

## ROADMAP

Roadmaps aim to inform citizens and stakeholders about the Commission's work in order to allow them to provide feedback and to participate effectively in future consultation activities. Citizens and stakeholders are in particular invited to provide views on the Commission's understanding of the problem and possible solutions and to make available any relevant information that they may have.

<b>TITLE OF THE INITIATIVE</b>	A European Approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability
<b>LEAD DG – RESPONSIBLE UNIT</b>	DG EAC B.1; DG EMPL E.3
<b>LIKELY TYPE OF INITIATIVE</b>	Council Recommendation
<b>INDICATIVE PLANNING</b>	Q4 2021
<b>ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</b>	In the field

This Roadmap is provided for information purposes only and its content might change. It does not prejudice the final decision of the Commission on whether this initiative will be pursued or on its final content. All elements of the initiative described by the Roadmap, including its timing, are subject to change.

### A. Context, Problem definition and Subsidiarity Check

#### **Context**

In her [political guidelines](#), Commission President Ursula von der Leyen states her intention “to bring down barriers to learning and improve access to quality education”, underlining the relevance of inclusion and quality in lifelong learning as stated in the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). The [Skills Agenda](#) (July 2020) puts forward a strategy to help individuals develop skills in a rapidly changing labour market and announces a new initiative on micro-credentials. The [Communication on achieving a European Education area by 2025](#) (September 2020) announces a Council Recommendation in 2021 to support building trust in micro-credentials across Europe and aims at having all the necessary steps in place by 2025 for their wider use, portability and recognition. This will widen personalised learning opportunities for all and contribute to more flexible learning pathways throughout life. A European approach to micro-credentials is included in the [Commission Work Programme 2021](#) under the headline ambition “Promoting our European way of life”.

#### **Problem the initiative aims to tackle**

Within Europe a growing number of people need to update their knowledge, skills and competences to fill the gap between their (sometimes old) formal education and fast-changing knowledge-development and labour market needs.

As the economy recovers from the COVID-19 crisis, demand for short learning options and their recognition and validation is expected to increase. The green and digital transitions also require people to upskill or reskill for a successful move from one job or economic sector to another, as well as for gaining access to further studies, and as a consequence, the need for just-in-time, short, and tailored learning will grow.

Short learning courses and experiences are rapidly being developed across Europe and globally by a wide variety of public and private stakeholders in response to the need for more flexible, learner-centred forms of provision of education and training for lifelong and lifewide learning. Demand for credentials that certify the outcomes of these short learning experiences is thus increasing. This is what we call ‘micro-credentials’. Nevertheless, the value of these micro-credentials is not always clear, due to a lack of standards for quality and transparency in such a diverse landscape. The growing number of diverse alternative credentials (i.e. not full or partial qualifications) has led to increasing concerns about their value, reinforced by an absence of shared understanding of what a micro-credential is, despite different attempts at coining a definition. The lack of a commonly agreed definition and the diversity of formats and providers raise questions on quality, recognition, transparency and portability of micro-credentials between and within countries, education and training sectors, and on the labour market. These constraints limit the value and impact of micro-credentials, leading to limited trust that prevents their wider acceptance and uptake and which impedes the objectives of reskilling and upskilling, flexible lifelong learning and mobility.

High quality, innovative and learner-centred learning and teaching offered by education and training institutions and other providers would be further enhanced with the flexibility that shorter courses, like micro-credentials, could offer for people of any age. Such continuous learning opportunities can fill the knowledge, skills and competences gap, increase the efficiency of the higher education and vocational education and training systems, encourage innovation in provision, and reach new types of learners, including those from

disadvantaged backgrounds, to foster their personal, social and professional development.

Micro-credentials allow for a targeted acquisition of skills and competences, adapted to a fast changing society and labour market, while not replacing traditional qualifications. In particular, more flexible learning pathways and a larger take-up of micro-credentials will serve social, economic and pedagogical innovation and will help people to gain and update their knowledge, skills and competences in all domains and for all purposes (employability, personal development, active ageing in the digital age, etc). This will notably contribute to more inclusive education systems and learning, and smoother labour market transitions in the greener and more digital economy of today and tomorrow.

### **Basis for EU intervention (legal basis and subsidiarity check)**

Article 165(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) establishes the legal basis for EU action in the areas of education and training. Article 166 further defines actions to implement EU's vocational training policy. Article 149 combined with Article 292 TFEU establishes the legal basis for coordinated strategy for employment and promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce. Action at the EU level on the quality, transparency and take-up of micro-credentials as a means of upskilling and reskilling is necessary to support cross-border mobility (both physical and virtual) of learners and workers. It will also support the cross-border provision of education and training, notably through digital means. This action will fully respect the responsibility of the Member States on the content of teaching, the organisation of education, training systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity; reflecting the supplementing and supporting role of the EU, and the voluntary nature of European cooperation in education and training. The initiative fully respects EU competences.

