

Micro-credentials for employee upskilling

Results of employer and PSRB surveys

Background

Micro-credentials are small, credit-bearing qualifications that are outcome-based. To achieve a micro-credential, learners are assessed to demonstrate they have achieved the learning outcomes.¹ A Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland Tertiary Working Group, the Micro-credentials Special Interest Group (MIC.SIG), has been established through QAA's grant arrangements with Medr to support the development and sharing of practice in the rapidly developing field of micro-credentials across higher and further education. The principal aims of the MIC.SIG are to:

- Support the tertiary sector in ensuring that micro-credential students and learners experience the highest possible quality of education in line with other traditional tertiary education provision.
- Contribute to developing excellence, independence, and trust in the quality assurance and enhancement of micro-credential provision using the QAA's focus areas of standards, leadership and quality assurance and enhancement as pillars to guide the work of the MIC.SIG.
- Promote the use of the Micro-credentials Characteristics Statement to tertiary education providers developing and maintaining micro-credential provision, as well as supporting any further developments to the Statement.

To support the engagement of tertiary providers with employers in the development and promotion of micro-credentials as opportunities for employee upskilling, the MIC.SIG undertook a survey of employers and professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) to both raise the awareness of micro-credentials and to gauge the level of existing understanding of these small qualifications and their potential within these organisations.

The surveys

Two surveys were launched in May 2025. The first survey was aimed specifically at PSRBs and was open for three weeks. The survey comprised 10 questions and provided respondents the opportunity to add additional comments if wanted. The survey was shared with members of QAA's PSRB Forum. 28 responses were received from 27 PSRBs.

¹ Further information is available in the QAA [Micro-credentials Characteristics Statement](#) and the [Good Practice Guide for Micro-credentials and Small Qualifications in Scotland](#).

The second survey was aimed at employers and was shared via members of the MIC.SIG to their contacts and was also shared via the membership newsletter of the British Chambers of Commerce. Like the PSRB survey, there were 10 questions; eight of these were the same as posed to PSRBs. The survey was open for five weeks and there were 66 respondents.

The annexes provide information about respondents' companies and organisations.

Where the same, or very similar, questions were put to both employers and PSRBs, the presentation of results will be disaggregated.

The findings

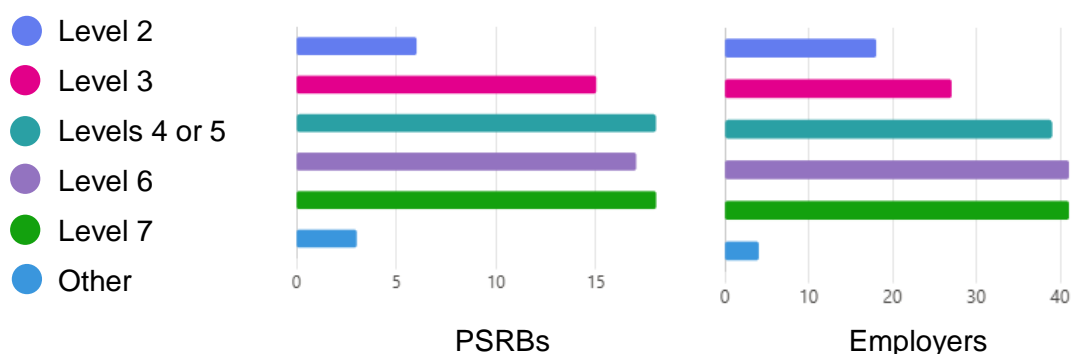
Awareness of micro-credentials

The first question of each survey explored the respondents' awareness of micro-credentials. All PSRB respondents were aware of micro-credentials, with 15% agreeing that they did not know much about them. Respondents from eight organisations (29.6%) reported that their organisations offer or accredit micro-credentials. Employer awareness was reduced with 56% reporting that they had never heard of micro-credentials; 14 employers were aware of them with just four of these having used micro-credentials for employee upskilling or for personal development.

