

# MICRO- CREDENTIAL PROVIDERS

STANDARDS AND  
GUIDELINES FOR  
ACCREDITATION

(FEBRUARY 2024 REVISION)

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**ECTE**  
Micro-credential Provider

European  
Council for  
Theological  
Education

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# 1. INTRODUCTION TO MICRO-CREDENTIALS

This document contains the *Micro-credential Provider Standards and Guidelines* (MCP-SG) for accreditation, including criteria and procedures, MCP accreditation standards, good practice guidelines and relevant appendices.

## 1.1 - DEFINITION

Within Europe, the definition of a micro-credential (MC) is:

‘The record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning.

These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs.

Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be standalone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity’.<sup>1</sup>

To help bridge the lack of a common global agreement on the term the UNESCO<sup>2</sup> offers a further definition whereby a micro-credential:

- Is a record of focused learning achievement verifying what the learner knows, understands or can do.
- Includes assessment based on clearly defined standards and is awarded by a trusted provider.
- Has standalone value and may also contribute to or complement other micro-credentials or macro-credentials, including through recognition of prior learning.
- Meets the standards required by relevant quality assurance.

## 1.2 - COMMON FEATURES

Common features of micro-credentials include:

1. They are a transparent proof of acquisition of one or more learning outcomes<sup>3</sup>. Micro-credentials are typically focused on a specific set of learning outcomes/competences.
2. They operate within a narrow field of learning.
3. They follow a short learning experience and can be designed following as little as a few hours of learning.
4. They feature reliable assessment of the learning outcomes against transparent standards.
5. They certify competences.
6. They are relevant. This is sometimes referred to as ‘just in time learning’
7. They privilege student-centred learning.
8. They are an authentic formal higher education credential (not a ‘course’ leading to a credential). This responds to the misconception that micro-credentials are really nothing new - since short courses have been around for a long time. Micro-credentials are meant to sit alongside traditional macro-credentials and to be recognised as self-standing qualifications within a learner’s portfolio and curriculum.
9. They can be delivered by a variety of means, including distance and online education.
10. They can be delivered in a variety of modes, including full and part time, intensives, workshops, synchronous, asynchronous and self-paced online learning.
11. They can address different levels of the QF-EHEA/EQF.
12. They have flexible access requirements including a ‘no requirement access’ provision.

<sup>1</sup> <https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-01/micro-credentials%20brochure%20updated.pdf> , It should be noted, however, that the term is still mainly used at EU and EHEA policy level, as ‘most EHEA countries do not have an official definition nor a widespread usage of the term. However, it is generally agreed that micro-credentials are small volumes of learning and are mainly part of the lifelong learning provision that aims to respond to the needs of society and learners for reskilling and upskilling... Among the terms used (for the learning unit and/or the certification), the most common ones are badges, certificates, module certificates, partial qualifications, micro-qualifications and supplementary qualifications... Some countries use the term micro-credential to refer to both the learning activity and the certification.’ (p. 6, [https://www.ehea.info/Upload/IMINQA\\_MC\\_report\\_Approaches\\_to\\_Quality\\_Assurance\\_of\\_Micro\\_credentials.pdf](https://www.ehea.info/Upload/IMINQA_MC_report_Approaches_to_Quality_Assurance_of_Micro_credentials.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> *Towards a common definition of micro-credentials* <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381668>

<sup>3</sup> ‘Learning outcomes’ means statements regarding what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy Annex I [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615(01)&from=EN) (C 189/20)

13. They are subject to quality assurance procedures and standards.
14. They can be delivered by HEIs and alternative providers alike.<sup>4</sup>
15. They can be developed in collaboration with others (e.g. other HEIs, alternative providers, employers, learners, NGOs, charities, public authorities).<sup>5</sup>
16. They can be organised in pan-regional catalogues.
17. They can offer a smooth transfer of knowledge from recent research to education.
18. They are portable, usually produced in digital format with certified methods for identification to ensure authenticity.
19. They can facilitate learning pathways, are portable and may be combined into smaller or larger micro-credentials or qualifications. This process is called stacking.<sup>6</sup>
20. They can: a) consist of modules or courses extracted from existing programmes (e.g. from a full qualification), b) be designed as original, self-standing micro-credentials or c) be a combination of existing and new materials. This source of the micro-credential should be specified in the description of the micro-credential.

### 1.3 - COMMON FORMAT

Micro-credentials share a common format that includes the following elements<sup>7</sup>:

- Information on the learner
- Information on the provider
- Information on the micro-credential
- Information on the learning experience
- Information on the level
- Form of participation in the learning activity and delivery mode
- Source and authors
- Access requirements
- Relevance, stacking and recognition
- Quality assurance
- Signature or seal of the awarding provider

More detailed information on the common format for micro-credentials is found in Appendix A.

### 1.4 - ECTE QA OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS

In the dynamic and varied landscape of micro-credentials in Europe, the ECTE offers institutional accreditation of micro-credential providers within the following boundaries:

1. Size. ECTE micro-credential providers may design micro-credentials from 1 ECTS (25-30 hours of learning) to a maximum of 30 ECTS (750-900 hours of learning).
2. Delivery means and mode. ECTE micro-credential providers may offer micro-credentials through a wide range of delivery means and modes, including full online delivery.
3. Access. ECTE micro-credential providers may implement flexible access requirements, including a 'no requirement' option.

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<sup>4</sup> A 'provider' can be any actor that provides micro-credentials in terms of teaching, classes, learning materials, etc. This may include higher education institutions (public, private, academic, professional, preparatory, initial, continuing, adult, local, foreign, cross-border, European or international), as well as alternative providers, including employers, companies, social partners, NGOs, public authorities and others. Micro-credentials may be provided through a cooperation of different providers... The ESG apply to all higher education offered in the EHEA, in whatever format, duration or mode of delivery. Hence, they can be used by HEIs and alternative providers alike, in case they deliver micro-credentials on higher education level. Alternative providers can also establish internal QA arrangements that are compatible with the ESG in order to align themselves with the European framework for micro-credentials. [https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials\\_Framework\\_final-1.pdf](https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials_Framework_final-1.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Collaboration may take different forms: 1) development and design micro-credentials in collaboration, 2) agreement that the micro-credential is taught by experts from industry, 3) develop professional mentoring systems through which learners can be linked with practitioners in a given field, 4) inclusion of work placements as a compulsory element of the credential, 5) recognition of micro-credential completion as first stage of their hiring process ([https://www.ehea.info/Upload/IMINQA\\_MC\\_report\\_Approaches\\_to\\_Quality\\_Assurance\\_of\\_Micro\\_credentials.pdf](https://www.ehea.info/Upload/IMINQA_MC_report_Approaches_to_Quality_Assurance_of_Micro_credentials.pdf)).

<sup>6</sup> See more on stacking in Appendix D.

<sup>7</sup> See Annex I of EU-MC <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf> (p.27). This division of tasks firmly places responsibility for assuring the quality of provision of micro-credentials with the education providers. They are expected to put in place explicit QA policies and processes corresponding to the expectations laid down in Part 1 of the ESG, provide transparent information about these and include learners in all steps of development, implementation and evaluation of micro-credentials. [https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials\\_Framework\\_final-1.pdf](https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials_Framework_final-1.pdf) (p. 6).