### **B. What does the initiative aim to achieve and how [max 25 lines]**

The European Approach to Micro-credentials will enhance the quality, transparency and take-up of short learning experiences leading to micro-credentials that are issued by education and training institutions and other training providers (e.g. private companies, chambers of commerce).

It will substantially widen learning opportunities and make lifelong learning a reality across the EU. It will help foster the mobility of a more diverse group of learners across the EU and encourage EU level providers of micro-credentials, including European Universities and Centres of Vocational excellence, to actively contribute to achieving a European Education Area by 2025 and the objectives of the European Skills Agenda. By making learning more targeted to individual needs, the initiative will also contribute to inclusive learning and better employability chances. More flexible and modular learning pathways and a larger take-up of micro-credentials will serve social, economic and pedagogical innovation, and will help people to gain, update and valorise their knowledge, skills and competences.

By supporting the portability and recognition of micro-credentials across borders, individuals will find it easier to move for further learning or work. Employers and education and training institutions will also find it easier to understand the competences, skills and qualifications of mobile learners and workers. The European approach to micro-credentials aims at turning these objectives into action by developing European standards which address minimum requirements for quality, transparency, cross-border comparability, recognition and portability, building on existing tools, as far as possible. These standards will be developed together with all relevant stakeholders (public or private education and training providers, social partners, chambers of commerce, employers), quality assurance and recognition authorities, and Member States. Dialogue with national qualification authorities will explore the relation of micro-credentials with qualification frameworks. Individuals will be able to showcase to employers acquired micro-credentials with the help of Europass and its Digital Credentials Infrastructure, which allow for issuing, storage and sharing of micro-credentials in a digital format. The European Student Card initiative will allow students to share the outcomes of these micro-credentials electronically and in a secure way with other education and training institutions. Finally, EU funding programmes will contribute to facilitating the uptake of short learning experiences leading to micro-credentials.

### **C. Better regulation**

#### **Consultation of citizens and stakeholders**

The planned consultation activities organised by the Commission include:

- An ad hoc expert group on Higher Education, with representatives from all member states and a wide range of stakeholders; report published in December 2020.<sup>1</sup>
- Consultation on micro-credentials through dedicated questions in regular meetings of existing expert and advisory groups working in EU education and training and employment contexts, including:
  - European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group
  - Europass Advisory Group

<sup>1</sup> The report is available at <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/european-approach-micro-credentials-higher-education-consultation-group-output-final-report.pdf>

- Advisory Committee on Vocational Education and Training
- National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs)
- Education and Training Working Group
- Bologna Follow Up Group
- Public Employment Services;
- Dedicated hearing with EU Social Partners;
- Dedicated webinars with representatives from education and training (Higher Education, Vocational Education and Training, etc.) and labour market actors (Public Employment Services, trade unions, companies);
- Bilateral meetings with individual stakeholders from education, training, employment and civil society; An open public consultation (OPC) for 12 weeks (starting Q2 2021) accessible via the Commission's central [public consultations page](#) and promoted through social media and tailored emails to stakeholder groups.

#### **Evidence base and data collection**

The initiative will benefit from the outcomes of various studies and Erasmus+ projects<sup>2</sup> on the role of micro-credentials in facilitating learning for skills development and employability. A report prepared by Network of Experts working on the Social dimension of Education and Training (NESET) - will contribute to understand the current issues that surround micro-credentials, such as transparency, quality assurance, portability and stackability. Moreover, the initiative will benefit from the preliminary results of a study of CEDEFOP on the role of micro-credentials in facilitating learning for employment.<sup>3</sup> In accordance with the European Commission's "Better Regulation Guidelines", an impact assessment is not required for this initiative, given that it is not likely to have significant economic, environmental or social impacts that would call for such an assessment. A staff-working document, reporting on the above mentioned collected evidence, will accompany the initiative.

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<sup>2</sup> These Erasmus+ projects include, among others: Microbol (<https://enqa.eu/index.php/microcredentials-linked-to-the-bologna-key-commitments-microbol/>); MicroHE (<https://microcredentials.eu/>); e-Valuate (<http://ecahe.eu/home/about/projects/e-valuate-2018-2020/>).

<sup>3</sup> Public procurement for the study is ongoing. The study will start in December 2020.