

Communiqué 2 of 2023

To: Higher Education Institutions

Subject: Offering of microcredentials by higher education institutions

Rapid developments on microcredentials as viable, flexible, responsive learning opportunities are taking place globally. In reimagining their higher education systems, many countries have adopted systemic approaches to introducing microcredentials in national and / or regional education and training systems. Some countries / regions have embraced this more than others, and even in countries where it is being taken up, uptake may be uneven and uncoordinated.

Across all Southern African countries, including South Africa, the development of policies and strategies with regard to microcredentials is just beginning. National qualifications frameworks have yet to formulate ways of adequately conceptualising and incorporating microcredentials, although some regional, government and quality assurance role-players have already developed discussion documents in this regard and a few higher education institutions and entities have draft frameworks under construction, or have taken up the opportunities afforded. Learner, employee and employer awareness is low, despite the growing availability of alternative forms of learning including microcredentials. While microcredentials are increasingly available, the full extent of provision is unknown, along with their quality, relevance, usefulness, stackability and potential articulation and alignment with each other and with formal qualifications.

Not least, limited access to the internet and/or limited broadband availability, or limited access to devices which can access the internet and other barriers to access and provision - including, above all, social inequalities, widespread poverty and high unemployment - restricts both provision and access.

There are several issues to consider, including the following:

- What is a suitable definition for microcredentials in the Southern African context?
- Should microcredentials be registered on national qualifications frameworks or other types of registers?
- Should microcredentials be credit-bearing?
- How can recognition of microcredentials be enabled, including in workplaces?
- What is the relationship between microcredentials and full qualifications?
- Should microcredentials be recognised in formal qualifications?
- Should the stacking of microcredentials towards the achievement of a qualification be permitted? What criteria are needed if this is to be permitted?
- How should the quality assurance of microcredentials and their offering be undertaken and by whom?
- Should a repository for microcredentials be set up? Who should take responsibility for this?

- How do we ensure that access to, and achievement of microcredentials, advances social justice imperatives, especially in developing contexts?

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) together with a range of national, regional and international partners, is embarking on a project that will seek to explore these questions and which will have as its main outcome the development of a broad Southern African framework (including regional guidelines in the form of a roadmap that will be enabling and will inform and guide individual countries and institutions to develop country-specific frameworks) for the recognition of learning through microcredentials.

In the interim, as the policy framework on microcredentials is developed, and in recognition that there are some higher education institutions that have already progressed in the offering of microcredentials, higher education institutions that offer microcredentials have the responsibility to ensure that quality and integrity are maintained throughout the value chain, from the design of the microcredential, its approval at institutional level, to its delivery and beyond.

Institutions that are taking up this opportunity in the interim, and currently in the absence of a national policy framework, are requested to have an institutional policy framework on the offering of microcredentials in place which should cover aspects such as:

- Effective governance structures to oversee the development and offering of microcredentials, including rigorous approval processes.
- Robust and ethical processes and procedures for the design, development and delivery of microcredentials.
- Systems for approval and registration.
- Rules and regulations pertaining to marketing, recruitment and registration of participants.
- Adequate teaching and learning resources, and appropriate processes.
- Assessment strategy and procedures.
- Certification arrangements.
- A system of records management.
- A system for monitoring and review as a basis for continuous improvement.

The issue of whether microcredentials can be credit-bearing bears specific mention. Regulations currently in place in higher education only allow for learning that is part of a qualification to be allocated credits on a particular level of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Credits for modules that are part of a formal qualification, but that are taken for non-degree purposes (NDP) could be recognised as microcredentials that are credit-bearing. This will allow for the possible recognition of this form of microcredential in formal qualifications through Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) mechanisms.

Other microcredentials can be recognised through their inclusion in an assessed Portfolio of Evidence for RPL for access and/or advanced standing into formal qualifications.

The CHE's Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in higher education (CHE, 2016) provide guidance in this regard.

Institutions that have developed institutional frameworks and / or guidelines for practice in this area are requested to share these with the CHE as a basis for convening further discussions/engagement on this, and as inputs into a national framework. Please send any input in this regard to green.w@che.ac.za by 30 April 2023.



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Chief Executive Officer, on behalf of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC)

Date: 23 March 2023