

Global Dialogue on Micro-Credentials

Initiatives and Perspectives on Small Learning Units from around the World

23 June 2022

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**Initiatives and Perspectives on Small Learning
Units from around the World**

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Micro-credentials for lifelong learning

Micro-credentials stand for lifelong learning in compact, flexible and integrative units. The European Union took an important step towards their continental recognition on 16 June 2022 when the member states adopted the recommendation of the European Council and thereby agreed on the further development of micro-credentials on a common basis. The goal is to organise these certificates of individual learning in a transparent and uniform way across sectoral and national boundaries. Within the framework of the *bologna hub*, a project funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the National Agency for Erasmus+ Higher Education within DAAD put a spotlight on this approach with its online seminar “Global Dialogue on Micro-Credentials: Initiatives and Perspectives on Small Learning Units from around the World.” Experts from all over the world discussed the opportunities and challenges of these compact learning units and presented examples of good practice.

We would like to thank the experts for their contributions to the panel discussions and breakout sessions as well as the chairpersons of the events and all the participants. Furthermore, our thanks go to the Federal Ministry of Education and Research for the support that made this event possible.



Opening

- **Mark Brown**, Director, National Institute for Digital Learning, Dublin City University, Ireland
- **William O’Keeffe**, Policy Officer, Vocational Education and Training Unit, DG EMPL, European Commission

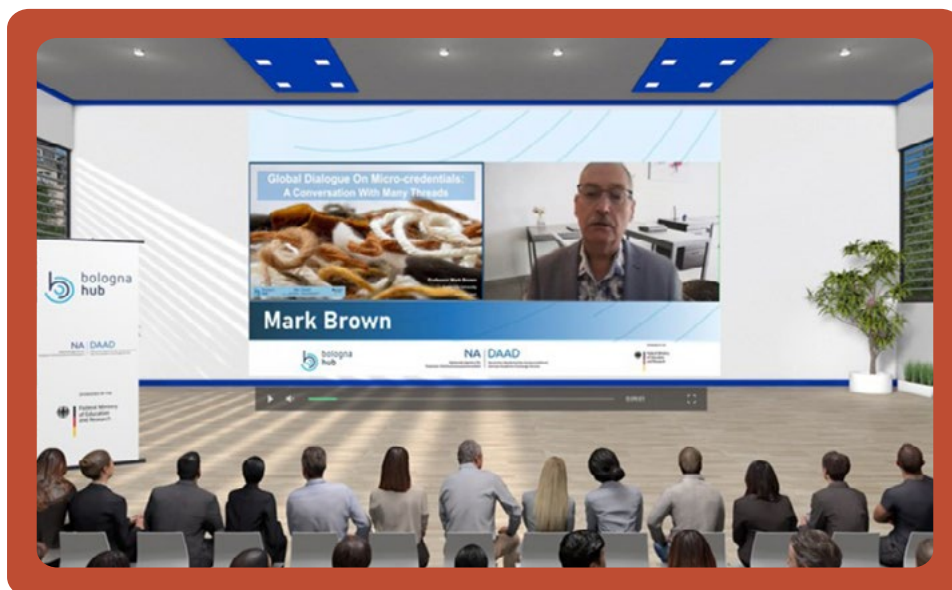
Keynote speaker Mark Brown, Director of the National Institute for Digital Learning at Dublin City University in Ireland, and William O’Keeffe from the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Union, opened the event with an overview of various approaches to micro-credentials and the objectives that are essential for their development. “What kind of ‘market’ do we want to create?” asked Brown, after contrasting the learning society with the knowledge economy. “Do we want to leave the decision to the market, would we prefer competitive cooperation or are we aiming for strategic partnerships that become active in the areas where the need is greatest?” Other questions are also contingent on these – for example, the question of the benefits that micro-credentials bring. This requires a common definition, as provided within the European Council recommendation on micro-credentials.

“There are some serious holes in terms of understanding the benefits of micro-credentials, and we would do a great disservice if we didn’t address those holes. Because, if public funding is going to be committed to the development of micro-credentials, we do need to have a better sense of telling learners, telling our politicians and our policymakers, where the evidence is of the impact and the tangible benefits. [...]”

