
DELIVERABLE 3.5

Methodological framework for the Micro-Credential Development

WP3 – Common Understanding

WP LEADER: BIBB



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Beyond Europe with
Micro-credentials

About BEM

The Erasmus+ project “Beyond Europe with Micro-credentials” (BEM project) is about transferring experiences from ECVET to the development of micro-credentials. The aim is to reflect these in the non-EU member states and adapt them to the respective local conditions.

With micro-credentials (MC), labour market-relevant qualifications are developed whose contents are derived from the needs of selected sectors in the countries and implemented in consultation with regional companies. MCs also focus on groups of people who have so far been insufficiently covered by the education systems (e.g. learners in structurally weak regions, single parents, unskilled workers, people with support needs, refugees). BEM MCs can be used in vocational education and training (VET), as an additional qualification or for the validation and recognition of informal learning. It is planned to develop 10 to 12 MCs per country. The developed MCs will be linked to the Europass templates and included in the multilingual "Skillsbank" maintained in Norway. This will give them an additional European added value, and they can be transferred to other countries or sectors.

The BEM project brings together VET institutes, national qualifications authorities, intermediate institutions, and VET providers (vocational schools and training centers) from eight countries. This broad project partnership enables the accreditation, documentation, recognition, or validation of MCs according to the conditions applicable in each country, thus building a bridge between education (VET and higher education) and the world of work.



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From ECVET to Micro-Credentials

Preliminary remarks: What has ECVET to do with micro-credentials?

In our application for the BEM project, we set ourselves the goal of transferring promising approaches from ECVET to the development of micro-credentials. In doing so, we are creating synergies between the two key EU priorities for lifelong learning from recent years. Particularly, we are looking at the application of the learning outcomes approach and a suitable structure for the description of a template and the adaptation of some accompanying tools such as the Memorandum of Understanding to the framework conditions of our BEM-project.

We assume that 15 years of work on and with ECVET have produced a wealth of experience, approaches, recommendations and practical tools. We want to crystallise those that prove useful for the development and use of BEM micro-certificates.

A brief look back

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) was designed a framework that aims to facilitate the recognition and transfer of learning outcomes across different vocational education and training (VET) systems in Europe. The concept of ECVET was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in 2009 and has been piloted by the member states in terms of Erasmus+ projects since then.



Immediately after publication of the recommendation in 2009, the EU called for tenders to enable piloting of the ECVET specifications. While the first call focussed on the use of ECVET for mobility purposes (2009-2012), the second call (2011-2014) focused on the use of ECVET for credit transfer and accumulation purposes. In the two tendering rounds, which were managed

Looking back

- 2009: Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708(02))
- 2009-2012: 1. Round on Testing the ECVET recommendation (centralized call), 12 projects selected
- 2011-2014: 2nd generation of ECVET projects (centralized, 8 selected)
- 2011: NetECVET – a network project of national agencies aiming to develop a toolbox for using ECVET for mobility
- 2012 onwards: ECVET promoters at the National Agencies in Europe
- 2014: Implementation of the ECVET recommendation. Final report. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/ecvetmag21_en.pdf
- 2015: Monitoring Report ECVET in Europe, <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/5556?NL=61#group-downloads>
- 2020: Evaluation on ECVET

and monitored centrally via Brussels, a total of 20 projects were carried out, which served as a reference for the implementation of ECVET and - more importantly - were intended to show where the obstacles and advantages of the instrument are evident in practice. Parallel to these developments, ECVET promoters were appointed in the Member States to provide information on the instrument and promote its use, the national agencies promoted projects in which ECVET was trialled and the national agencies joined together in a



network (NetECVET) in which units of learning outcomes developed in the projects were collected and made available on a platform.

In 2018, the European Commission conducted an evaluation of ECVET to assess its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value. The evaluation was based on a combination of desk research, surveys, interviews, case studies and workshops with various stakeholders involved in ECVET.