Skills needs

In terms of skills needs in their sector (PSRBs) or their business (employers), PSRB respondents considered there to be skill needs across all levels from Level 2 through to Level 7, although Level 2 skills were identified as being the least in need. Employers responded similarly with Level 2 being the skills in least need as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Levels of skills needs



Importance of assessment of learning

To differentiate between micro-credentials which are assessed in order for awarding organisations to evidence achievement and other short courses that may be certificated but without the need to evidence that learning has taken place, the survey asked the level of importance of assessed training/skills development.

46% of PSRB respondents rated assessment as very important, with 25% conversely reporting that it was not at all important. Four respondents (14%) said assessment is somewhat important and equally 14% considered assessment to be somewhat unimportant.

Employers were more in agreement with 94% indicating that it is very important (58%) or somewhat important (36%) that their employees' learning is assessed. Of the four employer

respondents who considered assessment to be unimportant, two indicated that assessment is somewhat unimportant and two responded that assessment is not at all important.

Use of micro-credentials for skills development

All but two PSRB respondents (93%) agreed that micro-credentials would be useful for employee upskilling/CPD within their sector; one disagreed and one did not know.

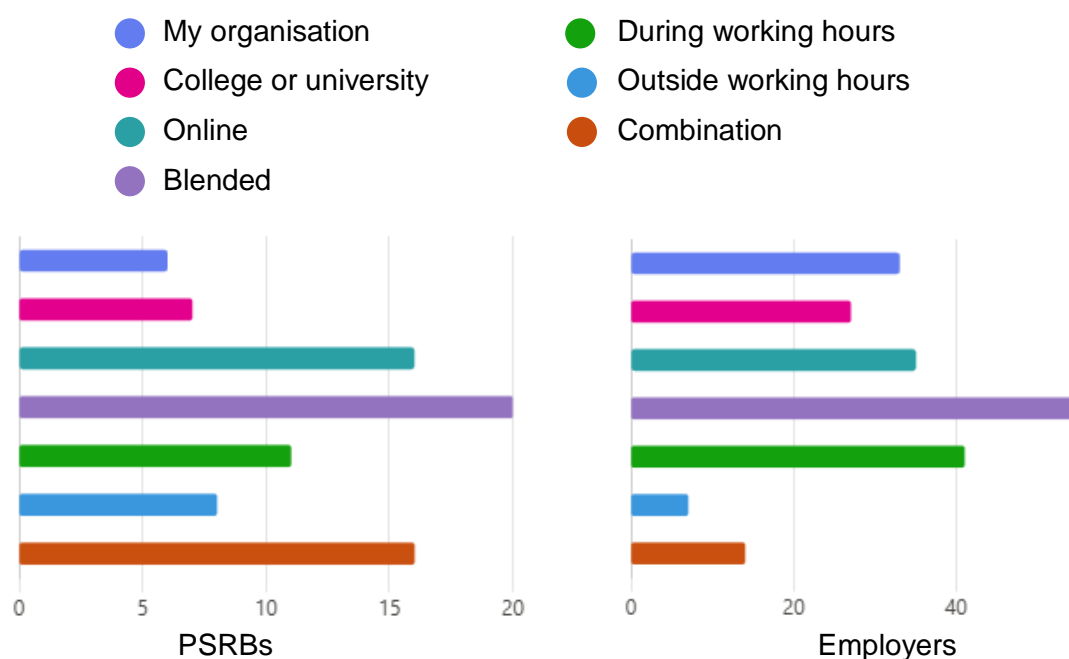
39% of employers indicated that they would approach a college or university to deliver a CPD need or employee upskilling; 32% indicated they would not approach a college or university and 29% did not know. To keep the survey short – the reasons for these answers were not further explored.

Approximately a quarter (23%) of PSRBs who took part in the survey already accredit micro-credentials for their sector and 18% would be willing to accredit university or college-developed micro-credentials. Five PSRBs would be willing to accredit micro-credentials but do not have a process for that in place. Five PSRBs indicated that they would not be willing to accredit micro-credentials; two indicated this was due to the process being onerous or lengthy, the other three did not provide a reason.

