Scottish Tertiary Education Micro-Credentials Glossary

Introduction

> A micro-credential is the record of assessed knowledge, skills and/or achievements within a focused area of outcome-based learning. It is normally the outcome of a small, discrete credit-bearing course.

Micro-credentials are increasingly gaining interest across Scottish colleges and universities (the tertiary sector), as well as across the UK and internationally. Micro-credentials can play a key role in upskilling and reskilling the workforce as well as providing recognition of short, focused areas of learning that can meet a range of learner, employer and employee needs.

During 2021-23, QAA Scotland is leading an Enhancement Themes project: Understanding Micro-credentials and Small Qualifications in Scotland as part of the wider Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme. To support the project, a Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-Credentials has been established, bringing together universities, colleges, students and other stakeholders to provide a central point for discussion regarding sector understanding, development and delivery of micro-credentials and small qualifications (see also section 4 below).

During 2021-22, the Enhancement Themes project has highlighted a lack of consistency in the understanding and interpretation of micro-credentials language and terminology. This mirrors the outcomes from the predecessor Collaborative Cluster project (Exploring the Potential of Micro-credentials and Digital Badging) undertaken in 2020-21. Desk-based research carried out for the current Enhancement Themes project identified a need for a clear and universal micro-credential language across stakeholders. This glossary of terminology in relation to micro-credentials and small qualifications addresses this identified need and represents one of the key outputs of the Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-Credentials. It is also intended that this Glossary will help in developing the portability of micro-credentials and small qualifications across the tertiary sector.

In arriving at the definitions/descriptions of the terms in this Glossary, a number of reference points have been used. In some cases, these have been adjusted to reflect the Scottish sector and also to reflect a tertiary education sector. In particular, considerable reference is made to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) as the agreed qualifications framework for Scotland that spans the breadth of tertiary education.

This Glossary is intended to support institutions, staff, learners and other stakeholders in the development and/or delivery of micro-credentials. At the time of publication, there are additional documents which will support micro-credentials such as the QAA Characteristics Statement for Micro-credentials, and it is expected that future guidance and references will emerge as the sector develops its approaches to micro-credentials. A contextual note and list of useful websites are provided at the end of the document.

Context

With an increasing interest in micro-credentials worldwide, there are a myriad of terms used within the field of micro-credentials. Various definitions are based on the context and broad

area of remit of the relevant organisation/authority. This Glossary and the definition of micro-credentials within it, has been specifically created for use in Scotland by Scottish tertiary education providers (colleges, universities and other higher education providers) working in partnership with each other, with learners, employers and professional bodies. It will be used to support ongoing plans within the sector to develop good practice guidelines for micro-credentials in Scotland, as the 'Understanding Micro-credentials and Small Qualifications in Scotland' Enhancement Theme project continues into 2022-23. Given the pace of development of micro-credentials, it is likely that the Glossary will be reviewed and updated as the project develops.

Definitions/descriptions

- **Accreditation**

  A process for approving a programme by an authorised external organisation. This could be by a university, a professional body or a regulatory body. For example, a food safety course may be accredited by the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS), or a qualification which leads to a licence to practice in the security sector needs to be accredited (and regulated) by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Accreditation.

- **Articulation**

  Articulation is the process that enables a student who satisfies (or achieves) academic criteria on one programme to be automatically entitled (on academic grounds) to be admitted with advanced standing to a subsequent part or year of a programme. This can enable a learner to progress directly from one qualification to another without having to repeat any learning.

- **Awarding body**

  Any organisation or institution which is authorised to award a particular qualification. For example, universities are authorised awarding bodies for degrees.

- **Certification**

  Certification is providing a document or other evidence of achievement such as the passing of an examination and/or the completion of a programme of study. In the context of micro-credentials, this may be a paper-based or digital badge or certificate or other record of achievement.

- **Characteristics Statements**

  Characteristics Statements, published by QAA, describe the distinctive features of qualifications. They describe the qualifications in terms of their purpose, general characteristics and generic outcomes, but do not include subject-level detail.

  Characteristics Statements are only available for higher education qualifications at particular levels within *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*.

- **Connectible**

  This term refers to the opportunity to connect or combine credit from a series of micro-credentials into a larger qualification or macro-credential.

- **Credit**

  Credit is awarded to a learner on achievement of a credit-rated (or credit-bearing) qualification/learning programme's learning outcomes. The amount of credit awarded reflects the time required for a typical learner to achieve the qualification/learning programme.

  10 notional learning hours equates to one SCQF credit point.

- **Credit transfer**

  Credit transfer is the transfer of credit from one qualification/learning programme to another in order to minimise duplication of learning. In many cases this may also involve the transfer of credit between providers.

- **Credit rated**

  In Scotland, this is the process of allocating SCQF levels and credit points to qualifications and learning programmes, including formal and non-formal learning.

- **Digital badge**

  A digital badge is a visual representation of achievement or skill that can be displayed, accessed and verified online. Digital badges are considered portable credentials with data describing an individual's achievement or skill embedded into the badge image. Holders can embed their badge on a personal website or professional profile - for example, on popular social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook.

- **Flexible learning**

  A term used to describe situations in which learners have the flexibility to select courses that satisfy their specific educational needs, interests and/or work. The mode of access, method and pace of learning and assessment should be appropriately personalised for individual learners.

- **Learner**

  A learner is someone who directs and supports their own learning. Typically, a learner works at their own pace and is motivated by the acquisition of knowledge and mastery of skills. Learners may develop their own learning goals and monitor their progress.