The main findings of the evaluation, published in 2020, were:

- ✓ ECVET is relevant to the needs and challenges of the VET sector in Europe, as it **supports the mobility, transparency and quality of VET qualifications and learning outcomes**.
- ✓ ECVET has contributed to the development of a **common language and understanding of learning outcomes** among VET providers, learners and employers, as well as to the improvement of the documentation and validation of learning outcomes acquired abroad or in non-formal and informal settings.
- ✓ ECVET has also **fostered the cooperation and exchange of good practices among VET actors and stakeholders** at national, regional and local levels, as well as with other European initiatives such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and Europass.

However, the evaluation also revealed problems with the application of ECVET that hindered its full potential and impact. These were summarised:

- ✓ The **low awareness and understanding of ECVET among some VET stakeholders**, especially learners and employers.
- ✓ The **lack of clarity and consistency in the application of ECVET principles and tools across different VET systems and contexts**.



- ✓ The **insufficient integration of ECVET** with other national and European policies and instruments related to VET quality assurance, validation, guidance and recognition.
- ✓ The **limited evidence on the benefits and outcomes of ECVET** for learners, employers and VET providers.

The evaluation concluded that ECVET can be understood as a **valuable instrument for improving mobility within Europe** that should be further developed and supported by the EU and the member states. The evaluation also provided some recommendations for improving the design, implementation and monitoring of ECVET in the future.

ECVET / EQAVET Evaluation

Background:

Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience,
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0275>

“In line with the results of their recent evaluations, both instruments **need to be modernised and streamlined**”.

“ECVET has widely contributed to the development of a better-quality mobility experience through the use and documentation of units of learning outcomes, with almost all Member States using now ECVET in international mobility. However, the concept of ECVET points was generally not applied and ECVET did not lead to the development of an European credit system in VET.

The present proposal incorporates and reinforces some elements of the 2009 ECVET Recommendation and abandons others that do not bring an added value or respond to a real need in the VET systems.

Source: PPP BEM partner meeting, Podgorica, October 2023



What remains of ECVET?

- The principle that qualifications are made of **units of learning outcomes** (modularisation). This is seen as a pre-requisite to increase flexibility of the VET programmes and facilitate validation as means to boost the take-up of up- and reskilling.
- The **mobility tools** developed under the 2009 Recommendation (e.g. learning agreement and memorandum of understanding) related to supporting geographical mobility of VET learners will be further developed in the framework of other EU instruments such as those supported by the Erasmus+ programme and linked to the further development of Europass;
- the **credit points** introduced by the 2009 Recommendation will be discontinued, due to the very low take-up and **no evidence of added value**. In practice, ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) applied widely in higher education is used also for post secondary and tertiary VET.

The 2009 ECVET Recommendation will be repealed and the ECVET provisions and principles as outlined above will be taken forward on the basis of the present proposal and mainstreamed into other EU policy instruments.

Source: PPP BEM partner meeting Podgorica, October 2023



Micro-Credentials: A path to greater flexibility in VET?

The concept of micro-credentials is currently high on the EU agenda for lifelong learning. First mentioned in the Council recommendation from 2018¹ the concept quickly gained momentum, initially in higher education and, although only briefly mentioned in the Osnabrück Declaration², also in vocational education and training.

Micro-credentials are not a new phenomenon but have been used mostly in Anglophone countries [Australia, USA, New Zealand) for some time. This is also highlighted by the EU, which deliberately refers to the experience with MC there. Contrary to what one might assume, however, the concept of MC is not uniformly defined. Whereas the EU publication “A European Approach to Micro-Credentials”³) describe a micro-credential as

- a “**proof of learning outcomes that a learner has acquired after a *short learning experience*. These learning outcomes have been *assessed against transparent standards*”,**

UNESCO publications emphasize a micro-credential (or alternative credential) mainly as

- a “**certified achievement of learning outcomes, competencies or skills, assessed as part of a short learning experience designed to enable employment and or lifelong learning**”⁴,
- a “**verified representation of a specific and focused learning achievement, assessed according to transparent standards and awarded by a recognized body**”⁵ or

¹ [Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning Text with EEA relevance. \(europa.eu\)](#)

² [osnabrueck_declaration_eu2020.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

³ [european-approach-micro-credentials-higher-education-consultation-group-output-final-report.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ [The emergence of alternative credentials | en | OECD](#)

⁵ [Towards a common definition of micro-credentials - UNESCO Digital Library](#)

- “a **record of focused learning achievement** verifying what the learner knows, understands and or can do, including assessment based on clearly defined standards and is awarded by a competent organization”⁶.