Delivery of upskilling

In terms of a preference for the location and time of study or training, there was a mixed response from employers and PSRB respondents. Respondents were able to select multiple answers and some chose both online and blended for location/mode of delivery and some chose during or outside working hours as well as a combination of both. This has complicated the results slightly but provides an indication of overall preference, as shown in Figure 2. Where % figures are given – these include all responses to the relevant section of the question which due to multiple responses sometimes add to greater than 100%.

Figure 2: Preference for location and time of skills development



While employers responded that online delivery (53%) was slightly preferable to in-person delivery either at their organisation (50%) or at a college or university (41%), a blended approach was the most popular option chosen by both PSRBs (77%) and employers (83%).

In terms of when training/study may be delivered, PSRB respondents indicated that during working hours (50%) was preferable to outside working hours (36%), although a combination of both was significantly the most popular option at 73%. Employers were considerably more favourable of training/study delivered during working hours (82%), with outside working hours being unfavourable at just 14% and a combination appealing to just over a quarter of respondents (28%).

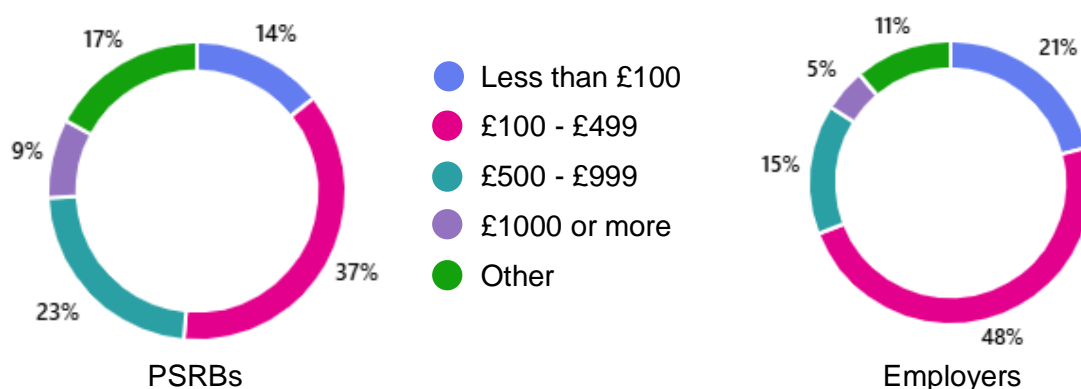
Value of micro-credentials

The majority of employers (68%) agreed that their business/organisation would be willing to fund employees taking micro-credentials that meet their business needs. Of these 38% noted that they would only fund this staff development if the cost was appropriate and 18% only if the cost was subsidised.

In terms of the cost, PSRBs were asked what approximate cost they would expect to be charged for a micro-credential course that is delivered full-time for one week or the equivalent, e.g. 1 day per week for 5 weeks. Approximately one third of respondents (37%) indicated a cost between £100 and £499. 23% of respondents recognised the need to pay more (up to £999) and 9% felt that this amount of staff development was worth £1000 or more. 14% opted for a cost below £100.

The employer responses indicated they valued staff development at a lower level than the PSRBs as depicted in Figure 3. The majority of employer respondents (48%) indicated a cost between £100 and £499 with 21% opting for a cost below £100. 15% of respondents recognised the need to pay more (up to £999) while only 5% felt that this amount of staff development was worth £1000 or more.

Figure 3: Cost of one week's education/training



Discussion and conclusions

While it is positive that PSRBs are aware of micro-credentials, the awareness of micro-credentials remains low among employers at 44%. It is worth noting that the British Chambers of Commerce undertook a large scale micro-credential survey in 2022 in which 80% of employers were not aware of micro-credentials. The results from this survey may indicate that employer awareness has increased over the last few years, but it is also possible that the results are skewed by the method of engaging with employers through university and college contacts. Nevertheless, if micro-credentials are to be developed and delivered as a means of employee upskilling, it is important that there is greater engagement of governments, tertiary education providers and sector bodies with employers and employer representatives to raise this level of awareness and encourage dialogue with business and

providers to develop appropriate education and training.

