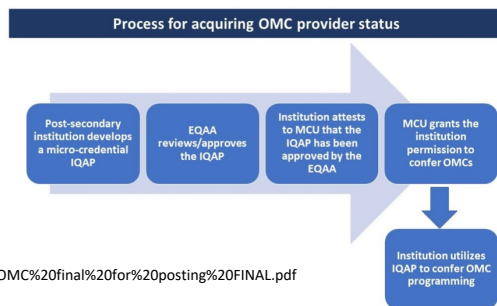
2. How are leading institutions responding?

Ontario Micro-Credentials: Harnessing the Potential

A draft proposal for an Ontario Micro-Credential Quality Assurance Framework

Prepared by the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB)

July 2023



<http://peqab.ca/Publications/OMC%20final%20for%20posting%20FINAL.pdf>

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2. How are leading institutions responding?



Compare Courses

The new way to get ahead

Browse and compare microcredentials available in Australia from tertiary education and training providers.

Search for microcredentials

Search

93% Online

<https://www.microcredseeker.edu.au>



Delivery mode i

343

Online

11

On campus

12

Multi-modal



2. How are leading institutions responding?



Microcredentials ▾ Educators ▾ About ▾ Resources ▾

Compare Courses

Active Filters

Clear all

Showing 1 - 10 of 93 courses

Sort by Relevancy

Industry

Education & Training X

Refine courses

Level >

Credit ⓘ >

Start date ⓘ >

Industry >

Duration >

Expert



Personal Effectiveness

The University of Melbourne

Gain strategies to better manage your own time and resources to lead others more effectively.

📅 Start date 29 May 2023

🕒 Duration 4 Weeks

💰 Price \$1350 including GST

✓ Credit may be available

🔗 Stackable with other microcredentials

Competent



Online Marketing Strategies in Business

CQUniversity Australia

Explore and evaluate the effectiveness of online marketing strategies.