To obtain an overview of the current discussion, a literature list was compiled in the BEM project. It takes the international literature up to around mid-2023 and attempts to focus on literature on vocational education and training (literature list in the appendix to this deliverable). Taking that into account we can summarize:

- There are currently **different ideas/definitions** about the MC phenomenon internationally
- The area of **higher education is currently the dominant area** of application
- Various relevant processes on **implementation, design, quality assurance and recognition** have not yet been really clarified
- Stakeholders in the vocational training sector - especially business representatives - **do not yet articulate a clear position** on MC

Selected [bibliography](#)
on [microcrednetials](#)
with focus on TVET

<https://www.bibb.de/de/174468.php>

⁶ [Transforming higher education to achieveSDG4 - UNESCO Digital Library](#)

Based on the Australian experience Paul Cochoran (2021) mentions in his publication “The 10 key problems of micro-credentials” that neither the definition nor the usage of the term ‘micro-credential’ is consistent⁷. The same applies currently for the European Approach to Micro-credentials. We take this “definition gap” as an opportunity and starting point to develop our own BEM definition of what a BEM-micro credential is.

Questions to be answered when designing micro-credentials:

1. Micro-credentials alone standing or stackable?
2. What is the reference of the Micro-credential: curriculum or work/ professional tasks?
3. Partnership with local companies, involvement of company representatives (MoU)
4. Assessment criteria and procedures? (Partnership agreement)

The answers to these questions result from the respective contexts of the partner countries and the specific objectives and target groups to be reached with BEM. Reminder: BEM micro-credentials are intended to meet the demand of the local/regional companies (documented by MoUs) and they are tailored to people who are currently not reached/not addressed by the formal VET provision in the country.

A survey among the BEM partners involved showed that there are already concrete ideas in the partner countries about the areas and contexts in which the BEM Micro-Credentials should be used:

⁷ Corcoran, P. (2021) The 10 Key Problems of Micro-Credentials (Monograph 1/2021). Canberra, Australia.

Using Micro-Credentials ...