It’s crucial events like this really engage in the ‘Why’ of micro-credentials. Perhaps rather than the ‘How’ and the ‘What’, I think the ‘Why’ is still a very important part.”

Mark Brown

This is precisely where O’Keeffe came in. “We must release the hidden potential of micro-credentials,” he said. “That is how we can support lifelong learning and employability.” The basis for this is a uniform definition of micro-credentials, a collective effort and an open standard for defining learning units. He explained it would also be important to give equal consideration to input from employers and learners – and to their different expectations.



What is a micro-credential?

'Micro-credential' means 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.

Microcredentials 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.

Definition according to Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials

The first panel discussion: global dialogue on micro-credentials

Participants:

- **Hazman Shah Abdullah**, Quality Assurance Consultant, Former Professor at Universiti Teknologi MARA and ex-Deputy CEO of Malaysian Qualifications Agency
- **Koen Nomden**, Team Leader, Transparency and Recognition of Skills and Qualifications, DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Julie Reddy**, Chief Executive Officer, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)
- **Wesley Teter**, Senior Consultant, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

Facilitator: **David Akrami Flores**, Head of Section EU04, DAAD

Micro-credentials are treated differently in different countries. However, one central task unites countries' efforts here: the transformation of education to make it accessible to all irrespective of gender or origin in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. Education must be organised in a flexible and open way – and achieving that requires a broader definition of credits that is not exclusively oriented towards the academic world. This could equally include not only training courses from various industrial sectors, but also skills acquired in an informal education context, as Julie Reddy from the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) emphasises.

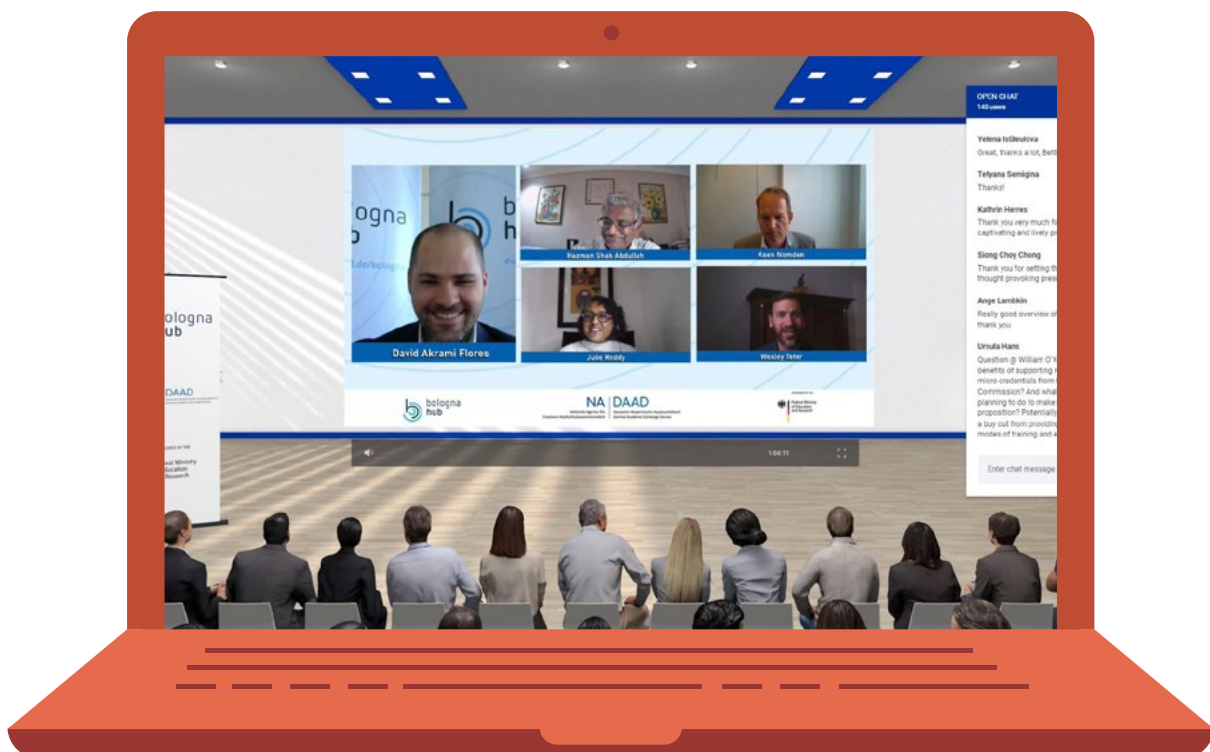
Malaysia has already undertaken such steps. “On the one hand, we have called upon universities to unbundle their micro-credentials and thereby make them accessible to a completely new group of learners and, on the other, increased the transparency of thousands of courses that private providers offer to meet the needs of business,” explains Professor Hazman Shah Abdullah, who was Deputy Chief Executive Officer responsible for Quality Assurance at the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) from 2015 to 2018. “Universities meanwhile offer over 15,000 micro-credentials that people can use to put together their own portfolio. As a result, many businesses now offer their employees precisely these courses instead of organising them themselves.”

