

Lessons from the Commonwealth of Learning: A Commonwealth Approach to Micro-credential Framework Implementation



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Introduction

Good morning, distinguished colleagues and esteemed guests. It is a privilege to be part of *CredX 2026: Symposium on Micro-Credentials, Badges, and Recognition*. Thank you very much for the kind invitation to share insights and lessons from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) on our Commonwealth-wide approach to implementing a micro-credential framework.

Commonwealth of Learning and Micro-credentials

I am representing COL, an intergovernmental organisation that is one of the three Commonwealth organisations and is based in Vancouver, Canada. Our organisation has long championed access, openness and collaboration across its 56 member states – covering over 2.5 billion people. Through initiatives in open and distance learning, digital transformation and policy support, COL has provided a foundation for inclusive lifelong learning systems.

Historically, one of the key objectives of COL (2014) has been to specifically “establishing and maintaining procedures for the recognition of academic credit” (p. 3). It is within this context, and amid increased interest and need for the use and recognition of micro-credentials in partner countries, that COL has embarked on the *Micro-credentials in a Digital Age: Developing a Commonwealth credit transfer framework* project (COL, 2025; Olivier et al., 2025). This project aims to develop a Commonwealth Framework for Micro-credentials, advancing more flexible, recognised and inclusive learning pathways across member states. For COL, a micro-credential is a:

Digital credential awarded for shorter learning experiences – including courses – that show a record of focused learning achievement and verify what the learner knows, understands, or can do. This includes credentials awarded by a trusted provider and assessed in accordance with clearly defined outcomes and standards. A micro-credential has stand-alone value and may also contribute to or complement other micro-credentials or macro-credentials, including through recognition of prior learning. Micro-credentials

must meet the standards established by the relevant quality assurance agency. (COL, 2025, p. 124).

At its heart, the framework seeks to answer a simple question: How can we make learning portable across borders and institutions through micro-credentials?

To achieve this, we are working towards:

- Mainstreaming of micro-credentials in partner countries and institutions;
- A Commonwealth-wide registry and metadata system for micro-credentials;
- A model that supports interoperability between national qualifications frameworks; and
- Mechanisms for quality assurance and policy alignment across member states.

The ultimate goal is not just technical integration, but human mobility, enabling learners to carry their learning achievements wherever they go, whether for work, further study, or personal development.

Status of Micro-credentials in the Commonwealth

A status review of micro-credentials in Commonwealth was conducted with stakeholders and governments (COL, 2025). Across the Commonwealth's 56 countries, 43 responses were received from governments and quality assurance agencies. These respondents were not casual observers: they were government officials in ministries of education or from national-level agencies responsible for education and quality assurance. So, the findings offer a valuable policy-level snapshot of how micro-credentials are currently understood across the Commonwealth.

Of those 43 respondents, only 17 said their country has a policy, strategy or framework specifically related to micro-credentials. Among the identified policy mechanisms, the most common was the national qualifications framework. By contrast, because very few countries have a national credit framework, this was the least frequently cited mechanism for promoting micro-credentials (COL, 2025).

The survey also explored how micro-credentials are being made available, who is providing them, and through what modes of delivery. Here, universities were the most frequently identified providers, with 22 responses. They were followed by polytechnics or vocational training institutes (18), then private or for-profit companies and industry providers (17). This tells us that provision is already spread across both public and private sectors, with strong involvement from higher education and skills-based institutions (COL, 2025).

At the national level, the strongest motivation for micro-credentials is flexibility. An overwhelming 90.24 per cent of respondents highlighted flexible learning pathways as a key driver. This was followed by promoting lifelong learning at 80.49 per cent, and by both improving employability and providing industry-oriented or industry-linked courses at 78.05 per cent. Other important motivations included recognising training provided by industry

(63.41 per cent), assuring the quality of short courses (58.54 per cent), and increasing the efficiency and quality of learning (56.1 per cent). Interestingly, reducing the cost of learning was the least important factor, cited by only 26.83 per cent (COL, 2025).