4. Source. ECTE micro-credential providers may: a) extract modules or courses from existing programmes and offer them as micro-credentials, b) design original/self-standing micro-credentials, or combine a) and b).
5. Collaboration. ECTE micro-credential providers may: a) design and offer micro-credentials independently or b) cooperate in partnerships with other entities (e.g. professionals, faith-based communities, missions, NGOs, etc).
6. Higher education qualifications. ECTE micro-credential providers must offer higher education learning opportunities corresponding to QF-EHEA learning outcomes (equivalent to EFQ levels 5-8).
7. Provider status. The status of ECTE micro-credential providers may equally be that of higher education institutions or of alternative providers. Micro-credentials delivered by both kinds of providers are considered comparable in level and quality, having been equally assessed against the ESG.<sup>8</sup>
8. Relevance and scope. ECTE micro-credential providers offer learners knowledge, skills and competences that are generally relevant to the fields of Christian theology, religion and practice. The outcomes of these micro-credentials typically respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs that can be served by theology graduates.
9. European reference points. ECTE micro-credential providers will be accredited in line with the recommendations, standards and best QA practices in the European Higher Education Area. In recognition that this is a developing sector, the current Guidelines may undergo revision. See References.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘... caution should be taken when labelling only micro- credentials provided by HEIs. They should not be portrayed as somehow better than the ones offered by non-HEI providers. HEIs do not have the monopoly on offering micro-credentials and we should not give the impression that we consider HEIs to be superior in offering them. It is expressed that there should not be a separation between micro-credentials offered by HEIs and by other providers, as this goes against the policy of recognising informal and non-formal learning’  
[https://www.ehea.info/Upload/IMINQA\\_WG%20on%20MCs\\_minutes\\_02-09-2022.pdf](https://www.ehea.info/Upload/IMINQA_WG%20on%20MCs_minutes_02-09-2022.pdf).

## 2. QA CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES

Accreditation of providers delivering micro-credentials is substantially an institutional accreditation. The formal outcome is Micro-Credential Provider accreditation (MCP accreditation). The following are the criteria and the procedures to achieve this outcome.

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### 2.1 – Criteria for the accreditation of Micro-credential Providers

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To successfully obtain accreditation as a micro-credential provider (MCP accreditation) the following criteria must be satisfied.

- Compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Micro-credential Providers* listed in this document (Section 3 below). This matches compliance to ESG (Part 1).
- Compliance with micro-credential certification according to the standard format (see Appendix A).

A simplified procedure is in place for providers holding a valid external review that demonstrates compliance to the ESG (Part 1) (see Section 4 below).

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### 2.2 – Procedures for accreditation of Micro-credential Providers

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Given the small volume of learning involved in micro-credentials, providers undergo an institutional review that validates them as micro-credential provider (MCP accreditation), with no need for accreditation of each micro-credential. This means that:

- MCP accreditation focuses on the provider rather than on single micro-credentials.<sup>9</sup>
- Individual micro-credentials do not undergo scrutiny by the ECTE.
- It is possible that no micro-credentials are yet delivered at the time of the first review.
- Once a provider is accredited, it can generate and offer as many micro-credentials as needed without further review procedures.

The procedures for achieving accreditation as a micro-credential provider (MCP) are as follows:

1. **Eligibility check.** Candidate providers submit an eligibility form<sup>10</sup> to verify whether they are bona fide cases for MCP accreditation. The General Secretary, Accreditation Director and MCP Review Secretary review the eligibility requests and either:
  - a) authorise an MCP application
  - b) request that the provider undergo an orientation as a first phase in the application process<sup>11</sup>
  - c) provide alternative instructions (should the application be insufficient or unsuitable as a bona fide case for accreditation)

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<sup>9</sup> 'To be fit-for-purpose and to avoid overburdening the institutions unnecessarily, the focus of external QA should be on the institutional approach to micro-credentials and their explicit inclusion in existing or new processes. The external QA should ensure that the HEIs offering micro-credentials have a reliable and well-built system to monitor their quality internally. As the procedures for programme level external evaluation are extensive, it would not be suitable to apply them to micro-credentials in the same way as to study programmes, given that micro-credentials are much smaller volumes of learning and expected to be updated frequently to respond to societal needs'. [https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials\\_Framework\\_final-1.pdf](https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials_Framework_final-1.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> <https://ecte.eu/micro-credential-provider-eligibility-check/>.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix G. An orientation phase serves to assess the readiness of the provider for an MCP review. Additional fees apply see <http://ecte.eu/introducing/fees/>.

2. **Application.** Once the eligibility check has been passed, the provider applies through the *MCP Application*.
3. **Authorisation.** The ECTE General Secretary, Accreditation Director and MCP Review Secretary examine the eligibility of the application, and the MCP Review Secretary assembles a VET panel, and arranges an agreed date for the online review.
4. **MC-SER.** The provider produces a *MCP-Self Evaluation Report (MCP-SER)* (an online form is provided and must be used for all MCP-SERs).<sup>12</sup> The MCP-SER must:
  - d) Provide evidence of compliance to the *Guidelines for Micro-Credential Providers* in Section 3 below (and hence to ESG Part 1).
  - e) Provide a template for micro-credentials that follows the standard format (see Appendix A) and one example of a fully designed micro-credential.<sup>13</sup>
  - f) If micro-credentials are being delivered in modes that have not been previously subjected to external quality assurance reviews (e.g. by online or distance education) the MCP-SER needs to respond to the additional standards which are summarised in Appendix H.

The MCP-SER and any supporting documents must be submitted digitally, in English, at least two months prior to the date of the review.

5. **Review.** The VET panel performs a review on the designated date. An on-site visit will normally be required for providers that are new to ECTE's accreditation processes and/or that do not hold a valid ESG-based institutional review outcome. An online review will be arranged for providers that already hold ECTE accreditation (the protocols for the online review are described in Appendix F adapted from those already in use in the *Guidelines for Site Visits and VETs*).<sup>14</sup>

The VET panel will be normally composed of 3 experts including a student, plus the MCP Review Secretary.

6. **Review report.** After the accreditation visit, the VET panel and the MCP-RS produce a *MCP Review Report* which normally includes commendations, recommendations, and requirements.
7. **Review/evaluation fees.** After the approval and publication of the Review Report, the provider is invoiced by ECTE for MCP review fees.<sup>15</sup>
8. **Decision-making process and publication.** Through a vote by simple majority, the Accreditation Commission will either.
  - a. Grant MCP accreditation, meaning full compliance to all standards.
  - b. Grant MPC accreditation with recommendations, meaning substantial compliance to one or more standards. Recommendations indicate areas of further improvement and development, and progression must be reported in the MC-APR.
  - c. Grants MCP accreditation but set forth requirements, meaning non-compliance to one or more standards. Providers that are subject to requirements will not be granted accreditation until the requirements are met. During this phase, the MCP provider will be listed on the ECTE MCP directory as 'Under Review'.
  - d. Does not grant MPC accreditation and provides further instructions to the institution if it wishes to re-apply

9. **Publication.** The accreditation decision, together with the integral *MCP Review Report*, is published on the ECTE MCP Directory<sup>16</sup> and communicated to the DEQAR. The provider can include the claim "ECTE Accredited Micro-

<sup>12</sup> See <https://ecte.eu/ser-mcp/>. Note that this digital form must be used for submission of all MCP SERs. Other formats will not be accepted.

<sup>13</sup> It is understood that these micro-credentials may not yet be delivered, but an example of a full design will allow the review to verify the compliance to the standard micro-credential format.

<sup>14</sup> <https://ecte.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Guidelines-for-Site-Visits-and-VETs.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> See <http://ecte.eu/introducing/fees/>

<sup>16</sup> See <https://ecte.eu/mcp-directory/>

Credential Provider” on its website and publications and use the ECTE Micro-Credential Provider logo.

