EQAVET PLA on 'Quality Assurance and micro-credentials in VET' – Background note

Virtual meeting, 8 -9 November 2022

1. Context

Global megatrends and developments, such as green and digital transitions, automation, demographic changes, climate change, and the COVID-19 crisis, all impact the link between education systems and the labour market and increase the importance of offering up- and re-skilling opportunities as a growing number of people need to update their knowledge, skills and competences. Given the increasingly fast pace of developments, education and training systems can often not keep up with the pace of innovation and can lose their relevance for labour market stakeholders. Responding to the demand for more flexible provision of skills, short forms or small chunks of learning have emerged, such as micro-credentials, which are spreading rapidly. They are offered by a variety of public and private providers and can help to flexibly up- and reskill learners and workers in line with labour market demands.

Until now, there have been no common standards to ensure the quality, transparency, cross-border comparability, recognition, and transferability of such short forms of learning that are complementary to traditional qualifications. This can undermine their understanding and value.

'The **Council Recommendation** of 16 June 2022 on a **European approach to micro-credentials** for lifelong learning and employability' however, recommends to Members States to apply a common EU definition, EU standards and key principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials. It also emphasises that they need to be underpinned by **quality assurance** and that this should be done in VET in line with **EQAVET** where appropriate.

This PLA offers the opportunity to share and reflect on experiences of countries that have been implementing micro-credentials for some time or have established a framework for introducing them. It also offers a space for the **EQAVET Network** members to meet and reflect on effective practices and open questions around the quality assurance of micro-credentials. The participants will be introduced to successful practices from the host country (Ireland), and three additional countries (Estonia, Spain and Sweden).

This note will first introduce the European policy background related to this topic and the Council Recommendation on micro-credentials before reflecting on key challenges and approaches of addressing quality assurance of micro-credentials in VET and on the link to EQAVET Framework. Following this discussion, the country examples to be featured at the PLA will be briefly introduced. This background paper ends with the presentation of questions to be discussed at the PLA.

2. Introduction of the topic

2.1 European policy background

Within the current EU policy context, micro-credentials are increasingly being identified as a mechanism to support the European objectives of lifelong learning and increased flexibility, transparency, mobility and transversality across the education and training sectors and policy framework. This aligns with the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, which states that 'everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market' (p. 11) in order to ensure equal opportunities and access to the labour market. The **United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Agenda** also includes a focus on lifelong learning for all, under Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (p. 19).

The **European Skills Agenda** for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020) stresses that Europe needs flexible, resilient and sustainable VET systems and calls for a European approach to micro-credentials as one of the tools and initiatives to support people in their lifelong learning pathways.

As a central element of the European Skills Agenda, the European Commission has launched the **Pact for Skills** on 10 November 2020. It refers to up- or reskilling actions that are flexible, modular and when possible provided through tools (including digital tools) ensuring access to learning to all working age people. Among others, it calls for working against discrimination and for gender equality and equal opportunities, for example, by the use of validation and recognition of acquired skills (including micro-credentials).

The **Council Recommendation** of 24 November 2020 **on vocational education and training** (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience also acknowledges that flexibility and opportunities for further development are at the heart of VET, and that VET programmes should be designed to allow flexible learning pathways. Moreover, it confirms the intention of exploring the concept and use of micro-credentials, including in VET, together with Member States and relevant stakeholders, including in the context of the EQF Advisory Group, as proposed in the European Skills Agenda.

The **Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025** again emphasises the development of a European approach to micro-credentials to help expand learning opportunities and strengthen the role of higher education and vocational education and training institutions in lifelong learning through more flexible and modular learning options.

Finally, in June 2022, the **Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability** was adopted.

2.2 Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials

The European approach to micro-credentials consists of three building blocks:

- the provision of a **common definition** of micro-credentials,
- the definition of European **standard elements** for the description of micro-credentials (i.e. information that any micro-credential should provide to ensure transparency) and
- the presentation of **European principles** for the design and issuance of micro-credentials.

