Harmonizing and Aligning Micro-credentials according to EU policies

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and outcomes from the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on the harmonization and alignment of micro-credentials at institutional, national, and European levels in relation to micro-credential policies. The PLA involved ten Higher Educational Institution partners from the Erasmus+ funded project "Modular Continuing Higher Education by Micro-credentials (MCE)", with specific participation from the institutional representatives responsible for defining and developing institutional micro-credential policy/strategy.

The report highlights significant variations in how different European countries and institutions are developing and implementing micro-credentials. Although there is a strong institutional commitment across all partner universities to integrate micro-credentials into their educational offerings, the lack of a common definition and varying national policies presents challenges to uniformity and cross-border recognition.

Key findings and themes from the discussions include:

1. **Institutional Strategies and Maturity Levels**: All institutions involved in the MCE consortium have either developed or are in the process of developing strategies for micro-credentials, which are often integrated into broader frameworks for continuing education and professional development (CEPD), emphasizing lifelong learning, employability, and innovation. However, there is considerable variation in how institutions define and implement micro-credentials, including differences in terminology, structure, and the range of ECTS credits offered. Some institutions have comprehensive strategies, while others are still in the early stages of policy development. Common challenges include the need for clear quality assurance processes and the development of sustainable business models.

2. **Alignment of Policies (National and EU)**: There is a significant need for alignment between EU recommendations, national frameworks, and institutional strategies. The European Commission provides flexible recommendations, allowing member states to develop their own policies. However, this has led to disparities in how individual countries are progressing, with Spain leading the way in developing a formal policy, while countries like Portugal and Germany face challenges due to political instability and institutional pressures. The lack of coherent national policies in many countries results in a fragmented approach that hinders broader adoption and recognition of micro-credentials. This creates challenges in terms of quality assurance, recognition, and the standardization of micro-credentials across borders.

3. **Challenges in Policy Alignment**: Several key challenges were identified in this regard, including:

- *Terminology and Standardization*: A lack of consensus on what constitutes a micro-credential, with institutions using different terms and assigning varying credit values (ranging from 1 to 50 ECTS credits).

- *Quality Assurance*: Most institutions rely on internal evaluations, with few incorporating micro-credentials into formal external quality assurance mechanisms, leading to inconsistent quality and hindering cross-institutional recognition.

- *Funding Models*: Micro-credentials are often funded through temporary initiatives, such as post-COVID recovery funds, with few institutions having developed long-term, sustainable business models.

- *Digital Credentials*: The adoption of digital credentialing systems like Europass has been slow, limiting the portability and recognition of micro-credentials.

4. **Future Directions and Opportunities for Alignment**: The PLA report concludes with recommendations for future work, calling for stronger alignment within institutions and across national borders. This includes the development of clear quality assurance frameworks and the strategic positioning of micro-credentials by higher education institutions. Institutions can leverage the European Commission's guidelines to further develop micro-credential offerings with a focus on lifelong learning and employability. Additionally, cross-institutional collaboration could lead to the standardization of terms, credit systems, and quality assurance processes, enhancing the portability and recognition of micro-credentials across countries.

In summary, while the partners in the Erasmus+ funded MCE project have made significant progress in incorporating micro-credentials into institutional strategies, the absence of standardized policies and frameworks at the national level continues to hinder broader alignment. Moving forward, collaborative efforts at both institutional and governmental levels will be key to ensuring effective recognition and portability of micro-credentials across Europe.

Table of contents

1.Introduction

The rapid evolution of the educational landscape and the growing emphasis on lifelong learning have highlighted the need for flexible, innovative learning pathways. Micro-credentials have emerged as a vital tool in this context, offering short, focused learning opportunities that allow individuals to quickly upskill and reskill in response to shifting demands in the workforce. Recognizing their significance, the European Commission has introduced policy frameworks aimed at supporting the development, implementation, and recognition of micro-credentials across institutions and borders.