Both PSRBs and employers indicate a wide range of skill needs across the levels served by tertiary education providers (Levels 2 to 7). However, much of the discussion around micro-credentials has centred around higher education (HE) and HE providers, largely ignoring provision at Levels 2 and 3 which is primarily delivered by colleges. In order to leverage micro-credentials as a useful and accessible method to deliver short, focused skills development across all levels identified by employers, it is important that tertiary education is more widely featured within the micro-credential discussion and all tertiary education providers (colleges and universities) can see themselves as key players within this developing area.

With a strong importance placed on assessment by employers, the expertise and experience of colleges and universities should be emphasised in discussions with businesses about provision to meet skill needs.

Within many sectors, the role of PSRBs is important and PSRB accredited or endorsed courses are often seen as being relevant and valued by employers. While some PSRBs already accredit micro-credentials there is an issue around the process being lengthy or onerous. It would be useful for the tertiary education sector and appropriate sector bodies, such as QAA, to discuss with PSRBs how accreditation may be simplified or streamlined and explore the use of 'recognised' provision that is delivered by reputable tertiary providers. The nature of micro-credentials means that provision will be small and so any process of accreditation or recognition needs to be appropriate and proportionate.

While many micro-credentials have been developed that are designed for online delivery, there is significant interest from employers for both in-person and blended delivery. Tertiary education providers should ensure that all new micro-credential developments take into account the preferences of their target market and offer delivery that matches the preferred modes, times and locations of their intended audience.

The monetary value of micro-credentials is an area that would benefit from further exploration. The value of a week's education as posed in our survey resulted in various responses, but the majority of employers (69%) valued this at below £500. In terms of the cost of developing provision, especially provision that may be highly specialised, £500 per learner may be insufficient to cover costs. Tertiary education providers and businesses need to be open about costs of micro-credential development and delivery and the number of employees who may undertake the learning. For some provision, there may be a need to compromise on delivery mode in order to make micro-credentials economically efficient. With nearly one-fifth of employer respondents indicating they would only pay for employee development if it was subsidised, there needs to be transparency between funders and businesses on the availability of subsidies, if any, for this type of staff development.

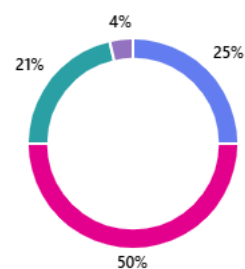
Annex 1: PSRB respondents

PSRBs identified the following broad categories of employment as the sector(s) in which they operate – up to three categories may have been chosen by each respondent.

Accountancy, banking, finance and law	3
Business consulting and management	2
Charity and voluntary work	6
Creative arts, design and media	2
Education	7
Engineering information technology and manufacturing	2
Environment and agriculture	2
Healthcare and social care	3
Hospitality, retail and sales	1
Leisure sport and tourism	2
Property and construction	3
Public services and administration	1
Science and pharmaceuticals	4

The PSRBs were predominantly medium sized businesses:

- Small or micro company: fewer than 50 employees
- Medium sized business: 50 to 249 employees
- Large business: 250 to 1000 employees
- Super corporate: more than 1000 employees



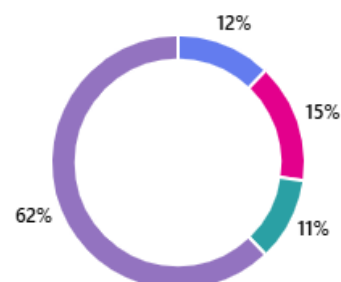
Annex 2: Employer respondents

Employers identified the following broad categories of employment as the sector(s) in which they operate – up to three categories may have been chosen by each respondent.

Accountancy, banking, finance and law	2
Business consulting and management	7
Charity and voluntary work	4
Creative arts, design and media	1
Education	13
Energy and utilities	1
Engineering information technology and manufacturing	3
Environment and agriculture	3
Healthcare and social care	38
Hospitality, retail and sales	0
Leisure sport and tourism	7
Property and construction	4
Public services and administration	10
Recruitment and HR	3
Science and pharmaceuticals	2
Transport and logistics	0

The employers were predominantly from very large businesses:

- Small or micro company: fewer than 50 employees
- Medium sized business: 50 to 249 employees
- Large business: 250 to 1000 employees
- Super corporate: more than 1000 employees



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