📅 Start date Flexible

🕒 Duration 50 Hours

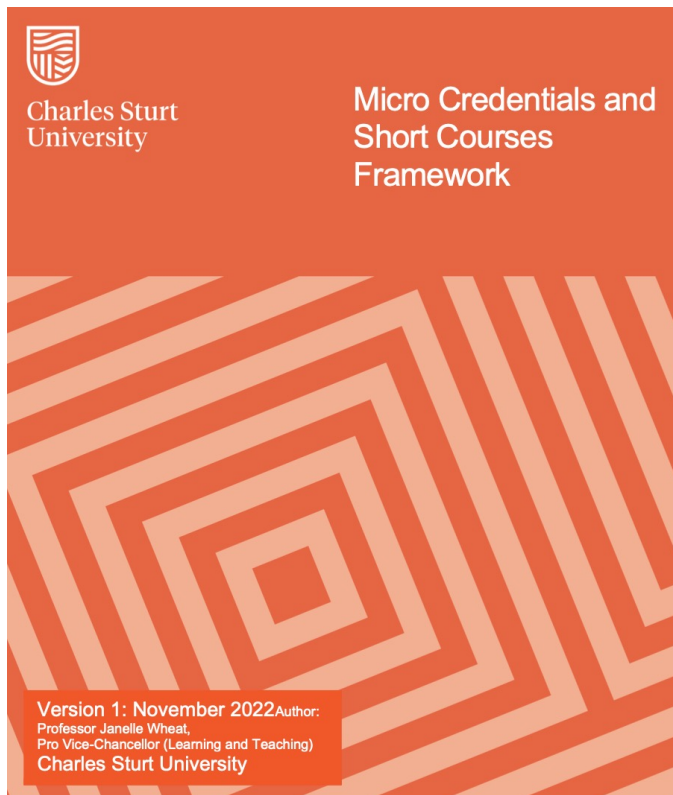
💰 Price \$450 including GST

Top





2. How are leading institutions responding?



Types of micro credentials and short courses

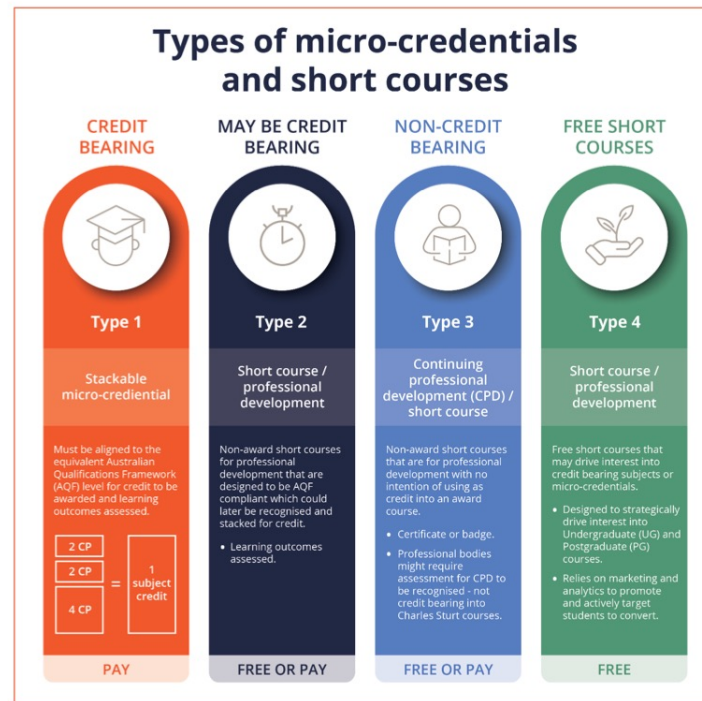


Figure 1. Types of micro credentials and short courses offered at Charles Sturt



2. How are leading institutions responding?



EXPLORE ▾

SEARCH FOR MICRO-CREDENTIALS



FOR EMPLOYERS

ABOUT U

MICROCREDS

278 MICROCREDS

Online = 150 On-campus = 0
Blended = 95 Hybrid = 0

30/05/2023

<https://microcreds.ie/>

FILTER BY

SUBJECT AREA ▾

TOPICS ▾

DELIVERY MODE ▾

COURSE DURATION ▾

UNIVERSITY ▾

SORT BY ▾

CLEAR ALL



UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

This module will provide an understanding of the principles of accident investigation and the...



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

ADVANCED ANIMAL NUTRITION

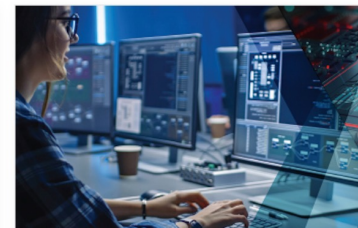
The provision of feed is by far the greatest cost of modern animal production. It is important, therefore, to ...



UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

ADVANCED ASSESSMENT IN RESPIRATORY NURSING

This module provides the student with the opportunity to develop their competence and expertise in respiratory nursing...



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

ADVANCED DATA PROGRAMMING WITH R

This comprehensive micro-credential covers advanced use of R and Rstudio, following on from the Data Programmin...



2. How are leading institutions responding?



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Faculties and Schools Courses Research A

Search Academic Affairs



Academic Affairs

Menu

Home

About Us

Academic Policies

Course Development

TTL

Gaeil

Postgraduate Education

Academic Regulations and Policies

Course Development

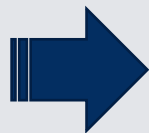
Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies

POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION

Micro-credential Proposal Approval Process

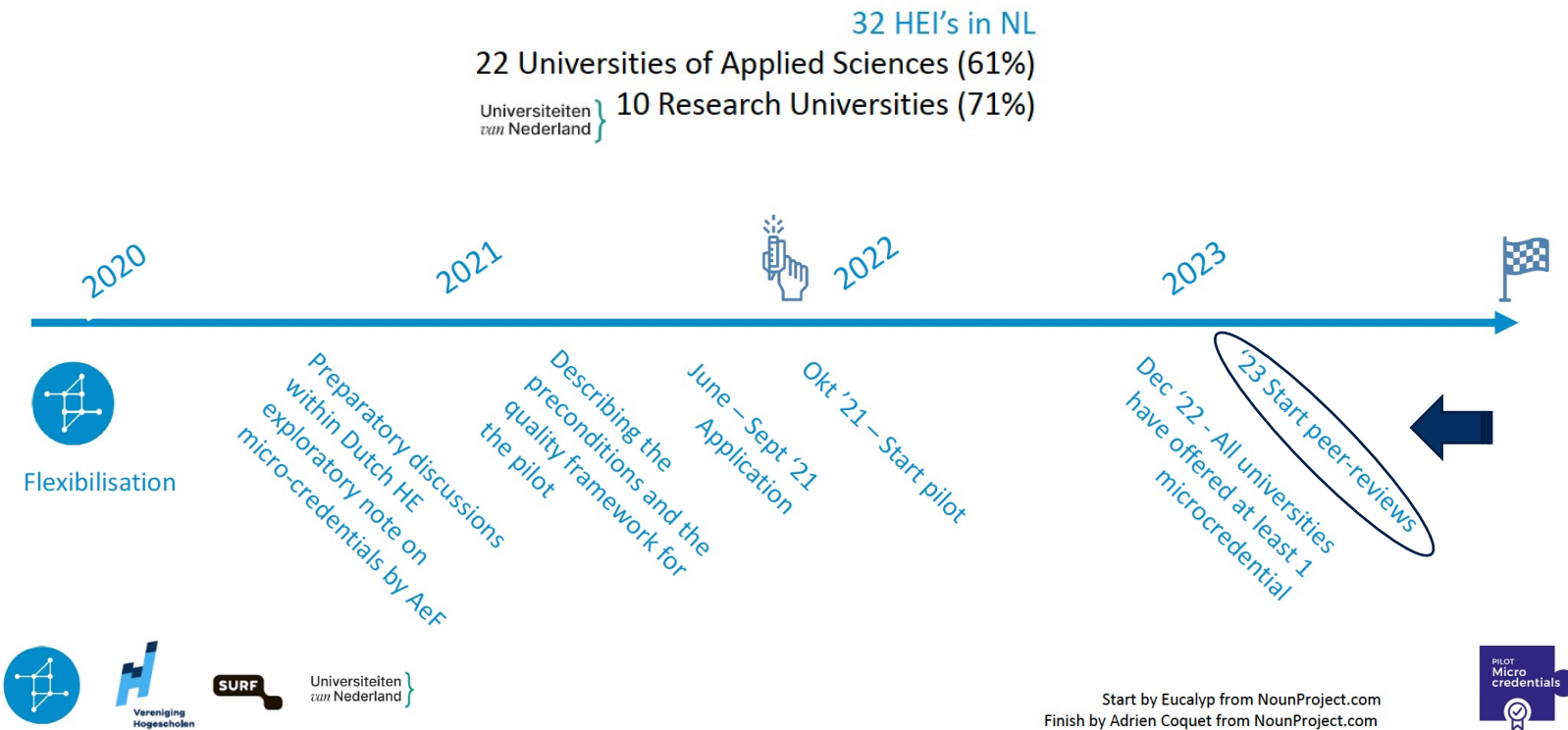
Trinity is developing micro-credentials as part of Human Capital Initiative (HCI) Pillar 3, allowing for a highly flexible and inclusive form of learning that focuses on the acquisition of skills and competencies and supports professionals and lifelong learners who wish to develop alongside the changing needs of industry and society. Four Schools are participating in the Trinity micro-credential pilot project - School of Engineering, School of Nursing and Midwifery, School of Social Work and Social Policy and Trinity Business School. Micro-credentials are specifically designed to upskill the workforce and they consist of credit offered for continuing professional development purposes.

Credit Range: 2.5 ECTS (not available currently), 5 ECTS or 10 ECTS





2. How are leading institutions responding?





3. Where are the holes keeping us from flying?

3. Where are the holes keeping us from flying?

MICROCREDS
249 MICROCREDS

FILTER BY

SUBJECT AREA TOPICS DELIVERY MODE COURSE DURATION UNIVERSITY SORT BY CLEAR ALL

100% Online
Blended
On campus
Hybrid

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
ADVANCED ANIMAL NUTRITION

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
ADVANCED ASSESSMENT IN RESPIRATORY NURSING

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
ADVANCED DATA PROGRAMMING WITH R

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK
ADVANCED NEGOTIATION SKILLS

Fast, affordable, flexible training opportunities.

