International Week on Microcredentials

Sharing, Learning, Growing

Here you can view in more detail the themes we will be discussing in the Roundtable Discussions:

Subject 1: Government Regulation in the EU / Spain

1.1 Roundtable discussion: Microcredentials vs Degrees Debate

To begin with we wish to confront one of the central debates concerning the development of Microcredentials, acknowledging positions which are critical of, or opposed to, their development in centres of Higher Education, as demonstrated by some published research on the subject. To this end, in this roundtable discussion we aim to open an honest, respectful, and constructive debate that will give voice to various positions and make it possible to advance the terms of the debate. We propose the following questions to guide the discussion:

- How will microcredentials affect traditional degree programmes?
- Are they a threat to centuries of tradition?
- Are they an opportunity to modernize?
- Are they compatible with traditional degrees?

1.2 Roundtable discussion: Microcredentials and Quality Assurance Systems

The application of a quality assurance system which would aid the development and ensure the reliability, transparency, and accountability of microcredentials is proving to be one of the most pressing issues that we face.

- What are universities doing in this respect? What challenges need to be overcome if are to move forward?
- And how do microcredentials accord with the quality assurance systems of businesses?

Some inspiration, some inputs

It is worth consulting the European Commission´s proposed recommendation of microcredentials as a way of promoting lifelong learning and employability, published in July 2021: European project MICROBOL: Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments. This is the result of the EU´s public consultation on "Micro-credentials – broadening learning opportunities for lifelong learning and employability".

Bologna Key Commitments
Quality Assurance

Internal and external quality assurance

11. All micro-credentials should be subject to internal QA, independently of the external QA approach. However, the application of programme level evaluation procedures should not be encouraged for each micro-credential course, as these procedures are too elaborate for small volumes of learning like micro-credentials. The institutional evaluation approach is better fit to cover also micro-credentials.

12. Design a set of "key considerations" for (internal) QA of micro-credentials in collaboration with various stakeholders and providers.

13. Explore in collaboration with alternative providers (including companies) if and how QA procedures should be adapted for the provision of micro-credentials in partnerships.

Learner involvement in quality assurance

14. Include learners in all steps of development and implementation of micro-credentials. When designing a micro-credential, learners should be involved and the needs of the target group of learners need to be considered. Furthermore, learners should be involved in the quality assurance processes and the feedback of alumni should be taken into account as part of the continuous improvement plan of the micro-credential.

Transparency of information

15. HEIs should provide information on the quality assurance mechanism for awarded micro-credentials. In particular, this should be included on the HEIs' websites and in the micro-credential.

Register and catalogues of providers and micro-credentials

16. Develop official registers of micro-credential providers at national/regional levels, or incorporate them into existing registers.

17. Ensure the inclusion of micro-credential providers in DEQAR, based on quality assurance in line with the ESG.

18. Promote the development of clear and transparent catalogues of existing micro-credentials, offered by registered providers.

Subject 2: University Practices

2.1 Roundtable discussion: Certification of Educational Programmes vs Skills-Based Qualifications

In this roundtable discussion we propose to initiate debate and share views and experiences on what the learning content of a microcredential certification should be. Some approaches view microcredentials as offering a model for the certification of short competency-based educational programmes or online courses, for example. While others stress that microcredentials ought to be essentially skills-based qualifications, orientated more towards *student competencies* (such as is the case with soft skills, for example) than the *educational programme* in which these competencies are exhibited, and thereby to help overcome the skills gap.

- Do you think microcredentials will be an effective way to certify short courses?
- How can the skills-based perspective be incorporated in Higher Education, beyond what has already been achieved?
- What do you think the demands of the job market are in this respect?
- Are these two perspectives concerning microcredentials compatible?

