Global Dialogue On Micro-credentials: A Conversation With Many Threads

Professor Mark Brown
Dublin City University
23rd June 2022
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The Global Micro-credential Landscape: Charting a New Credential Ecology for Lifelong Learning

Mark Brown, Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichil, Elaine Beirne and Conchúr Mac Lochlainn

National Institute for Digital Learning, Dublin City University

Abstract: This article offers a global overview of the burgeoning field of micro-credentials and their relationship to lifelong learning, employability and new models of digital education. Although there is no globally accepted definition of micro-credentials, the term indicates smaller units of study, which are usually shorter than traditional forms of accredited learning and courses leading to conventional qualifications such as degrees. The paper aims to provide educators with a helicopter view of the rapidly evolving global micro-credential landscape, with particular relevance to higher education leaders, industry stakeholders and government policy-makers. It addresses five questions: (i) What are micro-credentials? (ii) Why micro-credentials? (iii) Who are the key stakeholders? (iv) What is happening globally? and (v) What are some of the key takeaways? Drawing on a European-wide perspective and recent developments in The Republic of Ireland, the paper concludes that micro-credentials are likely to become a more established and mature feature of the 21st-century credential ecology over the next five years. While the global micro-credential landscape is currently disconnected across national boundaries, more clarity and coherence will emerge as governments around the world increasingly align new credentialing developments with existing national qualification frameworks. The micro-credentialing movement also provides opportunities for governments and higher education institutions in partnership with industry to harness new digital learning models beyond the pandemic.

# State of the Art Literature Review on Micro-credentials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Thematic Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the problem that micro-credentials are seeking to address?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are the underlying drivers and attractors of the micro-credential movement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How are micro-credentials being positioned within the credential ecology?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How are different stakeholders responding to the micro-credentials movement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What are the main benefits arising from the development of micro-credentials?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What are the benefits of adopting a European-wide approach to micro-credentials?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What are the major barriers for the successful implementation of micro-credentials?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What are the major enablers for the successful implementation of micro-credentials?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What evidence is there that further development of micro-credentials will contribute to a more future-fit education system?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What evidence is there that further investment in micro-credentials will contribute to tangible individual and societal benefits?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Conversation With Many Threads
### Drivers and Attractors for Micro-credentials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>All Publications</th>
<th>Highly Relevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase employability</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support CPD and workplace training</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase flexibility for learning</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close skills gaps in response to changing nature of work</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote lifelong learning</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop 21st Century transversal skills</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a new 21st Century credential ecology</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase access and pathways to formal education</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support new models of pedagogy</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to COVID crisis</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflects Neo-liberal market forces</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test innovations and trigger changes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce costs of education and training</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase equity for under-represented groups</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Brown et al., 2021)

- **Employability**: 65%
- **Lifelong Learning**: 48%
Equity SDGs

Drivers and Attractors for Micro-credentials

(Brown et al., 2021)
TWO MAJOR TRADITIONS

Reproducing
- Sifting agent
- Human capital
- Social cohesion
- Cultural heritage

Knowledge Economy

Reschooling
- Competencies
- Entrepreneurship
- Technology as progress
- Increased market competition

Deschooling
- Democratic
- Opening access
- Personalized learning
- New learning pathways

Learning Society

Reconceptualizing
- Just society
- Lifelong learning
- Pillars of learning
- Education for citizenry

Mark Brown, 2016
If the micro-credential is the solution, then what is the problem?

1. To help upskill the workforce
2. To respond to the changing nature of work
3. To increase the rate of participation in further and higher education
4. To increase the rate of lifelong learning throughout society
5. To develop a more 21st Century future-fit credential ecology
6. All of the above
7. Other
Outline...