One of the major challenges for micro-credentials at the European level is the issue of making courses measurable and comparable. If possible, according to the European Council recommendation, this should be done by the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) – without, however, laying down a scale in advance on the policy side. “Although ECTS is intensively used in the higher education sector, until now it has hardly been employed in adult education or on the labour market,” explains Koen Nomden from the European Union Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. “That’s why the Council Recommendation does not include an indicative ECTS volume to differentiate micro-credentials from other qualifications. The situation in the different EU countries is far too varied for that.”

“When we talk about micro-credentials, stackability is a natural extension, recognizing that they are puzzles that can make a picture.”

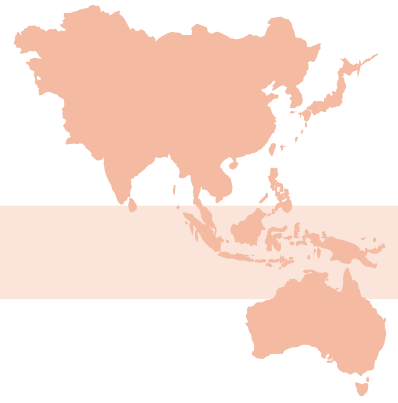
Hazman Shah Abdullah

At the same time, however, it should be possible to combine micro-credentials to open up a complete path towards regular qualifications. This kind of accumulation raises new questions about the combinability and coherence of programmes with regard to content. Wesley Teter from the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, points to the UNESCO Global Convention on Higher Education and complementary Tokyo Convention at regional level, in which there has at least been agreement on the need for fair and transparent recognition of “partial studies”; as a result, this approach could enable the desired “stackability”. Koen Nomden also emphasises, however, that the Council recommendation does not have any normative force with regard to micro-credentials, and it is the member states that decide how and to what extent an appropriate accumulation can be implemented.



Breakout sessions

Asia and the Pacific Region



Input:

Australia's Micro-Credential Marketplace:

- **David Christie**, Managing Director, Universities Admissions Centre, Australia
- **Dudley Collinson**, Chief Information Officer, Universities Admissions Centre, Australia

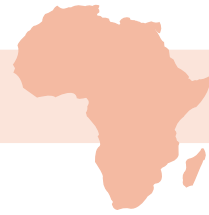
KMUTT for Lifelong Education (KMUTT4Life®):

- **Bundit Thipakorn**, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Thailand

Facilitator: **Sebastian Gries**, Programme Manager, European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE), Jakarta, Indonesia

Micro-credentials currently play an essential role in the education and higher education sectors of many Asian countries and in the Pacific region. Emerging industries constantly demand specialisations that can best be acquired alongside the normal working day. To that extent, most strategies call for a practice-oriented approach. In Australia, for example, the Universities Admissions Centre (UAC) is currently in the process of setting up an online marketplace for micro-credentials. Learners, providers and enterprises are to gain access to a nationally standardised framework for equipping the country's workforce with skills for the future. The approach enables micro-credentials to develop their full potential: as easily accessible and comparatively low-cost offerings with a low time requirement combined with greater flexibility, they are ideal for learners from the world of work. At the same time, providers and employers can together tailor courses to the respective market requirements while government support strengthens confidence in the quality and benefit of these offerings. The precondition for this, and also the greatest challenge, however, is the establishment of uniform standards.

