

BOOK REVIEW

Microcredentials for Excellence: A Practical Guide

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Microcredentials for excellence offers a detailed guide to creating, managing, and understanding the value of microcredential programmes. Ferguson and Whitelock bring significant expertise from The Open University, where they developed a highly regarded microcredential programme that has attracted thousands of learners. The book explores the distinct advantages of microcredentials for workforce-oriented education, emphasising flexibility, accessibility, and stackability. The book chapters cover relevant pedagogies, learner support, assessment methods, and future directions for microcredential programmes, making it a comprehensive resource for educators, policymakers, and institutional leaders.

Microcredentials are emerging as short, flexible, and often online-based qualifications that provide evidence of specific learning outcomes (Bozkurt & Brown, 2022; Cowie & Sakui, 2021). Microcredentials can be stackable or standalone and are typically assessed against transparent criteria (Bozkurt & Brown, 2022). They are seen as part of the 21st-century credentialing ecosystem (Bozkurt & Brown, 2022) and can be collected and shared online (Halavais, 2013).

The authors establish the uniqueness of microcredentials in aligning closely with workplace demands, and allowing for skill-based learning that is typically shorter and often delivered online. They also address challenges such as defining microcredentials uniformly and integrating them with existing qualifications. Each chapter combines practical guidance with research-backed insights, making the book a credible resource for institutions looking to adapt to rapid changes in the job market through educational innovations.

The first chapter introduces the concept of microcredentials, defining them as short, stackable courses primarily aimed at workplace skills and accessible online. They do well in defining them as scholars have noted the lack of consensus on their definition and value (Cowie & Sakui, 2021; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2021). The chapter discusses the potential of microcredentials to address employment needs by equipping learners with specific competencies, positioning them as valuable for both personal development and workforce readiness. The authors outline the book's goals, including practical guidance on microcredential production, learner support, assessment, and evaluation.

In the second chapter, entitled "Pedagogy of Microcredentials", the authors explore pedagogical approaches that suit microcredentials, emphasising the need for training and flexibility in both learners and educators. They discuss how these credentials differ from traditional courses, which shapes both instructional methods and the learner experience. This chapter identifies key educational practices like competency-based learning and project-based assessments as effective for microcredentials due to their emphasis on skill acquisition relevant to the workplace.



Chapter 3: “Microcredentials and Supporting Learners”, describes the logistics of creating microcredential programmes, from team roles to the technical and pedagogical skills required. The authors stress that successful microcredential development demands collaboration across departments and integration of expertise in areas such as instructional design, video production, and accessibility. They also discuss the role of learners in programme feedback, highlighting how learner input can improve microcredential relevance and effectiveness.

In Chapter 4, Ferguson and Whitelock provide a roadmap for institutions new to microcredential development. They review frameworks that guide the planning process, including strategic considerations like alignment with institutional goals and industry needs. Case studies of various global implementations illustrate different strategic intents and highlight the benefits of microcredentials for learners and institutions alike.

The fifth chapter, on learning design, outlines the innovative learning design methods used at The Open University to produce microcredentials. The authors discuss ways to accelerate course production while ensuring high-quality content. Emphasis is placed on teamwork and rapid iteration, which are vital to developing up-to-date programmes in fast-evolving fields like AI and cybersecurity.

Recognising the need for learners to balance their studies with work or family responsibilities, the sixth chapter, on student well-being, examines how institutions can support their mental health and well-being. The authors discuss potential stresses specific to online learning, such as isolation, and offer strategies for providing meaningful support that enhances learner engagement and retention. Assessment is critical when it comes to microcredentials, as it validates skills for employers. In Chapter 7, the authors thus discuss the challenges of designing assessments that are rigorous yet adaptable for short courses. They explore traditional and digital assessment formats, looking at how to align them with industry standards while also considering issues related to stackable credentials.

In Chapter 8, Ferguson and Whitelock investigate the quality of microcredentials and discuss how these programmes fit into broader accreditation frameworks. The authors emphasise that credible evaluations are essential for acceptance by employers and higher education institutions. They outline best practises for ongoing evaluation, such as stakeholder feedback, to ensure microcredentials remain relevant and high quality. In the final chapter, the authors speculate on the future of microcredentials, considering potential growth in accessibility, international recognition, and integration with traditional qualifications. They address technological and pedagogical advancements, predicting that microcredentials will become a significant element of lifelong learning and workforce development.

Strengths and Weaknesses

One of the book’s key strengths is its research-backed approach, grounded in the authors’ extensive experience in the field. The practical insights are not only theoretically sound but also adaptable to different educational settings, making them relevant for a diverse audience. The book’s inclusion of current pedagogical models, such as competency-based learning, case-based learning, and Universal Design for Learning, showcases innovative approaches to support diverse learners.

However, a possible limitation is that the book focuses heavily on the UK and European systems, which might make some institutional guidelines less applicable in regions with different educational standards. Additionally, while it provides excellent frameworks, educators new to online learning design may require more granular details on implementing these ideas. Also, it would have been useful to indicate that some critics argue that microcredentials may contribute

to the privatisation of education, the transfer costs to individuals, and reinforce precarious labour market conditions (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2021). As the field evolves, governments and organisations are working to establish criteria and guidelines for microcredentials (Cowie & Sakui, 2021). For this reason, Ferguson and Whitelock's work is particularly relevant and noteworthy.

Conclusion

This book is a leading resource within the educational technology and workforce development fields. By addressing both pedagogical and administrative aspects of microcredentialing, it fills a unique gap, offering a comprehensive view that is often missing from similar publications. The book's emphasis on rigorous quality standards and the future potential of microcredentials makes it a pioneering work in how education can meet modern workforce demands. Compared to other texts on digital badges or online education, this guide focuses on practical applications within accredited educational settings, offering a roadmap to sustainable microcredentialing practices.

In conclusion, the value of *Microcredentials for excellence* lies in its timely and actionable insights for institutions responding to the demands of lifelong learning and skill-specific education. The emphasis put by the authors on quality assurance and structured assessments enhances the credibility and portability of microcredentials, which is essential for both learners and employers. The book's balanced approach to theory and practice makes it an essential read for those seeking to navigate the evolving landscape of higher education and professional training. This guide is well-suited for educational leaders, policymakers, and curriculum designers focused on fostering accessible, stackable, and skill-focused learning experiences.

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Reviewer Notes

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