



Micro-credentials – the under-utilised tool for workforce development

Micro-credentials are mini-qualifications that deliver skills, knowledge and/or experience in a given subject area or capability. The subject areas and level of challenge or skills are unlimited and could range from entry level customer service and email etiquette to graduate level front-end web development, for example.

Micro-credentials have the potential to provide essential upskilling and CPD for many businesses and yet employers' awareness of these courses is relatively low.

In 2022 the British Chambers of Commerce undertook a large scale micro-credential survey in which 80% of employers were not aware of micro-credentials. In recent surveys conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in Wales, QAA Cymru, awareness of micro-credentials had increased to 44% (24% increase). Awareness of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) is much better with all PSRB respondents indicating they were aware of micro-credentials. It is worth noting that these results may be influenced by the method of engaging with employers and PSRBs through university, college and QAA contacts.

Across the UK regulatory bodies are investing in approaches to encourage the development and take-up of micro-credentials: Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education in Wales funds QAA Cymru to work with colleges and universities in Wales and the nations to explore micro-credentials practice and development; the Scottish Funding Council is actively producing a micro-credential framework for Scotland; and the Department for Education in England is rolling out the Lifelong Learning Entitlement which will provide loans to individuals to study a range of post-16 qualifications including eligible micro-credentials.

The cost of staff development and CPD also plays a major factor in workforce development. In the QAA Cymru surveys, the majority of employers (69%) valued a nominal example of 1 week's of full time education/training or equivalent (e.g. 1 day a week for 5 weeks) at below £500. For some provision, especially that which is bespoke or highly specialised, £500 per learner may be insufficient to cover costs. One-fifth of employer respondents indicated they would only pay for employee development if it was subsidised, however, there is currently no hint of government subsidy for short course training in any of the UK nations, although plans for the Growth and Skills Levy include short courses in its scope. Tertiary education providers and businesses need to be open about costs of micro-credential development and delivery.

There is often a disconnect between businesses and academic establishments in terms of ensuring courses and qualifications meet the needs of business and adhere to the high

quality and standards demanded for UK further and higher education. Micro-credentials are an area in which close collaboration between companies, both large and small, with local colleges and universities can provide tailored qualifications for the UK workforce that delivers exactly what is needed for the UK economy.

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