But the survey also reveals why progress remains slow. Most respondents said stakeholders lack the capacity to implement micro-credentials effectively. Human resourcing is especially weak: 19 countries reported no dedicated human resources at all; 9 described provision as sporadic and variable; only 4 reported adequate human resources; and just 1 indicated comprehensive and dedicated staffing (COL, 2025).

The barriers are also strikingly consistent. Almost all were rated in the ‘significant’ range on a five-point scale, ranging from 3.5 to 4.49. The only exceptions were the availability of local-language micro-credentials (rated 3.39) and the cost of micro-credentials (rated 3.37). The most significant barriers were a lack of incentives for training providers (3.97), followed by a lack of quality assurance (3.95), a lack of industry recognition (3.92), and a lack of supporting policies and guidelines (3.84) (COL, 2025).

So, the message is clear: interest is strong, providers are active, and the case for micro-credentials is compelling, but without stronger capacity at governmental level, clearer policy, and more robust quality assurance, they will remain difficult to mainstream.

Consultation and collaboration: Building consensus

In developing the Commonwealth Framework, COL engaged in wide-ranging consultations with governments, institutions, and stakeholders across the Commonwealth through five in-person regional consultation meetings in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Pacific.

From the consultations, several recurring themes and recommendations emerged:

- First, the need for a Commonwealth registry is clear: a shared platform for cataloguing and accessing verified micro-credentials.
- Second, there is a strong consensus on the need for a unified digital infrastructure that ensures interoperability across systems and borders.
- Third, participants emphasised that multi-stakeholder collaboration among ministries, universities, private-sector employers, and learners themselves is essential to scale success.

Above all, the consultations underscored the importance of communication and clear policy frameworks. Innovation, after all, cannot thrive in isolation; it requires coordination, trust, and transparency. The Commonwealth, with its diversity of education systems yet shared heritage of cooperation, offers an ideal environment for such collaboration. The framework we are developing is thus not only a technical tool but also a symbol of collective commitment to inclusive and lifelong learning.

Developing a Commonwealth Micro-credential Framework for Lifelong Learning

In developing the *Commonwealth Micro-credential Framework for Lifelong Learning* (COL, 2025), COL commissioned three targeted studies: a review of the scholarly literature on micro-credentials, a status survey across Commonwealth countries, and a scoping review of relevant technologies and registries. As noted before, five regional stakeholder consultations were also used to gather practical insights. These efforts have already produced two major outputs: the *Towards a Micro-credential Framework for the Commonwealth* report and the *Commonwealth Micro-credential Framework for Lifelong Learning*¹. Together, they provide a strong basis for embedding micro-credentials in education and skills systems, with a clear emphasis on quality assurance, recognition of prior learning, digital interoperability, and learner-centred design.

From our research and dialogue, several foundational elements have emerged as critical to the success of micro-credentials:

- *Shared definitions*: Without a common language, there can be no common understanding. Establishing what we mean by “micro-credential” is the first step toward policy coherence.
- *Integration with qualifications frameworks*: Micro-credentials should not exist in isolation; they must articulate with existing national and regional frameworks to ensure recognition.
- *Quality assurance*: The credibility of micro-credentials depends on transparent, standardised quality measures.
- *Collaboration*: Governments, institutions, and industries must co-design pathways that link learning to employability.
- *Sustainability and capacity building*: Institutions require both technical and human resources to design, deliver, and maintain micro-credential systems.
- *Technology standards*: Without interoperable digital systems, scalability becomes impossible.

Together, these principles form the blueprint for a resilient micro-credential ecosystem, one that can flex, scale, and endure.