Key elements of the three building blocks are outlined in the following sections.

2.2 EU definition of micro-credentials

Across the EU, the term 'micro-credential' has been used to describe all manners of shorter forms of learning experiences irrespective of type, mode and size. Various definitions have been in use: while some characteristics can be identified as common in these definitions (e.g. a smaller volume of learning), other characteristics differ or individual characteristics are emphasised, e.g. depending on the education sector or provider interests. The European approach offers a common definition that is valid for all stakeholders across sectors of education and the world of work.

EU definition of micro-credentials

The 2022 Council Recommendation defines micro-credentials as

'… 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 stand-alone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity'.

2.3 European standard elements for the description of micro-credentials

To build trust in micro-credentials, they need to be described and presented in a transparent way. Learners, education and training institutions, quality assurance agencies and employers should be able to understand the value and content of micro-credentials and compare them. The Recommendation suggests that the European standard elements to describe a micro-credential should include a set of mandatory elements (see Annex I of the Recommendation)[1]:

Mandatory elements:

- Identification of the learner
- Title of the micro-credential
- Country(ies)/region(s) of the issuer
- Awarding body(ies)
- Date of issuing
- Learning outcomes
- Notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in ECTS, wherever possible)
- Level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (EQF, QF EHEA), if applicable
- Type of assessment
- Form of participation in the learning activity
- Type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential

2.4 European principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials

The Recommendation also includes ten principles to be followed when designing and issuing micro-credentials across sectors of education and all other areas (s. Annex II of the Recommendation – summarised in box below). These 10 principles specify the nature of micro-credentials and highlight their key characteristics.

EU principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials:

1. Quality (see below)
2. Transparency (Micro-credentials are measurable, comparable and understandable, with clear information on learning outcomes, workload, content, level, and the learning offer, as relevant)
3. Relevance (Micro-credentials should be designed and issued as distinct, targeted learning achievements and learning opportunities leading to them are to be updated as necessary, to meet identified learning needs)
4. Valid assessment (Micro-credential learning outcomes are assessed against transparent criteria)
5. Learning pathway (Micro-credentials are designed and issued to support flexible learning pathways, including the possibility to validate, recognise and 'stack' micro-credentials from across different systems)
6. Recognition (Micro-credentials have a clear signalling value of learning outcomes for smaller modules of learning. Recognition paves the way for a wider offer of such learning experiences in a comparable way across the EU)
7. Portable (Micro-credentials are owned by the credential-holder - the learner - and may be stored and shared easily by the credential-holder, including through secure digital wallets, e.g. Europass)
8. Learner Centred (Micro-credentials are designed to meet the needs of the target group of learners. Learners are involved in the internal and external quality assurance processes and

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[1] These standard elements will be included in a European data model that specifies a common format for describing micro-credentials.

their feedback is taken into account as part of the continuous improvement of the micro-credential)

9. Authentic (Micro-credentials contain sufficient information to check the identity of the credential-holder – learner –, the legal identity of the issuer, the date and place of issuance of the micro-credential)

10. Information and guidance (Information and advice on micro-credentials should be incorporated in lifelong learning guidance services and should reach the broadest possible learner groups, in an inclusive way, supporting education, training and career choices)

(Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, pp. 23-25)

2.5 Quality assurance of micro-credentials

Quality assurance is a key element in all the three building blocks presented above:

■ it is highlighted in the **definition of micro-credentials**, as it is stated that micro-credentials 'are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity';

■ the 'Type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential' is one of the 'European **standard elements** for the description of micro-credentials' (mandatory element);

■ the first of the '**European principles** for the design and issuance of micro-credentials' refers to quality and is of particular importance for this PLA.

The box below presents this principle in full detail:

Quality

'Micro-credentials are subject to internal and external quality assurance by the system producing them (e.g. the education, training or labour market context in which the micro-credential is developed and delivered). Quality assurance processes must be fit-for-purpose, clearly documented and accessible and meet the needs and expectations of learners and stakeholders.

