

ENQA WORKING GROUP FINDINGS

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QUESTIONS

- **Should there be external quality assurance of micro-credentials?**
OR can there be reliance on internal quality assurance?
- **Are the ESG applicable?**
OR what are the peculiarities of their application?
- What relationship to higher education? Exclusively higher education, articulation to higher education, collaboration with?
OR would/could agencies expand portfolio in the future?
- If contexts have moved to institutional review, where do MCs stand? Is a shift to programme review desirable?
OR what could be viable options?
- Ex ante or ex post quality assurance?
OR ongoing?

DEFINITION?

- MICROBOL

Working definition:

A micro-credential is a small volume of learning certified by a credential. In the EHEA context, it can be offered by higher education institutions or recognised by them using recognition procedures in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention or recognition of prior learning, where applicable. A micro-credential is designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills or competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials have explicitly defined learning outcomes at a QF-EHEA/NQF level, an indication of associated workload in ECTS credits, assessment methods and criteria, and are subject to quality assurance in line with the ESG.



About education levels

Outline of the proposal



Common definition of micro-credentials
Standard elements
Principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials

Towards a common definition of micro-credentials



CHARACTERISTICS

- Flexibility
- Agility
- Portability
- Stackability
- Recognition
- Authenticity
- Variability
- Reskilling/Upskilling

Constitutive elements

- Information on the learner: identification of the learner
- Information on the provider: information on the provider, including country; information on the awarding body institution, including country (if different), including a signature or seal of the provider and/or awarding body institution
- Information on the micro-credential: title, date of issuance or date of assessment, verification of authenticity
- Information on the learning experience: learning outcomes, workload (in ECTS, when possible), assessment and form of quality assurance
- Information on the QF level: NQF level (when possible), EF-EHEA and EQF level (if self-certified/referenced), ISCED level & subject area code, SQF level (if needed)
- Form of participation in the learning activity
- Access requirements



GENERAL FINDINGS

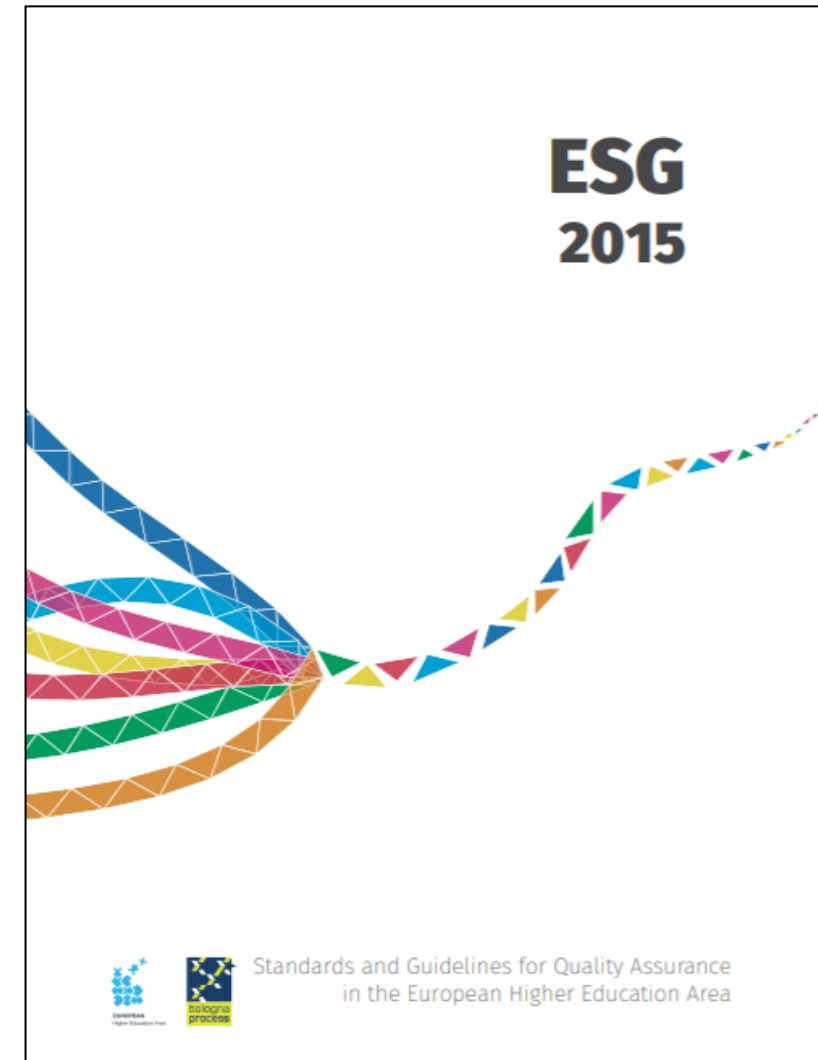
- Reassurance for the quality of MCs is important
- How to gain reassurances can be context-dependent and will consider existing QA arrangements
- Capturing MCs in external quality assurance processes has benefits
- Tools for recognition must be in place
- Models for stackability must be developed
- Combination between online, blended and face-to-face modalities must be explored

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Mission and vision to integrate LLL (and accommodate rationale for MCs)
- Clear responsibilities to be allocated for management and review of MCs
- Policies to cover MC activities in meaningful ways
- Professional collaborations and academic partnerships to be intensified (for recognition and stackability)
- Labour market expertise to be prominent in QA processes
- Internal quality monitoring to be more frequent or take different approaches
- Ongoing agile adjustments need to maintain currency
- Closure triggers need to be explicit (“shelf-life” limited)