The Erasmus+ funded project, "Modular Continuing Higher Education by Micro-credentials (MCE)", running from April 2022 to March 2025, brings together ten partner institutions from across Europe. Coordinated by the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), the project aims to foster institutional and policy-level development of micro-credentials in line with both national and European Union (EU) frameworks. The overall goal is to contribute to the conceptualization of micro-credentials and to support transformative institutional developments by providing a robust evidence base for high-quality, trusted, and widely recognized micro-credentials.

This document explores the harmonization and alignment of micro-credentials at the institutional, national, and EU levels. It begins by reviewing the current status of institutional strategies, national policies, and the alignment of micro-credentials with EU recommendations. The findings from studies conducted as part of the project provide insights into the diverse approaches and challenges faced by institutions and governments in this space.

Insights from a Peer Learning Activity (PLA), which involved representatives from the partner institutions reflecting on their maturity level in micro-credential policy development are then given. The discussion uncovers key challenges and explores what institutions and governments need to do to make micro-credential policies a reality, offering a detailed analysis of the institutional landscape and the steps required for further progress.

Next, this report addresses the challenges and opportunities surrounding the alignment of policies, touching on issues such as inconsistencies in terminology, the need for robust quality assurance frameworks, varying funding models, and the slow adoption of digital credentialing systems.

Finally, it concludes with recommendations for the future, emphasizing the importance of standardization, collaborative efforts between institutions and governments, and the development of sustainable business models. These insights aim to guide the ongoing efforts to integrate micro-credentials into higher education systems across Europe, ensuring their recognition, quality, and alignment with EU policies.

2. The studies on institutional, national and EU policies for micro-credentials development

To construct the harmonization and the alignment of policies for MCs at institutional, national and EU levels three studies have been conducted. The first two were led by the FernUniversität in Hagen (FernUni) and consist of a survey run across the ten HEIs part of the MCE aimed at identifying; 1. Micro-credential offerings and 2. Institutional policy for MCs. While the third study, was also a survey, that focused on the identification of national policy in relation to MCs and CPD, it was conducted by the Universidade Aberta de Portugal (UAb) and involved the nine countries represented in the partnership, and specifically: Spain, The Netherlands, Greece, Germany, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Cyprus.

2.1 Institutional Strategies for Micro-credentials

The study conducted by FernUni reveals significant variation in institutional strategies for micro-credentials among partner institutions, largely due to differing national regulatory contexts (see Weiß et al. 2023, Zeman et al. 2023). Despite this, most partners have already developed policies or plans for micro-credentials, even if these are not always labelled explicitly. Notably, seven out of ten partner institutions actively promote micro-credentials as part of their institutional strategies, embedding them within broader frameworks of continuing education and professional development (CPD).

All partner institutions have implemented strategies centred on continuing education and lifelong learning, with CPD initiatives playing a crucial role. The survey across 10 partner institutions indicated that continuing education, employability, and flexible learning pathways are integral to institutional strategies. Concepts like "lifelong learning," "employability," and "flexible learning pathways" are consistently emphasized. Micro-credentials are often incorporated into existing units such as lifelong learning departments, continuous education centres, or cross-institutional working groups, signalling a broad commitment to their development.

However, ***how institutions define and implement micro-credentials varies widely***. For instance, some use terms like "short learning programs" and "certificates" interchangeably, leading to ambiguity. This inconsistency reflects the broader lack of a standardized definition for micro-credentials, which presents challenges in fostering uniformity across institutions and countries.

Furthermore, there are substantial ***variations in the structure and characteristics of micro-credentials across institutions***:

- *ECTS Credits*: Micro-credentials, within the MCE partners, can range from 1 to 50 ECTS credits, depending on the institution.

- *Academic Levels*: Most micro-credentials are offered at EQF level 6 or 7, though this also varies across different countries and institutions.

- *Target Audiences* The intended learners vary, with some institutions targeting non-traditional learners, while others focus on specific professional groups.

Some institutions offer micro-credentials as standalone courses, while others design them to be stackable toward larger qualifications, such as degrees or professional certifications. This variability highlights the diverse ways institutions are attempting to integrate micro-credentials into their broader educational offerings.

