MCMC
MICRO-CREDENTIALS
MASTERCLASS 2026

MCMC 2026

How digital tools are transforming micro-credentials from design to delivery

Knowledge
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Magazine introduction

How digital tools are transforming micro-credentials from design to delivery

Our fourth Micro-credentials Masterclass brought together education practitioners, policymakers, and experts at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences on 24–26 February 2026. Speakers and participants came from across Europe, the United States, and South Africa - sharing what works, and what still needs work.

MCMC 2026 asked a pointed question: now that micro-credentials are scaling, how do we make sure they deliver?
Digital tools are reshaping the whole system - how we design, deliver, support learners, and connect credentials to the job market.

The event explored four themes:

- Trust in the system - recognition, quality, and assurance across borders
- Innovation forward - emerging technologies reshaping learning design and delivery
- Credentials for all - equity, access, and labour market relevance
- Skills on the move - portable skills and micro-credentials

Each theme included a MC Studio - a practical place of guidance and exchange for everyone building and scaling micro-credentials.

Our MCMC 2026 magazine features summaries of every focus session and masterclass. This includes forty presentations, four themes, and an interactive fishbowl discussion on micro-credentials in practice. There are also many ideas worth contemplating. You'll find links to the original slides and session recordings for further exploration.

None of this would have been possible without our host and co-organiser, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.

See you in 2027?
Planning is already under way for the next edition. Save the date: From Tuesday, 23 March to Thursday, 25 March 2027, join us at FH JOANNEUM University of Applied Sciences, Eggenberger Allee 11, 8020 Graz, Austria. Sales start in September. Leave your details and we'll keep you informed.

Opening and keynotes

KEYNOTE

Opening thoughts and ice breaker: Welcome to MCMC 2026

Bram van der Kruk, Anthony F. Camilleri, and Stefan Jahnke
Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences / Knowledge Innovation Centre

Bram van der Kruk warmly welcomed participants on behalf of the hosting institution, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, setting the stage for three days of rich exchange.

Anthony Camilleri opened MCMC 2026 by grounding the conference in three numbers that command attention.

- €2.5 trillion is the investment flowing into AI in 2026 alone - “the most money we have ever spent as a species on anything.” (Gartner)
- 44% of core skills will need to be replaced by 2030. (World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2025)
- And 59% of workers will require retraining within five years. (World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2025)

Against this backdrop, Camilleri traced the evolution of the MCMC theme: from access to education in 2018, to scaling lifelong learning in 2024, to the defining question of 2026: “How do we ensure the quality of micro-credentials as they reshape society?”
He also explained the Knowledge Innovation Centre’s name - not just knowledge and innovation, but the idea that what it means to be knowledgeable is itself changing. As a social enterprise of 20 people, KIC positions itself as an ecosystem enabler - dreamers who try to make education better. The masterclass format, he said, exists because these questions are too hard for any one expert: the answer lies in the room.

Stefan Jahnke opened MCMC 2026 with an energising icebreaker that immediately embodied the conference’s ethos. He invited all attendees to stand, identify their primary ecosystem role: policy-maker, university or provider, quality assurance body, employer, EdTech platform, researcher, funder, or innovator - and find a stranger to introduce themselves to.
The task: identify one micro-credential challenge they could only solve together. Running two rounds of pairing, Jahnke coaxed the room back to attention - singing included.

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KEYNOTE

Keynote: Skills portability initiative: Removing barriers to worker mobility

William O'Keeffe
European Commission

William O'Keeffe from the European Commission's DG Employment delivered the Skills Portability Initiative - a legislative package aimed at unlocking the EU Single Market's full potential by removing barriers to worker mobility. An experienced policy officer who previously led development of the new Europass framework including the European framework for digital credentials, O'Keeffe has been at the heart of EU credentialling policy for over a decade. He noted that, when he spoke, only two days remained to contribute to the public consultation on the Skills Portability Initiative. He urged all participants to submit their views. The initiative comprises three interrelated actions:

- Action 1 enhances acceptance and transparency of skills and qualifications through portable digital credentials, the EU Digital Identity Wallet (eIDAS), strengthened national qualification frameworks aligned to the EQF, and broader visibility of micro-credentials across Member States.
- Action 2 modernises regulated profession recognition - expanding automatic recognition and simplifying processes.
- Action 3 proposes common EU rules for recognising qualifications from non-EU nationals. O'Keeffe drew a Star Wars metaphor throughout - adapting Princess Leia's line: "You give me hope" - while making clear that the practitioners in the room are precisely those whose experience must inform commission policy.

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Keynote: Transforming learning recognition and innovation: What if?

Tom Wambeke

International Training, Centre of the ILO (ITCILO)

Tom Wambeke, Chief Learning Innovation Officer at ITCILO - a UN training centre serving 100,000 online learners and 10,000 residential participants annually across 50+ countries - delivered a wide-ranging provocation on the frontier of learning recognition. A certified facilitator and published author with executive certificates from Stanford and MIT, Wambeke charted ITCILO's transformation: from paper-based certificates - secretaries manually verifying diplomas in archive rooms as recently as 2019 - to issuing over 250,000 digital credentials to 112,000 learners since the COVID pivot of 2020.

But his real purpose was to model a different kind of innovation thinking. Drawing on the "Misfit Economy" - hustling, copying, hacking, provoking, and pivoting - he posed five structural "What if?" questions for the field. What if micro-credentials grew from the ground up without waiting for institutional permission? What if they needed "translation layers" to speak the language of legacy systems? What if the barrier isn't technical but a question of power and governance? What if credentials worked like a currency? Wambeke invited audience members to generate their own disruptive questions and challenged the field to stop extrapolating from existing expertise - drawing on examples from biomimicry, Gutenberg's printing press, and ancient Rome to argue that the best insights come from stepping outside one's disciplinary zone entirely.

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Theme 1:
Trust in the system – recognition, quality, and assurance

KEYNOTE

Keynote: Building Trust in the System

Willem van Valkenburg
TU Delft, Extension School

Willem van Valkenburg, Executive Director of TU Delft's Extension School, delivered the Theme 1 keynote on building trust in micro-credential systems. With over 13 years at TU Delft transforming how the university delivers education through technology - including MOOCs, OpenCourseWare, and blended learning - and a former board seat at the European Distance and E-Learning Network, van Valkenburg brings deep institutional knowledge to the trust question. He set TU Delft's ambition: to be a globally trusted provider of lifelong learning in Science, Engineering, and Design, illustrated by a world map of learners already engaging with TU Delft programmes. He explored the infrastructure of trust through the DCC Open Source Software ecosystem - an Issuer Admin Dashboard, Learner Credential Wallet, and Verifier Plus tool - as the technical backbone for issuing and verifying digital credentials. Partnership models with organisations including Axim Collaborative, Credlens, IvyTech, and Northern Essex Community College demonstrate how verified, student-level outcomes data can connect education and workforce systems. Crucially, he argued that trust is not solely a technical problem: it requires institutional commitment, interoperability standards, and genuine stakeholder engagement at every level. The combination of open-source infrastructure and strong partnership governance, he argued, is what separates trusted credentials from certificates that merely claim quality.

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Masterclass 1a:
QA perspective by providers

Microcredentials at AUAS: Quality assurance and challenges

Annechien Langevoord
Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS)

Annechien Langevoord, Educational Advisor at AUAS, presented the institution's quality assurance framework for micro-credentials - a case study in both institutional commitment and the genuine challenges of alliance-level harmonisation. A specialist in associate degrees and lifelong learning pathways who trains teachers and builds flexible connections between vocational and higher education, Langevoord operates within the U!REKA SHIFT European University Alliance - a network spanning the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Belgium, Czechia, and Portugal with 123,000 students and 11,000 staff. She detailed the internal QA mechanisms at work: a certification committee acting as quality assurance body, a dedicated advisory team for micro-credentials, peer reviews with partner institutions, participation in Npuls learning groups, and edubadges via SURF as the digital credentialling platform. Participants learned the context in which AUAS issues micro-credentials, the processes involved, the challenges encountered, and future developments underway. The central challenge she addressed - harmonising QA standards across institutions with different legal frameworks, accreditation systems, and cultural expectations of quality - is one that every European university alliance faces. Peer review, she argued, serves double duty: a quality improvement tool and a vehicle for mutual learning across the alliance. The AUAS case offers a grounded example of how a European university alliance can build shared trust without sacrificing institutional specificity.