10. **Follow-up** is envisioned at various levels, depending on the outcomes of the accreditation decision (see 9 above).
  - a. When accreditation is granted, the provider follows up with an MCP - Annual Progress Report (see below).
  - b. When accreditation is granted with recommendations, the provider reports on progress in its MPC-Annual Progress Report which are noted and monitored by the Accreditation Director and successive review visits. Progress relating to recommendations receive special attention in the 5-year reaccreditation process.
  - c. When accreditation is subject to requirements, the provider responds in direct correspondence with the Accreditation Director providing evidence as the requirements are met. During this correspondence, the Accreditation Director can provide further clarification on the requirements. Documentation related to the fulfilment of requirements are submitted to the Accreditation Commission. Once Accreditation Commission deems requirements to be met, the Accreditation Director will confirm this in writing to the provider and grant MCP accreditation (the tag ‘Under Review’ will be removed from the website directory). This establishes the start of the five-year period until re-accreditation.
  - d. When accreditation is not granted, the Accreditation Director will contact the provider to provide further guidance should a new application be sought.
11. **Annual reporting.** A MC-Annual Progress Report (MC-APR) is required which includes:
  1. Changes in current MCs (with link to provider’s website).
  2. Reporting on new MCs (with link to provider’s website). To ensure that the provider is using the ECTE MCP accreditation label only for trusted/verified micro-credentials, the report will substantiate that the MCs on offer have undergone the IQA procedures described in standard MCP 1 (see below).
  3. Lists of retired MCs (with link to provider’s website). For retired MC’s, provisions for teach-out situations are included as necessary.

During the piloting phase (Dec 2023 – Dec 2026), accredited MPC providers will be asked to provide additional feedback (including MC student feedback) to ensure fitness for purpose in ECTE’s methodologies.

The report will be signed by the individual responsible for the provider for micro-credentials.

A response to the report will be given by the Accreditation Director after deliberation with the Accreditation Commission as needed.

12. **Catalogue.** In order to facilitate the production of a general catalogue of active micro-credentials and update the DEQAR, the provider informs the ECTE through the MC-APR on the activation of all new micro-credentials as well as on their retirement.
13. **Annual fees.** The provider pays annual fees for MCP accreditation. These fees are in addition to other ECTE fees, if present.<sup>17</sup>
14. **Cyclical review.** The provider undergoes a 5-year cyclical review as outlined in ECTE *Criteria and Procedures*. MCP accreditation is valid until the next cyclical review and applies to all micro-credentials offered or retired throughout this period (see standard MCP 10 below).

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://ecte.eu/introducing/fees/>



## 3. STANDARDS FOR MICRO-CREDENTIAL PROVIDER ACCREDITATION

The primary responsibility for the quality of micro-credentials lies with providers. The role of the quality assurance agency is to support providers in developing and monitoring compliance to agreed standards for quality and to ensure the public and stakeholders about their effectiveness.<sup>18</sup>

While preserving flexibility and encouraging providers to be innovative, the ECTE is committed to foster trust and transparency in relation to micro-credentials through agreed standards. Accreditation as a Micro-credential Provider (MCP accreditation) requires compliance with the standards outlined below that reflect the European Standards and Guidance (ESG part 1) used in the European Higher Education Area.<sup>19</sup>

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### MCP 1 – Policies for quality assurance<sup>20</sup>

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Providers have formal policies for internal quality assurance (IQA) that are well adapted to incorporating lifelong learning activities in general and micro-credentials in particular.<sup>21</sup> Providers publish IQA policies and certify their application to each micro-credential that bears the ECTE MPC accreditation label.

IQA policies are developed and implemented by internal stakeholders through appropriate structures and processes and involve external stakeholders.<sup>22</sup> IQA policies cover the entire scope of standards as described in ESG 1<sup>23</sup> and include micro-credentials that are subcontracted or carried out in partnership with other parties.<sup>24</sup>

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### MCP 2 – Design and approval of micro-credentials<sup>25</sup>

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Providers have formal institutional processes for the design and approval of micro-credentials that are distinct and adapted to the specific nature of micro-credentials, remaining flexible and agile without compromising quality.<sup>26</sup>

Micro-credentials are designed to be level-specific and meet the learning outcomes of Levels 5, 6 and 7 of the *European Qualification Framework* in parallel with the short, first or second cycle descriptors of the

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<sup>18</sup> 'Different micro-credentials can be combined into a degree or other type of certification. Programme developers should consider the stackability of a micro-credential and how they might fit in the wider offer of the HEI, when designing the content and structure of a micro-credential programme' [https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials\\_Framework\\_final-1.pdf](https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials_Framework_final-1.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> These standards are a direct reflection of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 1). They also incorporate the *EU Council Recommendation on a European Approach to Micro-credentials* (EU-MC), the *EU Annex V to the EQF Recommendation* (EQF QA) and the EQAVET indicators (EQAVET).

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix E for further guidance on the IQA of micro-credentials.

<sup>21</sup> Providers that already have IQA systems for other qualifications, should identify and rely on the elements that are already in place that are capable of serving micro-credential provision, and then develop elements that stand apart and speak for the specific features of micro-credential provision. (*Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials*, ENQA Report 2024 <https://www.engq.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-micro-credentials-report.pdf>) (p. 30)

<sup>22</sup> ESG 1.1. External stakeholders must include micro-credential students who are involved as in monitoring and review and their feedback is considered as part of the continuous improvement cycle. EU-MC Principle 8: Learner centred <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf> (p.33).

<sup>23</sup> The scope of ESG 1 is covered in the ECTE standards for micro-credentials that follow: MCP1 - MCP10.

<sup>24</sup> IQA policies covering collaboration with other entities include the requirement of comprehensive MOUs between the provider and the collaborating party. The IQA responsibility, however, cannot be franchised and always lies with the accredited provider.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix B for a Micro-credential Design Template.

<sup>26</sup> *Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials*, ENQA Report 2024 <https://www.engq.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-micro-credentials-report.pdf> (p.38)

*Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).*<sup>27</sup> Micro-credentials may also include additional learning outcomes which are not specified in the QF-EHEA.

Micro-credentials are designed involving stakeholders.<sup>28</sup> They are relevant, meet identified learning needs<sup>29</sup> and match the profile of learners. To qualify within the field of theological education, learning outcomes normally include reference to outcomes related to Christian theology or religion and/or cognate disciplines and consider elements of holistic integration and formation that are typical of theological education.<sup>30</sup>

Micro-credentials are designed to address all the categories outlined in the standard format for micro-credential certification (see Appendix A) including the expected student workload in ECTS (from a minimum of 1 ECTS to a maximum of 30 ECTS).

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## MCP 3 – Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

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Providers profile their intended learners and ensure that micro-credentials are delivered in ways that encourage students to take an active role in creating the learning process.<sup>31</sup>

Providers select and transparently inform the public on delivery modes and pedagogical methods that best enable the learning process and that cater to a diverse student population. When distance, online or blended delivery modes are used for micro-credentials, they are adequately supported and designed to enhance participation, interactivity and learner autonomy.<sup>32</sup>

Providers ensure that assessment is designed to allow students to demonstrate the extent to which intended learning outcomes have been achieved in ways that are fair, consistent, varied and supported by clearly stated procedures.

Appropriate feedback mechanisms and complaints and appeals procedures are available to micro-credential students.

