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GUIDELINES ON THE INFORMATION PROVISION

ON STUDY PROGRAMMES,
STUDY COURSES AND
MICRO-CREDENTIALS
FOR THE USE OF
CREDENTIAL
EVALUATION

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These guidelines are based on the results of the study that was conducted in two stages:

Firstly, within Erasmus+ NARIC project “Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition” (OCTRA, 2020-2022) by the Academic Information Centre (Latvia) in cooperation with the Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Bosnia and Herzegovina), National Centre for Information and Documentation (Bulgaria), Agency for Science and Higher Education (Croatia), Education and Youth Board of Estonia (Estonia), BA School of Business and Finance (Latvia), Council of Rectors of Latvia (Latvia), Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (Poland).

Secondly, during Erasmus+ NARIC project No 101101695 “Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition 2” (OCTRA 2, 2023-2024) by the Academic Information Centre (Latvia) in cooperation with the Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Bosnia and Herzegovina), National Centre for Information and Documentation (Bulgaria), BA School of Business and Finance (Latvia), Council of Rectors of Latvia (Latvia), Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (Poland), National Centre for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas (Romania), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (Ireland) and National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility (Armenia).

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¹ AIC website. OCTRA 2 Comparative report. Available here: <https://aic.lv/en/par-aic/projects/octra-2>

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Abbreviations

AIC	Academic Information Centre (Latvia)
ENIC	European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EAR Manual (2012)	Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and European Area for Recognition Manual (2012)
EAR Manual (2023)	Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and European Area for Recognition Manual (2023)
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centres
NQF	National qualifications framework
OCTRA	Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition
OCTRA 2	Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition 2
Recommendation (2022)	Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability 2022/C 243/02
The Guide	ECTS User's Guide (2015)

►► Welcome to the OCTRA 2 project

This project is continuation of the Erasmus+ project “Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition” (OCTRA, 2020-2022).

The **aim** of the OCTRA 2 project (2023-2024) is to further explore information provision on Bologna cycle study programmes and courses (online course catalogues of higher education institutions (HEI)), with a special emphasis on information provision on the micro-credentials offered at higher education (HE) level in order to support HEIs in ensuring reliable information for the recognition purposes.

This project also focuses on promoting a dialogue between credential evaluators at ENICs and NARICs and HEIs; thus, fostering easier and more transparent credential evaluation and recognition, including for smaller learning units leading to micro-credentials. One of the outcomes of the project is these guidelines to support HEIs and other institutions providing micro-credentials in publishing clear and comparable information on smaller learning units leading to micro-credentials, which could be used in credential evaluation.

The project explored online course catalogues designed by HEIs to inform public about their study programmes and/or courses, as well as other online sources providing information about HE qualifications. As regards micro-credentials, the project is targeted at analysing the publication of information about learning units leading to micro-credentials provided at HE sector, not on the nature or content of micro-credentials per se.

The OCTRA 2 project partners represent seven countries:

- Academic Information Centre – Latvian ENIC/NARIC (coordinator),
- Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education – ENIC of Bosnia and Herzegovina,
- Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange – Polish ENIC/NARIC,
- National Centre for Information and Documentation – Bulgarian ENIC/NARIC,
- National Center for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas – Romanian ENIC/NARIC,
- National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility – Armenian ENIC,
- BA School of Business and Finance (Latvia; consultative role),
- Council of Rectors of Latvia (Latvia, consultative role),
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland – Irish ENIC/NARIC (consultative role).

This guiding document is structured in two parts:

1. key findings of the study on course catalogues and micro-credentials;
2. guidelines on the information provision on study programmes, study courses and micro-credentials, based on the previously listed findings.

▶▶ Key findings of the comparative study

The guidelines were elaborated on the basis of a synthesis of consulting on the main international policy documents on information provision and credential evaluation and the results of two comparative reports, representing data on desk research carried out in eight countries on online course catalogues, (where the main focus was Bologna cycle study programmes and courses) and six countries on smaller learning units leading to micro-credentials.

These guidelines were developed considering the following sources:

- Results and conclusions of the study conducted during the OCTRA project (2020-2022);
- Results and conclusions of the study conducted during the OCTRA 2 project (2023-2024);
- Council of Europe and UNESCO Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (2010)²;
- Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability 2022/C 243/O2³;
- ECTS User's Guide (2015)⁴;
- European Area for Recognition Manual (2012⁵ and 2023⁶).