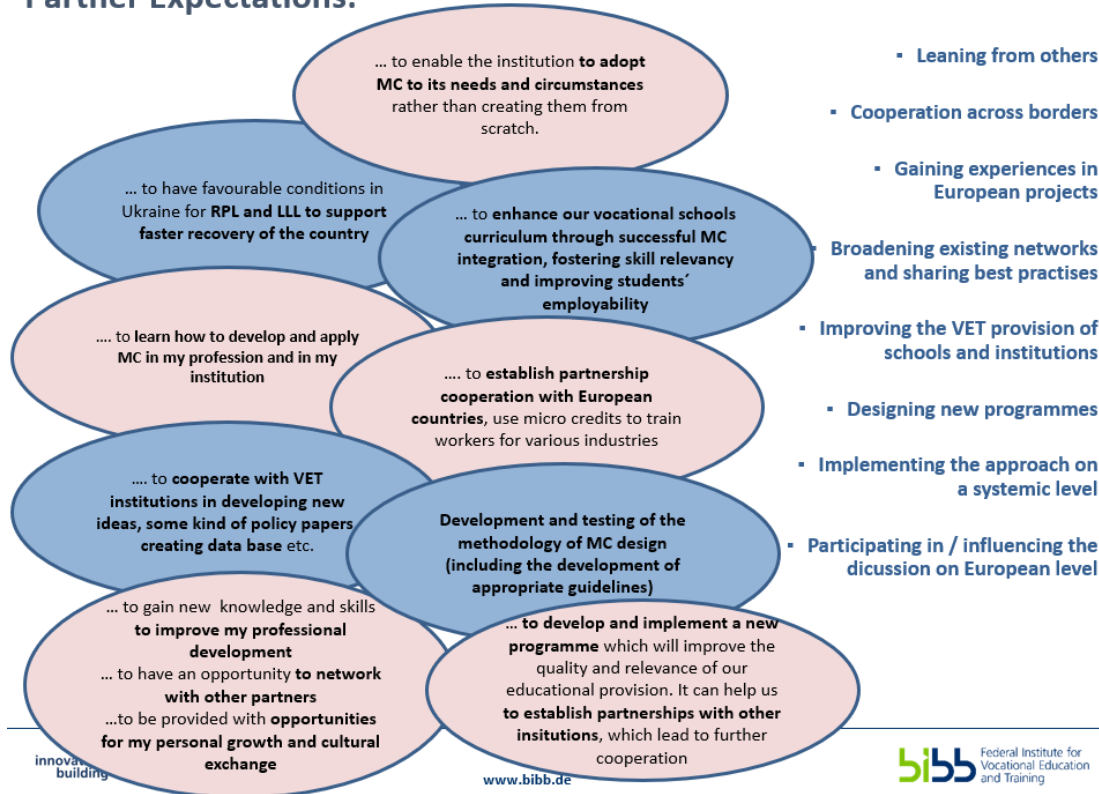
	Answers (N=15)
❖ In vocational training preparation	IIIII I = 6
❖ In initial VET, as single modules/units	IIIII III = 8
❖ <u>In further/advanced VET</u>	IIIII IIIII I = 11
❖ <u>For the validation of prior and informal learning</u>	IIIII IIII = 9
❖ As a partial qualification	IIIII III = 8
❖ <u>As specialisation courses (additional qualification) to better adapt the needs of the companies</u>	IIIII IIIII I = 11
❖ <u>For the qualification of unskilled workers</u>	IIIII IIIII IIII = 14
❖ For improved transition from labour market to higher education as „bridging qualifications“	IIII = 4
❖ As units for transnational mobility of learners and/or workers	IIII = 4
❖ <u>Others</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>As a key instrument for LLL at all levels,</u> ▪ <u>To get the necessary skills and competences for obtaining a professional qualification (level 5 to 7 EQF)</u> 	

Source: PPP Eberhardt at the Lelam-Conference in Dhulikhel, September 2023.



The survey showed also that there are expectations within the BEM partnership that go far beyond the direct work on the micro-credential development:

Partner Expectations:



Source: PPP Eberhardt at the Lelam-Conference in Dhulikhel, September 2023

When asked about the biggest hurdles and obstacles that the BEM partners see in implementation and utilisation, the following points were named, among others⁸:

- The war in the country (Ukraine)
- The cooperation with employers, with the Ministry of Education and the Chamber of Commerce / To cooperate with educational authorities.
- VET programmes currently do not include credits
- The existing legislation does not include this type of qualification / Legislation framework does not exist currently
- Limited awareness and understanding of MC among individuals, employers, and various organisations
- Communication and understanding. The state does not provide necessary support, the schools are doing it on their own.
- Maybe bureaucracy

Our BEM takes the planned application contexts, expectations and obstacles into account. BEM Micro Credentials are planned

- As a flexible tool and as a link between educational subsystems
- As a bridge between VET and the labour market (needs)
- For various purposes like upskilling, re-skilling, specialisation, the validation of prior learning and
- Not necessarily as an integral part of the VET system but as a its margins (add-on skills).

In the BEM project we understand a micro-credential as a kind of “**statement**”/“**certificate**”/“**document**” (not a program, not a course) that **documents learning outcomes** enabling the individual to be competitive in the labour market by demonstrating knowledge and skills that are not currently integrated into formal VET provision (additional skills/ bridging skills/ specialized knowledge /). Against this background the idea of BEM-Micro-credentials serves the **continuous professional development of**

⁸ Survey among BEM partners by CH. EBerhardt, Spring 2023

the individual (taking different life circumstances into account). How the micro-credential is delivered, the training process, the training programme, its duration is in the hands of the provider. **Course development or piloting is not part of the BEM project.**

Common assessment criteria prove that the learning outcomes are achieved regardless of how they are prepared and/or provided.