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## MCP 4 – Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

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Providers of micro-credentials consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.<sup>33</sup>

**Admissions.** Providers implement flexible, easily accessible and transparent policies concerning the admissions (access) to micro-credentials in consideration of the potential varied academic and professional backgrounds of micro-credential students.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix C. The QF-EHEA are designed to describe outcomes at the completion of a full qualification cycle, which is clearly not possible for a short qualification. Hence micro-credentials should express contribution to these outcomes.

<sup>28</sup> ESG 1.2. See also EU-MC Principle 2: Transparency <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf> (p.32) and EQF QA Principle 4: ‘Involve all relevant stakeholders at all stages of the process’ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615(01)&from=EN) (C 189/25). Involvement in design of stakeholders from the labour/employer market is particularly important in the case in which micro-credentials are characterised by a specific contribution to and tight engagement with the labour market and by the aim of promoting more agile upskilling and reskilling (<https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-micro-credentials-report.pdf>). (p.31)

<sup>29</sup> EU-MC Principle 3: Relevance <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf> (p.32). See also EQAVET Indicator 9: Identify training needs in the labor market <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1570&langId=en>

<sup>30</sup> Providers seek to integrate ‘academically focused and competence- oriented learning activities with spiritual formation and character education’ (ECTE *Standards and Guidelines*, B.1.1).

<sup>31</sup> ESG 1.3

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix H

<sup>33</sup> ESG 1.4

<sup>34</sup> It is possible to design multiple admission options for each micro-credential, but they will determine the use that the student can make of the

**Progression.** Providers develop, implement and transparently inform students concerning coherent and flexible learning pathways that consider the stacking of micro-credentials into larger/complete qualifications that allow learners to progress in their academic and professional career by means of micro-credentials.<sup>35</sup>

**Recognition.** Providers develop, implement and transparently inform students concerning the recognition options of micro-credentials. Recognition options may include possibilities of stacking towards larger qualifications in support of individual educational journeys, recognition of prior learning (RPL) both by the provider of the micro-credential and by other providers, recognition by labour market entities and employers and/or transfer across a variety of contexts.<sup>36</sup>

Recognition systems include recognition of micro-credentials delivered by other providers<sup>37</sup> and recognition of non-formal and informal learning that matches the learning outcomes of micro-credentials.

**Certification.** On successful completion of a micro-credential, providers award certificates according to a standard format (see Appendix A).<sup>38</sup> Certification includes features to verify the identity of the credential-holder (learner) and the genuineness of the micro-credential,<sup>39</sup> Certification systems are implemented, possibly in digital form, to improve their portability and permeability.<sup>40</sup> The title of the micro-credential does not contain protected academic nomenclature or wording that may cause confusion with a full QF-EHEA qualification (e.g. bachelor, master, postgraduate, undergraduate, degree, etc).

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## MCP 5 – Educational staff

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The collective expertise of educational staff involved in the design and delivery micro-credentials is fit for purpose and includes experience in micro-credential methodology and didactics, skills in dealing with non-traditional learners, professional competence related to the learning outcomes of the micro-credential, and academic qualifications that are normally one level above the level of the micro-credential.<sup>41</sup> As appropriate, providers encourage and support innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.<sup>42</sup>

Providers ensure a supportive environment that is conducive to effective work and, as needed, offer opportunities for professional development.

Providers apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and management of educational staff,<sup>43</sup> some of whom may presumably be hired specifically for the one-time delivery of a micro-credential.

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qualification. Access may be restricted to the level of the micro-credential (e.g. an EQF 7 micro-credential would require a previous EQF 6 qualification) but it may also be opened to admissions without any qualification (in which case the wording 'no access qualification' would be indicated on the micro-credential certification). In the latter case, the micro-credential would normally not transfer or stack into other formal HE qualifications. Care must be taken in open admissions policies to not set up students for failure.

<sup>35</sup> EU-MC Principle 5 Learning pathways <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf>. See more on stackability in Appendix D.

<sup>36</sup> *Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials*, ENQA Report 2024 <https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-micro-credentials-report.pdf> (31)

<sup>37</sup> Validation of non-formal and informal learning, means that obtaining a micro-credential is possible following assessment of learning outcomes, resulting from non-formal and informal learning.

<sup>38</sup> [https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials\\_Framework\\_final-1.pdf](https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials_Framework_final-1.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> EU-MC Principle 9: Authentic <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf> (p.33).

<sup>40</sup> *Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials*, ENQA Report 2024 <https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-micro-credentials-report.pdf> (34)

<sup>41</sup> The profiles of experts chosen for interaction and feedback need to align with the subject-matter of the micro-credential provision, rather than exhibit more generic areas of expertise across a broader area of converging subjects. <https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-micro-credentials-report.pdf> (p.33)

<sup>42</sup> ESG 1.5

<sup>43</sup> ESG 1.5

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## MCP 6 – Learning resources and student support

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Providers have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities related to micro-credentials. Providers ensure that learning facilities (including digital facilities), learning resources<sup>44</sup> are adequate and readily accessible to micro-credential students.<sup>45</sup>

Student support services are adapted to the heterogeneity of learners. Specific administrative systems and sufficient personnel are in place to support the diverse learner population and the short student life cycle.

Micro-credential students are well informed of the available learning resources and support services.

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## MCP 7 – Information management

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Providers have systems and policies to analyse and use relevant data for the effective management of micro-credentials.<sup>46</sup> These are adapted to the short cycle of micro-credentials and integrated into the overall information management system that feeds into the internal quality system of the provider.

Information is collected and analysed concerning the micro-credential provision itself, including, for example, data on stacking and recognition, shelf life of micro-credentials, design trends, partnerships, delivery trends, duration, etc.

Information is collected and analysed concerning micro-credential students, including, for example, student profiles, student satisfaction, career paths, progression, success and dropout rates and alumni follow-up mechanisms to evaluate the relevance of micro-credentials.

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## MCP 8 – Public information

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Providers publish information about micro-credentials within an overall lifelong-learning strategy which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.<sup>47</sup>

Public information includes an accurate description of the nature, content, outcomes, access criteria, nature of qualification, delivery mode, teaching and learning procedures, possibilities for recognition of prior learning, academic progression, assessment procedures, certification options, stacking opportunities, prerequisites, graduate employment information and quality assurance of micro-credentials. Special attention is paid to tailoring information for non-traditional learners.<sup>48</sup>

Strategies are in place to share information and intensify collaboration with stakeholders and other providers in order to facilitate recognition and the transfer of relevant information on the availability, quality and outcomes of micro-credentials.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Learning resources are provided to meet the learning outcomes at the level of micro-credentials being offered.

<sup>45</sup> ESG 1.6

<sup>46</sup> ESG 1.7. Data is used, for example, to build on good practice, evaluate micro-credential relevance, assess design and delivery, create student population profiles, collect student satisfaction surveys, evaluate learning resources and students support systems, analyze career enhancement of graduates and deal with progression, success, failure, and dropout rates. Ongoing monitoring of micro-credentials may also include (as applicable), participation rates, completion rates, placement rates of graduates, utilisation of acquired skills in the workplace and prevalence of vulnerable groups (EQAVET Indicator 3-6 and 8 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1570&langId=en>).

<sup>47</sup> ESG 1.8

<sup>48</sup> *Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials*, ENQA Report 2024 <https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-micro-credentials-report.pdf> (p.44)

<sup>49</sup> *Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials*, ENQA Report 2024 <https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-micro-credentials-report.pdf>

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## MCP 9 – On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

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Providers monitor and periodically review micro-credentials to evaluate the quality of design and delivery, the agility of the launch process, the ongoing relevance of the micro-credential, and strategies for either improvement or retirement of micro-credentials.<sup>50</sup> Monitoring and review are integrated into the provider's system, involve relevant stakeholders and external partners (where relevant), and are adapted to the specific nature and life cycle of micro-credentials.