A notable challenge in the adoption and expansion of micro-credentials is the ***lack of a consistent business model***. Few institutions have developed clear, dedicated business strategies for micro-credentials. Instead, offerings tend to vary widely in terms of costs and funding:

- Some micro-credentials are publicly funded or offered for free, while others can cost as much as €9000 per credential.

- Post-COVID public funding calls have provided some institutions with support to develop micro-credentials, but overall, funding remains inconsistent across institutions and countries.

The processes for ***quality assurance*** in micro-credentials are also varied. Typically, institutions apply internal quality assurance mechanisms modelled on those used for traditional degree programs, but there is no universal standard for assuring the quality of micro-credentials across different institutions. The use of digital certification tools, such as Europass, remains rare, with only one institution among the partners certifying its micro-credentials digitally. ***This lack of digital integration*** adds another layer of complexity in recognizing and validating micro-credentials across borders.

One of the significant barriers to the wider adoption of micro-credentials is their limited recognition across institutions, even though many are based on widely accepted frameworks like the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) and EQF (European Qualifications Framework). While some micro-credentials can be stacked toward larger qualifications, the lack of standardization makes it difficult for students and professionals to transfer their micro-credential credits between institutions or across national borders.

The study underscores that while many institutions have micro-credentials on their agenda, translating these into recognized and transferable qualifications remains a challenge. ***Stackability and transferability are particularly problematic*** in countries where political and regulatory frameworks are more cautious about implementing micro-credentials.

Despite the challenges, seven out of ten institutions consider micro-credentials and small learning experiences an important part of their university strategy. In several cases, micro-credentials are not just a supplemental offering but are central to the institution's broader strategic vision for flexible, lifelong learning. Some institutions explicitly promote micro-credentials as part of their efforts to innovate in educational delivery, focusing on non-traditional learners, lifelong learning pathways, and employability.

The institutional commitment to micro-credentials, however, is not uniform. Some institutions view them as integral to their mission of supporting lifelong learning and employability, while others treat them more cautiously. In some cases, micro-credentials are

strongly promoted as a key feature of the university's strategy for the future, often linked to innovation in teaching methods, educational content, and learner-centred approaches.

The study (see Weiß et al. 2023, Zeman et al. 2023) concludes that while all partner institutions have developed policies and strategies for continuing education, focusing on short, flexible, and tailored learning opportunities, *the lack of a common definition for micro-credentials remains a significant obstacle*. The term "micro-credential" itself remains ambiguous, with no standard framework guiding institutions in their design, implementation, or recognition processes.

Given this ambiguity, there is an urgent *need for greater standardization* of micro-credentials across institutions and countries. This would facilitate clearer pathways for learners and ensure that micro-credentials are recognized and valued in both educational and professional contexts. National ministries of education must play a more active role in guiding the development and recognition of micro-credentials, as their support is crucial for overcoming political, regulatory, and institutional barriers.

The European approach, with its broad definition of micro-credentials, offers a potential solution by allowing institutions to adapt the framework to their specific needs and contexts. However, without more consistent national and international policies, the awareness, acceptance, and scalability of micro-credentials will continue to face significant challenges across Europe.

2.2 Current Status of National Policies on Micro-Credentials

UAb lead the third study and provided an in-depth analysis of the implementation of the European Commission (EC) Recommendation on Micro-credentials (MCs) across nine EU Member States part of the MCE partnership. The EC Recommendation offers broad guidelines for integrating MCs into national policies to support lifelong learning and upskilling but leaves the details of policy development and implementation to individual countries. The survey (see Casanova et al. 2024) highlights the disparities in progress among member states, particularly in how each country incorporates MCs into their education and labour market systems.

The survey, conducted in 2023, reveals a highly uneven landscape in terms of national policies on MCs. While some countries have made substantial progress, many others are still in the early stages, with a lack of coherent strategies or formal guidelines. Below is a detailed breakdown of the status of micro-credentials in the surveyed countries:

- **Spain**:

Spain stands out as the most advanced country in terms of policy development for micro-credentials. It has implemented a specific policy for micro-credentials in higher education (Organic Law 2/2023 on the University System, LOSU), supported by a national Plan for Micro-credentials "Plan MicroCreds" (https://www.universidades.gob.es/plan-microcreds/) (2023) from the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. This plan is funded by a €50 million budget, which focuses on creating guidelines for short courses (under 15 ECTS credits) in a

variety of formats. This structured framework includes clear provisions for quality assurance and workload management, making Spain the leader in micro-credential policy within the EU.

