Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-Credentials Minutes

The second meeting of the Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-Credentials was held on 3 June 2024 at The SFC office.

Present:

Anne Black	Kristofer McKeown
Jon Buglass (Co-Chair)	Joy Perkins
Scott Connor	Sara Rae
Sheila Dunn	Anne Tierney (Co-Chair)
Alison Gilmour	Siobhan Wilson
Pauline Hanesworth	
John Kerr	
Wilma MacLeod	
Alen MacKinlay	

Officers:

Karen Gray
Phoebe Mayer
Phil McGuinness
Erica Russell-Hensens

Apologies:

Douglas Dixon	Debra Willison
Sarah-Jane Linton	Luke Millard
Sally Smith	Morven Shearer
Alison Malcolm (SFC)	

Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

1.   Welcome and Introductions

2.   Minute of previous meeting (MCN/Min1/23)

The Minutes of the last meeting were approved, with no comments arising.

3.   Reflection on last meeting outputs (MCN/01/24)

The Chairs invited members to discuss any concerns regarding the recent funding announcement, and potential impact this may have on the work of the network, and to reflect on the suggestion made by the SFC that the network could continue to develop a framework.

Members noted that whilst the funding that initiated the initial development of Micro-credentials was helpful, continuing work should not be inhibited by the current funding context. There is a need to focus on micro-credentials as a part of core delivery, and to consider collectively how the network can influence the direction of funding going forward.

The discussion highlighted that the changing funding landscape could create challenges at the institutional level, however, with varying impacts across the sector and it was noted that the degree of engagement with micro-credentials varied across institutions departments.

Members discussed Upskilling Funding, acknowledging that while its absence would be felt, there were questions regarding its effective utilization. Members recognised the need for a more strategic focus on priorities when using such funding.

Within the College sector, members noted concern over the current funding landscape, highlighting the benefit the Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF) has had to support programs. It was noted, however, that this initiative could potentially influence future funding models. Members stressed the need to address ongoing skills shortages and emphasized the group's role in advocating for effective strategies moving forward.

Members expressed a desire for insight from the SFC, particularly in relation to how the outcomes of the tertiary review might affect the speed and scale of micro-credential provision.
It was noted by the SFC that the motivation behind micro-credentials as outlined in the review was driven by curricular considerations rather than funding, and the ambition remains to allow students the flexibility to stack micro-credentials and to facilitate easier entry and exit points within programmes.

The group discussed access to funding and the need to incentivise more flexible funding options for learners, particularly in relation to a funding for part time students. The group reflected on the need to promote a more flexible definition of part-time status, adding this

issue has been an ongoing priority for the network and remains a crucial. It was recognised, however, that this issue lies within the remit of the Scottish Government (SG) and the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS).

The discussion concluded with a recognition of the challenges ahead and a commitment to collaboratively navigate the evolving funding landscape to support the development of micro-credentials. It was suggested that the group could play a pivotal role in envisioning the future of micro-credentials in Scotland and influencing funding discussions through the work of their respective workstreams.

4.   Workshops feedback

Members agreed that it will be necessary to understand how the workstreams and their respective outputs fit together from a sequencing perspective.

Students: Pauline Hanesworth will be leading this workstream.

Discussion involved wider issues including funding and the broader benefits of Micro-credentials. There is still a need to better understand students (as stakeholders).
Key points and actions included:
- Understanding the motivations behind students pursuing MCs.
- Engaging directly with students to gather insights rather than relying on assumptions.
- Assessing how institutions are currently deploying actions related to MCs to determine their fit within the workstream's scope.

The workstream's approach will consist of three strands:
1. Engagement with Academics, to gather understanding and feedback on student interest and demand.
2. Outreach to Students, Alumni, and Employers, to engage these groups for direct input.
3. Predictive Analysis, to assess current and future demand for MCs among students.

A follow-up meeting of workstream members will be scheduled to clarify the scope of MCs and to discuss the process and timeline for seeking ethics approval for student engagement.

Employers: John Kerr will be leading this workstream.
The group noted that it will seek to draw upon the insights provided from the previous SG-led employer forum.
Key points and actions included:
-    Acknowledgment of a high level of awareness and interest in MCs, especially in sectors like construction, however there is a need to promote this more broadly within institutions through the work of Business Development Teams'.
-    The need for further research on the current and past delivery of MCs, including connections to the collaborative cluster and upskilling initiatives.

- The group would like to enhance understanding around the scale and parameters of MC provision, including the distribution of stackable and non-stackable provision, opportunities for international delivery and the quantum of learners progressing from free, non-credit bearing micro-credential courses. It was noted that SFC's Skills team could provide some data and statistics regarding Upskilling and FWDF, however this currently excludes data on progression routes. It was noted that a visual matrix of the types of provision might be helpful.
- Consideration of the communications aspect to this workstream highlighted the potential for a website to act as a landing page for all stakeholder groups, listing MC provision nationally. It was recognised that this will need discussion and calibration with the other workstream groups.
- The group emphasized the importance of a national strategy over a regional focus, recognizing that the funding context may necessitate a more employer-driven approach. The Prolific Website, for researching employers, was suggested as a helpful resource to explore as it aligns with the QAA themes and can be easily filtered for relevant data. My World of Work and the SCQF websites were also noted as helpful resources to utilise.
- The group noted a need to clearly differentiate between employer and employee demands. It was emphasized that employers should not be disassociated from learners, considering the significant upskilling potential of micro-credentials.
- Further exploration is needed of the connections between student needs, institutional deployment, and employer engagement in the context of micro-credentials.

Institutional Priorities: Alen will be leading this workstream

This workstream group discussed the importance of understanding strategic intent, which will significantly influence how micro credentials are prioritised within institutions.
Key points and actions included:
- A desk-based summary will be conducted to review previous efforts and assess whether a new review is necessary, particularly considering the changing funding context.
- Playback of findings (from the desk-based summary) will be shared with stakeholders to sense-check progress and gather feedback.
- The group discussed the current glossary definitions, questioning whether they are sufficiently broad or if revisions are needed to enhance clarity and applicability.
- The group recognised a need for agreement on QAA practices, especially concerning portability between institutions and the context of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).
- The group discussed the approach to mapping (or not) to other frameworks beyond the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).
- Connection with QAA Statement: The relevance of establishing a connection with the QAA Statement, for facilitating further discussion, was highlighted by the co-chair.

6.   Next steps / close

Members discussed the importance of embedding a streamlined approach to ethics approval across workstream activity, in keeping with the approach used within the previous network. The Co-Chairs offered to lead on this work on behalf of all workstreams, which was agreed by members.

The Co-Chairs thanked members for their time and contributions.

It was agreed that the next meeting would be in-person on 17th September.