Monitoring and review processes and procedures are sufficiently flexible so that new micro-credentials can be developed, those currently running can be adjusted, where labour market changes call for such adjustments, or those which have become irrelevant or superfluous to be closed. The agility of monitoring and review processes and procedures do not compromise internal quality procedures.

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## MCP 10 – Cyclical external quality assurance

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Providers undergo regular external quality assurance (EQA) of their micro-credentialing activities on a cyclical basis (normally every 5 years).<sup>51</sup>

Providers submit an annual report which includes changes in current micro-credentials and reports on new and retired micro-credentials. To ensure that the provider is using the ECTE micro-credential provider accreditation label only for trusted/verified micro-credentials, annual report will substantiate that all micro-credentials on offer that bear the ECTE MCP label have undergone the IQA procedures described in standard MCP 1.

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<sup>50</sup> ESG 1.9

<sup>51</sup> ESG 1.10. The standards for ECTE cyclical reviews are laid out in part 3 of this document: Standards for Micro-credential Providers.

## 4. GOOD PRACTICES FOR MICRO-CREDENTIAL PROVIDERS

This section features a list of good practices for higher education/micro-credential providers. Adherence to these good practices is recommended but not required for MCP accreditation.

- Providers have **appropriate governance** that represents and involves their stakeholders and constitutes the body to which executive leadership is accountable. Management is in place to guide, inspire and administer the organisation to achieve the provider's mission through strategic planning and implementation.
- Providers have **decision-making processes** in place that evaluate, advise and approve micro-credentials. The processes normally involve a faculty council or academic steering committee, the internal quality assurance department and a higher level of the provider's governance structure.
- The activities of the provider are supported by **strategic planning** that is based on valid data and involvement of relevant stakeholders. The delivery of micro-credentials is represented in institutional planning and budgeting.
- **Collaboration** between education and training organisations, employers, social partners, other providers and users of micro-credentials is encouraged, in order to increase the relevance of the micro-credentials.
- Providers have a written **collaboration strategy** to design, produce and deliver relevant micro-credentials with other peers and with stakeholders (e.g. HEIs, alternative providers, employers, learners, NGOs, charities, public authorities, ecclesial bodies, etc).
- Where micro-credentials are developed in **collaboration** with others, memorandums of understanding/mutual agreements are in place between all parties. These memorandums include financial issues.
- Micro-credentials **design and approval** involves students as well as external expertise and reference points.
- Human resources are tailored to the objectives and activities of the provider and are monitored to ensure personal sustainability, **realistic workloads** and avoidance of 'job drift' (i.e. work done outside of predictable schedules).
- **Administration** staff is adequately qualified, trained and equipped for the management of micro-credentials.
- As far as it is possible in the delivery of short learning experiences, providers foster a healthy sense of **community life**. Transparent and truthful expectations are laid out in the context of micro-credential delivery around what can and cannot be achieved in terms of community, pastoral and spiritual support and the cultivation of responsible character.
- The provider's governance, management and staff are in **good standing** within the faith-communities they represent and exhibit character traits that are worthy of imitation by students.
- Providers nurture awareness of local and global cultures and contexts and develop **relevant** micro-credentials. Providers design micro-credentials to take into consideration the four purposes of higher education in Europe.<sup>52</sup>
- Providers implement student **communication strategies** that are suitable for short learning experiences. These strategies are regularly assessed through student feedback. Communication to students is planned to be accurate and timely, including, for example, timetables and

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<sup>52</sup> 1) preparation for sustainable employment; 2) preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies; 3) personal development; 4) the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. See *Council of Europe Recommendation*  
[https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/PublicResponsibility/Explanatory%20Memorandum%20public%20responsibility\\_EN.asp](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/PublicResponsibility/Explanatory%20Memorandum%20public%20responsibility_EN.asp)

deadlines, exam dates, assessment feedback, fees due, final results and receipt of the qualification.

- Any action planned or taken as a result of **periodic review** of micro-credentials should be communicated to all those concerned.
- Student services include a micro-credential **induction programme**, featuring a general orientation to student services, information on the delivery mode, introduction to how teaching and learning will occur, timetables and important dates, instructions on course delivery and assessment submission, and instructions on how to access technical, pastoral, or administrative support when needed.
- **Student services** are tailored to consider special needs, vulnerable groups, exceptional circumstances, diversity in student population, issues of mobility across educational systems and the shift towards student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching.<sup>53</sup>
- In countries with little theological literature in the vernacular, foreign **language** resources may be employed, provided that they are clearly utilisable by the educational staff and students or that they have adequate translation provisions.
- Providers have appropriate internal micro-credential **record-keeping procedures** that include updated contact information, student files, grades and certificates, and finances.
- Providers have adequate **technical infrastructure** and qualified personnel who assure that all related systems and procedures function correctly, safely, and reliably.
- **Financial planning** and budgetary procedures are in place, and a comprehensive, approved business plan matches the mission and strategic planning of the institution. Fundraising and other income sources are appropriately allocated.
- Fair policies, processes and **remuneration** provision are in place for both employees and for the occasional contracting of external experts involved in design and delivery of specific micro-credentials. Contracts are in line with local legal requirements.
- All student **fees** are transparent and public. Fees give due consideration both to the financial ability of the students and to the expenses of the institution. Scholarship programmes are administered according to written regulations with formal records of action taken.
- Both personnel **compensation** and student **fees are reviewed** regularly.
- **Assessment** is performed under the direct responsibility of the provider and is reliable, regardless of the assessment method used. Assessment is fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures and transparent criteria.<sup>54</sup> Assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the micro-credential learning outcomes and competences have been achieved.<sup>55</sup>
- Providers understand that micro-credentials are **owned by the credential-holder** (the learner) and enable systems whereby micro-credentials may be stored and shared easily by the credential-holder including secure digital wallets (e.g. Europass).
- **Data** is held in line with the General Data Protection Regulation. The infrastructure for storing data is based on open standards and data models. This ensures interoperability and seamless exchange of data and allows for smooth checks of data authenticity.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> ESG 1.6

<sup>54</sup> EQF QA Principle 2: 'Ensure valid and reliable assessment' [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615(01)&from=EN) (C 189/25).

<sup>55</sup> See [https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials\\_Framework\\_final-1.pdf](https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials_Framework_final-1.pdf) and EU-MC Principle 4: Valid assessment <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf> (p.32).

<sup>56</sup> EU-MC Principle 7: Portable <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf> (p.34).



