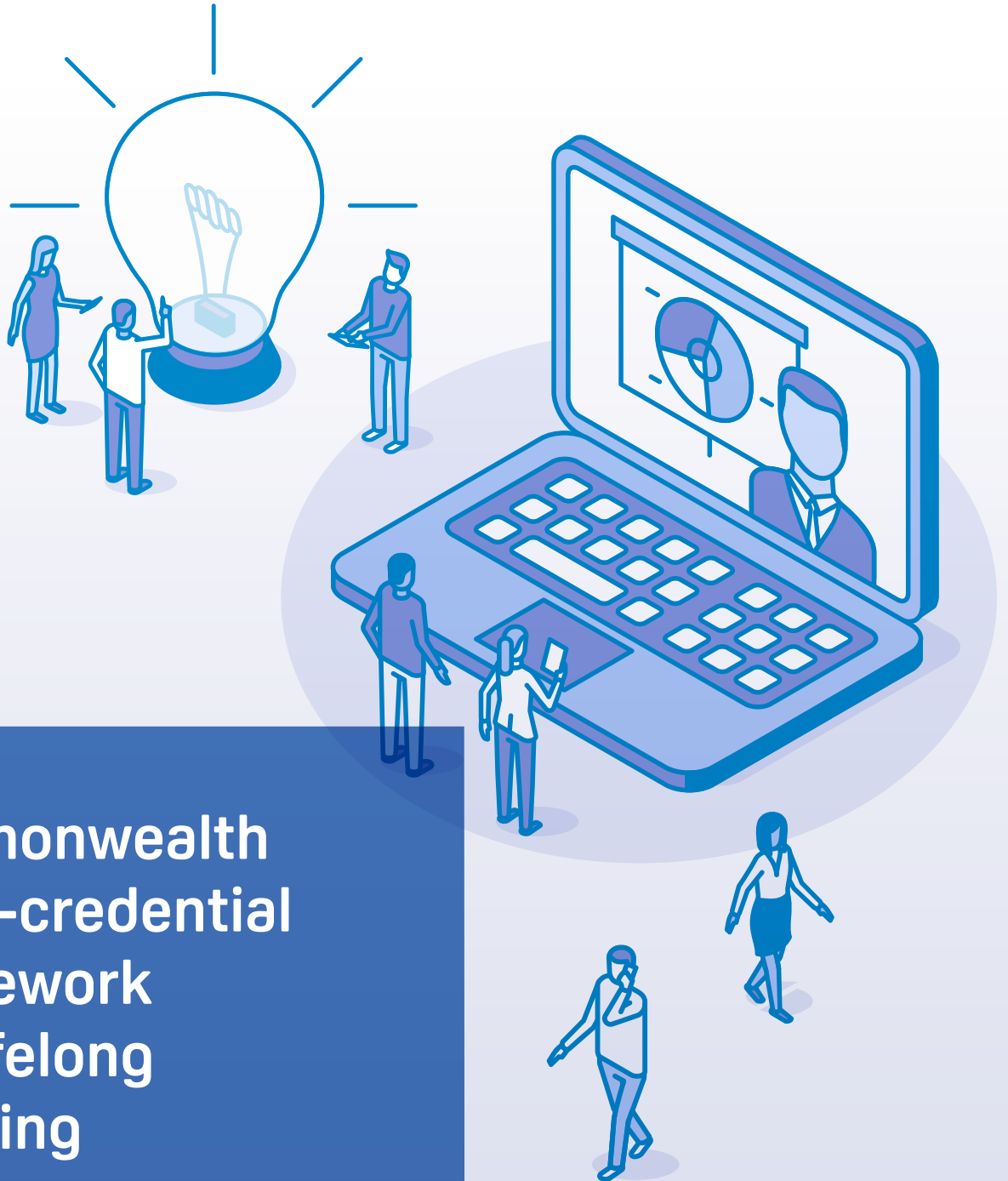




COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



Commonwealth Micro-credential Framework for Lifelong Learning



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Preamble

Recognising the need for Commonwealth countries to provide more accessible opportunities for skills development and lifelong learning to support economic development and progress,

Inspired by the common will to strengthen Commonwealth Member States' education systems to increase access to quality learning opportunities at all levels,

Reaffirming our commitment to gender equality and access for persons with disabilities in all levels of education and training,

Being mindful of the role and contribution of young people and the large youth population in the Commonwealth,

Taking note of the Commonwealth Charter "to improve the lives of all the people of the Commonwealth,"

Recalling the Member States' endorsement of Sustainable Development Goal 4, to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,"

Acknowledging the increasing mobility of students, workers, professionals, researchers, and academics across the Commonwealth, and especially in the Small States,