Both OCTRA⁷ and OCTRA 2⁸ Comparative Reports are available on the project website; therefore, this document outlines only the main findings to highlight the evidence supporting the guidelines. The Comparative Reports were based on the Country Reports prepared by the project partner countries (i.e. their ENIC/NARIC or ENIC centres) reflecting data collected through the desk research of national legal frameworks and existing national recommendations about online course catalogues and published information on learning units leading to micro-credentials; surveys of HEIs; in-depth case studies of selected online course catalogues; interviews with HEIs on publishing information about micro-credentials; and interviews with credential evaluators on information useful in recognition of qualifications.

The studies included the following data collection methods:

1. Regarding online course catalogues (HE study programmes and courses):

- Survey of HEIs,
- In-depth case studies,
- Non-structured interviews with credential evaluators at ENIC and ENIC/NARIC offices in the OCTRA project partner countries.

² Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications. Adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its fifth meeting, Sèvres. Strasbourg/Paris: 23.06.2010. Available here: www.enic-naric.net/Upload/Documents/Revised_Recommendation_Recognition_Foreign_Qualifications.pdf

³ Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability 2022/C 243/O2. Available here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32022H0627%2802%29>

⁴ ECTS User's Guide. Available here: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1>

⁵ European Area for Recognition Manual (2012). Available here: <http://ear.enic-naric.net/manual/>

⁶ European Area for Recognition Manual (2023).

Available here: https://www.nuffic.nl/sites/default/files/2023-08/1.%20EAR%20Manual%202023_2nd%20edition.pdf

⁷ AIC website. OCTRA project. Available here: <https://aic.lv/en/par-aic/projects/octra>

⁸ AIC website. OCTRA 2 project. Available here: <https://aic.lv/en/par-aic/projects/octra-2>

2. Regarding publishing information on learning units leading to micro-credentials provided on HE levels:
 - Survey of HEIs,
 - Structured interviews with the representatives of HEIs.

Comparative study on course catalogues (HE study programmes and courses)

Data on online course catalogues designed by HEIs were collected in two periods. Initial quantitative data were gathered in spring and summer 2021 by OCTRA project partners from: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, and supplementary data were collected in spring and summer 2023 by OCTRA 2 partners from Armenia and Romania. In total, 272 questionnaires were completed providing quantitative data regarding online course catalogues. Qualitative data was gathered on course catalogues by in-depth case studies of 32 online course catalogues (using specially designed template – fiche, see Annex 1).

Findings of the study indicate poorly developed national level legislation and guiding documentation on course catalogues in most project partner countries. In the countries where there is no clear national guidance, HEIs have creative approaches to the development of course catalogues both on the design, layout and content of the course catalogues. Although creativity itself is commendable, regarding the content of the information on study programmes this type of approach does not foster transparency and transferability of the issued credentials. Different approaches can hinder or even lead to an inability to find the necessary information in the course catalogue or on a HEI's website.

Data collected in both projects indicates that HEIs do not provide sufficient data for credential evaluation. The study also revealed an especially worrying practice – HEIs tend not to provide information on external quality assurance in the course catalogues or their website. External quality assurance plays a crucial role in recognition and transferability of the credentials; thus, the fact that more than half of surveyed HEIs (118 of 215 or 55%) do not provide this information in easy to find manner or do not provide it at all, is rather negative in the context of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA.

Varied approaches to the content of the course catalogues also indicate that existing international guidelines, e.g., the Guide, not only do not provide the perspective of a credential evaluator, but also do not prompt similar approaches to the development and updating of existing course catalogues.

The following key findings on course catalogues should be mentioned:

- 1) Most HEIs have already developed an online course catalogue that has public access and is not limited to only internal use;
- 2) Data on external quality assurance is rarely provided in course catalogues;
- 3) Content of the course catalogues varies by the country of location; none of the respondent HEIs provide all the information mentioned in the Guide or which is necessary for credential evaluation;
- 4) Varied results were collected on the content of the online course catalogues leading to the conclusion that there is a need to develop a common understanding on the content of these online tools.

Survey of HEIs and case studies on information provision about learning units leading to micro-credentials

The term “micro-credential” is relatively new term used to describe concept of learning units that “are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs.” Initial project research indicated that in all but one project partner country, the term “micro-credential” and thus understanding of the concept of this type of learning, was not well established on a national level, which was further confirmed in the in-depth case studies. For the purpose and in the context of OCTRA 2 project study definition and main characteristics of micro-credentials as described in Recommendation (2022) were used.