*“The ESG apply to all higher education offered in the EHEA regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery. Thus, the ESG are **also applicable** to all higher education including transnational and cross-border provision. In this document the term “programme” refers to higher education in its broadest sense, including that which is **not part of a programme leading to a formal degree.**”*

(our emphasis)



PART I

**EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES
FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

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GENERAL REMARKS

- All standards apply
- However, as most often, the devil is in the details
- Some standards (will) offer a bit more food for thought
- Consideration needs to be given to the elements presented
- Promoting transparency and mutual trust

ESG PART I STANDARDS

1. Policy for quality assurance
2. Design and approval of programmes
3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
5. Teaching staff
6. Learning resources and student support
7. Information management
8. Public information
9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes
10. Cyclical external quality assurance

I.I. POLICY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

- MCs explicitly considered in internal QA policy/processes of HEIs
- HEIs incorporate a LLL/MCs strategy in general strategic management
- Specifically addressed are:
 - Relation to research and e-learning strategy and policies
 - Due diligence approaches for alternative providers
 - Stakeholder feedback
 - Transparency/relevance/valid assessment/learning pathways (stackability, validation of formal and non-formal learning)/recognition/portability/learner-centred/authentic/information guidance/...

1.2. DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF PROGRAMMES

- Separate structures/specific budgets allocated for design/offer of MCs
- MCs fit into wider offer of HEI, but as a category of its own
- MCs have clear and explicit objectives in line with LLL strategy
- Engagement of all MC-relevant stakeholders in both design and approval
- Specific needs market, industry, personal development or society at large
- Lingua franca, where possible: learning outcomes, ECTS, EQF/NQF-level, ...
- Stand-alone (stackable in design phase) / based on existing courses

- I.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment
- I.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
- I.5 Teaching staff
- I.6 Learning resources and student support

- Short(er) life cycle – flexibility – adaptiveness
- Flexibility towards learning styles and needs of diverse student population
- MC-adapted admission/recognition: formal/non-formal/informal learning
- Tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression
- Staff: multi-layered experience and competences (professional/scholarly)
- Flexible funding for student support services
- Flexible recruitment/professionalisation of teaching/admin/supportive staff

I.7. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

I.8. PUBLIC INFORMATION

- System of data collection
 - Well adapted to the short cycle of the MCs
 - Capturing students' satisfaction, learning resources, student support availability, career paths, further study paths, ...
- Public information provision is in line with (e.g.) 'European standard elements to describe MCs' and 'European principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials', ...

1.9. ON-GOING MONITORING AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES

1.10. CYCLICAL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Regular monitoring, reviewing, and revising of MCs
 - Integrated, but adapted to nature and life cycle of MCs: agile start up and closure
 - Based on a smart system of indicators capturing fast evolutions in scientific/labour market/societal needs
 - Involving all MC-relevant stakeholders
- Cyclical external quality assurance of MCs
 - takes life cycle into account
 - aims at the right organisational level to avoid administrative burden

CONCLUSIONS

- Integration in existing strategies/policies/processes of HEI
- Respected as a phenomenon in its own right
- Situated in the wider offer of the HEI
- Flexibility/adaptiveness to address issues that relate to key features of MCs
- Specific stakeholder relations

PART II

EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

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GENERAL REMARKS

- Each standard for external QA (ESG Part II) has proven applicable even to new QA processes recently developed, e.g., for joint programmes, for cross-border assessments, for e-learning, etc.
- The look at MCs and how their quality can be assured externally opens up new aspects: With MCs, higher education is explicitly geared towards lifelong learning
- In principle, all standards of ESG Part II are applicable, but there are some challenges

ESG PART II STANDARDS

The following standards would need annotation:

- 1. Consideration of internal quality assurance**
- 2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose**
- 3. Implementing processes**
- 4. Peer-review experts**
5. Criteria for outcomes
6. Reporting
7. Complaints and appeals

2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

MCs...

- testify to the increased complexity of higher education and the growing diversity of expectations on HEIs
- carry a strong link to working life
- promote a modular view on higher education

... and thus invite a holistic approach to external QA

2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

- Institutional review vs programme evaluation?
 - Assessment procedures focused on institutions appear to be more applicable than procedures targeted to single MCs
 - External QA of short learning units is a challenge – workload, cost/benefit
- Lifelong learning perspective needs to be taken into account, according to HEI offer and national context
- Labour market stakeholders should be closely involved in the design of assessment procedures

2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Particular attention to:

- **Self-assessment**
 - Specific reference to MCs:
 - Role and function of MCs in HEI offerings
 - Profiles and experience of teaching staff
 - Clear description of MCs
- **External assessment/site visit**
 - Interviews to include external perspectives, as applicable

2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

- Experts familiar with the special features of MCs
 - Experience in curriculum design of short programmes
 - Experience in teaching smaller lecture units
 - Competence-oriented learning and teaching experience
 - If applicable, knowledge related to the discipline/sector/labour market domain external reviewers are assessing
 - Student representatives should also have experience in short courses and MCs
- Tools
 - Guidelines for experts' criteria and selection
 - Preparation and training for MC specific purposes

CONCLUSION

- Robust internal QA policy and processes crucial
- Programme level evaluation not encouraged
- Lifelong learning becomes more important to HEIs and should be made a topic in QA ('lifelong learning mainstreaming')
- MCs might develop the role of quality assurance agencies towards an even more supportive role beyond the assessment of compliance
- MCs might also develop the role of quality assurance agencies towards more cross-border and transnational activity

FOR THE FUTURE...

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FOR THE FUTURE...

- More thinking on integration of LLL
- More effort into models for recognition and stackability
- More consideration of dynamics between various types of providers
- (Maybe) more visionary approaches for quality assurance agencies
- ...

...more, more, more...