

## CAPÍTULO I

### THE UNIVERSITY AS A PROVIDER OF LIFELONG LEARNING.

María-Teresa PARRA-SANTOS

*Universidad de Valladolid.*

#### Résumé :

Les universités sont un agent de référence pour la conception et l'exécution de la formation continue, un droit de la population à s'adapter aux changements de la société et à l'adaptation aux exigences du marché du travail.

Un micro- diplôme est la preuve des résultats d'apprentissage qu'un apprenant a obtenus après une expérience d'apprentissage brève et évaluée de manière transparente. Ils sont décernés à l'issue de cours (ou modules) courts et indépendants.

Un point clé est la reconnaissance et la portabilité des micro-certificats entre les pays, ainsi que sur le marché du travail. Le concept de microcertificats doit être partagé par les mondes de l'éducation et du travail.

Les micro-diplômes se présentent sous de nombreux formats : ils complètent les programmes d'études, agissent comme des unités d'apprentissage indépendantes ou sont structurés en une séquence de cours qui peuvent éventuellement être intégrés ou accumulés dans un diplôme plus large.

**MOTS CLÉS:** apprentissage tout au long de la vie, monde du travail, diplôme, apprentissage court.

#### Abstract :

Universities are a reference agent for the design and execution of continuous training, a right of the population to adapt to changes in society and adaptation to the demands of the labor market.

A micro-credential is proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has achieved after a brief and transparently assessed learning experience. They are awarded upon completion of short, independent courses (or modules).

A key point is the recognition and portability of micro-credentials between countries, as well as in the labor market. The concept of microcredentials has to be shared by the educational and labor worlds.

Micro-credentials come in many formats: they complement degree programs, act as independent learning units, or are structured in a sequence of courses that can eventually be integrated or accumulated into a larger credential.

**KEY WORDS:** lifelong learning, labor-world, credential, short learning.

## **1. LIFELONG LEARNING**

The first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights is “Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and successfully manage transitions in the labor market”

Education and training are engines of job creation and economic growth. Small-volume apprenticeship opportunities that lead to microcredentials can aid in skill development. The rapid advances in the state of the art, are related to a well-trained workforce. In addition, adult learners request flexible and modular formats that may be suitable for graduate and master students to achieve transversal skills.

The knowledge, skills and competences can be acquired through an official degree (bachelor's, master's or doctorate), or through individual degrees (Expert, Specialization Diploma, Lifelong Learning Master) or through a series of formats of a different nature that have emerged before the demand of society and the labor market of specific needs. Technological and digital development has promoted innovative advances in the way of acquiring knowledge. To cite some of these formats: MOOCs (Massive Open Online Course), hybrid models,

A generation ago he had a job during his working life. Nowadays, it is common to change jobs every several years. Flexible learning pathways, multidisciplinary or multicultural workshops, language skills courses or digital skills. That forces us to assume the concept of learning throughout life to keep up to date, initially to access the labor market, later to stay in the labor market and after working life to update the necessary skills to have a life without risk of exclusion.

In the context of Lifelong Learning, professionals can stay linked to the university by doing face-to-face or hybrid training. These specialized courses must have academic and professional participation so that the offer is associated with the productive fabric. The collaboration of companies in a model of co-management and co-management is essential

## **2. WHAT IS MEANT BY MICROCREDENTIALS?**

In recent years the concept of microcredentials has emerged, however there are numerous studies on how to establish a definition that allows a homogeneous understanding of the implications of the term.

The MicroBol Project (2020-2022) "Microcredentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments" developed with the following participants: Ministry of Education of Belgium, Ministry of Education of Finland, CIMEA of Italy, European University Association (USA) and European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), proposes the following definition:

“A micro-credential is a small volume of learning certified by a credential. In the European Higher Education Area context, it can be offered by higher education institutions or recognised by them, using recognition procedures in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention or recognition of prior learning (RPL), where applicable. A micro-credential is designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills or competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials have explicitly defined learning outcomes at a QF-EHEA/NQF level, an indication of associated workload in ECTS credits, assessment methods and criteria, and are subject to quality assurance”.