1. Unraveling definitions
2. Stitching together micro-credentials
3. Picking out some of the bare threads
ECIU University
Micro-Credentials: A vision for European learners, values, and priorities

Authors: Conchúr Mac Lochlainn
Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl
Olga Wessels
Padmasheela Kiiskilä
Henri Pirkkalainen
Mikka Palvalin

There is a clear need for dedicated financial support to accelerate the rollout of co-constructed micro-credentials and to specifically support and upscale projects at the European level to support co-constructing. This includes wider infrastructure needed to facilitate micro-credential implementation at scale.

Following the outputs of the MICROBOL project, a dedicated and focused effort is required to promote harmonised national legislation and guidelines in education and training, to remove systemic-level barriers for micro-credential implementation.

European University Alliances are key stakeholders in the design and implementation of the European approach to micro-credentials as cross-cutting networks of institutions committed to innovation. European Universities and Higher Education Institutions must be positioned as key drivers of change.

There is a need for clearer, more tangible links between micro-credentials and the Council Recommendation on individual learning accounts (and vice versa). Explicit links between these policy initiatives need to be articulated to ensure that they reach their fullest potential.

A scaling-up at national and European level of the Europass Digital Credentials to issue and recognize micro-credentials, to augment and support rollout across Europe, and to attract more education and training providers into engaging with the system by reducing barriers, are all required.

The conceptualization and assessed quality criteria for a European Degree, creates bridges and leverages the micro-credential movement to demonstrate the complementarity between forms of learning opportunities as supported by the European Qualification Framework and other EQF tools.

A clear focus on bespoke-micro-credential characteristics is needed at European level, supporting relevance, collaboration with societal, professional and industry stakeholders while also implementing sustainable and holistic learning design for micro-credentials, building upon the outputs of the MICROBOL findings (MICROBOL, 2022).

There is an urgent need for both national and European-driven awareness-raising campaigns for micro-credentials aimed at a wide breadth of stakeholders, from learners across the continuum, to employers and employees.

Baseline studies and benchmarks of micro-credential implementation, adoption and impact at the European and national levels need to be designed and undertaken.

Coherent and cohesive policy coordination is required across the Commission and at national level to ensure that both the employability and lifelong learning drivers for micro-credentials can be distilled into clear actions and activities.

Micro-credential Observatory

The NIDL’s Micro-credentials Observatory provides a regularly updated collection of major reports, policy initiatives and research related publications on the growth, development and impact of micro-credentials in higher education and lifelong learning more generally.

- NIDL Activities
- NIDL Research
- Major Policy Initiatives
- National & International Reports
- Useful Journal Articles
- Events, Conferences and Webinars

87% of sample already in MC Observatory
Learning has no borders

MICROCREDENTIALS SANS FRONTIÈRES

JOIN OUR NETWORK

http://www.microcredentialssf.org
1. Unravelling definitions
Credit Bearing

Macro-credentials
Formal Accredited Degrees

Micro-credentials
Formal & Semi Formal Accredited & Stackable

Bundled
Unbundled

Credential Ecology

Non-Credit Bearing

Non-status Awards
Semi-Formal Courses Non-Accredited

Nano-credentials
Informal & Non-Formal Digital Badges & Certificates

(Brown et al., 2020)
Spectrum of recognition

- Academic Credentials: data on paper
- Academic Digital Credentials: data, no image
- Micro-credentials: image + data
- Open Badges
- Digital Badges: no data

(Presant, 2022)
Older

Micro-credentials

Newer
500,000 Canadians annually seek to complete St. John’s certificates

Since 1833
FINAL REPORT

A EUROPEAN APPROACH TO MICRO-CREDENTIALS

OUTPUT OF THE MICRO-CREDENTIALS HIGHER EDUCATION CONSULTATION GROUP

December 2020
“A micro-credential is a **proof** of learning outcomes that a learner has acquired after a **short** learning experience. These learning outcomes have been **assessed** against transparent **standards**”
Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments

Common Framework for Micro-credentials in the EHEA

[https://microcredentials.eu/microbol-framework-published/](https://microcredentials.eu/microbol-framework-published/)

**Definition**

A micro-credential is a certified small volume of learning

**Purpose**

Micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills, and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs

**Use**

- Credentials are owned by the learner, are portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications
- Micro-credentials can be earned before, during and after higher education degree programmes and as a new way to certify competences acquired earlier in life
More than 1 hour

Definition

The framework defines microcredentials as a certification of assessed learning or competency, with a minimum volume of learning of one hour and less than an AQF award qualification, that is additional, alternate, complementary to or a component part of an AQF award qualification.

