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Micro-credentials: Enriching European higher education

EC2U UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE VIEW ON MICRO-CREDENTIALS

EC2U Micro-credential Task Group
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European Campus
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Micro-credentials: Enriching European higher education

EC2U University Alliance recognises the importance of micro-credentials in fostering pedagogical innovation and encouraging life-long education.

Micro-credentials represent an important development and a way to provide clear evidence of specific competencies acquired by students. They are especially relevant for transversal competencies. The possibility to scale them up will allow students and graduates in working life to build up specific knowledge path perceived appropriate for future employment. However, from the perspective of the EC2U alliance, micro-credentials are to be conceived as a complementary tool to enrich and support personal and professional development in addition to degrees without substituting them.

The assignment of micro-credentials is a relevant opportunity for the structuring of more flexible and rapid training adapted to the demands of the labour market, both from the perspective of re-skilling and up-skilling. EC2U Alliance sees the innovative potentiality for life-long learning especially in a world where the up and re-skilling is a necessity in order to be competitive in the job market. Micro-credentials can also amplify student-centered learning opportunities throughout Europe, boost international cooperation and virtual mobility in higher and vocational education as well strengthen university-industry cooperation in competence acquisition. In the longer run, micro-credentials as a new tool could have a potential for improving inclusiveness of European education. They can represent an innovative way to support inclusiveness in higher education.

Micro-credentials will play a tremendous role in the recognition and showcasing of extra-curricular activities, non-formal learning or the valorisation of the transversal skills such as student engagement, volunteering, etc. High-quality online micro-credentials can also strengthen the attractiveness of the European Education Area when clearly defined and widely recognised, thereby creating new opportunities for cooperation activities within and beyond the EU.

EC2U

The European Campus of City-Universities (EC2U) is a **multi-cultural and multi-lingual Alliance** consisting of seven long-standing, education- and research-led, locally and globally engaged universities from four diverse regions of the European Union: the University of Coimbra, the University of Iasi, the University of Jena, the University of Pavia, the University of Poitiers (Coordinator), the University of Salamanca and the University of Turku.

EC2U represents a community of 160 000 students and 20 000 staff, in direct reach to more than 1 600 000 citizens.

The Alliance's **ambition is to develop an innovative space - allowing student, staff and citizen mobility to flow freely between the seven universities and associated cities.** This model of openness will contribute to overcome clichéd views of regional and national restrictions, still preserving identities and achieve a united and stronger Europe.

The EC2U Alliance will reach this ambition by **creating a pan-European campus**, connected by the common European identity, contributing to the creation of a smart higher education eco-system through a new model of quality education for an inclusive civic society. This unique model relies on the double **vertical and horizontal integration strategy**, producing synergies from education, research and innovation, from formal/non-formal/informal education, and

Definition and Standards

To date, the EC2U Alliance sees micro-credentials as a way to enrich and complement the educational offer within Higher Education and to expand the role of higher education institutions. Accumulated micro-credentials, however, cannot be the sole basis on which a higher education degree is awarded: it is of essence to remember that deep learning within a given field of study in an absolute necessity. High levels of knowledge and expertise are required, for example, in tackling the pressing problems facing the world today (such as climate change, etc.). Further, these requirements may only be met via proper understanding of basics of certain fields of science and the generation of new knowledge through purposeful and guided collaboration.

It will be important to have a clear transparent commonly shared definition on micro-credentials and a designated IT platform.

EC2U supports the common definition “A micro-credential is a proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards” (European Commission, 2020) :

Quality assurance sharing common standards should also be properly addressed at the EU level to make micro-credentials recognised among the EU Countries. Micro-credentials offered by higher education institutions should be quality assured against transparent and fit-for purpose standards. In this sense, the EC2U Alliance looks with interest to the [recommendations](#) of the MICROBOL projectⁱⁱ. It will also be important for the EU to make the European as well as national job markets well aware of the meaning of micro-credentials.

In the higher education sector, micro-credentials and their workload should be credited and recognised in ECTS credits. However, given the concept of micro-credentials is still in the experimental phase also Open Badges can be used to recognise the learning outcomes. ENIC-NARIC centres can play a significant role in supporting provision of transparent, pertinent and focused information on micro-credentials, supporting their acceptance and automatic recognition. EC2U supports the proposal to establish a register of trusted issuers and mutual recognition at a European level.

Micro-credentials should be awarded also in digital format, to support portability and mobility, using tools and

from the involvement of academic communities, municipalities, higher education regulatory bodies, socio-economic entities, citizens.

EC2U member universities have a long experience in crediting short training and prior learning and competencies.



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a platform in line with the internationally agreed standards (interoperability, protection of personal data, etc.), and in line with the [European digital education action plan](#).ⁱⁱⁱ

Successful uptake

EC2U emphasises the essentiality of the official recognition of micro-credentials both at the European level and in national legislation. In addition to the dissemination of the rules for the recognition and awarding of micro-credentials, it will be important to arrange and promote training actions for course directors and coordinators, directors of academic services and international relations at European universities. It is essential to have national focal points to clarify any doubts about the implementation of micro-credentials from a European perspective and to carry on the national dissemination of this new complementary educational tool. University Alliances can act as lighthouses for cross-regional recognition.

EC2U encourages also the development and adoption of virtual and blended micro-credentials, which will favour the development of an education platform in the EU and beyond.

More information

Vice Rector Piia Björn
Chair of EC2U Micro-credential
Task Force
University of Turku
ec2u@utu.fi

[https://ec2u.eu/
contact@ec2u.eu](https://ec2u.eu/contact@ec2u.eu)

ⁱ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7a939850-6c18-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-218457853>

ⁱⁱ <https://microcredentials.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2021/07/MICROBOL-Recommendations-1.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en