
Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-Credentials Minutes

The first meeting of the Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-Credentials was held on 30 January 2024, via Teams

Present:

Anne Black	Wilma MacLeod
Jon Buglass	Kristofer McKeown
Sheila Dunn	Luke Millard
Pauline Hanesworth	Joy Perkins
John Kerr	Sara Rae
Lee Lapin	Morven Shearer
Alen MacKinlay	Siobhan Wilson

Officers:

Dr Jacqui Brasted (Chair)
Karen Gray
Phoebe Mayer
Phil McGuinness
Erica Russell-Hensens

Apologies:

Scott Connor	Douglas Dixon
Alison Gilmour	Sarah-Jane Linton
Alison Malcolm (officer)	Sally Smith
Anne Tierney	Debra Willison

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and thanked them for accommodating the last-minute change to an on-line meeting and their support of the network thus far. It was noted that SFC was chairing this meeting until Co-Chairs had been appointed and confirmed to members.

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

The Minutes of the meeting held by QAA's Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-credentials, on 10th August 2023, were shared to support continuity, with no comments arising.

3. MCN Remit and Membership (MCN/01/24)

The Chair thanked continuing members for their feedback on the initial draft remit, which was circulated prior to the meeting. The Chair presented the following points for discussion:

- **Appointment of joint chairs:** SFC will invite and appoint members from this group to co-chair the network.
Members agreed that co-chairing would help manage burden and ensure equal representation across College and University sectors.
- **Framework development:** the focus of this group will be on developing the framework in line with the SFC Review recommendations.
Members discussed the proposed timeframe, noting that it was ambitious but helpful and achievable.
- **Preferred ways of working:** SFC will work with the network and provide support in developing papers. Members were asked to comment on the preferred mechanisms and frequency of meetings to facilitate progress.
Members agreed that a shared Teams site would provide a helpful platform for members to share papers and to develop workstreams asynchronously, between network meeting dates.
- Members agreed that establishing distinct workstreams would enhance the network's outputs and ways of working asynchronously.
Consideration should be given to members' specific areas of interest, expertise and professional networks.
- Members discussed the importance of engaging with stakeholder groups as the framework is developed, noting that scrutiny from institution's

Senior Leadership teams' may cause delays if the network doesn't seek to socialise and promote the framework's development.

- It was agreed that employer engagement should be underpinned with clear messaging that articulates the benefits and expectations of involvement and minimises academic jargon where possible. It was acknowledged that members' have existing employer networks that could be used to feed into the work of the network. It was suggested that the Scottish Government's work on Lifetime Skills Offer, which was shared with Chairs across sectors, may be of relevance and value to the network.
- The timeframe is ambitious, and it would be prudent to consider marketing and communications from the outset to generate awareness and encourage buy-in. It was recognised that different stakeholder groups will have different awareness, terminology and interest in MCs so deciding on the appropriate terminology – across stakeholder groups - will be important.
- It was acknowledged that the speed in which the network can develop a framework may depend on its willingness to learn from others. The Chair confirmed that SFC has had preliminary engagement with the lead for the Irish MC Framework, Jools O'Connor, who was open to further engagement with the network. The key advice received from Jools was to embed stackability at the outset as doing so retrospectively was proving challenging. Members acknowledged this would be a key consideration to explore, however it was noted that there is little evidence to support the notion that stackable MCs are in demand in other countries.
- It was noted that the Scottish institutions are already able to draw on the established platform, database, portal and digital infrastructure facilitated by the SCQF, and that this could be used to enable stackable MCs and portable MCs. What will be key is determining what makes MCs distinct from short courses that are already delivered by many colleges. It was noted that this would be discussed in a later agenda item and paper.

In closing, the Chair confirmed that in determining the parameters of the framework, and promoting its use, it will be helpful for the network to build on the existing [QAA Glossary](#), and to draw on the SCQFP's cross sector platform and expertise when considering how to operationalise the framework.