National Microcredentials Framework

November 2021
Micro-Credential Framework
for B.C.’s Public Post-Secondary Education System

Definition
Micro-credentials recognize stand-alone, short duration learning experiences that are competency-based, align with industry, employer, community and/or Indigenous community needs and can be assessed and recognized for employment or learning purposes.

Duration
Individual micro-credentials should be sufficient in length for learners to acquire the competency being sought and be shorter in duration than other formal post-secondary credentials, specifically a short certificate (under 288 hours).

Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training

SEPTEMBER 2021

Under 288 hours
A conversation starter: Towards a common definition of micro-credentials

The proposed definition of micro-credentials

A micro-credential:
1. is a record of focused learning achievement verifying what the learner knows, understands or can do;
2. includes assessment based on clearly defined standards and is awarded by a trusted provider;
3. has stand-alone value and may also contribute to or complement other micro-credentials or macro-credentials, including through recognition of prior learning; and
4. meets the standards required by relevant quality assurance.
Micro-credential innovations in higher education: Who, What and Why?

This Education Policy Perspective is Part A of a two-part series on micro-credentials (Part B can be found at OECD, 2021b). It contributes new empirical evidence on the current offer of micro-credentials across OECD jurisdictions, and provides an account of what is known about the costs and benefits of short learning programmes offered by higher education institutions. The evidence presented can support the work of policy makers who wish to build upon the momentum of recent innovations spurred on by the pandemic, and more deeply understand the models of provision for micro-credentials currently in place across OECD jurisdictions.

Key messages from this Education Policy Perspective:

- There is an increasing learner interest in micro-credentials, and growing activity related to micro-credential development among governments and providers.
- In higher education institutions, the term “micro-credential” is not in widespread use. Nevertheless, higher education institutions are offering a diverse range of short learning programmes that would meet the criteria of micro-credentials programmes as commonly defined.
- Higher education institutions tend to develop short learning programmes for advanced, postgraduate and professional education, and short learning programmes provide them with a source of revenue that is less regulated by governments.
- Online provision of micro-credentials is widespread. Digital learning platforms are becoming an increasingly important channel for the delivery of micro-credentials programmes and the COVID-19 pandemic has further strengthened their position. The past year has also seen a strengthening of “own-brand” online learning ecosystems and environments provided by private companies whose primary business is not education and/or training.
- Learners who avail of micro-credential programmes provided by higher education institutions tend to be more educated, more skilled and have greater levels of financial and social support from employers.
- Evidence on the outcomes of micro-credentials is limited, although some studies indicate that shorter programmes do provide at least temporary labour-market boost, and stacking micro-credentials may improve prospects in the labour market.