Respecting the different practices across the Member States in terms of modes, methods, developments, and innovations in teaching and learning, including online and distance learning,

Appreciating the role of private institutions in furthering education and training as a public good to achieve social, economic, and cultural developments,

Convinced of the need for a common understanding of and practical and transparent solutions to implement micro-credentials by adopting globally recognised best practices,

Acting within the mandate included in the Memorandum of Understanding of the Commonwealth of Learning for "establishing and maintaining procedures for the recognition of academic credit," and

Building on the experiences from the Transnational Qualifications Framework of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth,

This "Commonwealth Micro-credential Framework for Lifelong Learning" has been developed through extensive consultation with stakeholders in the Commonwealth to help Commonwealth Member States adopt systematic practices for offering and recognising quality-assured micro-credentials in Member States.

ARTICLE I. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this framework, the following definitions apply:

Accreditation: The systematic process of formally recognising the quality of an institution providing micro-credentials.

Assessment: The evaluation of a learner's knowledge, skills, or both through a systematic design process, verification of prior learning, or both.

Badge: A form of recognition, often electronic, of an individual's accomplishment.

Competencies: The knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviours that indicate an individual's potential performance.

Credential: A qualification or achievement — for example, the successful completion of a course or a programme of study — recognised by the competent authority in a country.

Credit: The notional value assigned to a course or learning experience that is earned by an individual when they successfully achieve the prescribed learning outcomes. Credits are normally expressed in notional hours of learning. Although notional credit hours differ from country to country, they allow courses to be compared for the purposes of credit transfer at the appropriate level and clarify how much can be transferred.

Credit transfer: The process of recognising credits earned in one institution or country to provide equivalency for further study and work in another.

Data privacy: An individual's ability to determine independently when, how, and to what extent their personal information can be shared in the context of micro-credentials.

Data transparency: The sharing of integrity of information about micro-credentials and processes associated with quality assurance in accordance with national legislation.

Digital credential: A credential that is available in a digital format and can be verified by using public and private keys so that learners, education institutions, and potential employers can check the status and validity of the credential.



Experiential learning: The experience, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies acquired by an individual in a work environment or daily life.

Formal learning: Learning derived from activities within a structured learning setting that lead to a formal qualification and are provided by a recognised education provider.

Informal learning: Learning that occurs outside the formal learning environment through day-to-day experiences at work, in the local community, and within family settings and leisure activities.

Learning outcomes: Acquired knowledge and skills that a learner can demonstrate upon the completion of a micro-credential.

Lifelong learning: Learning that occurs across an individual's lifetime through a combination of activities within formal, informal, and non-formal learning environments.

Micro-credential: 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.

Micro-credential provider: Any agency responsible for providing a micro-credential in accordance with the guidelines and regulations defined in the relevant country. Agencies can be recognised higher education institutions, technical and vocational education providers, teacher training institutions, industry and business organisations, or non-governmental organisations.

Mobility: The feature that makes it possible to transfer a micro-credential from one institution to another or one country to another, or for an institution or country to accept a micro-credential from another.

Modes of learning: The ways in which micro-credentials are offered to accommodate different learner needs and domain knowledge requirements. Modes can be categorised as in-person (face-to-face), online, or blended (a mix of online and face-to-face).

Non-formal learning: Learning outside the formal education environment. It can include education in the workplace or any other adult learning environment.

Prior learning: The experience, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies an individual already has as a result of earlier formal, non-formal, or informal learning.

Qualifications framework: A system for the classification, publication, and organisation of quality-assured qualifications according to a set of criteria. Normally, qualifications frameworks are developed at a national level and are called national qualifications frameworks (NQFs).

Quality assurance: The process of formally assessing the quality of a micro-credential or micro-credential provider to assure stakeholders that the credentials offered meet the accepted education standards. A competent authority conducts the assessment.

Quality assurance agency: A competent authority legally assigned by the national government to ensure the quality of micro-credentials.

Recognised micro-credential provider: An education and training provider authorised by the national government or its competent authority to offer education and training programmes at a certain level or those agencies that have been duly approved to provide quality-assured micro-credentials.

Recognition: The formal acknowledgement by the national government or its competent authority to validate the credential offered by a micro-credential provider.

Registry of micro-credentials: A directory listing the micro-credentials offered by micro-credential providers in a country.

Stackability: The feature of a micro-credential that allows it to be combined with other credentials so the learner can earn credit for higher courses or programmes of study.

Verification process: An authorised digital technique to verify micro-credentials using public and private keys.

Workload: The amount of learning activity within a course or micro-credential that can be reasonably achieved within the assigned credit value. This can be described in terms of notional study hours.