Find a micro-credential and unlock your potential with in-demand skills employers need. Your future starts with a search.

Topic, industry, institution... SEARCH

88% Online

or browse all 1795 micro-credentials from institutions across Ontario.

Micro-credentials Portal

FR

Micro-Credential Filters

Clear Filters x

Industries

Areas of Focus

Start Date

Deliveries ←

Languages

Duration

Hybrid (115)

In person (77)

Online (1,459)

20/09/2023

microcred seeker

Compare Courses

The new way to get ahead

Browse and compare microcredentials available in Australia from tertiary education and training providers.

Search for microcredentials Search

A lost opportunity...

- No course quality rating
- Limited careers guidance
- No learner support information
- Limited details on QA processes
- Little or no outcomes data



3. Where are the holes keeping us from flying?

Large holes in the data





3. Where are the holes keeping us from flying?

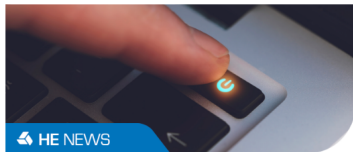
iteca
Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia

Skills Training Higher Education International Associations ITECA College About Membership

ITEC23 Conference — Collaboration Driving Excellence 7-9 June 2023, Gold

Turn Off The Microcredentials Marketplace

ITECA MEMBER-DRIVEN ADVOCACY



Article Date —

14 June 2023

Education Sector/s —

Higher Education

<https://www.iteca.edu.au/ITECA/Content/News/2023/he-q2/mc.marketplace.shutdown.call.aspx>



Doesn't give students good advice

Summary —

Despite the Microcredentials Marketplace being described as a colossal waste of money, another \$1 million has been committed by the Australian Government for an online resource that **doesn't give students good advice** on their full range of study options. The [Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia](#) (ITECA) has advised the Australian Government that this wasteful spending should stop and that a new online platform should be created that allows school leavers and existing workers to assess options across the skills training and higher education systems. This approach would bring together the three unconnected platforms that the Australian Government current spends taxpayers' money on.



3. Where are the holes keeping us from flying?



Outside of Country

Photo by [Alexas_Fotos](#) on [Unsplash](#)



3. Where are the holes keeping us from flying?

A Strategic Institutional Response to Micro-Credentials: Key Questions for Educational Leaders

ABSTRACT

This article responds to the rise of the micro-credential movement. It evidences the heightened attention politicians, policy-makers and educational leaders are giving to micro-credentials by framing the discussion in several recent high-level policy developments, an exponential growth in the number of academic publications and the increasing level of interest shown by popular media. It follows that micro-credentials appear to be high on the change agenda for many higher education institutions (HEIs), especially in the post-COVID-19 environment.

However, the emergence of the micro-credential raises several crucial questions for educational leaders, set against fear of missing out. Importantly, the paper identifies a significant gap in the literature regarding leadership and strategic institutional responses to micro-credentials. Indeed, there is a dearth of literature. Leadership is crucial to the success of any educational change or innovation, so five key questions are presented for institutional leaders. They challenge institutions to make strategic decisions around how they engage with and position micro-credentials. If micro-credentials are part of an HEI's change agenda, then serious consideration needs to be given to the type of leadership and internal structures required to develop and execute a successful micro-credential strategy. Consideration must also be given to fit-for-purpose business models and how to mitigate potential risks. We hope to bring these strategic questions to the table as institutions plan, envision and develop their micro-credential strategies.