Table 1. Selected definitions of micro-credentials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European Commission (draft definition)</td>
<td>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. The proof is contained in a certified document that lists the name of the holder, the achieved learning outcomes, the assessment method, the awarding body and, where applicable, the qualifications framework level and the credits gained. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared, are portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards (European Commission, 2020a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BloomBoard</td>
<td>Micro-credentials are a form of micro-certification earned by proving competence in one specific skill at a time, via a portfolio of evidence, created through classroom practice (BloomBoard, 2021d).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European University Association</td>
<td>A micro-credential is a small volume of learning certified by a credential (Cimino and Loukkola, 2020b).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Council for Open and Distance Education</td>
<td>A credential issued for a relatively small learning project that consists of several modules in a given subject (ICDE, 2019b).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MicroHE</td>
<td>A micro-credential is a sub-unit of a credential or a collection of badges that could accumulate into a larger credential or be part of a portfolio. Examples are Verified Certificates, Digital Badges, MicroMasters, and Nanodegrees (MicroHE, 2019a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand Qualifications Authority</td>
<td>A micro-credential certifies achievement of a coherent set of skills and knowledge, and is specified by a statement of purpose, learning outcomes, and strong evidence of need by industry, employers, learners and the community. They are smaller than qualifications and focus on skill development opportunities not currently catered for in the regulated tertiary education system (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2021a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quaestorrelli Symonds</td>
<td>A micro-credential is a sector-endorse short course that provides the recipient with specialist skills (Quaestorrelli, 2020a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State University of New York</td>
<td>Micro-credentials vary, validate, and attest that specific skills and/or competencies have been achieved. They differ from traditional degrees and certificates in that they are generally offered in shorter or more flexible timespans and tend to be more narrowly focused (State University of New York, 2021a).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## The Positioning of Micro-Credentials

(Brown et al., 2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>All Publications</th>
<th>Highly Relevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative to mainstream education (i.e., operates separately)</td>
<td>20 (13.5%)</td>
<td>3 (6.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A supplement rather than substitute to existing degrees (i.e., co-exists)</td>
<td>46 (31.1%)</td>
<td>8 (17.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded in mainstream education</td>
<td>35 (23.6%)</td>
<td>13 (28.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A new entry pathway to mainstream education</td>
<td>1 (0.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To bridge informal, non formal and formal learning</td>
<td>10 (6.8%)</td>
<td>1 (2.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reimagined partnership model</strong></td>
<td>1 (0.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrupt traditional 19th Century recognition model</td>
<td>3 (2.0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognises multiple approaches</td>
<td>28 (18.9%)</td>
<td>16 (35.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What word best encapsulates your view?
2. Stitching together micro-credentials
# Summary Matrix of Business Models
These business models and the multiple dimensions were validated and improved in respondent interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Solo Unit</th>
<th>Solo Institution</th>
<th>Peer Consortium</th>
<th>NGO Led</th>
<th>Industry Led</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Madison ConEd DeakinCo (RPP Credentials) Swinburne Engineering Otago Edubits</td>
<td>Deakin (Hallmarks) RMIT, Curtin</td>
<td>OERu/Educuits University Learning Store Terribores apprenants (FR)</td>
<td>Bestri/CINECA, SURFNet Education Design Lab, Colorado Community College System</td>
<td>IBM Skills Academy, Salesforce Trailhead, Microsoft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>MED</td>
<td>MED</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>LO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>MED</td>
<td>MED</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>LO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed (Time to Market)</td>
<td>HI</td>
<td>MED</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>HI</td>
<td>HI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact/Benefits Staff, students, LLLs, alumni</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>MED</td>
<td>MED-HI</td>
<td>MED-HI</td>
<td>MED-HI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>MED</td>
<td>LO-MED Membership fee</td>
<td>LO-MED Membership fee</td>
<td>LO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy (Flexibility)</td>
<td>HI</td>
<td>HI</td>
<td>MED</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>LO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Weaknesses   | Branding questions. Inter-departmental fragmentation. Lack of resources, scalability. Vulnerability to policy shifts, loss of senior champion. | Consolidating diverse viewpoints & departments can be slow. Preconceived policies can lead to unsustainable practices. | Peer governance can be s-l-o-w. Can be hard to sustain over time. | Lack of autonomy, control over the agenda, branding. Leadership may destabilize due to political / funding shifts. | Lack of autonomy, Subsidiary identity/branding. Potential for conflicting goals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Model</th>
<th>All Publications</th>
<th>Highly Relevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo Institution</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry-led</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery through MOOC Platform</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-construction with Industry</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Body</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Consortium (excluding MOOCs)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create Open Market</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Brown et al., 2021) Sole Institution
Discounts for students from developing countries

Bursaries for students from developing countries

Micro-credential online course

Applied Benefit: Cost Analysis

Build your expertise in the world’s most widely used economic technique. Develop the practical skills you need to analyse real projects and policies.