Providers: External quality assurance is based primarily on the assessment of providers (rather than individual courses) and the effectiveness of their internal quality assurance procedures.

Providers should make sure that internal quality assurance covers all the following elements:

- the overall quality of the micro-credential itself, based on the standards referred to below;
- the quality of the course, where applicable, leading to the micro-credential;
- learners' feedback on the learning experience leading to the micro-credential and;
- peers feedback, including other providers and stakeholders, on the learning experience leading to the micro-credential.

Standards: External quality assurance is to be conducted in line with:

- Annex IV of the European Qualifications Framework Recommendation, where applicable;
- the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, where applicable;
- the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (the EQAVET Framework) in the field of vocational education and training, where applicable;
- other quality assurance instruments, including registries and labels, to build public trust in micro-credentials, where applicable.'

(Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, p. 23)

3. Key challenges of quality assurance of micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are a tool to support lifelong learning and to provide the skills needed for the labour market. To fulfil the expectations placed on them, it is important that their quality is beyond doubt and recognised by all stakeholders. This is key to build trust, facilitate recognition and transferability, and achieve benefits for all stakeholders: learners, providers, employers and society at large.

However, quality assurance processes vary and not all micro-credentials are quality assured on the basis of quality standards set at national level. Many micro-credentials are created through markets rather than accreditation or as part of the formal system, which can work very well but can also challenge the traditional national governance of qualifications systems (as highlighted by the interim findings of an ongoing Cedefop study on 'Microcredentials for labour market education and training'[2].

Moreover, many micro-credentials are already available in continuing vocational education and training (CVET) or adult education. This is a very heterogeneous field across Europe but also often within individual countries: In CVET, a wide variety of organisations issues certificates and other documents to prove that a person has acquired certain skills and competences. These organisations can be formal (government-funded and government-accredited) VET providers, sometimes also offering IVET programmes, as well as private companies or course providers only offering CVET programmes outside the formal education system. In most EU countries there is no overarching quality assurance framework for CVET. However, other quality assurance instruments might be used, such as international company quality labels and instruments (e.g. the ISO 21001 and/or 29990 or EFQM certifications)[3].

4. Addressing quality assurance of micro-credentials in VET and the link to EQAVET

Micro-credentials are a rather new phenomenon for most formal education and training systems. One option countries can choose to ensure the quality of **micro-credentials** in a regulated way is to **embed them in their formal systems**, i.e. VET or further/adult education. Consequently micro-credentials have to comply with the respective **quality requirements and quality assurance measures set for this system**. This incorporation of micro-credentials into formal systems can be based on legislation, as the examples of Estonia and Spain show (see Chapter 5). Another important aspect in this context can be the inclusion of micro-credentials in NQFs referenced to the EQF. While many countries only assign full qualifications from the formal system to the levels of their NQF, some frameworks are also open to non-formal qualifications and partial or smaller credentials that also meet the **(quality) criteria for inclusion in the respective NQF**. Ireland is one of the EU Member States that already has many years of experience with including qualifications with a small volume of learning outcomes into their NQF (minor award types, see Chapter 5).

Furthermore, the **EQAVET Framework** could be applied for quality assuring the provision of micro-credentials**,** which is explicitly mentioned in the Council Recommendation on micro-credentials as reference according to which the external quality assurance of the provider could be carried out. The EQAVET framework is principally applicable in all learning environments, including CVET and work-based learning. Evidence from a 2019 study shows that in its first decade of implementation, EQAVET was mostly used inside the formal (initial, school-based) VET system.[4] There are currently numerous initiatives by EQAVET National Reference Points to extend the use of EQAVET to CVET and adult learning, and non-formal and informal learning contexts, possibly including the quality assurance of micro-credentials.