The objectives of MicroBol are: to verify the tools of the Bologna process suitable for microcredentials, to formulate recommendations, ...

One of the values is portability, that is, recognition when crossing borders, which requires them to be transparent throughout the process: learning results, evaluation. Credibility means that the credentials are digital and verifiable (between the supplier and the verifier without the participation of the credential holder). It is obvious that retraining always has an impact on improving employability.

One of the attractions is the flexibility of being able to train by making modules, each of which is associated with a micro-credential that can be stacked with others in a larger credential. In this way, the learning outcome can be acquired by working at the pace of the person concerned.

The MicroBol project indicates that microcredentials do not compete with official degrees, however, it is expected that in 10 years some degrees can be recognized by stacking microcredentials. A European objective for 2030 is that official qualifications can be issued by accumulating micro-credentials. Also it is recommended that the cost of micro-credentials to be economical to guarantee the right to continuous training for the entire society.

### 3. CLASSIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION

For the qualification framework, the equivalence of the Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (MECES) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) must be taken into account.

Table 1.- Qualification levels

Title	MECES	EQF
Higher Vocational Training Technician. Superior Technician of Plastic Arts and Design. Sports Superior Technician.	1	5
University degree with less than 300 ECTS. Graduated in higher artistic education.	2	6

University degree with 300 ECTS or more. Master's degree. Master in Artistic Education.	3	7
Doctor	4	8

It would be desirable to have a catalog of training specialties but this requires that every institution, academic or business, applies homogeneous procedures in terms of quality and qualification levels. The advantage for companies is that their employees are trained at a bachelor's or master's level even without having a bachelor's or master's degree.

#### 4. TRAINING AND CREDENTIAL PROVIDERS

One aspect is the training providers that have emerged, both academic institutions and other consortiums or business entities: coursera, edX, openclassrooms, FUN (France Université Numérique), miriadax, ...

Badge or credential providers include: ForAllRubrics, Open Badge Academy, .Bestr, Credly, BadgeFactor, makewav.es, ProExam Vault, ...

Training providers sometimes match badge providers like Amazon Web Services and their accreditation levels for Cloud Computing Services or Microsoft's Digital Badging.

Courses can be searched from the URL <https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/activate/courses> with the following filters:

- Categories: Digital Marketing, Professional Development, Data
- Course duration: Less than 2 hours, 2-10 hours, 11-20 hours, More than 20 hours
- Certification: Free Certificate, Payment Certificate
- Course Difficulty: Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced
- Course provider (search result in a Spanish browser): Google, Applied Digital Skills, Coursera, School of Industrial Organization, Santa María la Real Foundation, FutureLearn, Goodwill, Google Analytics Academy, Google and INCIBE, OpenClassrooms, Skillshop, Complutense University of Madrid, University of Alicante, University of Helsinki & Reaktor

There are experiences in different countries that serve to issue the credentials of academic institutions, such as the case of SURF in the Netherlands, CINECA in Italy, Digital Credentials Consortium in several universities in America, as well as the TU of Munich and the University of Potsdam and Milano-Bicocca.

In the European Union, the 2004 Europass program established transparency in qualifications and competences throughout the EU. Work is currently underway on the new Europass, which will be an online platform that will include an authentication service for digital documents.

## 5. COMPETENCES AND SKILLS

Skills are the experience or talents needed to perform a job or task. Job skills enable you to do a particular job, and life skills help with daily tasks.

Soft Skills are qualities connected to active listening, critical thinking, commitment, flexibility, teamwork, creativity, resilience or learning ability, growth mindset, mindfulness, decision making based on data. Many considered the best skills for a job.