# APPENDICES

## Appendix A - Micro-credential certification

Micro-credentials share a common certification format that includes the following elements (see MCP 4).<sup>57</sup>

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information on the learner<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Name</li><li>○ Identification information</li></ul></li><li>• Information on the provider<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Name of the provider</li><li>○ Status of the provider</li><li>○ Information on the main provider</li><li>○ Information on partner providers (if relevant)</li><li>○ Names of teachers/tutors (if identified)</li></ul></li><li>• Information on the micro-credential<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Title</li><li>○ Country/region of the issuer</li><li>○ Language of delivery/assessment,</li><li>○ Subject fields (broad fields/disciplines within which the M is situated)</li><li>○ Subject classification codes<sup>58</sup></li><li>○ Authenticity verification</li><li>○ Expiration date (if relevant)</li></ul></li><li>• Information on the learning experience<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Learning outcomes (with mapping onto the QF-EHEA/EQF)</li><li>○ Assessment</li><li>○ Grade and grading scale (if relevant)</li><li>○ Workload (in hours and ECTS)</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information on the level<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ QF-EHEA and EQF level</li><li>○ ISCED level &amp; subject area code</li><li>○ ICETE Qualification Comparability level</li><li>○ National framework level (where possible)</li></ul></li><li>• Form of participation in the learning activity and delivery mode<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Learning activities</li><li>○ Delivery mode and description of delivery mode</li></ul></li><li>• Source and authors<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Source of learning materials</li><li>○ Author(s) of learning materials</li></ul></li><li>• Access requirements<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Access requirements</li><li>○ Prerequisites (if relevant)</li></ul></li><li>• Relevance, stacking and recognition<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Relevance</li><li>○ Stacking options</li><li>○ Recognition agreements</li></ul></li><li>• Quality assurance<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Quality assurance provision</li><li>○ Quality assurance agency</li><li>○ Link to quality assurance listing(s)</li></ul></li><li>• Signature or seal of the awarding provider</li></ul> |
|---|---|

To simulate the production of a micro-credential certificate, use the online Micro-credential Certificate Template on the ECTE website (<https://ecte.eu/micro-credential-certificate-template/>). An example is also provided.



<sup>57</sup> See Annex I of EU-MC <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf> (p.27). This division of tasks firmly places responsibility for assuring the quality of provision of micro-credentials with the education providers. They are expected to put in place explicit QA policies and processes corresponding to the expectations laid down in Part 1 of the ESG, provide transparent information about these and include learners in all steps of development, implementation and evaluation of micro-credentials. [https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials\\_Framework\\_final-1.pdf](https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials_Framework_final-1.pdf) (p. 6).

<sup>58</sup> As possible, use international educational classification codes, such as the UNESCO ISCED-F 2013 <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-fields-of-education-and-training-2013-detailed-field-descriptions-2015-en.pdf>



## Appendix B - Micro-credential design

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To design a micro-credential, use the online step-by-step Micro-credential Design Template on the ECTE website (<https://ecte.eu/micro-credential-design-template/>). An example is also provided.



## Appendix C - QF-EHEA descriptors

The following table summarises the learning outcomes for each of the QF-EHEA Cycles. Micro-credentials typically certify one or two outcomes within a given level. The QF-EHEA outcomes are generic and are meant to be applicable for every field of higher education, allowing space for specification and application within the field of theology. Corresponding EQF levels for lifelong learning have been generally mapped onto the QF-EHEA categories.

| Category   | QF-EHEA Short Cycle  | QF-EHEA First Cycle   | QF-EHEA Second Cycle  |
|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Knowledge and understanding</b><br>---<br>EQF: Knowledge                    | Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon general secondary education and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks; such knowledge provides an underpinning for a field of work or vocation, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle | Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study | Is that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context                                       |
|  | EQF Level 5  | EQF Level 6   | EQF Level 7   |
|  | Factual and theoretical knowledge within the field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge   | Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles   | H highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research<br><br>C critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields |
| <b>Ability to apply knowledge and understanding</b>                            | Can apply knowledge and understanding in occupational contexts   | Can apply knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study  | Can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem-solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study   |
|  | EQF Level 5  | EQF Level 6   | EQF Level 7   |
|  |  |   |   |
| <b>Ability to formulate judgments and solve problems</b><br>---<br>EQF: Skills | Have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems  | Have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues  | Have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements          |
|  | EQF Level 5  | EQF Level 6   | EQF Level 7   |
|  | A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills  | Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable  | S specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to   |

|  |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
|  | required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems  | problems in a specialised field of work or study  | integrate knowledge from different fields   |
| <b>Ability to communicate</b>  | Can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients  | Can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences  | Can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously   |
|  | EQF Level 5  | EQF Level 6   | EQF Level 7   |
|  |  |   |   |
| <b>Autonomy in learning skills</b><br>---<br><b>EQF: Responsibility and autonomy</b> | Have the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy   | Have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy  | Have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous   |
|  | EQF Level 5  | EQF Level 6   | EQF Level 7   |
|  | Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others | Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups | M manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams |

## Appendix D – Stackability and RPL

This appendix provides additional information and key quotations related to stacking micro-credentials and recognition of prior learning policies (RPL). It should be remembered that micro-credentials are small, self-contained pieces of learning that have intrinsic value and whose main aim is not stackability.

### KEY QUOTATIONS

- ‘Stackability’ means the possibility to combine different micro-credentials and build them logically upon each other... Different micro-credentials can be combined into a degree or other type of certification. Programme developers should consider the stackability of a micro-credential and how they might fit in the wider offer of the HEI, when designing the content and structure of a micro-credential programme.’<sup>59</sup>
- ‘MC can, where appropriate, complement existing qualifications, providing added value while not undermining the core principle of full degree programmes in initial education and training.’<sup>60</sup>
- ‘Decisions to ‘stack’ or combine credentials lie with the receiving organization (e.g. education and training institutions, employers, etc.), in line with their practices, and should support the goals and needs of the learner. Stacking does not create an automatic entitlement to a qualification or a degree.’<sup>61</sup>

### SOME CONCERNS

- There is a concern regarding to what extent a degree is more than the sum of its parts. There is a fear that stackability may be harmful to traditional degree and that stackability should not lead to acquiring a full degree simply by stacking acquired micro-credentials. Clear rules in terms of the maximum number of ECTS that can be stacked towards a degree might be envisioned.
- There are less problems stacking within a provider than across providers. It is, in fact, much easier for providers to design micro-credentials that are part of their overall educational provision than it is to consider micro-credentials from other providers that are designed within different arrangements.

### RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND MCs

Stacking micro-credentials obtained through non-formal or informal learning with existing study programmes or lifelong learning courses requires a well-established recognition of prior learning (RPL)/validation procedure.

The Council of the European Union Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning may be applied to micro-credentials: “Validation means a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases: 1. IDENTIFICATION through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual; 2. DOCUMENTATION to make visible the individual’s experiences; 3. a formal ASSESSMENT of these experiences; and 4. CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification”.<sup>62</sup>

Further information on formal, non-formal and informal learning and recognition of prior learning can be found in the guidelines that ECTE has published on this topic.<sup>63</sup>

Given the relative novelty of micro-credentials in the EHEA, and that stacking procedures are in the initial stages for many providers, this information may be subject to ongoing development.

<sup>59</sup> [https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials\\_Framework\\_final-1.pdf](https://microbol.knowledgeinnovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/03/Micro-credentials_Framework_final-1.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf> (p.29).

<sup>61</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf> (p.32)

<sup>62</sup> [https://www.ehea.info/Upload/IMINQA\\_MC\\_report\\_Approaches\\_to\\_Quality\\_Assurance\\_of\\_Micro\\_credentials.pdf](https://www.ehea.info/Upload/IMINQA_MC_report_Approaches_to_Quality_Assurance_of_Micro_credentials.pdf) (p.22)

<sup>63</sup> <https://ecte.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guidelines-for-Recognition-of-Formal-non-Formal-and-Informal-Learning.pdf>

## Appendix E – Good practice in establishing MC IQA

ECTE's role is to support micro-credential providers in developing policies and processes for internal quality assurance (IQA) as the mechanisms whereby providers ensure the ongoing quality of their micro-credentialing activity. In addition to ECTE general guidelines on IQA policies<sup>64</sup> this appendix provides specific suggestions for micro-credential providers.