A BEM micro-credential:

- ➔ can be offered at different locations (learning venues) and by different providers.
- ➔ It can refer to other micro-credentials or a full qualification and build on them (be stackable), but does not necessarily have to.
- ➔ It can also stand alone.
- ➔ As a result of a European project it should be usable in different country contexts and thus be "mobile" (**interchangeable**).
- ➔ describes the result of a learning process, but not the learning process itself. It is not a course or a programme, it is a statement/certificate. Thus, the micro-credential is neither an occupational standard, nor an educational one.

Designing the micro-credentials according to this common understanding and agreement is in the core of work package 4.



Attachment:

Selected Bibliography on Micro-Credentials

WP 3 – COMMON UNDERSTANDING

WP LEADER: BIBB

Compiled by Christiane Eberhardt, Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), July 2023

About BEM

The European Commission has launched a call for proposals under the Erasmus Plus programme for the area "Capacity Building" at the end of 2021 (EACEA). This relatively new EU programme line aims to promote the relevance, accessibility and responsiveness of VET institutions and systems in non-EU Member States and to support educational partnerships. BEM is one of 58 projects proposed for funding in the 2022 call. The project started on 01.01.2023 and has a duration of three years.

The Erasmus+ project "Beyond Europe with Micro-credentials" (BEM project) is about transferring experiences from ECVET to the development of micro-credentials. The aim is to reflect these in the non-EU member states and adapt them to the respective local conditions. With micro-credentials (MC), labour market-relevant qualifications are developed whose contents are derived from the needs of selected sectors in the countries and implemented in consultation with regional companies. MCs also focus on groups of people who have so far been insufficiently covered by the education systems (e.g. learners in structurally weak regions, single parents, unskilled workers, people with support needs, refugees). BEM MCs can be used in



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vocational education and training (VET), as an additional qualification or for the validation and recognition of informal learning. It is planned to develop 10 to 12 MCs per country. The developed MCs will be linked to the Europass templates and included in the multilingual "Skillsbank" maintained in Norway. This will give them an additional European added value, and they can be transferred to other countries or sectors.

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Countries: Germany, Norway, Ukraine, Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Armenia, Georgia

Introductory Note:

Work package 3 of the BEM-project aims to develop a common understanding of what labour market relevant micro-skills are and how they can be displayed in a template. To this end, among other things, a list of references was compiled that serves several purposes:

- it maps European activities to promote micro-credentials,
- describes contexts of application (Higher Education, Industry) and
- provides insight into experiences and approaches from countries that already work with micro-credentials.

Special emphasis is placed on sources dealing with the development of micro-credentials with guidelines, definitions, samples, examples, etc. (often in the form of websites, videos, etc.). Here we expect important impulses for the design of our own BEM development/designing process. For this reason, the literature list is incomplete and essentially lists references





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that have a connection to the BEM objectives. References that deal in depth with the use of micro-credentials in higher education or with technical implementation aspects (digital credentials, badges, etc.) have not been included.

The bibliography concludes with information that critically addresses the issue of micro-credentials. This takes the topic off the current political agenda and puts it to the test from different perspectives.

The literature review reveals what previous discussion in the “European VET-project family” suggests: Although the term “micro-credentials” has found a firm place in European recommendations and publications within a short period of time, it has not been contoured either in its form or in its differentiation from other educational formats in relation to vocational education and training - i.e. to an application outside the higher education sector. Thus, BEM offers a space for experimentation and testing. With the work on BEM, the literature list will also continue to grow. We welcome literature references that are currently missing and those that should definitely appear. Please send all relevant references to bem@sbgdd.de or to eberhardt@bibb.de



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