Similarly to data collection on online course catalogues, both quantitative (via surveys) and qualitative (interviews) data from the HEIs was collected. In total, 146 questionnaires were completed by representatives of HEIs of seven project partner countries (Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Romania) and 28 structured interviews were carried out with the representatives of HEIs.

Further exploration on national level of legal frameworks and existing recommendations confirmed that only one country had a legal framework in place defining learning units and micro-credentials. This could be contributing factor to not only the low response rate to the OCTRA 2 project surveys of HEIs, but also may clarify the fact that only 40% (58 of 146 respondents) of respondents confirm that the HEI they represent implement learning units leading to micro-credentials. In-depth case studies in four project partner countries (Armenia, Latvia, Poland, Romania) revealed that lack of understanding in not only on a national level, but also on HEI level may be observed. Depending on the respondent, answers vary, i.e. in the mentioned project partner countries results of the interviews with HEI representatives differ from the results of the survey (in the survey HEI returns indicated that they did not implement smaller learning units, but the interview revealed that particular HEI implement learning units leading to micro credentials). This contradiction raises question about the validity of findings regarding the availability of this type of learning but does not impact the validity of findings regarding information provision on learning units leading to micro-credentials.

The following key findings on information provision on learning units leading to micro-credentials should be mentioned:

- 1) HEIs provide some information on this type of learning, but both the content of the published information and the platform used for the information provision is inconsistent;
- 2) Information on the type of quality assurance underpinning learning units is rarely provided;
- 3) Information on the learning units is frequently provided only for the time period matching the availability of the particular learning unit and not for longer term accessibility by students/employers etc.;
- 4) Information on further uses of the micro-credential is rarely provided (further study and or validation possibilities);
- 5) Findings indicate that national level legal regulation, recommendations or active discussions on micro-credentials fosters national level understanding of the concept of micro-credentials.

⁹ Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability 2022/C 243/02.
Available here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32022H0627%2802%29>

Information valued by ENIC and NARIC experts

On full HE study programmes, courses and modules

To describe the perspective of credential evaluators', two aspects were taken into consideration. First, the internationally accepted guiding documentation that can and need to be used in credential evaluation; and, second, the opinion of the credential evaluators.

Several key elements were identified during the non-structured interviews with national ENIC and NARIC experts in each project partner country to foster a better understanding and use of online course catalogues in Bologna cycle credential evaluation. Identified elements were afterwards compared to the list of elements compiled using various sources, i.e. results of previous projects managed by the project coordinator (AIC), Council of Europe and UNESCO Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (2010)¹⁰ and European Area for Recognition Manual (2012¹¹, in OCTRA 2 project EAR Manual 2012 was compared to updates 2023¹² version of the manual).

Based on both interviews with the credential evaluators and international documents on the subject, ten elements, which overlapped in both lists, as well as full title of the qualification, are suggested to be included in all online course catalogues for them to foster mobility and transparency of qualifications for credential evaluation (see "Guidelines").

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of documentation and information provided by ENIC and NARIC experts:

1. Information that is necessary in credential evaluation can be characterised as information that allows clearly identifying:
 - issuing institutions (title and legal status);
 - issued credential (title, legal status, content and type of the credential).
2. There is a need to strengthen ongoing dialogue between HEIs and national ENIC/NARIC office, which would be valuable for both sides.

On micro-credentials

Interviews with ENIC and NARIC experts on evaluation and recognition of micro-credentials were not carried out, since in the most project partner countries only recognition of full qualifications is carried out by ENIC and NARIC experts. However, revised EAR Manual (2023) provides list of five elements that are needed for the initial evaluation of micro-credential:

1. Level of learning unit;
2. Quality assurance underpinning learning unit;
3. Learning outcomes;

¹⁰ Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications. Adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its fifth meeting, Sèvres, Strasbourg/Paris: 23.06.2010. Available here: [https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/FINAL_REVISSED_Recomm__for_Rec_Foreign_Qualif_29%2006%2010_\(PUBLISHED\)\(1\).pdf](https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/FINAL_REVISSED_Recomm__for_Rec_Foreign_Qualif_29%2006%2010_(PUBLISHED)(1).pdf)

¹¹ Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and European Area for Recognition Manual (2012). Available here: <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/>

¹² Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and European Area for Recognition Manual (2023). Available here: https://www.nuffic.nl/sites/default/files/2023-08/1.%20EAR%20Manual%202023_2nd%20edition.pdf

4. Workload;

5. Assessment criteria.

Information useful for the evaluation of learning units, although shorter, closely resembles, list of elements necessary for evaluation of credentials issued for successfully completing full study programme. Thus, in context of evaluation of micro-credentials, all five information elements proposed by the EAR Manual (2023), in the OCTRA 2 project team's opinion, should be published when providing information on learning units leading to micro-credentials.