4. Micro-credentials Published Outputs (MCN/02/24)

The Chair handed over to Phoebe to introduce the paper. The paper and agenda item was included to foreground the key findings and guidance that has been published through the valuable work undertaken by SCQFP and QAA.

It was acknowledged that many members will have contributed to this body of work and thus be familiar with these outputs.

Sheila Dunn (SCQF) provided a verbal update on the work carried out with SCQFP and Colleges; and Joy Perkins (HWU) provided a verbal update.

Sheila presented slides. These are attached separately and will be available on the Teams site. Topics raised included:

- Activity undertaken by a small working group of colleges to scope employer' demand and recognition of MCs and to identify a model of delivery to pilot. EU funding was secured towards this.
- Potential benefits were noted as the ability for MCs to be stackable (towards higher level qualifications) or connected (laterally, across curriculum areas). It was noted that stackability may not be a primary aim for all users.
- Credit transfer mechanisms; being quick to develop and market; trusted stakeholder relationships, and diverse and inclusive provision were noted as enabling factors.
- SCQFP's working group developed an Outcomes report that identified common features.
 - 2 SCQF credits – 20 hours
 - Badged and recognizable brand
 - Hub approach advised for the development and delivery of MCs – to share responsibility amongst colleges.
- Proof of concept was developed through the development of a suite of MCs which were delivered across Edinburgh and Glasgow Colleges' respectively. City of Glasgow College commented that this approach helpfully enabled learners to undertake complementary learning objectives towards a chosen career or aspiration, which reflected contemporary labor market needs. A further benefit of the Hub model approach was that it reduced duplication of effort and outputs. However,

it was noted that delivery of the pilot ended due to funding and resourcing challenges. It was acknowledged that funding will be an ongoing and longer-term consideration of the network, which will need to work in tandem with SAAS definitions and SFC's funding review.

Joy Perkins provided an update on the stages and outputs of QAA's Resilient Learning Communities enhancement theme. Members were signposted to the QAA's webpages and were advised to refer to the case studies on stakeholder perspectives.

- QAA first undertook scoping activity to assess the demand, interest, and awareness of MCs within Scotland, and held events to showcase the accumulated data and research findings.
- QAA's Micro-Credential Network for Scotland, chaired by Jon Powell (UWS) and Anne Tierney (HWU) used these outputs as a starting point to develop a common understanding for the quality assurance aspects of MCs, and to surface the role of Recognised Prior Learning as an enabling factor to promote MCs in Scotland. It is noted that RPL has been requested as an area that the network returns to for further discussion.
- It was acknowledged that Anne Tierney played a significant role in developing the Good Practice Guidance which was published in August 2023.

5. National and International Comparisons (MCN/03/24)

The Chair handed over to Phoebe to introduce the paper. It was acknowledged that this paper draws on the work of Alison Malcolm (SFC) and recent conversations with colleagues in Ireland and HEFCW who, in collaboration with QAA Wales, are also seeking to develop a MC framework.

The paper summarises the key features from national and international micro-credential frameworks and practices. Members were signposted to the grouping of comparator approaches from the UK Nations and Ireland (Annex A) and frameworks from further afield (Annex B).

Members were asked to reflect on the key features of existing national and international frameworks and to consider what aspects we should draw onto inform the framework for Scotland, and whether there are aspects we would prefer not to include.

Areas of discussion raised included:

- It was noted that the value of opening MCs online increased institution's target markets but also posed a challenge to preserve academic integrity when pitched at a global audience.
- It was noted stackability was optional for students and institutions within some models, e.g., Australia and Ireland, and that this might provide example for how flexibility could be enabled within Scotland.
- It was noted that the network could seek to understand how the administrative burden of stackable MCs has been mitigated in those frameworks that enable it.
- It was noted that the objective to enable lifelong learning reflected the aspirations of a member institution in delivering MCs, and that Lifelong learning is potentially undervalued.
- It was noted that it is important to look at prospective audiences of MCs. In Ireland, the majority of MCs are at MA level, and that the framework therefore reflects a policy intervention to promote Upskilling. The target market within Scotland may be broader than this.