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MASTERCLASS 1A

From evidence to trust: Designing high-quality micro-credentials at scale

Joep Baars and Warren George
International Baccalaureate (IB)

Warren George (Lead of Professional Learning Architecture) and Joep Baars (Senior Manager Portfolio and Strategy) from the International Baccalaureate presented a rigorous account of evidence-based micro-credential design at scale. Their core argument: for decades, professional learning has relied on seat time as a proxy for quality. Research increasingly shows the limits of this approach - particularly for recognising real capability and ensuring equitable access to meaningful professional growth. Since 2023, the IB has developed nearly 40 micro-credentials and reviewed over 500 submissions from educators across programmes, regions, and languages. The full quality architecture covers clearly defined outcomes, shared success criteria, analytic rubrics, evidence submission, reviewer calibration, and structured feedback - working together as a coherent quality assurance system. Rather than focusing on tools or platforms, the masterclass concentrated on the design decisions that make evidence-based recognition rigorous, fair, and portable. IB Micro-Credentials are not knowledge-based exams, but flexible mechanisms for teachers to put skills into practice, collect evidence from classroom experience, and gain formal recognition for pedagogical capabilities. The central tension - standardisation versus contextual, evidence-based assessment - proved generative: how do you maintain consistent quality at IB's global scale while honouring the deeply contextual nature of authentic teaching evidence? Their answer: clear learning outcome frameworks alongside flexible evidence pathways, ensuring rigour without rigidity.

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Micro-credentials beyond pilots: What holds up in practice?

Thomas Korner
ZHAW – Zurich University of Applied Sciences

Thomas Korner, Head of Innovation Lab for Academic Affairs at ZHAW (Zurich University of Applied Sciences), shared pragmatic lessons from scaling micro-credentials beyond pilots at the institution he dubbed 'Competences to Go'. With nearly two decades of higher education innovation management including a former role as service owner of ETH Zurich's strategic Moodle platform, Korner brings both technical and governance experience. His masterclass began with a walkthrough of ZHAW's continuing education deployment, highlighting key design decisions around scope, certification, and institutional responsibilities - with emphasis on where trust is anchored, how recognition beyond the issuing unit is achieved, and which constraints arise when micro-credentials are designed to be portable. He identified six key design dimensions: the credential format (digital badge vs. PDF), course structure, content, governance, external stakeholder acceptance, and technical infrastructure. Digital badges via Open Digital Badge V2, Europass/EDC, or ELM are increasingly preferred for machine-readability and LinkedIn integration - but PDFs remain essential for legacy systems. ZHAW found learner motivation highest when micro-credentials were stackable or carried clear labour-market signalling value. Korner also spoke honestly about what has not worked - low uptake of purely digital formats without clear use cases, and governance friction within traditional university structures.

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Masterclass 1b:
Recognition frameworks

Revisiting the Common Microcredential Framework (CMF): Trust, recognition and portability in digital ecosystems

Alessandra Antonaci and Thomas Staubitz
EADTU / European MOOC Consortium (EMC) and German UDS

Alessandra Antonaci (EADTU) and Thomas Staubitz (German UDS), representing the European MOOC Consortium, led an expert co-creation workshop on the Common Microcredential Framework (CMF). As micro-credential ecosystems mature - shaped by evolving EU policies, growing institutional adoption, and advancing digital credential infrastructures - the masterclass asked: does the CMF remain fully fit for purpose? The CMF establishes shared standards that certified micro-credentials must meet: 4–6 ECTS credits (100–150 learning hours), EQF levels 6–7, assessed learning outcomes, identity verification, a Diploma Supplement, and ESG-aligned quality assurance. Through structured expert dialogue and rapid co-creation, participants examined which CMF principles remain robust, where tensions or gaps are emerging, and what strategic refinements could strengthen ongoing relevance. Three key areas for critical evaluation: digital trust, recognition, and portability in light of recent developments including the EU Digital Identity Wallet and the Union of Skills. The masterclass produced a set of prioritised, community-validated directions to inform the future evolution of the CMF - making it not just a framework review but a live contribution to European policy development. Antonacci and Staubitz positioned the CMF not as a ceiling but as a floor: a minimum standard enabling mutual trust without preventing institutions from going further, and one that must now evolve to address the next generation of digital and policy challenges.

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MASTERCLASS 1B

Rethinking recognition through actual learning outcomes

Merel Eimers
Nuffic

Merel Eimers, Policy Officer at Nuffic, explored the changing landscape of recognition for micro-credentials and the essential, often overlooked role of formal recognising institutions. Her speaker profile reflects deep expertise: over five years specialising in MENA region qualifications recognition, now shaping broader European policy frameworks. She presented the 'wheel of lifelong learning and recognition' - illustrating how micro-credential certification can accelerate the cycle between learning, recognition, and re-entry into education or work. A key policy development she addressed: the Union of Skills objectives set the stage for increased permeability between formal, non-formal, and informal learning - inviting formal recognising institutions to reposition themselves as strategic knowledge hubs. ENIC-NARICs and higher education institutions have an important role to play, and the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention can serve as a valuable starting point for guiding micro-credential recognition outside formal higher education. However, a significant capacity gap exists: recognition practitioners trained in LRC principles need to extend their expertise to non-formal learning offerings. In response, the Micro-Evaluator online tool is being updated through the Erasmus+ co-funded AR2030 project, incorporating explicit guidance for evaluating offerings outside formal education. Eimers called for a re-centring of the recognition question around actual, evidenced learning outcomes rather than institutional prestige - and for designing micro-credentials with the recognising institution's processes in mind from the outset.

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Recognising recognition: Micro-credentials as a tool for lifelong learning - the Polish approach

Michał Nowakowski

Educational Research Institute / National Research Institute, Poland

Michał Nowakowski, Project Leader at Poland's Educational Research Institute (IBE PIB), presented a richly detailed account of Poland's National Micro-credentials System - one of the most architecturally complete national approaches presented at MCMC 2026. Previously an advisor to Poland's Ministry of Education on higher education micro-credentials, Nowakowski opened with a crucial observation: recognition is not a single concept. It takes many forms - formal diploma recognition by a public authority, employer acceptance, credit transfer, authenticity checks, and third-party endorsements. The final decision always rests with the recognising institution. To design the national system, IBE PIB reviewed the literature and interviewed partners, identifying five dimensions that determine trustworthiness: the regulatory environment; the form and content of the credential; issuer prestige and procedures; public awareness; and the technology used. These shaped a four-pillar system: Actors, Rules and Standards, Technology, and Development. The system's 11 foundational principles distinguish micro-credentials sharply from digital badges: a micro-credential must always be based on verified learning outcomes - not simply awarded for attendance. The technology choice is deliberate: no signed PDFs (machines cannot read them reliably). Poland is testing OB 2.0/2.1 with a planned move to Verifiable Credentials. The national EUDI wallet will be implemented through the mObywatel app - the national store for all VC-standard credentials.

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Theme 2:
Innovation forward – technology reshaping education

KEYNOTE

Keynote: Digital public goods: A framework for lifelong learning

Chris Purifoy
Learning Economy Foundation

Chris Purifoy, CEO and Co-founder of the Learning Economy Foundation, delivered the Theme 2 keynote presenting a vision for digital public goods as the foundational infrastructure for lifelong learning. Since 2018 he has led the Learning Economy Foundation, launching LearnCard - the “Lifelong Learning Passport” - and co-founding the Web3 Education Alliance with the World Bank. His central argument: the technologies and standards underpinning credential issuance and verification should be treated as public commons rather than proprietary systems. LearnCard is a digital wallet platform enabling individuals to store, share, and build on learning achievements across providers, institutions, and borders - built on open standards including verifiable credentials and decentralised identifiers. Purifoy argued that interoperability is a precondition for portability, and that a learner-controlled credential ecosystem cannot be built on closed, proprietary infrastructure. He explored how open-standards-based tools can connect formal education credentials, employer-issued badges, and informal learning into a coherent, learner-controlled record - and challenged the audience to ask whose interests are served when credential infrastructure is privately owned. Central to his framework is a checklist for genuine digital public goods. These must be open source and designed for interoperability. The infrastructure should also be radically accessible, removing cost and technical barriers. It should operate as a non-profit to prioritise data dignity and personalisation without surveillance. Additionally, it must be federated and community governed, preventing any single entity from controlling the commons. Purifoy argued that these pillars set authentic public infrastructure apart from commercial systems that only use the language of openness.

