



# Conference on microcredentials for labour market education and training

25 and 26 November 2021

Virtual event

#Microcredentials4LabourMarket

## INTRODUCTION

The conference is an opportunity for policy-makers, stakeholders, experts and researchers from education and training, industry and beyond, to discuss and understand the emerging roles of microcredentials in supporting labour-market-related and employment-relevant education, training and learning.

Building on research carried out by Cedefop in recent years, the conference complements the ongoing political discussion on tools and initiatives supporting people in their lifelong learning pathways established in the July [2020 Skills Agenda](#), the [Council Recommendation on vocational education and training \(VET\)](#) and the [2020 Osnabrück Declaration](#).

## OBJECTIVE AND AIMS OF THE CONFERENCE

The conference aims to initiate a discussion on the characteristics and the potential roles that might be played by microcredentials in supporting labour-market-related and employment-relevant education, training and learning, including vocational education and training. It offers Cedefop an opportunity to share with participants the methodology and interim findings of its study on [microcredentials](#), as well as a space for reflection and discussion of microcredentials' broader uptake and function.

Presentations and discussions during the first day of the conference (25 November) will focus on the project and its outcomes and will give participants an opportunity to participate actively in three breakout sessions. The second day (26 November) will take a broader perspective on microcredentials, as they are increasingly being viewed as independent building blocks in national and international skills strategies responding to several drivers (fast-changing labour markets demands, digitalisation, ageing populations, need for reskilling and upskilling, etc).

## THURSDAY 25 NOVEMBER

### A CHANGING QUALIFICATIONS LANDSCAPE

Microcredentials are increasingly being viewed as a new and more flexible way of recognising knowledge, skills and competences. Giving learners and employees the possibility to collect and combine smaller units of learning according to their specific needs, microcredentials can act as building blocks facilitating lifelong and life-wide learning. However, it is not always clear whether microcredentials represent something genuinely new and innovative. Looking at the certification and qualification landscape in general, task- and competence-oriented certificates – often linked to shorter learning experiences – already play an important role in many parts of the labour market (for example those offered by sectors, private companies, international organisations and public bodies).

Recent research carried out on microcredentials has focused on their increasing use in higher, academic education. While this perspective is important and relevant, Cedefop's study aims to examine their potential role in vocational and professional education and training, placing emphasis on their role outside formal education and training, notably in upskilling and re-skilling in companies and labour market sectors.

Following a brief introduction, there will be a presentation of the main research questions and interim findings of Cedefop's study on [microcredentials](#) by the project leaders. The study aims to offer new knowledge on the characteristics of microcredentials, their added value to individual learners and employees, as well as their impact on existing qualifications and recognition systems.

The first day will also include three break-out sessions:

- **break-out session 1** will address the role of microcredentials in EU labour-market-related education and training. It will question whether microcredentials are **something genuinely new or if they are just a new name for existing qualifications and certificates**;
- **break-out session 2** will look into the ways **microcredentials interact with existing qualification and certification systems** already serving enterprises, sectors and technology areas, by comparing them to modularisation and partial qualifications;
- **break-out session 3** will explore the issue of **trust and added value of microcredentials for end-users**, notably individual learners and employers.

## FRIDAY 26 NOVEMBER

### MICROCREDENTIALS AT NATIONAL, EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

The second day of the conference will offer participants an opportunity to discuss various issues related to microcredentials' existing and potential use at a national, European and international levels. Microcredentials are awarded by a diversity of stakeholders operating at different levels and institutional contexts. Many countries operate with modularised VET systems, in which numerous smaller learning units can be flexibly combined and accumulated to meet the needs of individuals and employers better. Several European countries have also opened up their national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) to include private, international and/or non-formal qualifications and certificates. Validation of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal learning facilitates upskilling and reskilling, leading not only to full qualifications, but also to microcredentials or partial qualifications. It also acts as a bridge between different fields, which is necessary for developing a green and sustainable economy. A discussion focusing on these issues, as well as on the extent to which international organisations and bodies issuing microcredentials could **potentially challenge the traditional national governance of qualifications and credentials systems**, will be the focus of the second day. Discussions will also explore whether microcredentials are **actually changing the progression in learning more broadly**.

## WORKING METHODS

The conference will take place online (Zoom platform). Participants will attend presentations and will be able to participate both through standard Q&A sessions and through chat comments.

Both days will include plenary sessions. For the break-out session discussions of 25 November, participants will be able to choose a topic and theme of interest to them.



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## Programme

### DAY ONE – THURSDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2021

(indicated times are CET)

**9.00-9.30**

Registration (technical check)

**9.30-9.45**

Welcome and introduction to the conference

Chair: Loukas Zahilas, Head of department for VET and qualifications, Cedefop

- Participant welcome
- Context and objectives of the conference
- Housekeeping rules

Opening address

Jürgen Siebel, Executive Director, Cedefop

**9.45-10.30**

Session 1. Microcredentials for labour market education and training

Presentation of Cedefop's *Microcredentials for labour market education and training* project  
Jens Bjørnåvold and Anastasia Pouliou, Experts, Department for VET and qualifications, Cedefop

Greta Kirdulytė, PPMI

Q&A on Cedefop's project and findings

**10.30-11.30**

Session 2. Microcredentials and the political context

- Chiara Riondino, Head of Unit – Vocational Education and Training, Directorate B: Skills and jobs, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission
- Robert Plummer, Senior Adviser, Business Europe
- Agnes Roman, Advisor, European Trade Union Confederation

Open discussion

- What is the added value of microcredentials for individuals and employers?
- How can Member States increase learning opportunities for individuals, while supporting the preparedness of microcredential providers and fostering inclusiveness and equal opportunities for their citizens?
- How can coherent development of microcredentials be ensured? What level of regulation (if any) should be applied?