The table below shows links between EQAVET indicative descriptors at VET-system and VET-provider level and the European principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials:

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[2] Results of this study will also be presented at the PLA -
https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/microcredentials-labour-market-education-and-training

[3] These approaches were discussed at the 'Peer Learning Activity on Quality Assurance in continuing vocational education and training (CVET)', 27-28 April 2020

[4] See European Commission (2019). Study on EU VET instruments (EQAVET and ECVET), January 2019.
https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&furtherPubs=yes&langId=en&pubId=8176

Table 1.1 EQAVET indicative descriptors at VET-provider level and their link to the European principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials – examples

Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level	European principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials
Planning: ■ Mechanisms are established for the quality assurance of the design, assessment and review of qualifications **Implementation:** ■ A national and/or regional quality assurance framework has been devised and includes guidelines and quality standards at VET-provider level to promote continuous improvement and self-regulation **Evaluation;** ■ A methodology for evaluation has been devised, covering internal and external evaluation ■ Stakeholder involvement in the monitoring and evaluation process is agreed and clearly described ■ The national/regional standards and processes for improving and assuring quality are relevant and proportionate to the needs of the sector ■ Systems are subject to self-evaluation, internal and external review, as appropriate **Review:** ■ Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews are defined and used to improve the quality of provision at all levels	**Planning:** ■ Responsibilities in quality management and development have been explicitly allocated ■ There is an early involvement of staff in planning, including with regard to quality development ■ VET providers have an explicit and transparent quality assurance system in place **Implementation:** ■ Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance **Evaluation:** ■ Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers, covering also the digital readiness and environmental sustainability of VET institutions ■ Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education and training including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction ■ Evaluation and review includes the collection and use of data, and adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders **Review:** ■ Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place	**1. Quality:** See box in Section 2.3!
Planning: ■ VET qualifications are described using learning outcomes		**2. Transparency:** ■ Micro-credentials are measurable, comparable and understandable, with clear information on learning outcomes, workload, content, level, and the learning offer, as relevant.

Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level	European principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials
Planning: ■ Social partners and all other relevant stakeholders participate in setting VET goals and objectives at the different levels ■ Mechanisms and procedures have been established to identify the training needs of the labour market and society ■ VET programmes are designed to allow flexible learning pathways and to respond quickly to changing labour market needs	**Planning**: ■ Ongoing consultation with social partners and all other relevant stakeholders takes place to identify specific local/ individual needs ■ Providers plan cooperative initiatives with relevant stakeholders ■ The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs	**3. Relevance**: ■ Micro-credentials should be designed and issued as distinct, targeted learning achievements and learning opportunities leading to them are to be updated as necessary, to meet identified learning needs. ■ Collaboration between education and training organisations, employers, social partners, other providers and users of micro-credentials is encouraged to increase the relevance of the micro-credentials for the labour market.
Planning; ■ Standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of competences of individuals have been defined **Implementation:** ■ Guidelines and standards have been devised for implementation at different levels. These guidelines and standards include assessment, validation and certification of qualifications	**Implementation:** ■ VET providers use valid, accurate and reliable methods to assess individuals' learning outcomes	**4. Valid assessment:** ■ Micro-credential learning outcomes are assessed against transparent criteria. **5. Learning pathways - Validation of non-formal and informal learning:** ■ Obtaining micro-credentials is possible following assessment of learning outcomes, obtained either through a specific course leading to a micro-credential, or on the basis of assessment of learning outcomes resulting from non-formal and informal learning. **6. Recognition:** ■ Micro-credentials have a clear signalling value of learning outcomes for smaller modules of learning. Recognition paves the way for a wider offer of such learning experiences in a comparable way across the EU. ■ Micro-credentials are recognised, where possible, by the competent authorities, for academic, training or employment purposes, based on the information provided according to the European standard elements (Annex I) and the principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials (Annex II). ■ When micro-credentials are issued by formal education providers, they are recognised, where possible, based on standard recognition procedures used in recognising foreign qualifications and learning periods abroad. This is without prejudice to the right of the competent authorities to define recognition procedures or to verify the authenticity of documents.

Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level	European principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials
Planning: ■ VET programmes are designed to allow flexible learning pathways and to respond quickly to changing labour market needs		**5. Learning pathways:** Micro-credentials are designed and issued to support flexible learning pathways, including the possibility to validate, recognise and 'stack' micro-credentials from across different systems. ■ **Stackability:** Micro-credentials are designed to be modular so that other micro-credentials may be added to create larger credentials. Decisions to 'stack' or combine credentials lie with the receiving organisation (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. Such decisions are made by regional and national authorities or institutions in line with their awarding processes. **7. Portable:** ■ Micro-credentials are owned by the credential-holder (the learner) and may be stored and shared easily by the credential-holder, including through secure digital wallets (e.g. Europass), 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
	Implementation: ■ VET providers respond to the learning needs of individuals by using a learner-centred approach which enable learners to achieve the expected learning outcomes	**8. Learner-centred:** ■ Micro-credentials are designed to meet the needs of the target group of learners. Learners are involved in the internal and external quality assurance processes and their feedback is taken into account as part of the continuous improvement of the micro-credential.

While the indicative descriptors do not explicitly relate to 'information and guidance' (which is number 10 of the European principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials), the reference set of EQAVET Indicators establishes this link as it refers to the provision of information and guidance to (potential) VET learners (process indicator).

The quality principle for micro-credentials (see box in Section 2.3) explicitly refers to '**peers feedback**, including other providers and stakeholders, on the learning experience leading to the micro-credential' and also the EQAVET indicative descriptors at VET-provider level refer to the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in evaluation and review. Moreover, through two Erasmus+-funded projects (2017-2019/2019-2021), the EQAVET NRPs from Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, and Slovenia developed and road-tested a methodology for peer review at VET provider level[5]. This methodology could also be carried out to obtain feedback from peers on implementing quality assurance requirements of courses leading to micro-credentials, if applicable.

5. Country examples

Ireland, a country that already has experiences with micro-credentials since some years, is the host country of this PLA. Irish experts will provide insights into their experiences and learning points from Ireland on the use of micro-credentials and resulting demands to quality assurance. Participants will have the opportunity to share and exchange with Irish stakeholders on their experiences and receive advice and suggestions based on the Irish experience.

Following the Irish host country example, three other countries will share details on their use of micro-credentials and how they are quality assured and embedded in formal education and training. The approaches from the following countries will be featured at the PLA: **Estonia**, **Spain and Sweden**. All these countries have (more recently) embedded micro-credentials into the formal education and training system.

The table below presents more details on the identified examples.

Table 1: Country examples

Country	Example
Ireland (host country)	Ireland has included awards of small volume in its NQF since its establishment in 2003: The set of qualification classes that are included in the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) comprises Major, Professional, Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards. The latter three award-types can be considered as closely related to micro-credentials[6]: - Minor award-types provide recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes, but not the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award.' Minor award-types are always linked to major award-types and are therefore smaller in volume than the major award of which they are a part. Awarding bodies may develop their own approaches about what is the smallest part of a major award that is to be recognised as being a minor award; - Special-purpose award-types are made for specific, relatively narrow, purposes and they are standalone. There is no requirement that they be linked to a major award, and they will always be significantly smaller in volume than a major award. A special purpose award may also relate to more limited strands of learning outcomes than a major award. It is possible that a special purpose award could, for example, focus on discrete skills (concentrating on the skill strands of learning outcomes) only. A special purpose award will always be significantly smaller in volume than a major award;

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[5] European Peer Review Quality Areas and Criteria for VET providers (2021) - https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/European_Peer_Review_Quality_Areas_and_Criteria_for_Vocational_Education_and_Training_VET.pdf

[6] https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2022-01/descriptors-minor-spa-supplemental-awards.pdf