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KEYNOTE

Keynote: AI literacy in Germany: Learnings on micro-credentials with higher education institutions

Florian Rampelt
KI-Campus / Stifterverband

Florian Rampelt, Programme Director for Future Skills and AI at Stifterverband and Managing Director of KI-Campus - Germany's AI learning platform funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research - presented Germany's experience deploying micro-credentials to certify AI literacy competences in partnership with higher education institutions. A passionate advocate for European collaboration in education who previously helped found Kiron Open Higher Education, Rampelt works at the intersection of technology and learning to develop future-ready skills programmes across Europe. KI-Campus provides free online courses, tools, and learning pathways on artificial intelligence - and has built a growing infrastructure for digital badges that can be articulated with formal academic credit. Key learnings from the rollout: quality assurance and institutional buy-in require sustained effort; learner motivation varies significantly depending on whether credentials are stackable or carry clear labour-market value; and the relationship between informal platform-based learning and formal academic credit is still being negotiated institution by institution. The presentation offered a practical roadmap for how national platforms and universities can collaborate to develop credible, scalable AI competency certification - arguing that success depends on understanding both the technical credential infrastructure and the organisational incentives of HEIs. Germany's experience demonstrates that national scale requires national coordination - and that AI literacy is now a policy priority, not just a pedagogical choice.

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KEYNOTE

Keynote: Skills, AI, and what comes next

Simone Ravaioli, Florian Rampelt and Chris Purifoy

Instructure, Stifterverband / KI-Campus, Learning Economy Foundation

A sharp panel conversation between Florian Rampelt and Chris Purifoy moderated by Simone Ravaioli asked how AI changes what skills mean - and what education should do about it. Florian pushed back on the idea that AI creates skills from nothing. Creativity, collaboration, and computational thinking already exist - education just hasn't prioritised them enough. Innovative programmes don't need entirely new content; they need to refocus on human fundamentals.
Chris was more conflicted. As both an educator and a novelist, he sees AI democratising capability but worries about what that trades away. His conclusion: expertise matters less than curation, style, and editorial judgement. The people who thrive will be those who know how to pick, shape, and refine. Florian then described an AI literacy framework developed with the European Commission, OECD, and code.org - one that will inform PISA assessments. Its edge: a focus on human skills and learning scenarios that make competences visible and credentialing-ready. Publication is expected in June 2026.Chris closed with two examples: a Roblox integration that captures teamwork and leadership skills during gameplay, and a Scout Pass built with World Scouting - digitalising credentials for 57 million scouts across 174 nations, with ambitions to scale by 2030.

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Masterclass 2a:
Portability tech

Making competence acquisition visible with support structures and the help of GenAI

Karsten Böhm

FH Kufstein Tirol – University of Applied Sciences

Karsten Böhm, Professor of Business Informatics at FH Kufstein Tirol, specialises in semantic technologies and the European Learning Model - tackling key challenges in making micro-credentials standardised, machine-readable, and interoperable across borders. His masterclass challenged the prevailing focus of the European Learning Model (ELM) on digital certification, arguing that while certification transparency is valuable, the real gains lie in using technology to model and support the learning process itself - “thinking forward” toward a validated credential and “thinking backward” to scaffold learning and reflection. The session teaser: “This talk motivates the use of GenAI to build support structures for education programmes based on the European Learning Model.” Böhm introduced Hierarchical Concept Matrices (HCM) as a tool for representing competences at multiple levels of granularity, transformed into learner-facing interfaces through a stack-of-cards metaphor connecting module learning outcomes, course learning outcomes, and qualification profiles. GenAI is then introduced as a personalised learning navigator - helping learners explore these structures, generate targeted feedback, and identify competence gaps, making invisible growth tangible and actionable. The masterclass made a compelling case that digital credentials should be the endpoint of a richer, AI-supported competence development journey, not merely a digital certificate for existing course completion. Böhm also assists institutions in implementing practical frameworks, making credentials accessible and interoperable across borders.

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MASTERCLASS 2A

Digital identity, wallets and credentials: Exploring lifelong learning

Peter Eikelboom
Npuls / SURF

Peter Eikelboom, Product Owner of the Npuls Eduwallet Project at SURF, brings over 30 years of experience designing online and mobile solutions, with the last seven focused specifically on self-sovereign identity ecosystems, digital wallets, and verifiable credentials. His masterclass presented a live demonstration of real-world eduwallet use cases drawn from the Npuls project - one of the most practically advanced implementations of SSI in European education. The Npuls Eduwallet Project explores practical use of self-sovereign identity (SSI), digital wallets, and verifiable credentials (VCs) to support lifelong learning in the Netherlands, aligned with European developments in digital identity and eIDAS2. A sandbox environment - including a demonstrator and pilot implementations - enables learners to securely manage and share their academic identity, qualifications (including micro-credentials), and credentials across institutions and employers. Early outcomes have been promising, with a functional prototype developed and pilot testing underway involving students and institutions actively engaging with the wallet ecosystem and verifiable credential technologies, including the underlying trust layer. Eikelboom framed a learner's digital wallet around three dimensions: Who I am (digital identity), What I can (credentials), and Which I agree with (digital signature).

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Bridging the trust gap for a portable skills economy

Sebastjan Pirih
Velocert

Sebastjan Pirih from Velocert - the conference's main supporter - presented a technically detailed case for interoperable micro-credentials as the solution to the trust gap in a portable skills economy. Velocert operates within the Netis Group, blockchain pioneers in Slovenia and leading architects of European Blockchain Services Infrastructure and the MyNextID verifiable credentials framework. The core problem Velocert addresses: in Europe, European Digital Credentials (EDC) define the regulatory benchmark; globally, Open Badges drive adoption. Institutions should not have to choose between compliance and global reach, nor allow skills to remain locked in platform silos. Velocert's answer is the interoperable micro-credential - a technical bridge that harmonises EDC and Open Badges metadata, allowing credentials to be issued in both OB v3 and EDC formats from one unified builder. By adding JAdES (JSON Advanced Electronic Signatures - the EU standard for eIDAS-compliant signatures), Velocert also opens the door for Open Badges to achieve legal validity in the European market. The result is true portability: credentials remain globally usable while meeting EU requirements for legal validity and cross-border recognition. Standards alignment, signatures, and compliance are handled in the background - enabling institutions to issue EU-aligned credentials at scale without carrying the regulatory or technical burden themselves. With 92,800 credentials issued across 2,300 institutions, Velocert demonstrates that scalable, standards-compliant issuance is already operational.

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Masterclass 2b:
Alliances and recognition

Joint micro-credentials within the DIVERSE European university alliance

Ana Tecilazić, Ivana Verveger, Ruth Jamers and Frauke van der Rijt

Algebra Bernays University (Croatia) and PXL (Belgium-Flanders) / DIVERSE Alliance

Ana Tecilazić, Vice-Rector for Quality at Algebra Bernays University and a key figure in shaping European micro-credentials policies through EURASHE, led a team presentation from the DIVERSE European University Alliance combining a short presentation with an interactive workshop involving four alliance members. The masterclass introduced the DIVERSE Policy on Micro-Credentials and three micro-credential programme models reflecting different cooperation arrangements. Model 1 (Single Partner): one institution handles all functions. Model 2 (Cooperative): a delivering partner operates under a lead partner's accreditation. Model 3 (Joint): lead and delivering partners share governance fully. The second part unpacked the concept of "jointness" - examining key elements of joint design, delivery, and recognition through concrete DIVERSE examples. In the interactive final section, participants reflected on their own experiences, assessed the adequacy of the three models, and collaboratively challenged and expanded the framework - co-designing alternative cooperation models applicable to other alliances and institutional contexts. A quality assurance checklist developed within the DIVERSE framework allows a Micro-Credential Committee to verify compliance at design, delivery, and evaluation stages. The masterclass directly addressed the broader questions that every multi-institution alliance must answer: who is accountable for quality when credentials span national and institutional borders? How is recognition shared rather than merely delegated to whoever holds the formal accreditation?

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MASTERCLASS 2B

Micro-credentials in Dutch higher education

Elsbeth Vonkeman

Vereniging Hogescholen (Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, Netherlands)

Elsbeth Vonkeman, Education Organisation Advisor at Vereniging Hogescholen (the national umbrella body for Dutch universities of applied sciences), presented the state of micro-credentials in Dutch higher education from both a policy and practice perspective. Involved in designing and elaborating the concept of micro-credentials in Dutch higher education from the early days of the pilot, Vonkeman brings rare longitudinal perspective. The Dutch UAS sector chose an unusual approach: a pilot in which all institutions worked together on their own quality mark and branding of the concept, based on broad agreement on a quality framework - with the ultimate goal of achieving legal formalisation of certification of non-formal education. This collaborative, sector-led approach reflects a broader challenge: society faces rapid changes through digitalisation, an evolving labour market, and the impact of AI. A properly trained workforce requires a tertiary education sector capable of providing lifelong learning for everyone. The masterclass addressed the regulatory and policy landscape enabling HE institutions to issue formal micro-credentials, the national edubadges infrastructure, and the challenges of balancing learner and employer demand for flexibility with the quality assurance obligations required for formal recognition.