### CONTENT

The IQA policies needs to describe how ESG 1 standards will be implemented, monitored and improved. The easiest way to do this is to develop policies and processes that address each of the ten MCP standards found in section 2 of this document (as they reflect ESG 1). So, for example:

- There should be a policy to ensure the ongoing quality of the design and approval of micro-credentials (MCP2/ESG 1.2). This policy would, for example, include ways to monitor that all micro-credentials remain relevant and that they match the profile of learners.
- There should be a policy to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are, and remain, student-centred (MCP3/ESG 1.3). This policy would, for example, include ways to monitor whether pedagogical methods used in the delivery of micro-credentials are enabling the learning process of the chosen student population. The policy would also monitor whether assessment is consistent and how student feedback, complaints and appeals are being addressed.

An idea for good practice is to have an 'IQA policy of policies' that keeps all the IQA policies for micro-credentials in order and keeps a timeline/methodology of implementation for each.

### SPECIFIC EMPHASES

As IQA processes are designed for micro-credentials, special care should be given to demonstrate the following:<sup>65</sup>

1. That labour market expertise contributes to all stages of the micro-credential life cycle, including design, approval, teaching, learning and assessment, monitoring and review and quality assurance processes. This is because, micro-credentials, by their nature, suggest a very close relationship with the labour market highlighting the need to develop and maintain collaboration with professional bodies and industry representatives.
2. That professional collaborations and academic partnerships are intensified, particularly for the purposes of quality assurance, recognition, and stackability. This is meant to boost both the employability prospects of learners and the prospects of further learning pathways.
3. That lifelong learning is integrated in a provider's mission and vision, allowing for micro-credentials to be anchored in the broader educational offer. The institutional strategy and the policy for quality assurance on lifelong learning and micro-credentials might, for example, reflect the relationship between the institution's research and the teaching and learning of the micro-credential offer, and clarify how lifelong learning, in general, and the micro-credential offer, in particular, respond to societal, personal, cultural, and labour market needs, and how micro-credentials are related to other study programmes of the provider.<sup>66</sup>
4. That clear responsibilities are allocated, within any given provider, for the management and review of micro-credentials.
5. That the delivery methods used (e.g. online, blended, face-to-face) fit the provision of micro-credentials.

<sup>64</sup> See <https://ecte.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Guidelines-for-Internal-Quality-Assurance-Policies.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> *Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials*, ENQA Report 2024 <https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-micro-credentials-report.pdf> (pp 32-34)

<sup>66</sup> *Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials*, ENQA Report 2024 <https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-micro-credentials-report.pdf> (pp 32-36)

6. That internal quality monitoring for micro-credential activity is more frequent or takes different approaches than procedures for traditional degrees, enhancing a system of agile adjustment to maintain the relevance of micro-credentials on offer.
7. That the engagement with stakeholders is calibrated for short learning experiences, given the reduced amount of time during which students and external experts involved in delivery are connected with the provider.

## **APPROACH**

While ensuring the ongoing quality of micro-credentials, there is a general agreement that the internal quality assurance approach to micro-credentials needs to be light, agile and flexible, so as not to burden the academic and administrative staff and to allow for a fast response to the changing needs of learners and the labour market.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> [https://www.ehea.info/Upload/IMINQA\\_MC\\_report\\_Approaches\\_to\\_Quality\\_Assurance\\_of\\_Micro\\_credentials.pdf](https://www.ehea.info/Upload/IMINQA_MC_report_Approaches_to_Quality_Assurance_of_Micro_credentials.pdf)

## Appendix F – Protocol for MCP online review visit

The following is the protocol for MCP online reviews (adapted from the ECTE *Guidelines for Site Visits and VETs*).

### 1. GENERAL GOOD PRACTICE

Please keep the following general items of good practice in mind as you prepare for the MCP online review visit.

1. Online review visits examine MPC standards and guidelines for accreditation and accompanying evidence.
2. Online review visits normally rely heavily on video conferencing, but they can also take advantage of other tools to consider evidence (e.g. videos, photographs, virtual tours, etc).
3. The video conferencing platform must be easily accessible to all participants, easy to use and verified for security and privacy. Links for meetings must be sent well in advance to all participants.
4. Institutions ensure appropriate bandwidth and secure connectivity for the duration of the online review visit.
5. Online review visits require a detailed preparation of the visit and its scheduling by the VET panel leader, the MCP Review Secretary and the provider.
6. Online review visits demand a careful distribution of tasks among the VET panel.
7. Online review visits require attention to timing. This normally means, for example, no more than 4 hours of meetings during a day, interspersed with breaks and VET panel rounds. Online video conferencing sessions should not last more than 1 hour.
8. Online review visits give special consideration to the pressures that the medium and the circumstances may place on staff, students and stakeholders involved.
9. During the online review visit, the VET panel should schedule informal sessions to exchange expertise and explore consensus around the outcomes of the site visit.
10. Confidentiality will be guarded, and the proceedings will not be recorded;
11. Institutions commit to providing extra documentation as the ECTE MCP Review Secretary and the VET Leader request it.
12. An online review visit may tend to focus more on compliance than on enhancement, and an effort must be made to also include the latter.

### 2. ROLES

An online review visit works well when clear roles are in place, both in the ECTE VET panel and in the Institution.

1. The ECTE **MCP Review Secretary** (MCP-RS) works with the VET panel, ensures they have the documentation, advises and helps throughout the visit and leads in the final drafting of the MCP Review Report. The MCP-RS is considered a member of the MCP-VET panel.
2. The VET **MCP Team Leader** (MCP-TL) is responsible (with the MCP-IRC) for the review schedule, general leadership and delegation of sub-roles leads in the first drafting of the Review Report.
3. The **MCP VET panel**, normally composed of 2 members in addition to the MCP RS, examines documentation, participates in the visit and participates in the initial drafting the Review Report.
4. The institution receiving the online visit must nominate an **MCP Institutional Review Coordinator** (MCP-IRC) who coordinates the entire schedule and visitation logistics from the institutional side. The MCP-IRC, for example, makes sure the right people are in the right meetings at the right time, sends links as necessary, participates in all meetings, coordinates technology troubleshooting from the institutional side, arranges virtual video tours and provides documentation where required.

### 3. PRE-VISIT DOCUMENTATION

In addition to the required MCP-SER and documentation, institutions receiving online site visits are advised to provide the following additional documentation for the VET panel least one month in advance.

- Video of facilities. A live video tour is included in the scheduling during the visit, but an additional video may provide better quality and more information before the actual visit.
- Brief video interviews of students, staff and faculty. If there are students already engaged in studying micro-credentials, they might respond to simple questions about why they have chosen to study a micro-credential, how their experience has been so far. Staff and faculty might be asked about their experience in working with micro-credentials so far. The main purpose is to establish a relational context with the visitation team.
- Videos of collaborating partners (if any). These should again be brief and simply provide a visual and relational context of the activity (not a full report).
- If online delivery is envisioned in the delivery of micro-credentials, 2-3 video excerpts of lectures or other learning events. Links and access passwords to the VLE should be provided.

The videos should all be no more than 3 minutes each and do not necessarily need to be of high quality or edited (they should not become a major production burden for the institution).

Videos should be uploaded by the institution to a cloud server and the links sent to the MPC VET Team Leader (MPC-TL) and to the MCP Review Secretary (MCP-RS).

### 4. SUGGESTED SCHEDULING

Online site visits require particular care in scheduling. A detailed schedule is agreed on at least two weeks before the visit by the MCP-TL and the MCP-IRC. The MCP-RS will stand by for help and advice as necessary.