Africa



Input:

Microcredentials and Digital Badges: Opening Higher Education in South Africa through Innovative Recognition

- **Barbara Jones**, Curriculum Development Specialist, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

From academia to workplace: A micro-credentialing methodology for improved recognition of HE employability skills.

- **Lourdes Guàrdia**, Professor and Deputy Dean of teaching at Psychology and Education, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain
- **Marcelo Maina**, Professor and ICT and education Master program director at Psychology and Education, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain

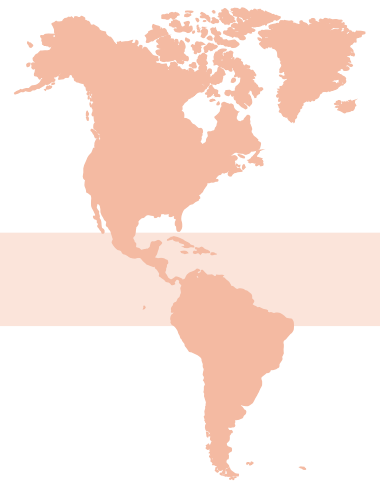
Creating successful careers through recognition and validation of skills with digital micro-credentials in Africa

- **Satu Järvinen**, Founder and CEO of SkillSafari.io, Finland

Facilitator: **Tim Maschuw**, Section EU04, DAAD

Micro-credentials could release their potential in African countries by providing improved access to education and thus countering social inequality. The need is enormous: according to Satu Järvinen, founder and CEO of the Finnish SkillSafari enterprise, eleven million young people a year will enter the labour market in the coming decade. However, the existing education system in Africa is not up to this task, as Barbara Jones from the University of the Western Cape in South Africa explains. Only a small section of the young population has any access to higher education at all, and only a fraction of students actually gain a degree. Moreover, these are only of limited value on the labour market; many graduates either find no work at all or only jobs for which they are overqualified. Furthermore, there is the problem that students have often had to accumulate horrendous debts to pay for their higher education. According to Jones, micro-credentials could be a solution here too – the basis for this, however, would be a national higher education policy that explicitly prioritises social justice. At the same time, learning units would have to be organised in such a way that they are not only valued on the labour market, but can also be accumulated and combined into complete diplomas or other professional qualifications.

In the opinion of Marcelo Maina and Lourdes Guàrdia from Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, the evaluation of appropriate learning achievements should enable students – among other things, with micro-credentials as certificates – to communicate their skills in both academic and professional environments, and emphasise their importance for the labour market. Importantly, this should equally guide universities to explicitly target employability within and across curriculums, both revising what they already offer and making the necessary adjustments to identify missing skills, and integrating in the discussion all relevant stakeholders.



The American Continent

Input:

Micro-Credentials at the State University of New York (SUNY)

- **Cynthia Proctor**, Director of Communications & Academic Policy Development, Provost's Office, SUNY System Administration, USA
- **Deb G. Pernet**, Program Coordinator for Microcredentials and Workforce Development, Institute for Rural Vitality, SUNY Cobleskill, USA

Building a Connected Micro-credential Ecosystem

- **Rich Louttet**, Program Manager, eCampus Ontario, Canada

UCollege Javeriano

- **Alejandra María González Correal**, Director, UCollege Javeriano, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia

Facilitator: **Ann Katherine Isaacs**, Co-chair, Bologna Process CG Global Policy Dialogue & Member of the Steering Committee, MICROBOL project

While Europe is only now beginning to cautiously examine micro-credentials, the New World is already one step ahead. The first universities are already realising concrete models not only in the United States and Canada, but also in several South American countries. In Colombia, for example, school students are gaining insights into the academic world with a trial year; in other countries employees with successful certificates qualify for advanced jobs in their companies. The demand is clearly there: there are currently some eleven million vacancies in the USA alone that employers either cannot fill at all or only with difficulty. On the other hand, there are six million unemployed who do not have the required skills. Furthermore, according to the statistics, 117 million US citizens have no college degree and therefore no chance of obtaining highly paid jobs. This is a huge education market, which can benefit from micro-credentials. A positive example here has been set by the State University of New York (SUNY), which educates 1.3 million people per year at its 64 campuses. Some of its study modules are developed jointly with industry, but thanks to academic supervision they satisfy the same standards as regular degree programmes. Most of the learning units can be accumulated and thus open the path towards diplomas or degrees. Furthermore, micro-credentials can take the place of theoretical components of training programmes in specific areas.