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European alliance: Scaling micro-credentials in higher education

Johan Peterson
ECIU University

Though Johan Peterson was unable to join us in person, he shared his presentation, allowing us to explore his insights and case study together. His slides speak for themselves. Johan Peterson, IT Architect at Linköping University and ECIU, set out to show how technical and organisational architecture can enable a European university alliance to scale micro-credentials meaningfully and sustainably. With 24 years in education technology, he has spent the last decade on system architecture. He leads the development of the ECIU University Student Information System. He also contributes to EU projects like EU-FORALL, WE-BUILD, and the QualityLink pilot aggregator. Since 2021, ECIU has created a custom ecosystem from the ground up. This includes an Identity and Access Management (IAM) system, a Student Information System, a personalised course catalogue, and a micro-credential platform. It now supports 13 member universities and issues thousands of micro-credentials each year. Peterson aimed to tackle the core challenges of scaling head-on: interoperability across different institutional LMS and student information systems, consistent credential metadata, automated issuance workflows, and learner identity management across borders. His central message - framed as “challenging conventional thinking” - is that the real barriers to scaling are structural and political, not technical. Institutions need to align on shared data standards, governance models, and recognition processes before technology can do its job. Building from the ground up showed ECIU exactly where the pain points lie: not in the code, but in the agreements.

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Theme 3:
Credentials for all – equity, access, and global recognition

KEYNOTE

Keynote: Making skills count: OECD's work on skills-first approaches

Shizuka Kato and Iván Bornacelly
OECD

Shizuka Kato (OECD Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs) and Iván Bornacelly (OECD Centre for Skills) delivered a data-rich keynote on skills-first approaches to hiring, credentialling, and workforce development. Bornacelly, an economist specialising in labour and education economics who uses data analysis to develop practical policy recommendations, and Kato, a policy analyst leading OECD research on micro-credentials and individual learning accounts, together presented findings with significant implications for the field. Their headline finding, drawn from LinkedIn specific data across OECD countries: individuals are increasingly signalling more skills - particularly tech and transversal skills - with a sharp acceleration from 2022 to 2023. The OECD's framework for skills-first approaches comprises three interlocking elements: a Learning Ecosystem (enabling skill formation and recognition), Talent Recognition (connecting skills to labour market outcomes), and an Enabling Environment (policy, governance, and infrastructure). A genuine skills-first transition requires not just better credentialling technology but systemic change in how employers source, screen, and develop talent - moving beyond degree proxies toward demonstrated competences. The equity implications were addressed squarely: skills-first approaches can widen access if designed inclusively, but can replicate or amplify bias if data and algorithmic tools are poorly governed. Without robust governance, skills-first risks becoming a new form of gatekeeping - replacing credential bias with algorithmic bias.

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KEYNOTE

Keynote: The South African journey towards micro-credentials

Nadia Starr
South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)

Nadia Starr, Chief Executive Officer of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and President of the African Continental Qualifications Framework Network, delivered the Theme 3 keynote from a distinctly South African perspective. A career civil servant with degrees in Psychology from the University of Cape Town and a Master of Education from Witwatersrand, Starr sits on several international boards including the Groningen Declaration Network. SAQA is the statutory body overseeing the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework - and micro-credentials are being positioned as short-unit standards within the NQF architecture. The presentation traced South Africa's policy evolution: from initial scoping, through stakeholder consultations and pilot programmes, to a proposed integration within the NQF.

Key issues addressed included quality assurance requirements for micro-credential providers, the relationship between micro-credentials and existing NQF qualifications, recognition of prior learning integration, and the particular importance of micro-credentials for widening access in a context of a young democracy with high youth unemployment and significant skills gaps. South Africa's journey illustrates that micro-credential policy development is not exclusively a European concern - and that questions of access, equity, and national coordination take on distinctive urgency in contexts of structural inequality. Starr's preliminary recommendations provide food for thought. A national policy framework is essential but the risk of overregulation is real. Heavy-handed rules could stifle the very innovation and flexibility that make micro-credentials valuable. Any framework must be deliberately designed with industry, not merely for it. On credit allocation, Starr poses a pointed question: are credit counts primarily a concern for policy makers, or do learners and employers actually care? Most critically, Starr underscored that Records of Achievement - robust, portable documentation of learners' accomplishments - are central to the impact and value of micro-credentials. They determine whether learning is truly recognised and acted upon beyond the issuing institution.

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Masterclass 3a:
Equity and access

Collaborate to innovate: Scaling equity through international partnerships and micro-credentials

Brian Shee
University of Limerick

Brian Shee, Learning Design Lead at the University of Limerick and recipient of Ireland's 2021 Teaching Hero Award and 2023 Excellence in Teaching Award, presented UL's work using international partnerships and micro-credentials to scale equity in higher education. A champion of Universal Design for Learning and human-centred design, Shee's approach empowers work-based learners through accessible education that widens participation for disadvantaged and under-represented groups. The MicroCreds initiative has transformed lifelong learning in Ireland: as a founding partner, UL has helped position micro-credentials as a mainstream pathway that reduces barriers such as limited time, rigid structures, and unequal access. UL has developed over 150 industry-aligned micro-credentials providing targeted, relevant upskilling. Two major international collaborations extend this work further: the Learn-to-Learn MicroCred project co-designs and pilots courses across Australia, Norway, Italy, and Ireland to support disadvantaged learners; and the EMERGE initiative unites partners from eight European countries to create scalable micro-credentials for disadvantaged and marginalised groups. Shee was direct about what genuine equity requires: flexible, unbundled units of learning alone are insufficient. Programmes must be deliberately designed for inclusion - with attention to access, affordability, assessment design, and recognition pathways. International partnerships, he argued, should be mutual learning relationships, with partner institutions contributing local knowledge and contextual expertise rather than simply receiving credentials from established institutions.

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MASTERCLASS 3A

Community-based micro-credentials: Who gets to recognise student-led learning?

Lucija Vihar

Knowledge Innovation Centre / YOUROPE (Youth for Europe)

Lucija Vihar, Research and Development Associate at the Knowledge Innovation Centre representing YOUROPE (Youth for Europe), examined the contested question of who holds authority to recognise learning - particularly learning that is student-led, community-based, or generated outside formal institutional structures. The YOUROPE project (yourope-project.eu) engages over 6,000 community members across Europe through Community-Led Research and Action (CLRA) - a methodology that shifts control of the learning process to students, connecting learning directly to their lived experiences and community needs. Unlike traditional top-down curriculum design, CLRA produces learning with significant skills development, yet much of it exists outside formal institutional recognition. Students doing meaningful work in their communities often have no way to make that learning visible or portable - creating gaps in who gets their learning recognised and valued. Vihar explored the conditions under which community-based micro-credentials can gain credibility: clear learning outcomes, assessable evidence, transparent quality assurance, and institutional anchoring. The masterclass raised three practical questions: How do we recognise student-driven learning that doesn't fit traditional academic structures? What role can community-based micro-credentials play in bridging this recognition gap? And can micro-credentials make space for pedagogies that put learners - not institutions - at the centre? A provocation runs beneath the whole argument: even where institutions can recognise student-led learning, is that actually what students want? The credential that satisfies a policy framework may not be the form of recognition students themselves are seeking. Designing for recognition without asking that question risks building systems that serve institutions more than learners.

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Micro-credentials for access and inclusion: A perspective for the non-formal education sector

Viola Pinzi and Angeliki Giannakopoulou

European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

Viola Pinzi (Technical Advisor) and Angeliki Giannakopoulou (Senior Policy and Projects Coordinator) from EAEA presented the perspective of the non-formal adult education sector on micro-credentials as instruments for access and inclusion. Pinzi contributes to multi-sectoral expert panels including the European Digital Education Hub and UNESCO DELTA Framework; Giannakopoulou coordinates EU-funded projects on democracy, participatory and transformative learning, with a background combining computer engineering and gender studies. EAEA represents adult education associations across Europe and has been a strong policy voice in EU discussions on micro-credentials. A key policy development addressed: the Union of Skills objectives emphasise engaging private training providers in the expansion of micro-credentials - inviting formal recognising institutions to reconsider their role towards becoming strategic knowledge hubs in an increasingly diversified learning ecosystem. The presentation examined structural barriers preventing non-formal providers from participating: accreditation requirements, assessment infrastructure, digital literacy gaps among providers, and the risk that quality assurance frameworks designed around university norms will exclude precisely the providers best placed to reach marginalised learners. Pinzi and Giannakopoulou called for an inclusive approach to micro-credential governance that values the specific pedagogies and social functions of adult education alongside formal academic standards.