2.2 Roundtable discussion: Microcredentials Issued by Peers

One of the future challenges facing Higher Education is how to integrate innovative learning experiences within or alongside degree programmes. As some authors suggest, peer-networked learning may be key to 21st century growth in this respect, and so in this roundtable discussion we wish to explore some of the ways in which students can be issued microcredentials by their peers. We will hear from the students of the CEU University of Cardenal Herrera who have promoted and run Student Clubs. They will introduce us to the ways in which microcredentials have been applied to the activities of the clubs. We are very proud of them and feel that their insights are of central importance to our discussion. Even the most demanding of university professors and academic systems have a lot to learn from the rigor and seriousness with which these leaders among the student community have approached the design and control of microcredentials.

- Do you know of, or have you participated in any projects in which microcredentials were issued by peers?

Subject 3: Companies Developing Microcredential Ecosystems

3.1 Roundtable discussion: Learning Pathways

Microcredentials can be seen as more than just the certification of a particular learning outcome. They can be combined and organized into Learning Pathways, enabling students to take the reins of their own educational journey, thereby providing a model of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL). This has an important motivational effect: once a microcredential has been gained, it becomes ever more attractive to try and reach for the next microcredential in the pathway, and so on, until the student completes the Learning Pathway, possession of which can help to make their professional profile stand out in a competitive labour market.

A useful example of this would be the following simple pathway, composed of two microcredentials which accredit the necessary competencies for Information Literacy Skills in the Knowledge Society.

- Do you know of, or have you participated in any projects developing learning pathways?
- How can Learning Pathways be made compatible with regulated education programmes?

3.2 Roundtable discussion: Collaboration Between Universities and Businesses

Looking at Learning Pathways from another angle, we might highlight the pressing demand for stronger ties and better communication between universities and businesses in contemporary society, a demand that has been met in recent decades by initiatives such as joint research projects or practices, but in ways that have never satisfactorily bridged the gap.

Why should the Learning Pathways be defined solely by the universities? Would it not make more sense to include businesses in the elaboration of Learning Pathways, so that universities can offer their students learning contents and experiences which are relevant in the 21st century labour market?

Microcredentials present a new opportunity for interaction and collaboration between universities and businesses, which has the potential to build stronger and more enduring ties.

A practical example of this can be found in the following, more complex pathway, in which the progressive acquisition of certain competencies is interlinked with the academic trajectory of the degree programme, thereby adding extra value to the degree itself.

The microcredentials contained within this pathway, at the very heart of the students´ degree programme, are defined and issued not only by the university, but by an intervening company, in this instance Microsoft.

- Would you like to share any experiences of collaboration between universities and businesses?

Subject 4: Technology and Data

4.1 Roundtable discussions: Microcredentials and Technology I: Open Badges & LMS Platforms (Blackboard, Canvas, etc.)

How can microcredentials be certified? Digital Badges are, without doubt, becoming the most attractive option and so we wish to dedicate these roundtable discussions to the technology behind the issuing of digital certificates and the wealth of possibilities which this raises.

The key themes of this roundtable discussion include:
Open Badges:
- How well do we really know them?
- What metadata can we associate them with?
- How can they be managed from a university perspective?

 LMS y Open Badges (https://openbadges.org/):
- Can academics grant microcredentials themselves?
- We will also be looking more closely at the integration of LMS such as Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle etc., and the platforms issuing digital Badges

- Do you know about, or have you participated in the generation of microcredential models?

4.2 Roundtable discussions: Microcredentials and Technology II: Big Data

The key themes of this roundtable discussion include:

Microcredentials & Big Data:

- What information can we obtain about the management of Badges in this context?
- What KPIs should we develop? How would we measure them?
- Are we in a position to respond to questions such as these:
  - How does does the achievement of microcredentials correlate with academic performance?
  - Which microcredentials in the university ´ecosystem´ are most in demand among students?
  - When do students receive microcredentials?
  - Is the possession of microcredentials a demonstrable correlative indicator of improved access to the labour market and employment?
  - Can we develop predictive models?

- Do you know about, or have you had experience with the use of any of the diverse technological tools which are applied to microcredentials?