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## Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-Credentials Minutes

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The fifth meeting of the Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-Credentials was held on 25 February 2025 via Teams

Present:

Anne Tierney (Co-Chair)	Wilma MacLeod
Jon Buglass (Co-Chair)	Kris McKeown
Sheila Dunn	Luke Millard
Joy Perkins	Morven Shearer
Pauline Hanesworth	Sally Smith
Alen MacKinlay	Siobhan Wilson
John Kerr	Eni Adesida
Debra Willison	Sharon Rankin
Lee Lappin	Steve Osborne
Iain Hawker	Duncan Abernethy

Officers:

Karen Gray	Phill McGuinness
Erica Russell-Hensens	Stewart Squire
Elaine Malcolm	

Apologies:

Douglas Dickson	Anne Black
Alison Gilmour	Sara Rae

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed members of the network and extended a special welcome to new members of the network:

- Sharon Rankin (University of the Highlands and Islands)
- Duncan Abernethy (North East Scotland College)
- Iain Hawker (Fife College)

The Chair also welcomed Eni Adesida from the Scottish Government who was joining as a new observer in place of Anne Black who was retiring.

### 2. Minute of previous meeting (MCN/Min4/24)

The Minutes of the last meeting were approved with no amendments.

A short discussion was held on a recent meeting with Órla Barry from Quality and Qualifications Ireland who presented on their recent review work on micro-credentials.

### 3. Updates on workstream activity

This item was chaired by Jon Buglass.

The Chair invited members from Workstream 2 to provide the network with an update on their recent activities:

#### **Workstream 2: Employers**

- Members were informed that there had been a disappointing response to the employer survey which was circulated before Christmas.
- This was issued both through direct contact with employers and via employer engagement groups to approx. 6000 contacts however only 6 or 7 accurate surveys were completed with no follow-up contact information left.
- It was explained that given how recently the survey was circulated, that it would be difficult for the college and university groups to re-circulate it again.
- It was stated that the network would use the previous employer survey results from 2023/24 to support and influence the final framework.

The Chair thanked the workstream for their work on the survey and providing the update and invited questions from members.

- It was noted that the previous paper on employer data was presented at a recent international conference and won best paper.
- Members were informed that lots of employers are not tuned in to the language and understanding of micro-credentials and there is a lot of work to be done in presenting this to employers.
- Members were informed that some industries were accelerating their understanding of micro-credentials though it was slower in other sectors. They were updated on work being undertaken by the Welsh Government. It was noted that Medr, Wales's Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, was working on Advanced Practice Training Micro-credentials but that there was more work to be done.
- Members queried if there was any data available on which sectors had developed micro-credentials in Wales. Members were informed that there was not a list but over 100 papers had been published in the last 18 months – largely in health journals. It was noted that there is collaboration underway across Europe but nothing has been centralised.
- Occupational and Skills hub databases were mentioned as having potential going forward.

### Workstream 1 & 3: Institutional Survey

The Chair invited members from Workstream 1 and 3 to provide the network with an update on their recent activities:

- The workstream presented on the recent institutional survey findings. Thanks were given to workstream members and the SFC for their help in disseminating the survey. It was noted that 23 responses were received in total: 9 colleges and 14 universities.
- Members were informed that the survey sought to validate the original research into micro-credentials and the first question focused on institutions motivators.
- As with the previous research, the importance of flexibility, accessibility and credibility in micro-credentials was noted as well as the need to align with and link with employers and industry.
- The importance of public funding was highlighted and strong support for stackable micro-credentials was given. It was agreed that this should be incorporated into the micro-credentials framework even though it would not necessarily apply to all micro-credentials.
- The importance of learner demand was noted and the need to recognize different structures and systems involved.
- Barriers for micro-credentials were looked at. These include cost, lack of awareness, flexibility and time constraints and institutional systems not optimised to support micro-credentials.
- It was suggested that there would be value in having a centralised national hub for micro-credentials to increase visibility, ensure quality standards and allow for transferability.
- It was further reported that there was a strong desire to align with existing frameworks, avoid duplication and standardise terminology.
- It was noted that there are 14 institutions offering micro-credentials currently with 9 responding institutions not offering micro-credentials. Of these 9, 3 noted that they have courses that are due to start shortly.
- It was noted that there is a wide range of learner engagement. Some institutions have seen steady growth, but the Upskilling fund contributed significantly to this before being discontinued.
- In summing up members were informed that moving forward there was a need to optimise institutional systems, standardise data collection, address funding and accessibility and create a national micro-credentials hub.

The Chair thanked the workstreams for their update and invited questions from members:

- Members noted that the findings provided a roadmap for moving forwards.
- The work was praised and it was noted that the findings reinforced and was consistent with previous pilots from Wales and in Ireland.

- Members noted concern of a fractured approach to having different institutional websites provide different information on micro-credentials.

#### 4. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

This item was Chaired by Anne Tierney.

The Chair turned members attention to the next agenda item and invited Sheila Dunn to present on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership's (SCQFP) work on RPL.

Sheila provided an overview of the Scottish RPL landscape, how it was a devolved system and SCQF Partnership's role in relation to RPL in Scotland. Sheila further noted reform and review elements putting the learner at the centre and ensuring it was fit for the future.