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Masterclass 3b:
Global recognition of MCs

Better recognition through better data? Insights from QualityLink

Jochen Ehrenreich and Colin Tück

DHBW and Knowledge Innovation Centre (KIC) / QualityLink

Jochen Ehrenreich (DHBW) and Colin Tück (KIC) presented insights from the EU-funded QualityLink project - building the data infrastructure needed to enable better recognition of micro-credentials across Europe and beyond. Tück brings 15 years as Director of EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) to this work, bridging IT interoperability with quality assurance policy. Ehrenreich, active in multiple Erasmus+ projects including MicroHE, OEPass, and EdDiCo, leads framework development for issuing and recognising micro-credentials across European HEIs. Their central diagnosis: recognition fails not from lack of goodwill but from a data problem. The fix requires two layers. First, it includes foundational course data, such as titles, learning outcomes, credit values, and provider details. This data is published openly in a structured, machine-readable format. Second, share richer quality data. This includes student ratings, recognition history, and accreditation status. Using open standards, it can be shared with ease, discovered, compared, and acted upon. QualityLink has developed a structured set of quality indicators for micro-credentials, supported by a data model and ontology based on the European Learning Model (ELM), and implemented a technical architecture for data exchange in a pilot platform. Crucially, QualityLink bridges ELM with other key standards - OOAPI, Edu-API, and OCCAPI - feeding into one integrated course catalogue to support discovery, filtering, and comparison of micro-credentials. The project directly addresses the “discover” use case of the European Higher Education Interoperability Framework (HEIF), capturing a key area where European University alliances must be interoperable to enable seamless student journeys.

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MASTERCLASS 3B

Portable micro-credentials for innovation ecosystems

Nata Japiashvili
28DGTL

Nata Japiashvili, Education Lead at 28DGTL, brings expertise in global project management, digital curriculum transformation, and quality assurance - previously Global Engagement Manager at Budapest Metropolitan University and Quality Assurance Student Expert for the European Students' Union. Her masterclass presented a practical framework for developing micro-credentials that are stackable, portable, and trusted across borders - grounded in large-scale European pilots across higher education, VET, and industry. The masterclass addressed a recognised tension in the field: many micro-credential initiatives struggle with interoperability, recognition, and sustainability. The root of that tension, Japiashvili argued, is a speed mismatch: innovation moves fast, but credentialling does not. AI models update every 6–12 months, regulatory frameworks such as the AI Act and cybersecurity legislation shift rapidly, and emerging tech skills can become outdated within 2–3 years - while innovation ecosystems themselves operate in real time. Credentials designed on academic timescales simply cannot keep pace. Participants examined learning outcomes, assessment, ECTS/EQF alignment, quality assurance, and digital credentials within an integrated ecosystem - using hands-on design scenarios and micro-badge-driven activities to engage with core design decisions and governance challenges including institutional readiness, employer engagement, and sustainability. Five concrete learning outcomes framed the masterclass: designing micro-credentials aligned with EQF, ECTS, and European quality assurance principles; applying stackability and portability concepts to build coherent learning pathways; integrating micro-badges and digital credentials into learner-centred assessment models; identifying governance and interoperability challenges in cross-border implementation; and evaluating micro-credential designs against labour-market and institutional requirements. The innovation ecosystem context - where credentials must be fast to issue, highly specific, and recognised by ecosystem actors rather than traditional institutions - raises important questions about how credentials issued outside formal educational institutions can gain wider recognition.

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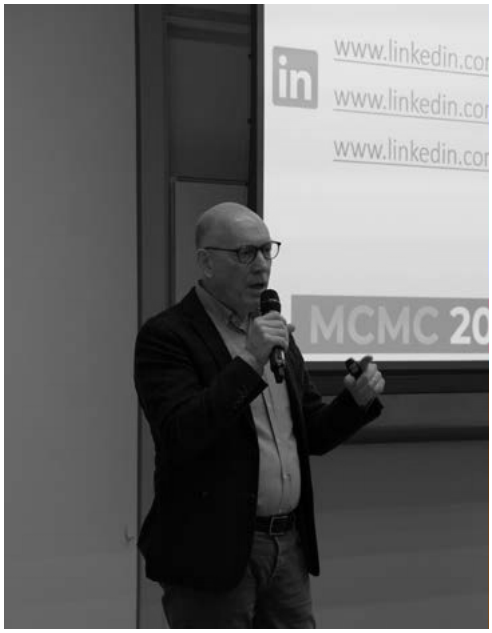
Quality as design: How micro-credentials reconfigure academic judgement

Özge Coşkun Aysal and Donald Staub

İzmir University of Economics / Digital Credentials Consortium (DCC)

Özge Coşkun Aysal (Strategic Operations and Quality Assurance Specialist, İzmir University of Economics) and Donald Staub (Director of the Office of Micro-Credentials, İzmir University of Economics) adopted a comparative, case-based approach to examine how micro-credentials are reshaping academic judgement, assessment validity, and standards. Coşkun Aysal, chief architect of the institution's Micro-Credential Quality Assurance Blueprint with 17 years' teaching experience and expertise as an inspector for national and international language programme accreditation, and Staub, who brings 15+ years as an accreditation inspector and 10+ years of micro-credential research, presented their masterclass in a dual format. The first explored how quality assurance is enacted through design choices rather than compliance alone - using short, contrasting micro-credential cases to highlight different approaches to modularisation, assessment design, and evidence of learning. Particularly relevant is the emerging micro-credential landscape in Türkiye, where national qualification frameworks and recognition mechanisms are still evolving. The second strand, drawing on Staub's role as co-editor of an upcoming special issue of Quality in Higher Education, was proposal-oriented: helping participants frame and position empirical or case-based contributions examining how quality assurance principles are re-interpreted and operationalised in micro-credential ecosystems. Participants identified key design decisions shaping academic judgement, compared alternative quality approaches across institutional contexts, and articulated design principles applicable to their own settings.



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Theme 4:
Skills on the move - portable skills and micro-credentials

KEYNOTE

Keynote: WE BUILD Consortium: Wallet for Europe

Liona de Graaf and Paul den Hertog
WE BUILD Consortium

Liona de Graaf (Project Officer, SURF) and Paul den Hertog (Senior Consultant for Lifelong Learning, SURF, with over 20 years driving educational innovation including current work combining micro-credentials with the European Digital Identity Wallet) presented the WE BUILD Consortium - Wallet for Europe: Building Unified Infrastructure for Lifelong Learning and Digital credentials. Their framing was distinctive: Europe's education systems and labour markets increasingly depend on the same thing - trustworthy evidence of skills - but operate with different needs and "languages." Education describes achievement through programmes, credits and learning outcomes; employers describe demand through roles, tasks and skills. This translation gap becomes critical in a context of widespread skills shortages and growing difficulty verifying qualifications across borders. Their proposed solution: quality assurance (QA) as the trust engine that can connect education and employment at scale. From an education perspective, micro-credentials can make learning more flexible and responsive - but only if issued under clear governance, consistent metadata, and transparent assurance levels. From a labour-market perspective, verified skills can strengthen recruitment by shifting from self-reported claims to tamper-evident, machine-verifiable records that employers can interpret reliably, including in cross-border hiring. Impact depends less on "more credentials" and more on QA-backed interoperability: common rules for issuance and verification, alignment with European approaches and the European Learning Model, and shared semantic mappings to ESCO.

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Masterclass 4a:
SkillsTech

Scaffolding skill ecosystems (Skilldata.info)

Anthony F. Camilleri and Domen Bevec
Knowledge Innovation Centre

Anthony Camilleri and Domen Bevec introduced Skilldata.info - a free platform connecting skill standards, educators, employers, and learners across a fragmented landscape.
The problem is structural. Skill taxonomies like ESCO hold nearly 14,000 skills, but without context, levels, or structure they're hard to use in practice. Most skill ecosystems are built from scratch - closed systems, high technical barriers, no standard flows. Each institution maps to its own taxonomy; each employer uses its own job ontology. The result is systemic opacity that undermines recognition and labour market matching.

Skilldata.info proposes a replicable three-step approach: find skills from ESCO or custom sources; build a scoped framework of 40–200 skills using a no-code builder that produces machine-readable outputs; then deploy tools for job profiles, assessments, learning pathways, and course matching. SFIA 9 served as the live working example throughout both masterclass, illustrating how an established professional framework can be operationalised in practice.
The platform also supports gap analysis, identifying where learner populations lack the competences demanded by regional or sectoral labour markets, and how that intelligence can directly shape micro-credential programme development. The masterclass treated skill data not as proprietary infrastructure, but as a public good.