Upskills are advanced skills through further education and training, usually related to ICT Information and Communication Technology

Among the transversal competences, soft skills, we can mention:

- Spiritual growth, understood as a guide to respect oneself and one's surroundings.
- Communication skills: covering oral and written expression and comprehension.
- Critical thinking to analyze evidence and search for answers in order to develop both scientific and ethical judgement.
- Capacity for intercultural or multidisciplinary collaboration to enrich individual perspectives in a perspective with implications for the common good of the group.
- Leadership to serve the whole group, both in the classroom and in the work environment.
- Self-sufficiency: management of skills that allow adaptation to the changing world.

Only skills and abilities that are evaluable and reproducible can be accredited. If a specific MOOC does not allow the evaluation, it could not be a microcredential.

## 6. CREDENTIAL CONTENT

Standardization is essential, to provide a guarantee of homogeneous quality and transparency. Hence, the credentials that certify the results of the short learning experiences are mandatory. The credential must include: the prerequisites for access, the workload (ECTS), the learning outcomes achieved, the assessment methods (tests, skills,...), the level of the learning experience (Vocational Training, degree or master, others). Micro credentials can be stored and combined into larger credentials or qualifications (integration and stacking). An added value is when micro-credentials are issued as digital credentials.

The standards for describing a micro-credential are:

- Student ID

- Title of the Microcredential
- Country / Region of the supplier
- Date of issue
- Description of the learning outcome
- Training qualification level
- Volume of work in Number of ECTS
- Assessment Type, Marks Scheme, and Grade Earned
- Teaching methodology
- Quality Assurance System
- Recognition and Awarding Body

Optionally: Entry Requirements, Expiration Period, Related Occupation

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Microcredentials have a different development in each country, but it is clear that every state must develop its regulations and every institution must adapt to assume more homogeneous procedures. The microcredentials of lifelong learning have come to stay and we must accept them.

The implementation of micro-credentials requires the involvement of quality agencies to issue quality seals, application of university quality assurance systems, digital registration of credentials (national or European), support to university institutions to assume the workload.

A national catalog of microcredentials with competencies, levels, average time to achieve them, providers would be desirable. It exists for vocational studies but it should exist at high education level.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- SHAPIRO FUTURES H., ANDERSEN T. and NEDERGAARD LARSEN K. "Final Report: A European approach to micro-credentials. Output of the micro-credentials higher education consultation group" ISBN 978-92-76-22977-3 doi:10.2766/30863 december 2020
- ORR, D., PUPINIS, M., and KIRDULYTĖ, G. "Analytical report: Towards a European approach to micro credentials: a study of practices and commonalities in offering micro-credentials in European higher education" NESET report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union ISBN 978-92-76-21357-4 doi:10.2766/7338, 2020
- ISAACS A.K., CAMILLERI A.F., UBACHS G., de DECKER F. and van der HIJDEN P. "European project MICROBOL. Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments". August 2020 <https://microcredentials.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2021/04/MICROBOL-Desk-Research-Report.pdf>
- AQU "Acreditación ex ante de programas de corta duración" AQU Catalunya. 2021 <https://www.aqu.cat/es/doc/Universitats/Metodologia/Guia-acreditacion-ex-ante-de-programas-de-corta-duracion-PCD>
- BEVERLEY O. "A conversation starter: Towards a common definition of micro-credentials" Unesco Draft Preliminary Report September 2021 [https://www.edubrief.com.au/uploads/4/5/0/5/45053363/draft\\_unesco\\_report\\_microcredentials\\_13\\_sept\\_21.pdf](https://www.edubrief.com.au/uploads/4/5/0/5/45053363/draft_unesco_report_microcredentials_13_sept_21.pdf)
- Van Hees J "Lessons learned pilot edubadges. Experiences with digital badges in dutch education" SURF. May 2020 [https://www.surf.nl/files/2020-06/edubadges\\_lessons\\_040620\\_eng-def.pdf](https://www.surf.nl/files/2020-06/edubadges_lessons_040620_eng-def.pdf)
- BEVERLEY O. "National Microcredentials Framework" Australian Government. Dptm. Of Education, Skills and Employment. pwc November 2021 <https://www.dese.gov.au/download/13591/national-microcredentials-framework/26500/document/pdf/en>