- **Portugal**:

Portugal has modified its higher education policies to accommodate micro-credentials, particularly in relation to lifelong learning and professional development. One of the key initiatives is the "*Adult Impulse*" program, with a budget of *€130 million*, aimed at reskilling and upskilling over *100,000 adults* by 2025 through micro-credential-based courses. While these initiatives demonstrate progress, the overall national policy on MCs is still in a nascent stage, with significant gaps in clarity and coherence.

- **Germany**:

Germany has *no specific national policy* for micro-credentials in higher education. Political reluctance and resistance from the vocational education and training (VET) sector have slowed the adoption of MCs. There is ongoing debate around the integration of the *European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)* into micro-credential frameworks, which has become a point of contention. There is pressure from VET circles against adopting MCs in the higher education sector, which contributes to the slow pace of policy development.

- **The Netherlands**:

Like Germany, the Netherlands currently has *no specific policy* for micro-credentials in higher education. However, the country has developed *Edubadges*, a digital platform designed for the registration and certification of micro-credentials. This initiative supports the recognition and portability of MCs within the country, but without a broader national policy, its impact remains limited. Therefore, new national policies are being developed in close collaboration with all stakeholders.

- **Flanders (Belgium)**:

Flanders has been more proactive, with clear *policies and guidelines for lifelong learning* and short courses in higher education. The region is currently planning a comprehensive framework for the implementation of micro-credentials. Between 2021 and 2023 the Flemish government has allocated *€60 million* specifically for the expansion of lifelong learning within higher education, the development of a Flemish future-proof training portfolio (including micro-credentials) and the introduction of digital education and teaching.

- **Italy**:

Italy has *no national policy* for micro-credentials in higher education. However, it has made strides through the creation of *three Digital Education Hubs*, including an *Observatory on Micro-Credentials*. These hubs aim to foster innovation in digital education and may serve as platforms for future micro-credential developments.

- **Lithuania, Cyprus, and Greece**:

These countries also lack specific national policies for micro-credentials in higher education, although both Lithuania and Cyprus have implemented *guidelines for lifelong learning* and short courses. Greece has no policy framework in place for MCs at this time.

Despite the EC's broad recommendations, the development of national policies for micro-credentials across Europe has been slow. ***Several key challenges were identified across the surveyed countries***:

1. *Slow Policy Development*: Most countries have been slow to formalize policies for micro-credentials. Spain is the only country with a structured and fully funded national plan. Other countries, such as Portugal and Flanders, are making progress, but their policies remain underdeveloped. The *lack of concrete mechanisms* in many member states prevents a clear strategy for integrating MCs into education and labour market systems.

2. *Lack of Clarity and Recognition*: One of the most significant barriers is the *lack of clarity* around how micro-credentials will be recognized across sectors—such as higher education, vocational training, and industry. The concept of "*trusted providers*" for issuing micro-credentials remains vague, which creates confusion and inconsistency in how MCs are delivered and valued. The European Commission has encouraged the inclusion of businesses and vocational institutions in the issuing process, but a lack of regulatory frameworks has slowed the development of a robust system.

3. *Portability and Stackability*: Another major issue is the *portability* of micro-credentials between institutions and across borders. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is seen as a potential solution for ensuring the transfer of MCs between countries, but only a few states, such as Spain, have integrated this into their frameworks. The *absence of national policies* to facilitate cross-border recognition is a critical gap, limiting the utility of micro-credentials for learners and professionals who wish to use their credits internationally.

4. *Quality Assurance*: *Quality assurance mechanisms* for micro-credentials are underdeveloped across most member states. Institutions tend to rely on *internal processes* without involving national or regional quality assurance agencies, leading to concerns about the credibility of MCs. Without a standardized approach, the value of micro-credentials in the labour market remains questionable. External evaluation mechanisms need to be developed to ensure MCs are both credible and widely recognized.