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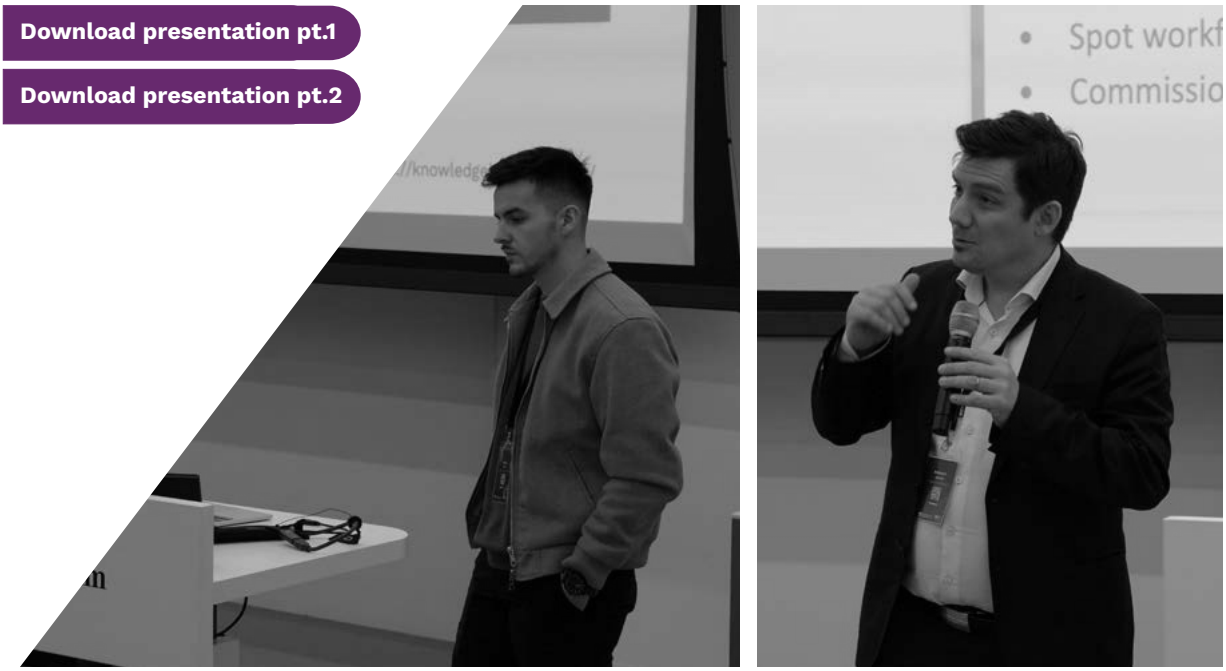

MASTERCLASS 4A

Why micro-credentials are more than certificates: designing trusted and interoperable learning registries

Viola Pinzi and Stefan Jahnke

EAEA and Knowledge Innovation Centre / RALExILA Initiative

Viola Pinzi and Stefan Jahnke presented the RALExILA initiative and a broader argument: micro-credentials are more than certificates - they are structured data artefacts that, when properly designed and stored in interoperable registries, become the connective tissue of a lifelong learning ecosystem. Jahnke, Senior Research and Project Manager at KIC with a background as former President of the Erasmus Student Network and Senior Policy Officer at the European University Foundation, brings both technical and policy expertise to registry design. The masterclass explored how attention across Europe is shifting from individual credentials to the systems that store, connect, and expose them - course catalogues, adult learning registries, and funding-linked platforms becoming critical infrastructure, yet remaining fragmented and designed as isolated lists rather than trusted, interoperable data sources. Drawing on lessons from the RALExILA project - which brings together EAEA, KIC, Algebra University, AIVA, and CARDET - the masterclass examined micro-credentials as a shared data standard for interoperable adult learning registries across higher education, VET, and non-formal learning. The technical and governance requirements for trusted learning registries: open standards for credential representation, authentication mechanisms, learner consent and data control, and interoperability with Individual Learning Account (ILA) systems across Member States. Underpinning the entire argument is a straightforward but consequential claim: ALE registries are not a technical nicety but essential infrastructure for stable lifelong learning systems. Without strong, interoperable registries, ILA's cannot function effectively. They depend on reliable registry data to direct funding to real, discoverable, quality-assured learning opportunities.

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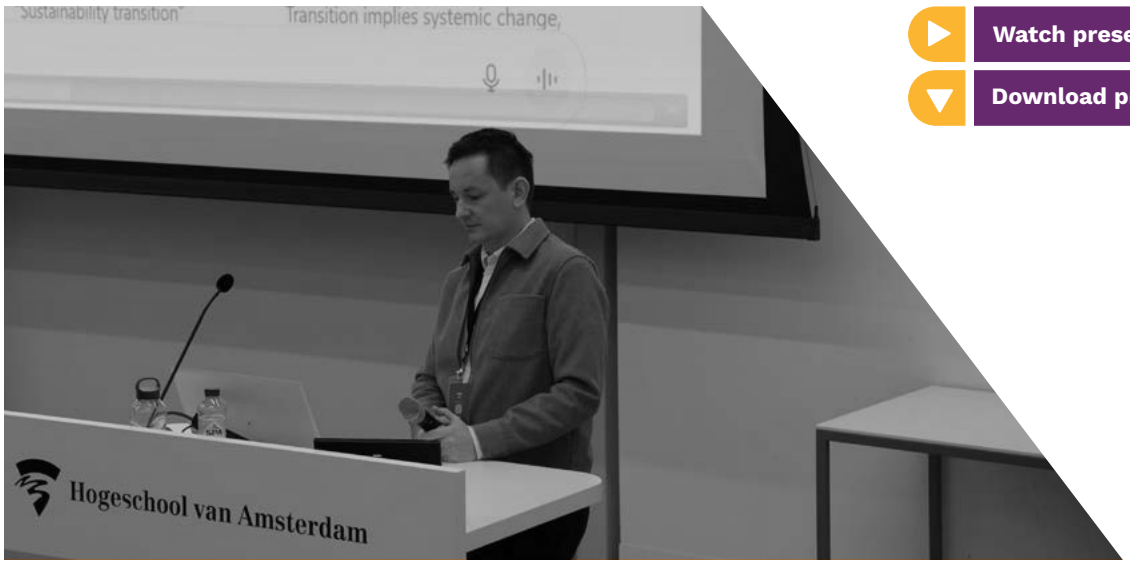
From GreenComp to practice: Leveraging AI to strengthen competence integration in micro-credentials

Ádám Tóth and Silvia Gallagher
Utrecht University and Trinity College Dublin

Ádám Tóth (researcher at Utrecht University's Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development and co-lead of educational practices within the CHARM-EU alliance) and Silvia Gallagher (CHARM-EU Research Fellow at Trinity College Dublin, leading assessment policies and pedagogical frameworks with expertise in challenge-based learning and AI in education) presented the first systematic analysis of how European sustainability micro-credentials integrate GreenComp competences and active learning. Examining 100 micro-credentials across 26 countries, they found that GreenComp competences are not widely incorporated. Credentials include 1-5 competences with an average of only 3.4, and 6 micro-credentials had no GreenComp competences identified. Fewer than half (47%) use active learning methods that meaningfully support competence development. These results offer timely insights for EU priorities on green skills, the development of micro-credentials in the European Education Area, and more transparent communication to learners. To support change, they created an AI-assisted dialogic design tool helping curriculum developers reflect on their choices, translate learning outcomes into GreenComp competences, and improve sustainability-focused micro-credentials iteratively. Participants used the tool directly in the masterclass to revise micro-credential descriptors and enhance transparency in GreenComp communication. The masterclass combined policy advocacy - for systematic integration of GreenComp into micro-credential quality frameworks - with practical guidance on AI-assisted curriculum analysis.