..... 10-minute break .....

**11.40-11.45**

Guidelines for break-out sessions

Anastasia Pouliou, Expert, Department for VET and qualifications, Cedefop

**11.45-13.15**

Parallel Session 1. The role of microcredentials in EU labour-market-related education and training

(30-minute presentation followed by 60-minute discussion)

Chair: Anastasia Pouliou, Cedefop

Introduction to the topic:

- Patrick Werquin, PPMI, Research leader and national researcher, France
  - Bodil Husted, VIA University college, Denmark
- Rapporteur, Greta Kirdulyte, PPMI*

Key topics:

- Are microcredentials related to a genuine change in the way we recognise knowledge, skills and competences? Or are they a way to define better and standardise the already existing offer?
- What roles do microcredentials play in the labour market? What are their current strengths and weaknesses and how could they be improved?

**11.45-13.15**

Parallel Session 2. Interaction of microcredentials with existing qualification and certification systems

(30-minute presentation followed by 60-minute discussion)

Chair: Jens Bjørnåvold, Cedefop

Introduction to the topic:

- Andrew McCoshan, Research leader and national researcher, PPMI, UK and Ireland
  - Anna Kahlson and Hans Almgren, Senior advisors, The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education
- Rapporteur, Mantas Pupinis, PPMI*

Key topics:

- How can microcredentials interact with formal qualifications, should they do so, and who decides on their requirements at national level?
- Can partial qualifications and module certificates be considered microcredentials?
- Why and for whom would it be helpful if systems evolve (or not) to accommodate microcredentials?

**11.45-13.15**

Parallel Session 3. Microcredentials and their added value for end-users

(30-minute presentation followed by 60-minute discussion)

Chair: Iraklis Pliakis, Cedefop

Introduction to the topic:

- Vibeke Rittmann Petersen, Trade Union for Commerce and Trade, Denmark
  - Wojciech Stęchły, Educational Research Institute, Poland
- Rapporteur, Hanne Shapiro, Research leader, PPMI*

Key topics:

- For end-users (individual holders as well as education institutions or employers) to trust microcredentials, which conditions must be met to ensure portability and transferability?
- Are there tensions between different end-users over the form and function of microcredentials (e.g. between individuals and employers)?
- How could microcredentials play a more targeted role in supporting 'age-neutral' systems for VET, strengthening the focus of up-skilling and re-skilling?

**13.15-14.00**

Session 4. Summary of break-out sessions and open discussion – Brief summary of the day

Chair: Loukas Zahilas, Cedefop

..... End of Day 1 .....



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### DAY TWO – FRIDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2021

(indicated times are CET)

#### 9.00-9.30

Registration (technical check)

#### 9.30-9.40

Welcome and introduction

Anastasia Pouliou and Jens Bjørnåvold, Experts, Department for VET and qualifications, Cedefop

#### 9.40-10.30

Session 1. How can microcredentials build stronger links between vocational education and workplace requirements? Examples of cases outside Europe

Chair: Anastasia Pouliou, Cedefop

#### Keynote speakers

- Dr Gavin Moodie, Centre for the Study of Canadian and International Higher Education, University of Toronto
  - Dr Julie Reddy, Chief Executive Officer, South African Qualification Authority, South Africa
- Discussant, John Hart, Independent expert*

#### 10.30-11.15

Session 2. Global market of microcredentials

- Professor Mark Brown, Director, National Institute for Digital Learning, Dublin City University
- Dr Dominic Orr and Olena Rusnak, atingi Management and Digital Learning Advisor, GIZ/atingi, Germany

#### Open discussion

- How can microcredentials enable interoperability: across sectors, industries, borders, lifespans and digital systems?
- Is globalisation of credentials a threat or an opportunity for national VET systems?

#### 11.15-12.00

Session 3. Accessibility of microcredentials: what constitutes value for learners/employees and for employers?

Chair: Jens Bjørnåvold, Cedefop

- Adam Gajek, Skills and Entrepreneurship Policy Advisor, Brussels
- Kristel Jakobson, The European Students' Union (ESU)

15-minute break

#### 12.15-13.30

Session 4. International perspectives on microcredentials (Moderated panel discussion followed by Q&A)

Chair: Loukas Zahilas, Cedefop

#### Panelists

- Borhene Chakroun, Director, Division of Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, Education sector, UNESCO
- Gillian Golden, Project Lead, Higher Education Policy Team, Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD
- Anatolii Garmash, European Training Foundation (ETF)
- Jens Bjørnåvold, Expert, Department for VET and qualifications, Cedefop

*Discussant, John O'Connor PhD., Head of Qualification Standards Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Ireland*

#### Open discussion

- Are microcredentials changing the progression in learning?
- What are the implications for the recognition of learning across borders?
- Should we be seeking a common language on microcredentials? What are the benefits and limits of doing so?

#### 13.30-13.45

Concluding remarks and end of the conference

Loukas Zahilas, Head of department for VET and qualifications, Cedefop

Anastasia Pouliou, Expert, Department for VET and qualifications, Cedefop

End of Day 2

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Project page: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/micro-credentials-labour-market-education-and-training>

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