Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-Credentials Minutes

The third meeting of the Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-Credentials was held on 17 September 2024 in the Scottish Funding Council offices, Board Room, Apex 1.

Present:		
	Anne Black	Wilma MacLeod
	Jon Buglass (Co-Chair)	Kris McKeown
	Sheila Dunn	Luke Millard
	Alison Gilmour	Joy Perkins
	Pauline Hanesworth	Sally Smith
	Alen MacKinlay	Siobhan Wilson

Officers:		
	Karen Gray	Phill McGuinness
	Erica Russell-Hensens	Stewart Squire
	Phoebe Mayer	

Apologies:		
	Douglas Dickson	Anne Tierney (Co-Chair)
	Sarah-Jane Linton	Morven Shearer
	Alison Malcolm (SFC)	Debra Willison
	Sara Rae	

1.   Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed members of the Network.

The Chair introduced Stewart Squire and provided a note of thanks to Phoebe Mayer for their contribution to the Network. The Chair provided apologies for members who were not able to attend and welcomed Anne Black and Kris McKeown from the Scottish Government, who were joining via Teams. The Chair noted that Joy Perkins would be presenting the Workstream update on behalf of John Kerr.

2.   Minute of previous meeting (MCN/Min3/24)

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

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

The Chair invited workstream representatives to provide the network with an update on their recent activities:

Workstream 2: Employers
- Members were updated that the employer survey design was nearly complete, and it had

been a collaborative process.

- Members were informed that the survey's purpose was to investigate employers' awareness and understanding of micro-credentials and had two broad themes of co-production and employers' ideas on micro-credentials.
- It was explained that the survey would be around 18 questions and anticipated to take 10 minutes to complete. The workstream still had some decisions to make to finalise the survey and to resolve some matters regarding the ethics procedure.
- It was reported that the aim was to launch the survey at the end of September.

The Chair thanked the workstream for their update and invited questions from members.

- It was noted that there had been a request to share the survey with Dr Ann Cotterrill (Quality Assurance Agency) as she is supporting the Welsh Micro credentials Network, and it was noted that there is also a similar exercise being done in England.
- A member asked whether the survey would be distributed UK-wide, but it was explained that currently the intention of the workstream is to finalise the questions prior to sending them to institutions for them to manage within Scotland. Workstream would be willing to share the questions with QAA once they were finalised.
- Members discussed the need to target employers, and an offer of assistance was made to support the workstream with that. This promoted further discussion on activity which was trying to avoid duplication of target groups, and it was confirmed that the survey circulation would be coordinated, and institutions would be able to review a list of organisations to help avoid duplication.
- Members enquired about accessing the employers list and seeing the survey questions before it was distributed. It was explained that they were available on the University of Glasgow SharePoint, and it was agreed that the link could be circulated to the network when the design had been completed. Members discussed the management of the employer's spreadsheet and were encouraged to add employers to it.
- Members requested more information on the development and purpose of the survey to support the network's awareness and understanding of it.

The Chair thanked workstream 2 members and requested an update from the next workstream.

Workstream 3: Institutions

- Members were informed at a recent meeting that they identified three themes which covered: 1) Strategic Intent 2) Guidance and Practice and 3) Quality and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).
- To support theme 1 the workstream agreed on a survey and members were informed of their thinking and it was agreed the workstream would confirm a core set of questions and methodology.
- Members were informed that the workstream had been in discussions with members of workstream 1 on survey approach and looked to avoid overlap.
- On theme 2 and 3 it was noted in the update that there were publications on micro-credentials and the aim to look at it through a new lens of the funding landscape and

updated planning.

- During discussions it was noted that the workstream 1 paper provided context and highlighted that existing practice should allow for micro-credentials but raised questions about current quality assurance arrangements, along with how it will fit with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

The Chair thanked workstream 3 for their update and invited questions from members.

- Members noted the pressure of other key priorities, and this was considered a barrier to progress in some institutions.
- Members also recognized the need for feedback to help begin thoughts around a future framework and the importance of knowing the purpose and connections between institutions and employers to aid progress.

4.   Workstream 1: Students (collaboration proposal – MC02/24)

The Chair turned to the next item on the agenda and noted the paper, inviting Pauline Hanesworth to present. Pauline noted:

- That the workstream met in August and kept in mind its main aim and the need to develop the framework.
- The workstream reviewed previous work undertaken which was summarised in the paper and agreed that further exploration was required, noting that they had also considered the implications of a new framework.
- It was reported that the workstream discussed terminology and definitions and if the work out there, in the sector, was being used and how that knowledge would help develop the framework.
- Members were further updated on the breadth of workstreams discussions in relation to not conflating micro-credentials and macro-credentials, testing stackability, re-thinking RPL, quality assurance considerations and funding models.
- It was noted that they did not want to repeat work that had been done and rather looked to connect with institutional contacts to validate the research, to see if it still holds true and look at definitions.
- It was highlighted that the workstream had talked about accessing institutional data regarding micro-credential learners and highlighted the need to work with the Institutional Workstream to avoid duplication.

The Chair thanked Pauline and moved to discussion on the proposal. Members discussed:

- Whether their institutions could provide specific data to the workstream. It was noted by members that it would depend on what data was being asked for and it was highlighted that there was still an issue with micro-credentials definition. It was clarified that the workstream would be interested in recruitment and progression data for micro-credential learners in the first instance.
- Members were informed that whilst any credit bearing micro-credentials should be on the SCQF register, there may be discrepancies between how colleges and universities

update and monitor this, depending on the definitions that are used and the data that is collated. Members noted the need to ensure consistency.