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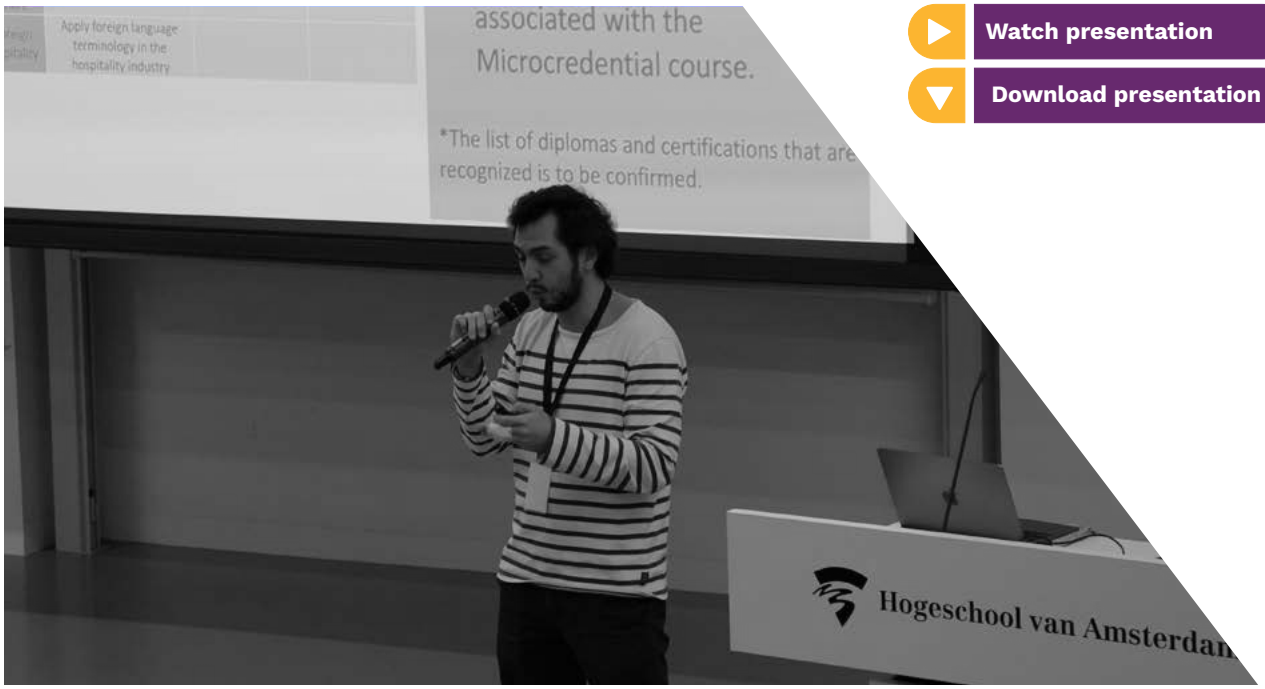
Masterclass 4b:
Labour market

Micro-credentials in VET: The EfVET perspective and the MICRO-IDEA project

Enrique Blanco

EfVET – European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Enrique Blanco Villarreal, Development and Project Manager at EfVET, represented the European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training - an umbrella organisation with 450+ members across 60+ countries, covering 2,000+ TVET providers, 150,000+ practitioners, and 2 million+ learners. Blanco, who holds a Master's in Social Innovation from the University of Turin and has contributed to UNESCO publications on hospitality skills, situated micro-credentials in the VET context through the MICRO-IDEA project - which developed and tested a methodology aligned with international standards for designing, issuing, assessing, and recognising micro-credentials. Using the Tourism sector as a concrete pilot, the masterclass showcased MICRO-IDEA's approach: connecting labour market needs with modular curricula using ESCO occupational profiles to identify precise skill sets, enabling stacking and portability across national contexts. A notable innovation: the project pursued ISO certification for micro-credentials, ensuring transparency, trust, and cross-border recognition - adding a layer of credibility beyond EQF/ECTS alignment alone. Participants explored an online platform and skills mismatch and self-assessment tool designed to help individuals and employers identify upskilling needs and relevant micro-credentials. Blanco addressed the particular challenges of the VET sector: the diversity of national frameworks, the importance of work-based learning and practical assessment, and the need for credentials portable across Member States.



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MASTERCLASS 4B

Micro-credentials in Dutch VET

Friso Lijftogt
MBO Raad (Dutch VET Council)

Friso Lijftogt (Policy Advisor on Internationalisation, Research and Innovation) from MBO Raad presented the current state and key lessons from the Dutch VET micro-credentials pilot. The labour market is evolving rapidly, demanding short, targeted learning units - and 27 vocational colleges are now exploring how micro-credentials can support lifelong learning and quick employability, particularly in shortage sectors such as healthcare and technology. The pilot was designed in cooperation with the already-existing higher education micro-credentials project, creating potential for cross-sector coherence. The masterclass shared concrete lessons on quality assurance, mutual recognition, and co-creation with the labour market - the three areas where the pilot revealed both progress and unresolved tensions. The S4R (Skills4Retail) Qualifications Framework was presented as a working example: S4R certifications, EQF-recognised micro-accreditations, and European Digital Learning Credentials (Europass) being aligned to increase portability. Key learning: micro-credentials in VET only work when co-designed with the employers who will ultimately recognise and value them. Introducing micro-credentials into a heavily regulated national qualifications framework requires legislative changes - and goodwill alone will not substitute for formal recognition pathways.

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The 4 tensions of micro-credentials: How micro-credentials shapeshift between education and work

Simone Ravaioli
Independent Researcher / Consultant

Simone Ravaioli, Director of Global Academic Innovation at Instructure and Co-chair of the W3C's Verifiable Credentials for Education Task Force, delivered a conceptually rigorous analysis of the structural tensions shaping micro-credentials. His "Policy as Data" approach bridges frameworks and practice, supporting UNESCO's global recognition efforts. The masterclass's central argument: micro-credentials sit at the fault line between two systems that no longer move at the same speed. One system is designed for coherence, hierarchy, and time-bound progression. The other is organised around relevance, signalling, and continuous adjustment. Micro-credentials did not create this fault line - but they are where it becomes visible. Four tensions were examined in detail. First, New vs. Not New: in higher education and policy discourse, micro-credentials are framed as a new qualification category; in the labour market, they are understood as routine instruments for skills maintenance and renewal. Second, Frameworks vs. Innovation: frameworks provide trust and comparability, but encode assumptions about pace and authority. Third, Accumulation vs. Activation: academic systems privilege vertical stacking toward future awards; career systems privilege horizontal activation - using credentials to amplify relevance in the present. Most adult learners are not accumulating; they are maintaining employability. Fourth, Quality vs. Value: quality ensures internal coherence; value enables exchange. When credentials are legible only as academic credit, their ability to circulate diminishes.

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Focus sessions

FOCUS SESSION

Designing quality together: A simulation of Quality Assurance for micro-credentials

Christiane Butler and Thu Van Le Thi

FIBAA and Technische Hochschule Nuremberg

Christiane Butler (Deputy Division Manager Certifications, FIBAA, who leads FIBAA's "Excellence in Digital Education"® quality seal and focuses on enhancing trust in digital education through innovative quality approaches) and Thu Van Le Thi (Officer for Future Skills and Micro-Credentials, Technische Hochschule Nürnberg, who bridges academic development with practical skills recognition) led an interactive focus session simulating the quality assurance review process for a micro-credential. The session builds on the Kollab4MC project, which is developing an agile quality assurance ecosystem for micro-credentials - exploring how QA processes can remain robust and trustworthy while becoming more streamlined, proportionate, and responsive to the unique characteristics of micro-credentials: shorter duration, modularity, and rapid updating cycles. Participants took on the role of QA experts and collaboratively evaluated a real-world micro-credential against FIBAA's "Triple-E" (ESG, ECTS, EQF) Quality Standards. The exercise was designed to provoke discussion around relevance, scope, and alignment with existing accreditation expectations. Three key questions drove the final discussion: Which Triple-E criteria are essential for ensuring trust and value? Which traditional accreditation requirements may be less critical or adaptable for micro-credentials? And how might AI support quality assurance - with what use cases, benefits, risks, and ethical considerations? The simulation surfaced real debates about what constitutes sufficient evidence of quality and where standards are genuinely clear versus open to interpretation.

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FOCUS SESSION

From pilot to practice: Building capacity for scalable micro-credentials

Virve Oksanen

Laurea University of Applied Sciences

Virve Oksanen, Development Manager for Continuous Learning at Laurea University of Applied Sciences, presented Laurea's journey from isolated pilots to scalable institutional infrastructure - sharing Finland's broader experience across eight pilots testing a framework focusing on transparency, quality assurance, and portability. A specialist in micro-credential development and lifelong learning strategies who coordinates Laurea's strategic involvement in the national Digivisio 2030 project, Oksanen brings both institutional and national perspective. The flagship example was the Future Leadership Expert Training Programme (25 ECTS), co-created with industry: participants rated teaching expertise at 4.5 out of 5 and recommendation score at 8.1 out of 10, reporting workplace benefits ranging from AI adoption to improved team climate. Success factors identified across the eight Finnish pilots: foresight-driven design, multi-stakeholder co-creation, and iterative feedback loops. ESR+ projects are now building institutional capacity further, with one initiative establishing unified models and quality criteria across five Finnish universities to create trusted, scalable micro-credentials aligned with lifelong learning and European frameworks. The capacity-building journey required dedicated staff, clear ownership of the QA process, alignment with employer partners, and communication strategies helping prospective learners understand what micro-credentials are and how they can use them.