In summing up the Chair recognised that it will be necessary within the Scottish context to recognise the breadth of stakeholders and existing provision.

6. **Micro-Credentials Framework for Scotland: Workshop plenary (MCN/04/24)**

Karen Gray chaired the workshop activity.

Members were split into four groups each representing key stakeholders, with 25 minutes to discuss and consider the following questions:

- What the main purpose of the MC Framework for Scotland should be from the point of view of each stakeholder group.
- What the scope of the MC Framework for Scotland should be in respect to definition, size, key information.

Members can review the comments collated via Padlet boards here: [Micro-credentials Framework Purpose and Scope Padlet Comments.pdf](#)

Members were invited to feedback during the plenary session.

- **The Student group** discussion focused on the different drivers of student demands for MCs, including how these are accessed. It was noted that credit bearing provision may be of little relevance for those pursuing MCs for interest only.

- It was identified that more work is needed to make definitions clearer, including the language used to refer to students vs learner. *Anne Black has since shared the Post School Education and Skills lexicon that was developed by SG, SFC, SQA, SCQFP, SDS ES which is the third document on this page <https://www.gov.scot/publications/post-school-education-research-skills-purpose-principles/documents/>*
- It will be essential to ensure student voice informs consideration of what is most important and beneficial for this stakeholder group, including campus experience and access to resources.
- **The Employers group** noted that employers often approach institutions with specific upskilling and work-based challenges to meet, and that HE and FE sectors need to be responsive to this need.
- The group questioned whether Micro-credentials are a university only term, noting that short courses were more commonly used to refer to MCs within the College sector and by employers.
- The group discussed modes of study, noting that some students may be more likely to stay local (where MCs were part of upskilling or work-based learning routes) but that there is also scope to develop online and specialised provision.
- Employers should be encouraged to co- fund and develop MCs.
- **The College group** noted that many colleges already deliver MCs, albeit labelled as short courses approximating 2 credits / 20 hours.
- Upskilling and employer focused courses are most likely to reflect College's development and delivery of MCs.
- It will be essential to consider mechanisms for Recognised Prior Learning to ensure that the necessary trust and credibility is in place to facilitate portability between institutions, and flexibility for learners seeking to build a portfolio of MCs.
- Funding is a critical issue that will determine stakeholders access too, and use of MCs.
- This group noted the value of using and adapting the infrastructure that is available (e.g., SCQF).
- **The Universities group** noted that the framework will need to encourage broad subscription from amongst diverse stakeholders, so the narrative and terminology will be important to get right.
- There is a need and opportunity for universities to articulate their respective USPs in their MC offering, to compete within a global online market.
- The group considered how the network would measure success, noting that uptake and use of the framework will require a sustained

programme of engagement with university colleagues in advance of launch.

- The group discussed how universities would adequately scale access to essential services and resources at MC level, including access to mental health and wellbeing resources and support.

7. Closing comments, reflections, and thanks

The Chair thanked members for taking the time to attend the meeting.

In summation of the discussions, it was noted that it will be essential for the network to carefully consider who the customers of the framework will be, and how best to bring them along with us in the development and launch of the framework. It was also acknowledged that the network will build on the work and outputs from the previous network.

It was noted that SFC will:

- Identify and invite co-chairs from the group.
- Share future meeting dates.
- Establish a shared Teams site to enable group working.
- Draw on international perspectives, and invite colleagues involved with comparator frameworks to speak at future meetings.
- Develop suggested workstreams for members to review and agree so that work can start ahead of the next network meeting, which is anticipated to be via Teams.

8. Date of next meeting – Tuesday 16th April at 10.00-12.00 via Teams.