- Further discussion was held on how students are registered at institutions. It was noted that institutions that have been using previous definitions may register non-credit bearing micro-credentials that would not be within the SCQF register.
- SFC confirmed that the Upskilling team can access some demographic data on Upskilling Funded micro-credential provision, but this would not include the college sector or commercial courses so institutions would need to use their own data to categorise in this way.
- There was agreement from the institutional workstream to work with the student workstream and also support given by SCQF on data.
- Members discussed access to data and capturing learners' intentions and what could be done moving forward with institutions asking students about their intentions.

The Chair noted the key points raised, which was to take an institution-led approach due to them having a better understanding of their data. No further comments were received.

5.   Framework Development

The Chair introduced the next item of business and advised members to refer to the paper on the Micro-Credentials Remit and noted the importance of why the network was developed. The Chair went through each part of the remit with members.

During the review the members discussed:

- Highlighting the reference in the remit to a single point of access. It was noted that when it was written it was not appreciated how critical that would be. Members felt that a single point of access was important for establishing reputation and credibility and was the right thing to do.
- Members discussed how a single point of access would connect to the framework's development and if the access should be held on an institutional website or centrally through an agency. It was noted that if a micro-credential was credit bearing it would need to be on the SCQF register.
- Members further discussed retaining the single point of access as an area of development and members agreed that it could make a recommendation as it is important.
- Members reviewed the network's governance structure, role of SFC and the timeline. It was noted that the framework proposal was intended to be complete by January 2025 but that this was unlikely.
- Members agreed that workstreams would feedback their outcomes to the network in early 2025 with a view to the timeline being extended to June 2025. Members agreed to meet online in January 2025 to provide feedback.
- It was agreed that there would be interim meetings with the Co-Chairs and Workstream leads prior to the next full meeting.
- Workstream leads were encouraged to utilise the goals set in the remit to help shape the feedback at the next meeting and to help envision the next stage of development.

The Chair ended the discussion and moved to the next item on the agenda.

6.   Communication Strategy

The Chair introduced the next agenda item and explained that members would be broken into three groups to consider how the work of the Network could be communicated, including its brand identity, avenues for communication and next steps. Members where then allocated into groups to discuss and prepare feedback to share within the plenary, presented below:

Group 1:

- Group 1 members considered a range of factors such as the framework timeline and the launch of Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP), with which they saw a fit between the theme of 'Diverse Learner Journeys' and the network's activities.
- Members reported that they considered it important to enhance the sector's awareness of the network's intention and ambitions soon, and that external messaging would be key towards this.
- Members noted previous discussion on who should be coordinating and communicating the work, and it was considered if this should be centrally run on the network's behalf.
- Members suggested that after the updates at the next meeting might be a good opportunity to give feedback to the sector, including any intelligence the network had collated from them to sense check it.

Group 2

- Group 2 members reiterated their discussion and reported that they were less convinced at having a centralised approach to communications, due to it being hard to maintain but were mindful of the beneficial impact it could have towards employer endorsement.
- Members fed back the need for a good brand to help address the noted differences in terminology between universities and colleges and felt that a more recognisable name would help.
- Members further discussed how communications were working now and noted inconsistency in how network activity was being brought back to institutions.
- Discussion continued about how the network's current work was being communicated and it was suggested that it was a good time for an update from the Co-Chairs to key groups as a pre-cursor to the activity of the Workstreams.

Group 3:

- Group 3 members fed back on items discussed and suggested that the Network needed a website which contained information on the group and its activities and noted other current online sources of information on micro-credentials.
- Members reiterated the need for credit bearing information to be on a future online hub with Quality Assurance Agency definitions and spoke about a new logo for the student learner project. Members raised the question of who might own the website and

suggested it could be SFC, QAA or SCQF.

- The group also suggested the need for wider signposting from other organisations who funded micro-credentials.
- Members raised the question of micro-credentials outside of Scotland and spoke about discussion on funding and work that had been done on international benchmarking and domestic pricing.
- Group members looked for feedback on the points raised and it was suggested that the future development of an online space could be considered at the next network meeting and further thought/discussions could be held with the Workstream and Co-Chairs in the interim. It was acknowledged that improved internal communications could be a quick win.
- It was noted that SCQF work with other bodies and suggested that it would help to get a sense check from them.
- Members held further discussion on the different types of portals and the importance of definitions. Members noted the importance of a future website role in signposting and in explaining what makes a micro-credential different from other forms of learning.

The Chair outlined the next steps for the group and explained that there would be 1) a discussion on internal commination's with SFC, Co-Chairs and the Workstream leads, 2) discussion on ownership of the database and 3) future scope and involvement from other credit rating bodies.

7.   Ethics Update

The Chair turned to the next item on the agenda and noted that it was brought up earlier in discussions and would be covered in detail at the next meeting.

8.   Next Steps/Close

The Chair asked members for any other business, and none were raised or discussed.
Members were asked to take a picture for an up-and-coming conference which will be attended by Anne Tierney.

The Chair announced that the next meeting was scheduled for 03 December but may be re-scheduled to January, in line with earlier discussions and ended the meeting.