The following sample schedule is proposed as a template. Each visitation may require adjusting and personalisation, but the basic components should stay in place.

|       | Time/length    | Purpose   | Who is involved  | Link                    | Notes  |  |
|-------|----------------|---|--|-------------------------|--|--|
| Day 1 | 9.30 (30m)     | Introductory meeting  | MCP-VET, MCP-IRC and everyone involved with the delivery of micro-credentials,           | Institutional Zoom room | Everyone connects. The MCP-VET panel introduce themselves and introduce the review visit. The provider introduces those involved in MCs and their roles. |  |
|       | 10.00 (1,30 h) | Review evidence for MCP 1 – policies for quality assurance and MCP 10 – cyclical review                       | MCP-VET, MCP-IRC, institutional leadership, external stakeholders as appropriate         | Institutional Zoom room | MPC – TL leads. This is a crucial meeting to ensure that appropriate IQA policies are in place and consistently applied to all MCs                       |  |
|       | Break          |   |  |                         |  |  |
|       | 12.00 (1h)     | Review evidence for MCP 2 – design and approval of MCs and for MCP 9 – ongoing monitoring and periodic review | MCP-VET, MCP-IRC, MC Dean of Studies (or equivalent)                                     | Institutional Zoom room | TL leads.  |  |
|       | Break          |   |  |                         |  |  |
|       | 15.00 (1h)     | Review evidence for MCP 3 – student-centred learning, teaching and assessment                                 | MCP-VET, MCP-IRC, MC Dean of Studies, educational staff involved in delivery, MC student | Institutional Zoom room | TL leads.  |  |



Day 2

|                |   |   |                         |   |
|----------------|---|---|-------------------------|---|
| 16.30 (1 h)    | Review evidence for MCP 4 – Student admission, progression, recognition and certification | MCP-VET, MCP-IRC, MC Dean of Studies administration staff involved in MCPs                            | Institutional Zoom room | TL leads.- Special attention is given in this meeting to examine the Certification of MCPs according to the standard format |
| 9.00           | Debrief   | VET   | ECTE Zoom               | Informal debriefing from day before   |
| 10.00 (1 h)    | Review evidence for MCP 5 – Educational staff   | MCP-VET, MCP-IRC, educational staff involved in delivery (including partnering organisations)         | Institutional Zoom room | TL leads.   |
| 11.30 (30 min) | Review evidence for MCP 6 – learning resources and student support                        | MCP-VET, MCP-IRC, librarian/resource centre leader, administration staff involved in MCPs, MC student | Institutional Zoom room | TL leads.   |
| 12.30 (30 min) | Review evidence for MCP 7 - Information management and MCP 8 –public information          | MCP-VET, MCP-IRC, IT staff, Dean of MCPs  | Institutional Zoom room | TL leads.   |
| Break          |   |   |                         |   |
| 14.00 (1h)     | Report preparation  | VET   | /                       | VETs work individually on the worksheets to compile report  |
| 15.00 (1.5h)   | Report drafting   | VET, MCP-RS   | ECTE Zoom               | TL leads, MCP-RS participates   |
| 17.00 (30m)    | Final meeting   | VET, institutional leaders, RS, IRC   | Institutional Zoom room | TL leads  |

Day 3

|   |                            |  |  |  |
|---|----------------------------|--|--|--|
| If necessary, an additional day may be required to examine the following (in this case these meetings would take place on day 2 and the report writing and final meetings on day 3) |                            |  |  |  |
|   | Online delivery facilities | MCP-VET, MCP-IRC, IT staff, Dean of MCPs |  | If extensive use of online delivery is in place the ECTE Guidelines for Distance and Online Delivery should be referred to |
|   | Partnering organisations   | MCP-VET, MCP-IRC, partners               |  | If MC delivery involves partnering organisations, these should be interviewed  |
|   | Meet students              | MCP-VET, MCP-IRC, MC students            |  | If MC are already on offer, students should be interviewed   |

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## Appendix G – MCP Orientation

One of the outcomes of an MCP eligibility check is that the ECTE requires that the provider undergoes orientation and guidance regarding policies and process for MCP accreditation and an initial assessment of readiness for an MCP review.

This appendix outlines the MCP orientation procedure.

1. Following the eligibility check, the provider receives notification from the Accreditation Director about the orientation with name and contact information of the staff person dedicated to this provider.
2. The institution identifies an MCP Internal Review Coordinator (MCP-IRC).
3. The IRC takes the ICETE Academy “Micro-credential Provider Orientation” course.<sup>68</sup> This is a 4-hour online course that gives an introduction to the MPC accreditation process and engages the institution in a preliminary draft SER. Tutoring will be provided in this course by ECTE staff.
4. Once the course has been completed, a series of online meetings between ECTE and the provider are arranged to further assess the readiness for the accreditation process.
5. The staff person will produce a summary report and evaluation of readiness, on the basis of which the Accreditation Director will either
  - a) authorize the provider to submit and MCP Accreditation Application,
  - b) provide further indications on how to adequately prepare for the accreditation process

An orientation fee will be invoiced after the orientation.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> <https://icete.academy/course/view.php?id=245>

<sup>69</sup> See <http://ecte.eu/introducing/fees/>

## Appendix H – Standards for online delivery of micro-credentials

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If micro-credentials are being delivered online, and this delivery mode has not been previously subjected to external quality assurance, the following additional standards will be used in the review. These standards are drawn from the ECTE *Guidelines for Distance and Online Education*.<sup>70</sup>

**MCP-OE1 - SECURITY AND PRIVACY.** Micro-credential providers making use of online delivery operate in full legality and respect of national laws concerning internet security and privacy of users

**MCP-OE2 - PUBLIC INFORMATION.** Micro-credential providers publicly describe online delivery modes and user requirements (e.g. availability of devices, internet connection, etc).

**MCP-OE3 - CONTINGENCY PLANS.** Providers have contingency plans that address the possibilities of disrupted internet service both from the institutional side and from the student's side

**MCP-OE4 – STAFFING.** Providers have appropriate educational and non-educational staff to support online delivery and make provision for initial and ongoing training.

**MCP-OE5 - COMMUNICATION.** Providers implement appropriate communication strategies at all levels and with all members of the online learning community. These strategies may include the use of social media.

**MCP-OE6 - STUDENT SERVICES.** Student services are tailored to fit online delivery.

**MCP-OE7 – TECHNOLOGY AND VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS.** Providers ensure that the technologies that undergird online delivery are available, are functioning properly and are appropriate to meet the demands of the number of users. Virtual learning environments (VLE or LMS) are designed to be user-friendly, complete, uncluttered, easily navigable, aesthetically pleasant and security-protected

**MCP-OE8 – RESOURCES.** Students have access to the digital learning resources that are required to meet programme outcomes. Digital learning resources are used in full compliance with copyright and intellectual property regulations.

**MCP-OE8 – HOLISTIC LEARNING.** Providers have a written policy that is regularly assessed on how to foster holistic integration in online delivery.

**MCP-OE9 – LEARNING DESIGN.** Providers implement good practice in online learning design.

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<sup>70</sup> <https://ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/>

# REFERENCES

The standards in this document refer, in the first place, to the *10 Principles for the Design and Issuance of Micro-credentials* (EU-MC) (May 2022 [EU Council Recommendation](#), pp.30-34). These principles include the conduction of external quality assurance of micro-credentials in line with:

- 1) [QA Principles for EQF](#) (EQF-QA) in the Annex IV of the European Qualifications Framework Recommendation]
- 2) [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#) (ESG).
- 3) [The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework](#) (EQAVET) in the field of vocational education and training.
- 4) Other quality assurance instruments, including registries and labels, to build public trust in micro-credentials, where applicable.

Other key references include<sup>71</sup>

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