  A student is a type of learner - see below.

- **Learning outcomes**

  A learning outcome is what a learner or student is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning and assessment.

- **Level**

  Levels indicate the difficulty or complexity of a qualification or learning programme. In Scotland, levels of qualifications/learning programmes are described in terms of the SCQF. Level descriptors describe in broad terms what learners should be able to do or demonstrate at each level by defining the generic outcomes for the characteristics at each level.

- **Macro-credential**

  Macro-credentials typically refer to broader-based formal qualifications that include HNCs, HNDs, degrees or postgraduate certificates and diplomas.

- **Micro-credential**

  A micro-credential is the record of assessed knowledge, skills and/or achievements within a focused area of outcome-based learning. It is normally the outcome of a small, discrete credit-bearing course.

  In Scotland, credit-rated micro-credentials are awarded by a body authorised to award SCQF credit.

  While designed as standalone qualifications, micro-credentials may be combined into larger credentials or provide entry into a larger award.

- **MOOC**

  A MOOC (massive open online course) is an online course available freely and aimed at unlimited participation. A MOOC is designed and delivered around a focused educational syllabus usually structured to meet a set of learning outcomes. No prior knowledge is normally required to access (or) participate. MOOCs are not normally credit-rated and do not lead to a credential or qualification.

- **Portability**

  Portability is the ability to carry or use a micro-credential achieved or awarded by one institution or awarding body and be able to build on the learning from that micro-credential with another institution/awarding body. The further learning may be at the same level (see 'connectible') or it may be a higher level (see 'stackable').

- **PSRB**

  PSRBs (professional, statutory and regulatory bodies) are organisations that set the standards for, and regulate entry into, particular profession(s) and are authorised to accredit, approve or recognise specific programmes leading to the relevant professional qualification(s) for which they may have a statutory or regulatory responsibility.

➤ **Qualification**	A formally-recognised academic award - such as a degree, diploma or certificate - granted on successful completion of a programme of study.
➤ **RPL**	Recognition of prior learning or RPL is the process for recognising learning that has come from experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. This includes knowledge and skills gained outside school, college and university, and outside formal learning situations - such as through life and work experiences.
	Some organisations use other terms for RPL including APL (accreditation of prior learning), APEL (accreditation of prior experiential learning), and APCL (accreditation of prior certificated learning).
➤ **Reskilling**	The process of learning new skills, particularly to access alternative employment (see also 'upskilling').
➤ **SCQF**	The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is Scotland's national qualifications framework. It is a lifelong learning and credit framework and has 12 levels. The SCQF is designed to enable the inclusion of a wide range of qualifications and learning programmes of differing types and sizes underpinned by a robust system of quality assurance. As a result it includes both micro and macro-credentials
➤ **Short course**	A short course combines practical and theoretical competencies about a specific industry and/or subject area, in a short period of time. The main purpose of a short course is to create and/or enhance learner skill sets. Short courses may or may not be credit-rated.
➤ **Stackable**	Stackable micro-credentials can be viewed as building blocks, where each micro-credential that a learner earns, has potential to build up to a higher-level credential (see also 'portability' and 'connectible').
➤ **Student**	A student is a type of learner who enrols or registers for a programme of study with an education provider. Typically, students follow a series of subject-specific goals that may be selected, assessed and monitored by educators. Students usually have access to a range of support services offered by the education provider.

➢ **Transcript**	A formal document also referred to as a statement of learning, a record of achievement or something similar, that certifies the results (marks or grades) achieved on successful completion of a programme or course.
➢ **Upskilling**	Learning new skills, particularly related to current or planned employment. Upskilling is often facilitated by employers through providing training and development opportunities to enhance workforce abilities and minimise skill gaps (see also 'reskilling').

Useful website links

Enhancement Themes

QAA Characteristics Statement for Micro-credentials

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Accreditation

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies

Understanding Micro-credentials and Small Qualifications in Scotland

Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-credentials

To support the sector-wide Understanding Micro-credentials and Small Qualifications in Scotland project, a Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-credentials has been established. The Network has representatives from across higher education, colleges, students and stakeholder groups to gain sector understanding of the development, use and delivery of micro-credentials and small qualifications. This Glossary has been created with input and co-authorship from members of the Network

Network membership 2021-22:

Name	Organisation
Professor Jonathan Powles, Chair	University of the West of Scotland
Dr Anne Tierney, Deputy Chair	Heriot-Watt University
Luke Millard	Abertay University
Professor Alastair Irons	British Computing Society
Siobhan Wilson	City of Glasgow College
Jonathan Rees	College Development Network
Mark McCahill	Colleges Scotland
Kerry Heathcote	Edinburgh College
Gillian Davies/Sally Smith	Edinburgh Napier University
Alen MacKinlay	Glasgow Caledonian University
Marty Wright	Glasgow Caledonian University
Demelza Curnow	QAA
Ruth Burchell	QAA Scotland
Ann Cotterill	QAA Scotland
Debra Macfarlane	QAA Scotland
Sharon Drysdale	Scottish Funding Council
Kathryn O'Loan	Scottish Funding Council
George Brown	Scottish Qualifications Authority
Sheila Dunn	SCQF Partnership
Lewis Gale	Skills Development Scotland
Megan Brown	sparqs
Morven Shearer	St Andrews University
Marie Hendry	The Open University in Scotland
Scott Connor	University of the Highlands and Islands
Claire Bannister	Universities Scotland
Joy Perkins	University of Aberdeen
John Kerr	University of Glasgow
Debra Willison	University of Strathclyde