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INTERACTIVE SESSION

Micro-credentials in practice: international perspectives (interactive session)

Designing credible soft skills micro-credentials

Blanca Gordo Pérez

Blank Space (Soft Skills Trainer and Researcher)

Blanca Gordo Pérez, Doctoral Researcher at Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, whose PhD examines how transversal competences are developed, evidenced, and recognised through short learning experiences, led an interactive session on one of the most contested design challenges in micro-credentials: making soft skills credentials credible. Soft skills - communication, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, emotional intelligence - are increasingly prioritised by employers but remain conceptually ambiguous, difficult to assess, and weakly recognised within formal higher education structures. The session addressed a critical gap: how to design micro-credentials that meaningfully develop, evidence, and signal soft skills while remaining scalable, digitally interoperable, and aligned with European quality and trust frameworks. Rather than treating soft skills as implicit or secondary outcomes, the session positioned them as explicit learning objectives that can be intentionally designed, assessed, and credentialled. Participants worked through design principles for credible soft skills micro-credentials: explicit, assessable learning outcomes aligned with employability needs; learner-centred methodologies supporting development of transversal competences in online and blended contexts; appropriate assessment and evidencing strategies; and alignment with recognition, trust, and signalling mechanisms relevant to employers and institutions. The session generated rich discussion about the fundamental difficulty of certifying contextual, complex human capabilities - and when the act of certification itself risks distorting the nature of the competence being certified.

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INTERACTIVE SESSION

Skills4Retail: Micro-credentials for the retail sector

Donal Grimes
Skills4Retail (S4R)

Donal Grimes, EU Project Specialist at Skillnet Ireland, led an interactive session on Skills4Retail (S4R) - an EU co-funded initiative developing a European qualifications framework and micro-credential system for the retail sector. The S4R Qualifications Framework adopts a deliberately layered approach targeting different objectives within the qualifications landscape: S4R Certifications (sector-specific skill certifications), EQF-Recognised Micro-Accreditations (aligned with ECTS/ECVET principles and national frameworks), and European Digital Learning Credentials (Europass). Ireland serves as a case study within the project, demonstrating alignment of selected learning outcomes with the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) - illustrating how formal recognition of micro-credentials within national qualification frameworks can be achieved in practice, even where EU Member States vary significantly in their approaches. The project simultaneously pursues digital learning credentials through Europass, enhancing transparency, portability, and cross-border recognition of acquired skills. The retail sector case is particularly instructive: a large workforce with high skills turnover, strong employer interest, and workers at different levels of prior qualification creates both the demand for micro-credentials and the pressure to ensure they are genuinely recognised and valued beyond individual companies. Participants engaged with practical design of S4R micro-credentials - discussing assessment approaches, digital badge implementation, employer engagement strategies, and the lessons that sectoral micro-credential development offers for the broader field.

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INTERACTIVE SESSION

From research to production: Rapid rollout of policy-compliant micro-credentials

Josef Spillner
M-CRED

Josef Spillner, Entrepreneurial Lecturer at M-Cred and Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor of Computer Science, works with researchers and administrative staff at several universities to understand their needs in design, issuance, management, and revocation of micro-credentials - mapping those needs to technology. His research focuses on distributed application computing paradigms, with novel system designs including FIPE, Edushell, CPILS, and d-gree innovating at the intersection of distributed systems and education. The session addressed the gap between the relatively well-developed research literature on micro-credentials and the messy reality of production deployment. Success requires adherence to country-specific recognition, issuance and revocation processes, combined free-form and ESCO competences, and visual representations of Open Badges and EDCs - all within well-defined multi-role workflows. For instance, lecturers propose new short-format courses that are then approved by secretariats. The live part demonstrated M-Cred's rollout features: a platform for policy-compliant micro-credential workflows with two concrete trials. In Switzerland, the focus is rewarding extracurricular effort. In Austria, the focus is recognising learning effort by remote participants. Both trials are valuable for understanding different institutional needs - and the demonstration directly reflected those needs with HEI representatives in the audience. Spillner's core argument: the field needs more practitioners sharing production experiences honestly, rather than only polished pilot results.

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INTERACTIVE SESSION

Dialogue with working life: Micro-credentials for accessible and equitable labour markets

Petri Liukkonen

JAMK University of Applied Sciences

Petri Liukkonen, Senior Advisor at JAMK University of Applied Sciences focusing on SME development, digital transformation, and sustainable business collaboration, facilitated an interactive session that used Mentimeter in real time to collect participants' perspectives - visualising responses immediately and incorporating them into the discussion. His central provocation: when does a micro-credential become a strategic tool for companies and labour markets, and when does it remain merely a CV line for individuals? Dialogue with working life, he argued, is not just an exchange of information but a process of creating shared understanding - where employers, educational institutions, and learners jointly define skill needs and solutions, guaranteeing that micro-credentials are authentically work-oriented and facilitate rapid transfer of newly acquired knowledge into day-to-day professional tasks. From an accessibility perspective, dialogue helps identify barriers - scheduling challenges, costs, technological limitations - and develop flexible learning formats including hybrid and workplace-integrated learning. Equality is achieved when learners from diverse backgrounds can participate in training that considers different starting points and offers alternative ways to complete tasks.

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CLOSING

What I learned: 10 Random observations from the Masterclass

Anthony F. Camilleri
Knowledge Innovation Centre

Anthony F. Camilleri closed with a frank account of where the field stands - and what it's still getting wrong.

Two views of micro-learning are pulling against each other: one holds that the guided learning journey matters; the other that only the acquired skill counts. The field hasn't resolved this. In practice, "skills portability" still mostly means qualification recognition - the more ambitious vision hasn't landed. Skills are becoming more interoperable, but learner wallets are growing more fragmented. Micro-credentials are also not breaking down the barriers between lifelong learning and higher education at any significant scale. And AI skills risk masking a broader need for retraining that the current system isn't built to handle.
Three things need urgent attention: reliable assessment at scale, clearer guidance on mapping micro-credentials to qualification frameworks, and real incentives to move beyond successful pilots.

1

The field is still asking whether it's ready to change - and too often the answer is "no thanks, we're too busy."

2

Two views of micro-learning are pulling against each other: the guided educational journey matters, or only the acquired skill does.

3

"Skills portability" sounds ambitious, but in practice it still mostly means recognition of qualifications.

4

Skills are becoming more interoperable - but real learner wallets are becoming more fragmented.

5

AI skills are hiding a deeper and wider need for retraining that the current system isn't built to handle.

6

Micro-credentials are not breaking down the barriers between lifelong learning and higher education at any significant scale.

7

Reliable assessment at scale remains unsolved - and it needs urgent attention.

8

The field needs clearer guidance on how to map micro-credentials to qualification frameworks.

9

Incentives are required to move beyond successful pilots.

10

Talking is not the same as doing - so write it down, make it specific, and expect a letter in the post.

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Letters to the future

Stefan Jahnke closed with something different. He asked every participant to write a goal on paper - a conversation they want to have, something they want to start, a follow-up they owe someone. Specific. Achievable. Time-bound. Later this year, the MCMC team will post those letters back - by physical mail. A friendly reminder, from yourself, that talking isn't the same as doing.

The closing panel

A final conversation brought together Angeliki Giannakopoulou (EAEA), Nadia Starr (SAQA), William O'Keeffe (European Commission), and Iván Bornacelly (OECD) to reflect on what MCMC 2026 revealed - and what comes next.

Watch presentation

Thank you to every speaker, participant, and partner who made MCMC 2026 possible.

END REFLECTIONS

From questions to answers - and new questions again

A personal reflection on micro-credentials and community

Thank you to everyone who made MCMC 2026 such a success.
Amsterdam welcomed us in the spirit it always does - open, international, and forward-looking. Three days of intense conversation left me energised and, honestly, a little humbled by how much this community continues to grow.

The real magic came from you - the participants. Across four themes and dozens of sessions, we heard from practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and learners from every corner of the world. We wrestled with quality assurance, skills portability, AI's role in reshaping work, and the urgent need to bridge lifelong learning with higher education.

What struck me most was a shift in the questions we are asking. Eight years ago, we asked "How can micro-credentials improve access to education?" Two years ago, "How can we scale them?" This year, we asked "How do we ensure quality as micro-credentials reshape society?" That is a sign of real maturity.

Hard truths emerged too. Micro-credentials are not yet breaking down the barriers between lifelong learning and higher education at scale. Learner wallets are becoming more fragmented, not less. And AI skills training risks masking the much deeper re-training challenge ahead of us. These are not reasons for pessimism - they are our agenda for 2027.

The progress is real. Skills are becoming more interoperable. Reliable assessment at scale is moving from aspiration to active problem-solving. And the incentive question - how do we move beyond successful pilots - is finally being asked with the urgency it deserves.
Thank you for being part of this journey. The ideas you challenged, the connections you made, and the commitments you are taking home will shape what comes next.

We already started planning MCMC 2027. I hope to see you from 23 to 25 March 2027 at FH JOANNEUM University of Applied Sciences in Graz, Austria.

Anthony F. Camilleri

P.S. Sales start in September. Leave your details on our website and we'll keep you informed.