

Quality Framework for Micro-credentials

What are the minimum requirements for (internal) quality assurance?

1. The quality of the education certified by micro-credentials is assured on the basis of the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#).
2. The Executive Board is familiar with and consciously chooses to offer micro-credentials on the basis of the institution's Lifelong Learning (LLL) vision.
3. The institution has set up an internal quality assurance process for the design, recognition and assurance of the quality of micro-credentials.
4. The institution has designated a body or bodies that can guarantee the final level of micro-credential-certified education.
5. A form of educational evaluation, participation and the possibility of submitting complaints has been organised for participants in micro-credential-certified education.

What are the conditions for participating institutions in the education?

1. The guideline for micro-credentials is that these are educational units that are no smaller than 3 EC and no larger than 30 EC.
2. The education certified by a micro-credential is substantively related to the institution's education and/or research portfolio. This may concern existing education as well as newly developed education or research.
3. It is clear who the intended target group of the education is, what prior knowledge is required from the participants, what the entry requirements are (if any), and how these are tested.
4. The educational programme, the educational environment and the quality of the teaching team enable the incoming participants to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
5. The learning outcomes, the educational level, and the size of the micro-credential are made transparent. The participating institutions describe this in a consistent manner, in line with European agreements (Bologna) and developments in Brussels. On this point, the boards of the umbrella organisations VH and UNL have adopted an addendum. You can find this addendum to the quality framework under these conditions.
6. Institutions in principle recognise the (validated) learning outcomes of micro-credentials already obtained and/or obtained elsewhere. Whether this leads to admission and/or exemption remains under the mandate of the Examination Board or another body designated for this purpose by the institution.
7. The assessments support the learning process of the participant, and the evaluation is valid, reliable, transparent for participants and sufficiently independent.



The adopted supplement to the quality framework regarding the description of the content of micro-credentials

To describe the content of micro-credentials, we adopt the European framework that is based on learning outcomes formulated independently of the learning pathway. Learning outcomes can be translated in Dutch as *leeruitkomsten* and/or *leerresultaten*. The methodology for formulating learning outcomes is up to the institution.

In the framework of the European Bologna agreements, learning outcomes are defined as follows ([Competences in Education and Recognition Project \(CoRe\), 2010, p.21-22](#)):

A learning outcome is a measurable result of a learning experience which allows us to ascertain to which extent/level/standard a competence had been formed or enhanced. Learning outcomes are not properties unique to each student, but statements which allow higher education institutions to measure whether students have developed their competences to the required level.

Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand, and be able to demonstrate after successful completion of a process of learning. They are statements of concrete and verifiable signs that witness/certify how the planned competences, including the required levels of knowledge, are being developed or acquired.

Quality framework regarding the description of the level of micro-credentials

The level of micro-credentials is described in two ways:

- By means of well-formulated learning outcomes that give the reader an idea of the level of the micro-credential.
- In addition, institutions use the EQF/NLQF indicators to indicate the level of the micro-credential. The institution must be able to justify this itself.

Quality framework regarding the description of the extent of micro-credentials

Describing the study load in terms of credits or study load hours is widely applicable for both accredited and accreditation-worthy^[1] provision. This promotes interchangeability and is preferable for micro-credentials.

Linking credits to (the European standards for) study load is relevant for participants and employers so they can estimate the possible time investment. This estimate can be based on the average participant without additional prior knowledge.

[1] We use “accreditation-worthy provision” as a working term to indicate that the provision meets the European ESG standards for quality assurance within the framework of the pilot’s quality framework, but still falls outside existing external quality assurance instruments.



Addendum Experimental Space Quality Framework Pilot Microcredentials

Since 2022, 12 universities and 24 universities of applied sciences have been participating in the microcredentials pilot for higher professional and academic education. The pilot was launched during the Acceleration Plan and has been continued within the Npuls programme. The foundation of the pilot is the quality framework (established by UNL and VH), which defines what is understood by a microcredential within universities and universities of applied sciences, and sets out the quality requirements that must be met. Experience gained during the pilot has now led to a desire to agree on additional experimental space, beyond the boundaries set out in the quality framework.

This was discussed at:

- UNL Steering Group for Education and Research, 4 October 2024
- Npuls Steering Group, 13 December 2024
- VH Board Committee for Education, 7 February 2025

These discussions resulted in the decision to offer the following experimental space alongside the current approach based on the previously established quality framework. It is important to gain practical experience in order to gather sound information for the future scaling of microcredentials.

The experimental space covers the following:

1. Universities are given the opportunity to experiment with provision from 1 ECTS, provided all other requirements of the quality framework are met. Goals to be evaluated at the end of this pilot period are:
 - Establishing the extent to which quality assurance is enforceable and proportionate to the learning unit.
 - Establishing whether it is possible to demonstrate the labour market relevance of the provision (i.e. whether an offering of 1 ECTS is sufficient to have an impact on the employment position of the learner/professional).
2. Universities of applied sciences are given the opportunity to experiment with provision for professionals who are enrolled as initial students (because they have not yet completed a bachelor's or master's degree). Goals to be evaluated at the end of this evaluation period are:
 - Establishing the extent to which this group of professionals benefits from microcredentials.
 - Establishing the extent to which it is possible to clearly delineate and identify this group of professionals from initial students.

The experimental space runs for a period of two years from 1 May 2025 to 30 April 2027. Evaluation should take place in March/April 2027; it is recommended that a light-touch evaluation be organised in March/April 2026.