5. *Inconsistent Funding*: A critical obstacle to the development and scaling of micro-credentials is the *lack of dedicated funding*. Countries like Spain and Portugal have introduced significant public funding initiatives, but many other states have no clear financial backing for the development of MCs. The survey identified *inconsistent public funding* across Europe, with countries like the *Netherlands* focusing on innovative platforms like Edubadges but with limited financial support to expand their initiatives at scale.

2.2.1 The Role of the European Commission and National Governments

The European Commission's recommendations provide a framework for integrating micro-credentials into national education and labour policies, but the responsibility for

implementation rests with the member states. The *fragmentation* of national policies on MCs across Europe underscores the need for *greater alignment and harmonization* between EU-level guidance and national strategies.

To overcome the current challenges, several key actions are needed:

- *Development of Clear National Policies*: National governments need to establish coherent policies that define the role of micro-credentials in higher education, vocational training, and the labour market. These policies should address the recognition, portability, and stackability of MCs to ensure they can be transferred across institutions and borders.

- *Quality Assurance Mechanisms*: A standardized approach to quality assurance is critical for ensuring the credibility of micro-credentials. National agencies need to work with institutions to develop external evaluation processes that align with the requirements of both education and industry sectors.

- *Funding and Support*: Governments should establish dedicated funding mechanisms to support the development, implementation, and scaling of micro-credential programs. This is especially important in countries where innovation in digital certification, such as the Netherlands' Edubadges, requires financial backing to reach its full potential.

- *Cross-Border Recognition*: The European Commission and national governments must work together to ensure that micro-credentials are recognized across borders. This will involve integrating frameworks like the ECTS into national policies and ensuring that micro-credentials issued in one country can be recognized and used in another.

The current status of micro-credentials across Europe is one of *uneven development*. While countries like *Spain* and *Portugal* have taken significant steps forward, the lack of coherent national policies in many member states creates a fragmented landscape. Issues such as quality assurance, funding, and cross-border recognition remain critical barriers to the widespread adoption and recognition of micro-credentials.

To fully realize the potential of micro-credentials in promoting lifelong learning, upskilling, and mobility, it is essential that both national governments and the European Commission take a more active role in *standardizing* and *supporting* the development of MCs across Europe.

3. Towards the harmonization and alignment of policy: Peer Learning Activity

These three studies alone do not lead to any firm recommendations. Therefore the 19 participants representing vice-rectors and/or department heads in MCs and CEPD from the HEIs in MCE were asked to reflect, via Padlet, first on the maturity level of their institution in relation to policy development for MCs and on what their own institution and nation would need to be able to make MCs policy/ies a reality.

3.1 The MCE's HEIs maturity level in relation to policy development for MCs

To gather this, participants were asked to estimate the maturity level of their institution in relation to the development of micro-credential policies, against an agreed set of criteria.

The exercise revealed that many institutions were progressing in their approach to micro-credentials, but challenges like lack of business models, varying definitions, and quality assurance systems remained obstacles for fully integrating micro-credentials into their institutional educational strategies.

Figure 1 below shows the maturity level estimates of each of the HEIs participating in the MCE project in relation to MCs policy development. These are not intended to be comparative but to reflect the participants' own view of their institutional progress.
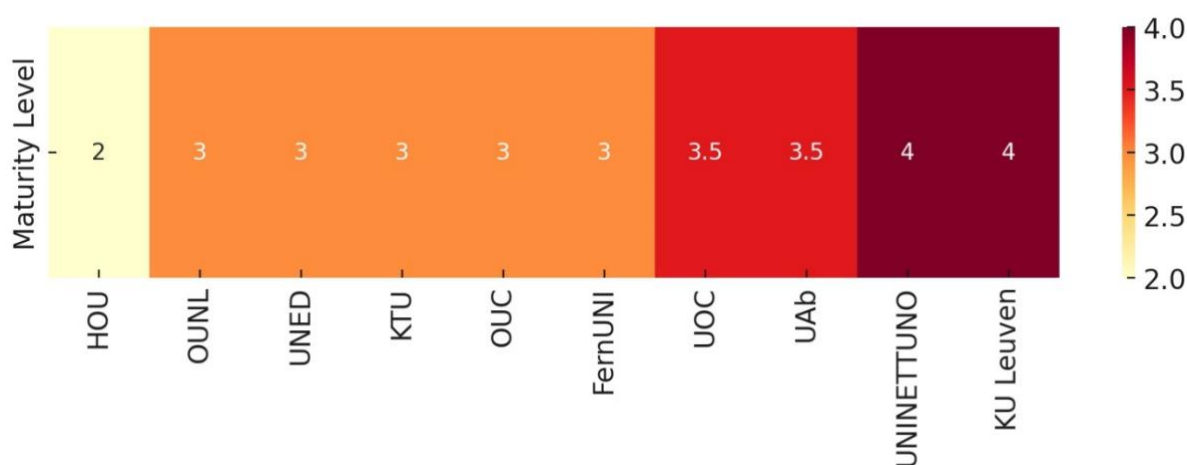