For economists, managers, consultants, students, researchers and policymakers.

Teacher

Professor David Pannell
guides you in all aspects of the course.

He has delivered dozens of BCA training courses.

Developed widely used BCA software.

Awards for teaching (UWA), communication (national) and research (international).

Advises many national and international agencies.

Student responses

“A fantastic course. It is by far the best course I have been involved in.”

“Essential for new BCA users.”

“Taught in an engaging way. Many real-world examples to demonstrate the theory and practical application.”

“I learned so much and there is still lots to learn from the material you shared I can return to if when needed.”

Benefits

BCA skills are in demand.

Improve decision making for management & policy.

Improve your spreadsheet & report-writing skills.

Outstanding teaching.

Fully online - flexible.

Live workshop each week with Professor Pannell.

Permanent access to all videos after the course.

Course can be stand-alone or part of a masters degree.

Requirements

No existing knowledge of economics is required.

No textbook required - all course materials provided.

Around one day of work per week for 12 weeks.

For further details or to enrol see
http://appliedeco.com

Course commences 28 February 2022.

Discounts

Course
A$990 inc. GST (approx. US$736)
25% discount

Course (discounted)
A$735 inc. GST (approx. US$560)
Additional 25% discount

Course (with bursary)
A$90 inc. GST (approx. US$66)

Individual support
A$366 per hour inc. GST (approx. US$270)

5+ students

Pricing

Bursaries

Ten bursaries are available (half for women).

Conditions:

(a) degree in economics or similar,
(b) sufficient English language skills, and
(c) home country GDP per capita below U$10,000.

To apply for this discount, email

To arrange for the discount for bulk enrolments, email

Support

Obtain individual support from Professor Pannell for a BCA you prepare after completing the course.

Support includes advice on project definition, data elicitation, spreadsheet checking and feedback on draft report.

Three hours of support is suggested.

To book support, email

For further details or to enrol see
http://appliedeco.com

Course commences 28 February 2022.

C500256958 | PRV3161, Australian University | CRICOS 10544I
Courses  Institutions  Scholarships

- On Campus Courses - In Australia
- On Campus Courses - In Australia (Online Start)
- Online courses
- On Campus Courses - in my home country

Enter course search keywords or Select field of study

- Select level of study
  - Career Based/Vocational
  - Certificates & Diplomas
  - Microcredentials
  - Undergraduate
  - Associate Degrees or Equivalent
  - Bachelor’s Degrees
  - Pathways to Undergraduate
  - Pathways Programs
  - Postgraduate
  - Pre-Masters Programs
  - Graduate Certificates & Diploma
  - Master’s Degrees
  - MBA
  - Doctorate Degrees

Search results

All courses and institutions are indicative, discounts and scholarships may be available.
MicroCreds is an ambitious 5-year, €12.3 million project (2020-2025) led by the IUA in partnership with seven IUA universities: Dublin City University, Trinity College Dublin, Maynooth University, NUI Galway, University College Cork, University College Dublin and University of Limerick. The project funding was awarded following a competitive process under the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science's (DFHERIS) Human Capital Initiative Pillar 3 Innovation and Agility, with funding drawn from the National Training Fund.

https://www.iua.ie/ourwork/learning-teaching/microcreds/
Fast, affordable, flexible training opportunities.

Find a micro-credential and unlock your potential with in-demand skills employers need. Your future starts with a search.

or browse all 1742 micro-credentials from institutions across Ontario.
Figure 11. Number of micro-credentials offered on selected learning platforms, and one-year percentage change

OECD, 2021
What type of micro-credential “market” do we want to create?