Members were informed that SCQF Partnership have been asked by the Scottish Government (SG) for a report outlining an analysis of and suggested approach to a National Strategy for RPL. Sheila added that by using RPL effectively, they could move forward quickly and cost efficiently towards SG's vision as set out in Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) published in 2022. SCQF Partnership's response was submitted last week and a response will be provided.

It was noted that SCQFP also have an RPL Hub which has recently been published on their website, and it is hoped to have more case studies, workshops, information and useful links added over time. Sheila confirmed that she would keep the network informed of SG's response as it would be good to have everyone involved from the beginning.

The Chair thanked Sheila for the presentation and invited questions and comments from members:

- Members enquired about next steps and were informed that they were unknown at this moment, but it was felt that having institutions involved at the beginning to help craft the strategy would help.
- Members were informed that SG had received the strategy and would ensure the relevant policy leads provided input.
- Members asked if material on micro-credentials could be added to the RPL Hub and were informed that SCQF Partnership were looking at opportunities for a qualifications register and the RPL hub and were supportive of publishing material on micro-credentials.

Members were encouraged to access the RPL Hub and to contact SCQF Partnership if they would like to provide content for it.

#### 5. Future MCN Framework

This item was chaired by Anne Tierney.

The Chair introduced the next item on the agenda and directed members to the relevant paper. The network was split into breakout groups to discuss the 5 questions from the paper before coming back to the group.

Members provide feedback during the plenary session which included:

**Question 1: What are the key priorities that must be included in the Micro-credentials Framework for Scotland proposal?**

- Members noted the importance in avoiding duplication and recognising context.
- Consideration should also be given to how best to target and balance demand.
- Members noted that there may be other providers that the framework would affect and to look to use the SCQFP and create a centralised accrual of knowledge.
- It was important to learn from other frameworks to help inform decisions.
- Members noted the overriding perspective should be the user rather than the institution.
- It was added that pathways and stackability were important as is accessibility of the language used.
- Members noted the importance of learner pathways and knowing what learners wanted. Consideration of how funding would be prioritised if it was made available and if it would be allocated regionally.

**Question 2: How do these relate to the original remit of the network and SFC's commitment?**

- It was noted that the priorities listed are in line with the remit and commitments.
- Members noted that there are different learners and referenced micro-credentials for metaskills.
- It was also felt that it was important to think about standards due to the new tertiary approach.

**Question 3: How will the network progress the development of the framework proposal in the next four months?**

- Members referenced back to the remit noting that there was a need to make progress. The network should decide on options and then narrow down the focus for the framework before looking at key areas such as the policy context and funding.
- Members noted the need to consider employer appetite and how to work with industry bodies.
- There was agreement to identify key sections, set a road map and make progress.

**Question 4: What consultation activity will be required to validate the framework proposal prior to submission to SFC?**

- Support was offered to raise awareness within SG in key departments, not directly linked to the work.
- Members considered engaging employers with different types of events and badging them as Continuing Professional Development for employers. Enhanced communication around curriculum development was raised and that it was a complex landscape that needed to be broken down.
- Members were informed of previous institutional activity for employers to help them to understand how degree programmes were developed as an example of engaging industry.

**Question 5: What support can the SFC offer the network in developing the framework proposal?**

- Members noted that funding was a top priority.
- In addition, in the breakout group, members had also discussed other important areas such as the framework's development, course development, learner entitlement, flexible payment models and workforce development.
- Members highlighted the need to consider the parameters and practicalities of who takes forward the development of the framework and who was responsible for each area.
- Members discussed stackability of learning in colleges, and it was noted that while progression pathways were important, the focus was often on upskilling and employment. It was highlighted that it can depend on the sector and noted the importance of vocational programmes, highlighting these would be needed across all areas.
- It was agreed that it is important for the framework to demonstrate parity between university and college provision, acknowledging the differences whilst ensuring both are well represented.

The Chair thanked members and noted a need to quickly identify the next steps.

**ACTION** – AT/ERH/JB/KG to meet offline to discuss further.

## 6. MCN Communications Development

This item was chaired by Anne Tierney.

The Chair invited Karen Gray to speak to the next item. Karen updated members that a Micro-credentials webpage had been drafted to provide and share information about the network including the minutes of meetings. Karen added that it would go live once it had been signed off and that a link to the page would be circulated to the network in due course.

The Chair suggested a Scottish Tertiary Micro-credentials Network LinkedIn page to raise awareness outwith the sector. It was agreed that this could be considered at a future meeting.

## 7. AOCB

The Chair informed members that she had received a collaboration request from micro-credential scholars in Finland and asked if the Network should invite them to a future meeting. Members agreed to the request.

The Chair and Joy Perkins updated members on their recent attendance at the Micro-credentials & Sustainability conference in Tallinn, Estonia. The Chair stated that everyone is tackling issues around micro-credentials and mentioned that Scotland's approach to engaging with employers was seen as unique as others had not yet directly engaged with employers. It was noted that there was a focus on stackability and upskilling which covered a broad spectrum of areas. Members were also informed of the different approaches to accreditation in different countries.

## 8. Next Steps/Close

It was agreed that:

- Framework development steps to be decided
- Next meeting date is still to be confirmed – Possibly end of March and in May
- Co-chairs to meet separately

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and contributions and ended the meeting.