Figure 1- Maturity level in relation to micro-credential policies across the HEIs part of the MCE, according to the participants in our study

Challenges for our HEIs were also underlined and the development of Micro-Credentials (MCs) appears to be the critical first step for institutions aiming to enhance their educational offerings. However, there is ongoing debate about the precise definition of MCs. While the EU provides a general framework, it remains somewhat unclear how MCs differ from other short learning programs and how they can be integrated into regular degree programs, such as through stackability. This ambiguity is further complicated by misalignments between national educational frameworks, making it more challenging to ensure the exchange and comparability of credentials across borders. Additionally, not all universities have established a clear strategy for MCs, although many are in the process of developing one. In many cases,

this strategy is operationalized through Lifelong Learning Institutes or similar entities within the university that focus on lifelong learning (LLL). This institutional approach often represents the first concrete step towards the realization of MCs.

Another critical aspect of the discussion is the need for a sustainable business model for MCs. In some countries, these credentials are either government-funded or self-funded, but the question of long-term sustainability remains. Tailoring MCs to meet the specific needs of customers is crucial but ensuring that there is a demand, and uptake is not yet certain. Additionally, there are challenges in determining who can deliver these credentials, as some countries have restrictions on who can serve as a trainer. Finally, quality assurance (QA) processes for MCs are seen as a significant challenge. Some institutions are beginning to develop new QA processes specifically for MCs, but this is still an area that requires further attention and development to ensure that these credentials maintain high standards and are widely recognized.

3.2 What is needed to make micro-credential policy and their development a reality

In a second reflection exercise, the representatives of all institutions were asked to consider what would need to happen for this alignment to be reached, from their context. All participants were requested to note down their reflections in a shared Padlet and a plenary discussion followed based on the Padlet results.

A thematic analysis of the Padlet notes was conducted and complemented with further specifications from the recording of the discussion. Table 1 gives an overview of the primary themes emerging from the Padlet notes.

Table 1 Towards Alignment of European, national and institutional policies of MCs

Theme	Description
Regulatory context and responsibilities	The role of the national government in devising a vision and strategy for MCs was underscored by many participants. They indicated that (i) the **lack of a coherent policy** on a national level was leading to fragmentation and the necessity for bottom-up approaches, (ii) governments were **not investing** as many resources in this as needed, (ii) the levels of government that are involved do not have the necessary **mandate** for deciding on strategy around MCs. For example, in Germany, the regulation on Higher Education is on a state level (Länder) and not on a federal level.
Scope of national frameworks	There was a range of opinions on **how far national frameworks should go** in defining official frameworks for HEI on MCs. Some preferred that national official frameworks are set up on how to manage MCs at a HEI. Some liked the bottom-up approach where institutions were defining the approach most in line with their needs.
Trusted Providers of MCs: Quality Assurance	Although the EC Recommendation opens the possibility of non-HEI MC providers such as vocational training institutions and industry sector organisations, the participants indicated that the **lack of clear definitions of quality and guidelines** on how quality can be