Micro-credentials implementation at national and regional levels

As part of the project, implementation is ongoing in the national and regional frameworks in Eswatini, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and the Caribbean. This will be followed by implementation at institutional level across 10 post-secondary institutions in the Commonwealth, where institutions will be supported to create an institutional micro-credentials policy aligned with the national and COL micro-credential frameworks. Furthermore, staff capacity building and support in developing at least 10 micro-credentials per institution will also be provided.

¹ The *Towards a Micro-credential Framework for the Commonwealth* report and the *Commonwealth Micro-credential Framework for Lifelong Learning* can be downloaded here: <https://hdl.handle.net/11599/5742>

In addition to sharing information about our project, this presentation also provides insights from good practices in the Commonwealth. In this context, some significant lessons from Malaysia, Mauritius and the Caribbean are shared.

Case example: Malaysia

Malaysia presents some interesting insights in terms of implementing micro-credentials in higher education:

- Malaysia has developed one of the clearest national policy approaches to micro-credentials (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2020). The Malaysian Qualifications Agency's 2020 guidelines define micro-credentials as digital certification of assessed knowledge, skills and competencies, whether drawn from accredited programmes or offered as stand-alone courses.
- Its framework is built around strong design principles (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2020). Malaysian guidance emphasises that micro-credentials should be outcome-based, personalised, industry-driven, secure, shareable, and transparent.
- Malaysia treats micro-credentials as part of lifelong learning, not as a side project (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2020). The guidelines explicitly position them as tools for reskilling, upskilling, flexible access and stackable progression.
- A significant feature is the connection to formal recognition (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2020). Malaysia links micro-credentials to credit transfer, Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, and recognised qualification pathways, helping learners move between short-form learning and larger awards.
- The model allows multiple forms of provision (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2020). Micro-credentials may come from a single higher education provider, from multiple providers working together, or as stand-alone offerings designed around specific workforce or learner needs.
- Quality assurance is not left implicit (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2020). The Malaysian framework requires market needs assessment, outcomes- or competency-based design, credible assessment, monitored delivery, review processes, learner experience measures, and secure learner records.
- Online and blended delivery are central to the model (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2020). The guidelines note that micro-credentials can be delivered through open and distance learning, conventional teaching or blended modes, with online provision seen as especially useful for widening access.
- Malaysia's system also takes professional relevance seriously (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2020). The guidance states that micro-credentials in professional fields should be clear about status and future recognition, and providers should consult relevant professional bodies.
- University practice shows that the policy is being translated into institutional systems (Cheng et al., 2025). Practices at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Pahang

Al-Sultan Abdullah, and Multimedia University shows that micro-credentials are organised through dedicated committees, faculty representatives, and university-level centres rather than isolated experiments (Cheng et al., 2025).

- These universities also show strong attention to labour-market alignment (Cheng et al., 2025). Their micro-credentials are shaped through job-market analysis, industry consultation, expert review, and quality checks before release.
- Employer engagement is a particularly important practical feature (Cheng et al., 2025). There is ample evidence of partnerships with industry bodies, customised professional development offerings, and collaborations with employers to strengthen relevance and uptake.
- Malaysia's experience suggests that successful micro-credentialing depends on both national architecture and institutional capacity (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2020; Cheng et al., 2025). The combination of policy guidance, quality assurance, industry partnerships, digital certification and pathway design makes it a strong example of system-building rather than ad hoc course provision.

Case example: Mauritius

The small island nation of Mauritius has also emerged as a regional leader on micro-credentials in Southern Africa. They are also a key partner in the *Potential of Microcredentials in Southern Africa (PoMiSA)* project². Some insights from Mauritius include:

