Stackability of micro-credentials for student-centred learning

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Focus

Micro-credentials, to be awarded after the completion of short courses (or modules) and proper assessment of the acquired competences, are intended to provide flexible opportunities for certified learning in response to evolving professional and societal needs.

It is suggested that the stackability of micro-credentials - in a student-centred perspective of continuous learning - would benefit from their integration into European HE systems and institutions through full alignment to the main structures and principles of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), such as:
1. National and European qualifications frameworks
2. European credit system (ECTS)
3. European student-centred approach to learning/teaching
4. European approach to quality assurance

Advantages of the integration process

1. Qualifications frameworks

Defining the level of micro-credentials with reference to National and European Qualifications Frameworks (level 1,2 QF-EHEA and level 6,7 EQF) would:

- *give micro-credentials a formal status in HE systems and position them clearly in HE institutions' educational offer;*
- *provide an essential indication for stacking them consistently according to level and for appropriate national and international recognition, as independent modules or part of a full qualification.*

To this purpose, European Qualifications Frameworks should acknowledge the existence and specific features of microcredentials

2. European credit system (as described in the 2015 ECTS Users' Guide)

When allocating ECTS credits to the short courses leading to micro-credentials:

- the learning outcomes of the course would be defined and clearly described;
- the learning time required to achieve them would be estimated;

   3 and 5 credits seem to be ideal sizes for microcredentials; the number of learning hours per credit would be based on those formally stipulated in most EHEA systems, ranging from 25 to 30 hours per credit (i.e., a 5-credit course would involve approximately 125/150 learning hours)

- the ECTS credits associated to micro-credentials would be a basic element for stacking them in a trasparent way on the basis of the volume of learning. They would also facilitate the national and international recognition of micro-credentials, as independent modules or as part of full qualifications.

To this purpose, the ECTS Guide already provides indications on the use of credits for stand-alone modules.

3. European student-centred approach to Learning/Teaching/Assessment

Regardless of the mode of learning adopted in short courses/modules,

- learning/teaching and assessment activities would be constructively aligned, in order to enable students to achieve the defined learning outcomes within the estimated learning time;
- students would be empowered to make learning choices and actively participate in the learning process;
- the implementation of student-centred learning would facilitate the stacking and recognition of micro-credentials in a student-centred perspective.

To this purpose, ample support is provided by innovative educational technology, already frequently adopted by short courses

4. European approach to quality assurance

The *stacking of micro-credentials would be facilitated by compliance with the same quality assurance framework*. So would their recognition as independent modules or part of full qualifications, both at the national and international level.

Of course, internal (for HEIs?) or external (for private providers?) monitoring and evaluation of the short courses should:

• take their specific features into consideration;

• follow simple and rapid procedures.

To this purpose, a new section of the European Standards and Guidelines for QA might be envisaged.

Thank you for your attention!