	guaranteed is hindering the implementation of this policy. A national strategy needs to be present that clarifies guidelines to all parties in an MC ecosystem (trusted providers, students and employers).
Trusted Providers of MCs: Topics and Disciplines of Expertise	Another aspect relates to **which topics and disciplines are most suited** for MCs from HEIs. Here, there was a note that as the EU Recommendation points to both labour market demands, as well as societal and cultural needs, universities may have a **distinct advantage** in developing MCs on the latter. Concerns were also raised that the societal and cultural needs were often defined by the source of funding (large industrial players, government priorities such as digital transformation, etc.), creating fewer possibilities for less marketable subjects (such as cultural studies). This would need strategic government support.
Credibility of Providers of MCs: Employer Awareness	As the landscape of MCs grows, concerns were raised that a potential tiering of micro-credential providers could denigrate the image of micro-credentials if not properly regulated. For example, if a company like Google offers a micro-credential in cybersecurity, who will recognize this certification? There needs to be a **regulatory body** that can affirm the credibility of such certifications, especially if they extend beyond the core expertise of the provider. This will create more awareness with employers and boost the credibility of micro-credentials.
Stackability and Curriculum-level	The participants called for a deeper discussion on the consequences of stackability: if 18 year-old students are able to collect MCs and see those recognized in full programs, are we going to lose the **"curriculum-level" narrative of the learning experiences**? Future projects or consortia should anticipate these risks and barriers, providing policy makers with support in governing these new educational tools. There was also a plenary reflection on the larger picture and how academia can respond to objections about the integrity of learning pathways with the advent of micro-credentials.
Funding in line with a clear policy	Multiple partners indicated that **national funding is fragmented** and not supported by a larger, long-term vision and strategy embedded in policy.
European alignment	One participant indicated that **policy alignment needs to take place between countries** as well, in terms of agreement on ECTS, digital certification tool, and mutual recognition among universities and countries.

4. Conclusions and Future Work

The MCE project findings highlight several challenges and opportunities in aligning institutional, national, and EU policies for micro-credentials. A primary conclusion is the significant variation in how micro-credentials are defined and implemented across institutions and countries. While some institutions have structured approaches with developed policies, others are still in early stages, using various terms and lacking formal strategies. This inconsistency creates a fragmented landscape that makes alignment difficult, particularly as institutions are often moving faster than national policy frameworks.

Quality assurance and recognition of micro-credentials are also areas of concern. Many institutions rely on internal processes, but there is a lack of external accreditation mechanisms that would ensure the portability and stackability of micro-credentials, especially across borders. Furthermore, while some institutions offer micro-credentials through public or self-funded models, the absence of a coherent business model or sustainable funding mechanisms presents a significant challenge to the broader adoption and scalability of these credentials.

The future work in this area should focus on fostering greater alignment across all levels. At the EU level, there is a need to develop a more detailed framework that builds on the European Commission's recommendations but provides clearer guidelines for institutions and national bodies. This framework should offer practical solutions to standardize aspects such as ECTS credits, assessment methods, and quality assurance, while allowing enough flexibility for institutions to adapt micro-credentials to their local and national contexts.

For national governments, it will be crucial to develop policies that are in harmony with the EU framework while addressing the specific needs of their higher education systems and labor markets. National policies should support the integration of micro-credentials into lifelong learning initiatives and provide a structure that encourages collaboration between institutions, vocational training providers, and industry. This would also involve working closely with quality assurance agencies to develop external accreditation mechanisms, ensuring the credibility and recognition of micro-credentials across borders.

Institutions themselves should focus on refining their internal strategies to better align with national and EU policies. They should invest in developing sustainable business models, exploring partnerships with industry, and enhancing their quality assurance systems to meet external standards. Additionally, institutions should work on making micro-credentials more stackable and portable, allowing learners to combine them into larger qualifications and transfer them across different institutions and countries.

In summary, aligning institutional, national, and EU policies for micro-credentials requires collaborative efforts across all levels. Clearer definitions, consistent quality assurance processes, and sustainable funding models are essential to ensure that micro-credentials become a valuable tool for both lifelong learning and professional development across Europe. While differences in national and institutional contexts are inevitable, a harmonized approach that supports flexibility within a common framework will be key to success.

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