ENABLE ENCOURAGE
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hub

NA DAAD



GLOBAL DIALOGUE ON

WHAT IS CREDITED... WHAT ISN'T?

GET THE BALL ROLLING!

STAND ALONE HIGH QUALITY?

WE HAVE A MISSION

UNIVERSITY HAVE TO CONNECT TO MARKET

BUILDING BLOCKS

KEY AREAS

CONNECTING LEARNING TO EARNING + RETURNING

THE AMERICAS
DEB G. FERNAT
CYNTHIA PROCTOR
ALEJANDRO M.G. CORREAL
ANNE KATHERINE ISAACS
RICH LOUETT



BUNDT THIPAKORN

SEBASTIAN GRIES

DAVID CHRISTIE

COURTNEY BROWN

DISCUSSION

WE HAVE A MISSION

UNIVERSITY HAVE TO CONNECT TO MARKET

THE NEW PIN ON THE BLOCK

DON'T PUT THE BURDEN ON LEARNERS

PERFR VAN DER HILDEN

MICHAEL HÖRIG

LEESA WHEELAHAN

SAME QUALITY FOR SHORT LEARNING AS FOR MASTER, DOCTOR, BACHELOR...

Measure in a scalable way

Focus

WILLIAM O'KEEFE

10 STANDARD ELEMENTS

| | |
|---|----------------|
| ✓ | DATA |
| ✓ | QUALITY |
| ✓ | INTEGRATION |
| ✓ | TRANSFORMATION |
| ✓ | INNOVATION |
| ✓ | ADAPTABILITY |
| ✓ | RESILIENCE |
| ✓ | AGILITY |
| ✓ | EFFICIENCY |
| ✓ | EFFECTIVENESS |
| ✓ | ACCOUNTABILITY |
| ✓ | TRANSPARENCY |

CENTRAL FRAMEWORK

PERSPECTIVES & INITIATIVES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

ASIA / PACIFIC

LOURDES GUARDIA

DUNLEY COLLINSON

AFRICA

TIM MASCHOW

MARCELO MAINA

BARBARA JONES

SATO JÄRVINEN

EVERY BODY IS BLAMING EACH OTHER + THE WORK ISN'T DONE

CURIOSITY IS THE MAIN DRIVER

FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHS

LIFELONG

Too FAST To Follow?

UPSKILING

ORGANIZE OFFER & DEMAND

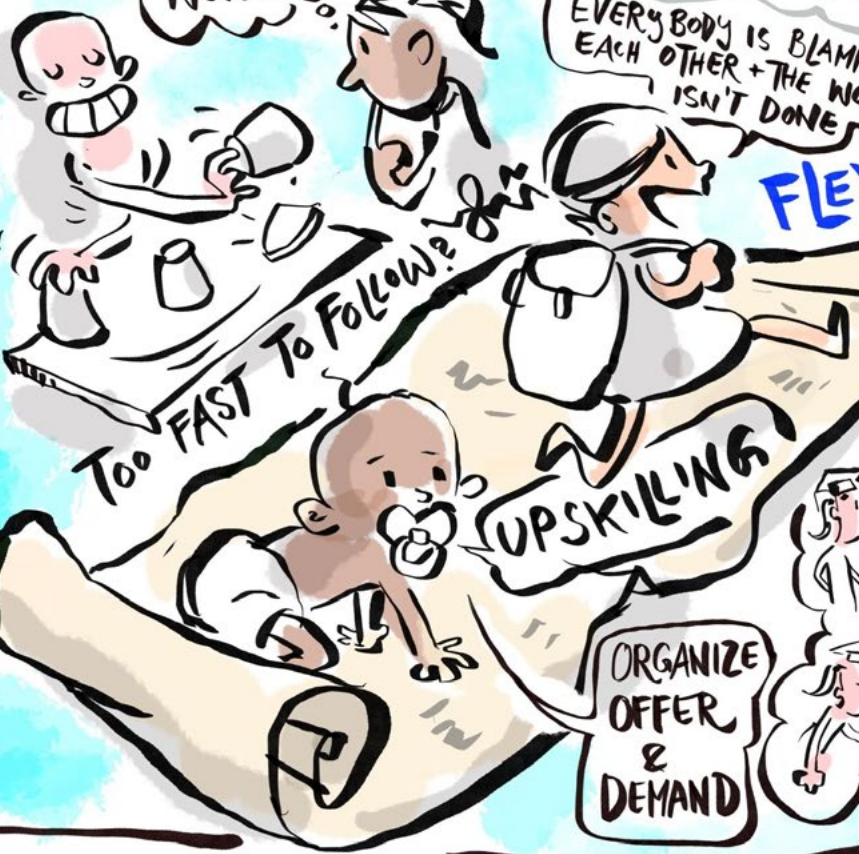
WHAT SKILLS DO YOU HAVE?