Country	Example
	○ Supplemental award-types always build upon a previous award. They could, for example, relate to updating and refreshing knowledge or skills, or to continuing professional development. 'Many labour market actors, such as the ICT sector, consider micro-credentials crucial to their national education and training landscape. Awarded for short courses that meet controlled criteria, they offer employees tangible and practical awards that can be verified online with a higher value than attendance certificates. In 2021, the Irish Qualifications Authority introduced a working definition stating that "a micro-credential is a qualification that attests to a small-volume, highly specific learning achievement".'[7]
Estonia	'Estonia's education ministry has launched a regulatory process amending its Adult Education Act to establish the content, provision, quality and duration of learning that leads to the award of micro-credentials.'[8] Part of the 2035 Estonian education strategy, micro-credentials are foreseen as an opportunity to acquire and recognise small learning experiences. 'Estonia has also launched a training credit programme as a result of cooperation between companies and higher education institutions. It is an in-service training platform, where companies support in-service training of their employees, and where, in the future, the training courses can be accumulated to form micro-qualifications. The range of training providers and users of the programme is limited, but in terms of its objectives, it is a good example of a micro-qualifications system.'[9] QA of micro-credentials is under development.[10] However, as the draft of the Adult Education Act is still in progress at the Ministry of Education and Research and it may take some time before this Act comes into force, it is only possible at this stage to provide information on the concept or core ideas of regulating micro-credentials.
Spain	On March 23 2022, the Spanish government adopted a new Organic Law on the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training[11]. This new law is a milestone of the 2022 Plan for modernisation of vocational Training and established a new VET model based on three pillars: VET provision, validation of prior learning and career guidance. This law also defines and regulates micro-credentials (or micro-training) as a part of the formal VET system. VET provision is made more flexible and accessible, as the 'new law establishes a single, modular and flexible offer of formal vocational training from a lifelong learning perspective' and the new VET system provides a ranges of training courses of different lengths and learning volumes (micro training, modules, VET programmes and specialisation courses). 'This formal VET provision is cumulative, certifiable and accreditable enabling IVET learners, as well as employed and unemployed people, to design and progress in their own training pathways to meet personal needs, expectations, and abilities.'[12] The new VET offer is arranged in training pathways that allow progression through five ascending grades (A, B, C, D and E). The training experience of each person will be recorded in the new national Register of Vocational Training, accessible to any citizen so as to obtain an updated Training-Professional Life Report. The new structure will facilitate access to a whole range of courses of varying duration and volume of learning, ranging from smaller units or micro-courses/micro-credentials (grade A, B and C) to degrees (grades D) and specialization courses (grade E). In this way, each person will be able to design and configure his/her own training itinerary adapted to his/her professional expectations and work needs. All training provision, regardless of its size and duration, will be cumulative, certifiable, and accreditable, which will

[7] Ibid, Cedefop briefing note

[8] Ibid, Cedefop briefing note

[9] Cedefop,news article, Estonia: micro-qualifications to encourage rapid competence acquisitions and wider participation in lifelong learning. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/estonia-micro-qualifications-encourage-rapid-competence-acquisition-and-wider-participation-lifelong

[10] See: EQAVET Webinar: Quality Assurance of Flexible VET pathways - Estonian case (Dec. 2021)

[11] Ley Orgánica 3/2022, de 31 de marzo, de ordenación e integración de la Formación Profesional [Organic Law 3/2022, of March 31, on the organisation and integration of Vocational Training] - https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2022/04/01/pdfs/BOE-A-2022-5139.pdf

[12] Cedefop, News article, Spain: VET revoluation, setting the pace for a new model for vocational education and training, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/spain-vet-revolution

Country	Example
	allow students, employed and unemployed workers to advance in their training path that will lead to accreditations, professional certificates, degrees and professional master's degrees.[13]

The types of training offers related to the grades A, B and C are sequentially arranged:

Grade A (**Partial accreditation of competence**) is the smallest unit in the new National Vocational Training System and will lead to partial accreditation of competence (micro-credential type A). Partial accreditation of competence may include one or more competence elements of a professional module included in the Modular Catalogue of Vocational Training and linked to the National Catalogue of Standards of Professional Competences.

