# TOWARDS A EUROPEAN MICRO-CREDENTIALS INITIATIVE

Innovative universities embrace their role as lifelong educators by offering inclusive and flexible education and by engaging with wider society. The micro-credentialing movement supports the increased flexibiliy of education, easing accessibility for life-long learners and enhancing possibilities to work with society. Micro-credentials are of crucial importance to exciting future-focused initiatives, like the European Universities Initiative and the ECIU University. However, a common understanding of micro-credentials is lacking and this is hampering the movement reaching its full potential.

The European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU) strongly supports efforts to better define micro-credentials and more explicitly align them with existing national and European qualification frameworks. Micro-credentials have an innovative nature and great potential; this note puts forward key principles to support the development of a European Micro-Credentials Initiative.

The traditional architecture of the European education and training system needs to be modernised to harness the potential of micro-credentials. Moreover, micro-credentials must be implemented in the service of big ideas, they are not the idea itself. The ECIU University anchors new recognition models in more systemic and transformative efforts to develop 21st Century life-long learners capable of addressing major societal challenges. Next to this testbed, we need a European Micro-Credentials Initiative to support and widen learning at an unprecedented scale, serving society, economy and educational innovation.

ECIU proposes the following guiding principles to better define and develop a common European terminology for the credible and sustainable investment in new recognition models.

## KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Micro-credentials require a **common definition** supporting both credit and non-credit recognition pathways. The ECIU University uses the term micro-credential to refer to "certification of learning that can accumulate into a larger credential or degree, be part of a portfolio that demonstrates individuals' proof of learning, or have a value in itself".

2. European **quality assurance** guidelines for micro-credentials are needed to define standards and support institutional best practices. Micro-credentials need to adhere to an agreed ECTS credit value when intended to be credit-bearing. They should be aligned with and fully embedded within the European Qualification Framework. Authentication and recognition challenges need to be addressed.

3. **Society engagement** is needed to identify, understand and help shape perceptions of the value, credibility, recognition and currency of micro-credentials. Developing micro-credentials is an open process where universities and society work together. Questions regarding ownership and financing need to be addressed. Universities are academic independent and in control of the quality assurance.

4. Suitable open **technical platforms and systems** are needed for sustainability and to help manage new credit and recognition models. Micro-credentials need to be brought together in a Learner's Wallet (as developed by the ECIU University).

5. **Commitment** from policy makers, institutions and initiative leaders are needed to support major system-level educational innovations.

# THE ECIU UNIVERSITY

The European Consortium for Innovative Universities (ECIU) is committed to developing new life-long learning pathways and recognition models to better educate citizens in a fast-changing world. The ECIU University will develop increased flexibility of micro-learning experiences to enable life-long learners to access education more easily and offers a new concept of the European University for the future.

## 13 PIONNEERS

University of Twente (The Netherlands)

Aalborg University (Denmark)

Dublin City University (Ireland)

Hamburg University of Technology (Germany)

Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania)

Linkoping University (Sweden)

Tampere University (Finland)

Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona (Spain)

University of Aveiro (Portugal)

University of Stavanger (Norway)

University of Trento (Italy)

Institut National des Sciences Appliquees (France)

TEC de Monterrey, associated partner

## UNITING OVER...

### 298,000
STUDENTS

### 46,688
STAFF, INCLUDING 27,182 ACADEMIC STAFF/RESEARCHERS

### 147
FACULTIES

### 489
RESEARCH groups

## 32 ASSOCIATES

**1** National authority

**6** Regional authorities

**8** Cities

**13** Enterprises

**2** Associations

**2** Agencies

Further Reading

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Oliver, B. (2019). Making micro-credentials work for learners, employers and providers. Available at: http://wordpress-ms.deakin.edu.au/dteach/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2019/08/Making-micro-credentials-work-Oliver-Deakin-2019-full-report.pdf?_ga=2.111267341.800090456.1581346665-482365450.1578914546 (Accessed 7th of March, 2020).

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Kato, S., V. Galán-Muros and T. Weko (2020), "The emergence of alternative credentials", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 216, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b741f39e-en. (Accessed on 31 March 2020).