WHAT SKILLS DO YOU NEED?

PORTABLE



SUBST...
OR...
SUPP...



MICRO-CREDENTIALS

23. JUNE 2022



HAPPINESS

RESKILLING



EDUCATION FAST MOVING FORWARD

EMPLOYABILITY

SHORT LEARNING

ABILITY TO SUCCEED

ABILITY TO PROVE

CHANGE YOUR CAREER

EAT IT LEARNING

WAYS

NG



ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO GO STRANGE WAYS...
OVERREGULATION



EDUCATION POLICY IS A NATIONAL TOPIC

STACKABILITY

DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNERS

HOW SMALL IS SMALL?

HAZMAN SHAH ABDULLAH

KOEN NORDEN

WESLEY TETER

LIFELONG LEARNER IN THE CENTER

STACKABLE EXCHANGEABLE CROSS-NATIONAL

The second panel discussion: the question of function and value

Participants:

- **Courtney Brown**, Vice President of Impact and Planning, Lumina Foundation, Indianapolis, USA
- **José Escamilla**, Associate Director of the Institute for the Future of Education, Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico
- **Peter van der Hijden**, Higher Education Strategy Advisor, Belgium
- **Leesa Wheelahan**, Professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada

Facilitator: **Michael Hörig**, Director, DAAD Brussels Office

In view of the many and entirely different challenges facing the world's education systems, the current debate about micro-credentials is primarily an attempt at definition. If all universities were to consistently open up their curricula and offer individual components as compact and micro courses while simultaneously attempting to meet the needs of the labour market, this would inevitably lead to conflicts between the academic and economic spheres. It is not without reason that Leesa Wheelahan from the University of Toronto warns that the introduction of micro-credentials could redistribute the costs of employee training from the market to society. "I expect businesses to invest in their employees," she says. "Instead businesses now expect applicants to come to them already fully trained with the specific skills needed for their enterprise, and I have a problem with that." That is why Wheelahan rejects transferring this responsibility to universities and other further education institutions.

To that extent, the debate does not only revolve around the question of what micro-credentials are, but also of what objectives a university education pursues. The "why" is essential, not the "how". In this context, José Escamilla, Associate Director of the Institute for the Future of Education at the Mexican elite university Tecnológico de Monterrey, even calls for an ideological transformation that underscores Wheelahan's fears: in his view, a higher education is not least the basis for a good job and micro-credentials the tool for making job changes as flexible and economical as possible. He emphasises that this must not be regarded as a secondary responsibility. "Universities sometimes find it difficult to recognise the needs of industry and society and are not fast enough at taking them into account. Micro-credentials could help remedy that because they are automatically linked to the needs of the market."

"We need more transparency for everyone to understand what these short-term credentials are going to cost and what the outcomes can be."

Courtney Brown

Inside the EU the Microbol project has been attempting to build a bridge between the existing higher education landscape, micro-credentials and the commitments that have arisen out of the Bologna process. When it comes to establishing micro-credentials, the independent expert Peter van der Hijden refers to the existing framework conditions with which the quality of study programmes is monitored and thanks to which a credit point system has been established with Europe-wide recognition. This could also be readily adapted for smaller learning units and integrated into universities' processes. "European universities should have a direct responsibility to open up their hidden treasures and find all the micro-credentials concealed in their curricula," he insists. "Of course, all actors must do their homework – but in my opinion the potential of this form of education is enormous."