Successful completion of Grade A training will lead to partial accreditation of competence valid throughout the national territory. Passing all the partial accreditations of competence of a module (microcredential type A) will imply obtaining the corresponding certificate of professional competence or Grade B of training, referring to a professional module (micro-credential type B).

Grade B (**Certificate of competence**) is the aim of the partial cumulative offer of the Vocational Training System associated to a vocational module included in the Modular Vocational Training Catalogue and it implies obtaining a Certificate of Competence. Passing a Grade B training course or being in possession of all partial accreditations of competence of a professional module will entail the issuance of a Certificate of Competence, which must specify the professional module passed and the standard of professional competence associated with it, included in the National Catalogue of Standards of Professional Competences, and its correspondence with the Spanish Framework of Qualifications.

Grade C (**Professional certificate**) is the partial cumulative offer of the Vocational Training System of several professional modules of the Modular Vocational Training Catalogue on the grounds of their significance in the labour market and it implies attaining a Vocational Certificate. Grade C of Vocational Training may be obtained either by passing the training or by being in possession of all Grade B Certificates of Competence (micro-credential type C).

Short introduction video |
| Sweden | 'In Sweden, the National Research Institute, the National Agency for Higher VET and the Digital Services Agency of the public employment service, JobTech Development, have taken forward discussions on the description, quality assurance, recognition, "stacking" and portability of micro-credentials with a range of stakeholders.' [14]

The Swedish NQF, is open for qualifications awarded outside formal education, potentially including also micro-credentials. However, it is still being discussed what actually can be considered as micro-credential. For example, the 'Shortfirer Class A' is assigned to NQF level 5. It is based on a four-day training course, a theoretical test and an assessment of practical skills. It is valid for ten years.[15]

Five pilot projects are currently being carried out to observe how different actors in education deliver competences in areas where there is a skills shortage. The data will be used to generalise models for a definition of micro-credentials in line with the EU Recommendation. First, a working model for documentation and quality assurance of micro-credentials will be established to disseminate the system and build trust.
The five pilot projects to collect data on micro-qualifications are:
- Formal education in the northern Skellefteå region following the establishment of the battery industry for electric vehicles and other green technologies: The region is facing rapid growth in a new technology sector and an influx of people with different and in many cases insufficient qualifications. As it is a new technology, it is necessary to offer short courses and combine upper secondary, higher vocational and tertiary level modules for skills transfer. |

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[13] https://www.todofp.es/sobre-fp/nuevaleyfp2022.html

[14] Ibid, Cedefop briefing note

[15] https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/05._parallel_session_2_-_microcredentials_in_a_swedish_context_-_a.kahlson_h.almgren.pdf

Country	Example
	- Labour market training through the Public Employment Service: Unemployed people are offered training in occupations where there is a shortage of labour. - Labour market training - three organisations: the employers' organisation in public enterprises (e.g. waste and wastewater treatment, water supply), the retail trade association (consisting of the social partners) and the textile industry, which has developed modules for training newly arrived immigrants in a sector with a skills shortage. In addition, there have been significant changes in Swedish labour market policy and a new CPD-programme will be introduced this autumn that will allow workers to take up to a year off for up- or reskilling. There are many activities to create training opportunities for this programme. [16]

6. Guiding questions for the event

The guiding questions for discussion during the PLA on quality assurance and micro-credentials include:

- To what extent do the micro-credentials in the individual countries comply with the definition of micro-credentials set out in the CR, the 'European standard elements for the description of micro-credentials' and the 'European principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials'?
- Are micro-credentials included in the NQF and which NQF/EQF levels are concerned? Is it mostly about learners in IVET or workers in CVET?
- To what extent are and how can micro-credentials be integrated in formal education and training, and the education and training system (incl. CVET)?
- What does this mean for quality assurance – are there any requirements that are specific to micro-credentials? What type(s) of quality assurance is (are) used in your country to underpin the micro-credentials in VET?
- How does the situation differ for non-formal and informal learning – what quality assurance issues arise in these sectors?
- What is the role of labour market stakeholders in the QA process?

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[16] Information from the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education