• Left to market forces
• Competitive collaborative model
• Strategically targeted partnerships
When masses meet markets: credentialism and commodification in twenty-first century Higher Education

Michael Tomlinson a and Richard Watermeyer b

 aSouthampton Education School, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK; bSchool of Education, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK

ABSTRACT
The institutional form and conception of Higher Education have changed through the growth of mass higher education, which in many national systems now operates on market logics. Drawing on theories of credentialism, this article provides a critical analysis of the inter-relationship between massification and marketization and examines a range of consequences this has for institutional relations and dynamics. A central feature of credential inflation in mass systems has been the growing competition for scarce status goods and the reproduction of structural inequalities in accessing sought-after occupational outcomes. The policy context of marketization has concurrently reinforced the pressures on institutions to fulfil the promise held by governments, employers and graduates of enhancing human capital and Higher Education institutions’ economic value. Accompanying New Public Management policy levers have further established institutional conditions based on competitive accountability and performative evaluation. We show how these pressures are manifested in new forms of instrumental rationality that valorize the commodification of academic credentials, and relatedly, studentship and academic scholarship. We finally consider the possible ways forward in appraising the goals of HE beyond credential inflation.

KEYWORDS
Credentialism; massification; marketization; higher education; values; commodification

“Institutions have become reconfigured as producers of economic value and human capital leading to a global commodification of credentials in an increasingly globally competitive marketplace” (p. 2).

3. Picking at some of the bare threads
Costs…
Demand-side…

Figure 4.6. Employer characteristics related to workers’ likelihood of being disengaged from available adult learning

Logit regression odds ratios

OECD, 2021
What is your level of awareness or experience with "digital badges" (information-rich records of verifiable achievements, often containing evidence of competency, that are easily shared on the web or social media)?

- I have never heard of them: 13%
- I have heard of them, but don't know much about them: 35%
- I have encountered them in screening or hiring candidates: 33%
- I have hired someone who earned them: 15%
- Don't know/not sure: 3%

Figure 10.

https://www.imsglobal.org/sites/default/files/wellspring/Wellspring_IL_Employer_Research.pdf
“Because alternative credentials are not identified in the educational attainment component of national labour force surveys or in international surveys of adult skills… evidence on their effects on earnings of large-scale populations is unavailable”

(Kato, Galán-Muros & Weko, 2020, p.28).
### Reported Benefits of Taking the Courses

**Table 2. Reported Benefits of Completing a MicroMasters (MM) or a Specialization (Sp)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit Reported</th>
<th>% of all completers</th>
<th>% of Sp completers</th>
<th>% of MM completers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learned something new</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved performance in current job</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved my English</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networked with other professionals in this field</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me start my own business</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved application to a first job</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved application to a new job at different employer</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved application to a formal degree program</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped in being moved to different job at same employer</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved my application to a formal degree other than related MA at same university offering MM or Sp</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me get a pay raise</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me get a bonus</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemented a formal degree program</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to my employer in getting first job</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me get a job promotion</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved application to formal degree other than related MA at other university</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(From Hollands & Kazi, 2019)

*Note.* The first column in this table represents responses out of the full sample of 262 respondents. The next 2 columns report percentages out of 180 Sp respondents and 82 MM respondents respectively. Numbers in bold indicate a statistically significant difference between Sp and MM.
Serious holes!
Final remarks...
Final remarks…

“Pull a thread here and you’ll find it’s attached to the rest of the world”

Nadeem Aslam
Micro-credentials Untethered: A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing?

Micro-credentials are the latest shiny new thing attracting educators’ increasing attention. Indeed, 2021 may become known as the year of micro-credentials. On the surface, the micro-credentialling movement offers great promise in helping to redesign and even reimagine more future-fit and complementary credential frameworks to enhance employability, continuous professional development, and the goal of a thriving learning society. But is there a danger that the micro-credential may be a wolf in sheep’s clothing?
Poll result...
Thank you

Go raibh maith agaibh!