Section II. Objectives of the Framework

ARTICLE II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the framework are as follows:

1. Assist Commonwealth Member States and institutions with the adoption of a systematic approach to regulating and implementing micro-credentials.
2. Facilitate the mobility of credentials across institutions and beyond national boundaries.
3. Offer stackability options to learners to help them earn higher qualifications in a flexible manner.
4. Foster trust and confidence in the quality of micro-credentials offered by institutions in the Member States.
5. Increase access to flexible quality learning opportunities in different economic sectors.
6. Strengthen Member States' education and training ecosystems by integrating micro-credentials into them.
7. Encourage the availability of reliable information on micro-credentials and their associated best practices.
8. Promote international co-operation, especially within the Commonwealth, by fostering a common understanding about micro-credentials.

Section III. Basic Principles for the Recognition of Micro-Credentials

ARTICLE III. PRINCIPLES

For the micro-credential framework, the following principles should be followed:

1. Formal, informal, and non-formal learning, including experiential learning, should all be recognised as ways to earn micro-credential qualifications.
2. Micro-credentials must be robust and offered through a trusted and quality-assured provider.
3. Learning outcomes should be assessed and recognised irrespective of the modality of learning. The focus of assessment is on learning, not the modality of learning.
4. The stackability of micro-credentials should be considered and promoted, but it will not be a requirement.
5. Micro-credentials must display the knowledge and skills of the person who earned them and offer different private and public views to ensure data privacy.
6. Institutions offering micro-credentials must follow nationally agreed standards and international best practices.
7. Where required, micro-credentials must be industry-oriented and developed in consultation with the respective professional agencies and employers to improve employability.
8. Quality assurance and recognition of micro-credential providers and courses must be carried out in a transparent and fair manner using agreed criteria.
9. Education providers must develop their own credit transfer mechanisms that accommodate local, regional, and international needs to accept micro-credentials.
10. Member States must commit to sharing data about micro-credentials to foster co-operation and learner mobility.



Section IV. Role of Member States and Micro-Credential Providers

ARTICLE IV. RECOGNITION OF MICRO-CREDENTIAL PROVIDERS

1. Micro-credentials can be offered by a range of providers, including higher education institutions, polytechnics/technical and vocational training institutions, the private sector, professional bodies, and community organisations.
2. Member States may develop specific criteria and mechanisms for the accreditation and approval of micro-credential providers to ensure that the quality of the credentials offered is globally acceptable.
3. Micro-credential providers must adhere to the quality standards set by the national regulatory agencies and offer reliable information about micro-credentials through institutional websites, other relevant platforms, or both.

ARTICLE V. RECOGNITION OF MICRO-CREDENTIAL QUALIFICATIONS

1. All micro-credentials offered should be mapped to a relevant national or regional qualifications framework.
2. Micro-credentials should indicate how the micro-credential was delivered and the credit value (in hours) for comparison purposes.
3. Micro-credentials should display the learning outcomes and the knowledge and skills gained and should outline the competencies achieved by the learner.
4. The stackability of a micro-credential may be indicated to provide learners with pathways to accumulate credits and earn qualifications.

5. Micro-credentials should be issued only after evidence-based assessment of the learner's competencies.
6. Micro-credentials should be offered as a digital credential, using a reliable technology system to offer both public and private access to the credentials and ensure users can stack their credentials to use them in the future and share them with employers.

ARTICLE VI. ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

1. Member States should recognise learning gained through formal, informal, and non-formal mechanisms, including experiential learning, and create a flexible learning environment for lifelong learning.
2. National regulatory bodies should develop guidelines to recognise informal and non-formal learning, including experiential learning.
3. Micro-credentials can be earned through the assessment of prior/experiential learning.
4. Successful completion of a micro-credential from an accredited provider can be allowed for credit transfer.

ARTICLE VII. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS

1. Micro-credentials offered by non-accredited providers must be quality-assured by a national regulator to ensure they are globally acceptable.
2. All micro-credentials must be developed by following a systematic process — including needs assessment, alignment with industry requirements, and knowledge and skill building — with provision for the recognition of practical experience, where needed.
3. Micro-credentials should be developed in accordance with national guidelines and international best practices.
4. Accredited micro-credential providers must create an internal system for the quality assurance of micro-credentials and document the process for verification by the national quality assurance agency.
5. Learners' micro-credential records should include the following metadata:



Learner Data:

- identification of the learner (e.g., name, national digital identity number, personal education number)
- date of issue of the credential
- expiry date (if relevant)
- evidence of achievement (if any)
- grade achieved/completion status
- unique micro-credential identifier

Micro-credential data:

- title of the micro-credential
- country of the issuer
- name of the awarding body
- notional workload (in hours)
- level of the learning experience as per the NQF
- level as per the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) category
- learning outcomes
- skills (where appropriate, aligned to relevant taxonomies)
- mode of learning (online, face-to-face, blended, experiential)
- quality assurance record (assuring body and validity)
- stackability options (stand-alone, independent, integrated, or stackable towards another credential)
- any other relevant information

ARTICLE VIII. MICRO-CREDENTIAL REGISTRY OF COURSES

1. Member States should each develop a national registry of micro-credentials through a national collective effort.
2. The national micro-credential registry should include a broad range of metadata to help citizens find, assess, and enrol themselves in relevant courses and programmes to earn credits and credentials.
3. The metadata in the registry will enable the data to be harvested across the Commonwealth to provide information services and access to a wide range of credentials and providers.
4. The metadata for a micro-credential should be categorised into two groups: (i) mandatory and (ii) optional.

The mandatory elements are:

- unique micro-credential identifier
- title of the micro-credential
- description of the micro-credential
- country of the issuer
- name of the awarding body
- notional workload (in hours)
- level as per the NQF
- equivalent ISCED level
- learning outcomes
- skills descriptors (where appropriate, aligned to relevant taxonomies)
- prerequisites (if applicable)
- status (active or archived)
- language (e.g., ISO 639-3)
- mode of learning (online, onsite, blended, experiential)
- type of assessment (traditional testing of theoretical knowledge, application of a skill, portfolio, recognition of prior learning, etc.)
- supervision and identity verification during assessment (unsupervised with no identity verification, supervised with no identity verification, supervised online, or onsite with identity verification)
- quality assurance of the credential
- grade required to earn the credential
- stackability options (stand-alone, independent, integrated, or stackable towards another credential)

The optional elements are:

- duration (in weeks)
- replacing (specify, if any)
- replaced by (specify, if any)
- cost to acquire the credential
- financial support available
- verification process (digital signature, blockchain hash, verifiable URL)

ARTICLE IX. INFORMATION SHARING FOR ASSESSMENT, RECOGNITION, AND CREDIT TRANSFER

1. The micro-credential registry must be updated regularly to ensure it provides up-to-date and reliable information.
2. A reporting system for micro-credential providers should be in place and monitored by the national regulator to protect data transparency and ensure that micro-credentials meet quality guidelines.
3. In the spirit of cooperation, Member States will share information about quality assurance, standards, and best practices.
4. Information about micro-credentials requested by any interested party must be shared within a reasonable period and in accordance with the data privacy and other related regulations of the Member States.



Section V. Implementation Structures and Co-operation

ARTICLE X. NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURES

1. In order to facilitate and promote the adoption of micro-credentials, Member States should create nodal agencies for this specific purpose.
2. Such an agency shall have the necessary human and financial resources to support the framework's effective implementation.
3. Member States shall promote equitable access to micro-credentials, in alignment with national social justice and inclusion priorities, by supporting marginalised groups and advancing gender equity.
4. Member States shall implement strategies to mitigate the digital divide and ensure equitable access to micro-credentials in underserved and remote regions by using context-appropriate delivery modes.
5. Member States in which a necessary framework or policy for micro-credentials is not available shall take appropriate steps to create an enabling environment for the adoption of micro-credentials in their countries. Where relevant policies are available, Member States will ensure they align with the Commonwealth Framework for Micro-credentials for Lifelong Learning.
6. Member States shall establish systems for ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning to inform continuous improvement and ensure the effectiveness of micro-credential initiatives.

ARTICLE XI. INSTITUTIONAL IMPLEMENTATION

1. Micro-credential providers are responsible for the continuous quality improvement of their offerings and for creating the relevant structures to facilitate the design, development, and delivery of quality-assured micro-credentials.
2. All accredited micro-credential providers shall have an internal mechanism for undertaking the quality assurance of micro-credentials.
3. All micro-credential developers shall receive relevant training to ensure the micro-credentials are developed in accordance with the requirements of the relevant industry and the work environment.
4. Institutions shall engage industry partners to co-develop, validate, and review micro-credentials, ensuring they align with current labour market needs and enhance learners' employability.
5. Micro-credentials should be offered only after rigorous assessment of the learners, in accordance with professional requirements or the needs of a specific discipline.
6. Micro-credential providers must maintain process documentation for all the activities and co-operate with the national regulatory agency by providing timely information as required.
7. Institutions that adopt micro-credentials must use suitable, trusted and secure digital credential platforms.
8. Institutions shall establish systems for ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning to inform continuous improvement and ensure the effectiveness of micro-credential initiatives.

Commonwealth Micro-credential Framework for Lifelong Learning is part of the report **Towards a Micro-credential Framework for the Commonwealth**.

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