- Mauritius is building a national model, not isolated pilots (Higher Education Commission, 2025). The 2025 blueprint frames micro-credentials as a system-wide reform to ensure consistency, quality, and uptake across higher education.
- Portability is a major strength. Micro-credentials are learner-owned, portable records of assessed learning that may stand alone or combine to form larger qualifications (Higher Education Commission, 2025).
- Stackability is being designed deliberately. Mauritius links micro-credentials to the National Credit Value and Transfer System and the National Qualifications Framework, creating clearer routes for credit, advanced standing and progression (Higher Education Commission, 2025).
- Quality assurance is central, not optional. External oversight by the Higher Education Commission is combined with internal institutional quality systems (Higher Education Commission, 2025).
- Industry co-design is treated as essential. The framework emphasises relevance, recognition and collaboration with employers to meet real-time skills needs (Higher Education Commission, 2025).
- A practical lesson is a phased implementation. Roll-out moves from academic micro-credentials to industry-led offerings and then to fully stackable models, which offer a realistic route for system adoption (Higher Education Commission, 2025).

² For more on the *Potential of Microcredentials in Southern Africa* project, see: <https://pomisa.hec.mu/>

- The Higher Education Commission, in collaboration with COL, has developed *Micro-credentials in Mauritius: Approval & Recognition Framework*. This sets out clear standards across three dimensions: design, delivery and provider capability.

Case example: Caribbean

COL's work in the Caribbean, carried out in collaboration with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), underscores the importance of not only institutional, provincial, or national thinking but also the affordances of a regional approach to micro-credentials. In this regard, the following can be noted:

- The Caribbean is shifting from isolated practice to regional coordination. A Technical Working Group convened by the CARICOM Secretariat, representing Ministers of Education and supported by COL, is leading this work as a regional effort rather than a set of separate national initiatives.
- Regional ownership is central. The framework is being drafted first as a Caribbean document, then reviewed and strengthened with COL support so it reflects both regional priorities and global good practice.
- The process is deliberately consultative. The draft is being tested across member states for accuracy, relevance, and alignment with Caribbean realities, while also being linked to the CARICOM Qualifications Framework for smoother implementation, portability, and credit recognition.
- This matters because policy has lagged behind practice. A 2024 study found no explicit regional micro-credential policy, even though many institutions were already offering short courses and certificates in practice (COL, 2024).
- There is already a base to build on. The Caribbean Examinations Council is piloting modular assessments, digital badges, digital assessment systems and blockchain-supported credential issuance (COL, 2024).
- The regional direction is clear. Next steps include a shared framework, a registry, credit systems, and stronger alignment between learning, recognition and mobility.
- A practical lesson is to build scale on trust. Start with shared standards, broad consultation, employer input, modular assessment and credit pathways into larger qualifications. That makes micro-credentials easier to recognise, transfer and grow across systems.

Looking towards institutional implementation at scale

Towards successful institutional micro-credential implementation, it is important to *design small, consult widely, and implement at scale*:

- Start with policy alignment: Link institutional policy to national, regional and qualification frameworks from the outset.
- Create a dedicated implementation team: Assign clear responsibility, staffing and decision-making authority.

- Build for labour-market relevance: Co-design micro-credentials with employers, professional bodies and industry partners.
- Prioritise quality assurance early: Use clear standards for design, assessment, review and recognition.
- Invest in staff capacity: Train academic, technical and administrative staff before expecting scale.
- Design stackable pathways: Make micro-credentials portable, credit-bearing where possible, and connected to larger awards.
- Use interoperable digital systems: Ensure secure issuing, sharing, verification and registry integration.
- Scale through phased implementation: Begin with targeted pilots, evaluate them carefully, then expand with evidence and stakeholder buy-in.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Commonwealth's experience shows that micro-credentials will only achieve their promise when they are treated not as isolated innovations, but as part of a wider learning, recognition and mobility ecosystem. COL's work demonstrates that successful implementation depends on shared definitions, policy coherence, quality assurance, digital interoperability, institutional capacity and strong collaboration across governments, institutions and industry. The lessons from Malaysia, Mauritius and the Caribbean confirm that scale requires both strategic vision and practical systems. Ultimately, the task before us is not simply to create more micro-credentials, but to build trusted frameworks through which learning can travel, stack, and matter.

Thank you very much.

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