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KEYWORDS:

Micro-credentials; Higher Education Leadership; Educational Change Management

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COLLECTION:
MICROCREDENTIALS

ARTICLE



<https://jime.open.ac.uk/>



3. Where are the holes keeping us from flying?

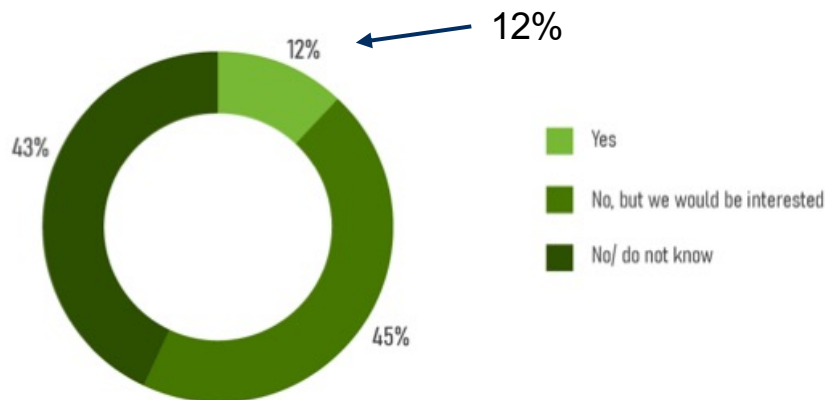
2020 Survey

Use of self-assessment and/or benchmarking tools for digitalisation

SURVEY REPORT

Digitally enhanced learning and teaching in European higher education institutions

eua EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITY
ASSOCIATION



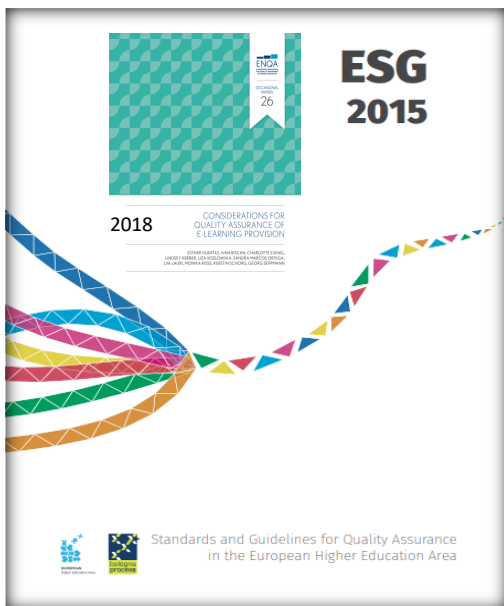
Q17: Has your institution used any self-assessment and/or benchmarking tools for digitalisation?

n=367



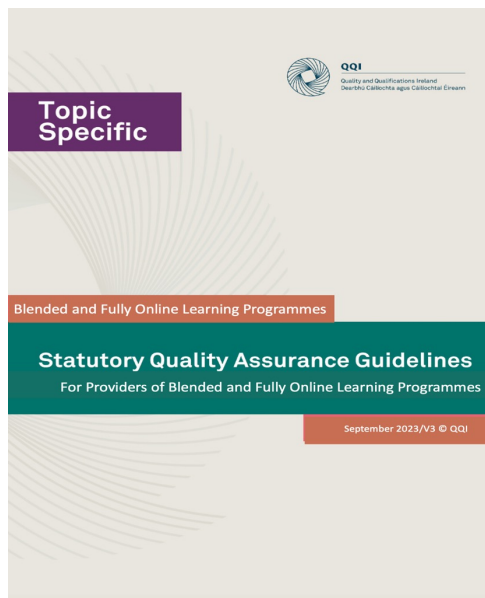
Final remarks

EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES



New QA considerations?

COUNTRY SPECIFIC QUALITY FRAMEWORKS AND GUIDELINES



Enabling or Constraining?

GUIDES AND BENCHMARKING TOOLS FOR ENHANCING QUALITY



Quality Conversations!

“How does one become a beautiful **butterfly**...
you must want to **fly** so much that you are willing
to **give up** being a caterpillar”.



(Trina Paulus, adapted from A. A. Milne, 1922).



Questions for discussion

1

How could we strengthen **ESGS** to enhance quality assurance for micro-credentials offered fully online and to learners outside of country?

2

Where in Europe can we find good examples of **institutions** responding to the quality assurance considerations related to micro-credentials?

3

How can we better engage **learners** as partners and key stakeholders in developing quality assurance practices for micro-credentials?