▶▶ Guidelines on the information provision on study programmes, study courses and micro-credentials for the use in credential evaluation

The trust and recognition of credentials are based on variety of aspects, e.g., status of issuing institution, quality assurance and transparency of credentials. The desk study showed that information on the quality assurance of issuing institutions and the international practices of quality assurance are often found outside HEI's website by professionals working with credential evaluation on a regular basis. Ensuring information on quality assurance practices is highly essential when exploring the information on learning units leading to micro-credentials, especially if the learning experience is designed as standalone learning unit, which is not a part of existing externally quality assured HE study programme. To facilitate trust in and recognition of issued credentials, transparency of information is essential, especially in terms of credentials that may not have status of state recognition, e.g., micro-credentials. The easiest way to build trust and foster recognition of credentials and micro-credentials is transparency of information that is provided in a similar and comparable manner on learning opportunities leading either to credentials or micro-credentials.

Based on the conclusions of the studies conducted in all the OCTRA and OCTRA 2 project partner countries, the project team prepared a set of guidelines about online course catalogues which may reflect information on HE study programmes, study courses and learning units leading to micro-credentials. Ensuring transparent and comparable information about the micro-credentials provided by HEIs is valuable not only for credential evaluators, but also for the recognition of micro-credentials both by other HEIs and labour market representatives at national and international level. These guidelines are targeted for the use of HEIs and institutions maintaining national online information sources on HE qualifications, including micro-credentials at HE level.

Since additional data on course catalogues gathered in the OCTRA 2 project is consistent with the previous findings, the OCTRA 2 project team agreed that the guidelines on the improvement of course catalogues elaborated during the OCTRA project were still valid. In addition, course catalogues could also be used to reflect information on learning units leading to micro-credentials, but if the same structure is used, information on micro-credentials should include not only the information fields on the content of the learning, but also further implementation possibilities, i.e. stacking, combining and recognition both for future learning and if possible, for labour market (especially in cases when learning units are designed by the demand of labour market or adhere to external/labour market quality standards).

Information on study programmes, study courses and study modules

In the context of the OCTRA and OCTRA 2 project, publishing information on the website should be understood as providing publicly accessible online information that can be used at any time by anyone (both students and credential evaluators) and is published in an online course catalogue. This ensures transparency of information on all types of learning and credentials.

Therefore, project team proposes the following **definition of an online course catalogue**:

An online course catalogue is a publicly available data system developed and maintained by a higher education institution, which includes organised, detailed and descriptive information on the higher education institution and study components that form study programmes offered by the higher education institution.

Course catalogues may include information on various conceptual layers – institutional, study programme and course/module layer. The type and detail of provided information varies by the conceptual layers. These conceptual layers should be interlinked when possible.

Course catalogue for the purpose of credential evaluation should include at least these elements of information on study programmes to ensure transparency:

- Full title of the awarded qualification.
- Level of the study programme and the study course (Bologna cycle, NQF/EQF level).
- Workload.
- Nominal length of the full-time programme.
- The composition of the study programme.
- Profile – speciality or field of study.
- General access requirement to the programme.
- Graduation requirements.
- Function of the qualification (formal rights the qualification gives to the holder for further studies and labour market).
- The status of the awarding institution and recognition of the awarding institution in home country.
- Information on the external quality assurance of the institution and the study programme and/or programme group.

Course catalogue for the purpose of credential evaluation should include at least these elements of information on study courses/modules to ensure transparency:

- Title of the study course/module.
- Level of the study course/module (Bologna cycle, NQF/EQF level).
- Description of study course/module (including learning outcomes, recommended literature)
- Workload.
- Course/module design.
- Profile – speciality or field of study.
- Course prerequisites.
- Evaluation and assessment.
- Function of study course/module (formal rights the study course/module gives to the holder for further studies and labour market).

Providing information is only the first step, there are several questions to be considered when developing a course catalogue:

- Is it possible to find the information?
- Is it possible to understand the information in terms of terminology at national level?
- Is it possible to understand the information in terms of terminology at international level?

The OCTRA project working group recommends that course catalogues should:

- be easy to find on HEIs main website,
- be easy to navigate (interlinked),
- provide information in commonly used terminology,
- available in commonly used international language.

The HEIs or other institutions wishing to improve and update their course catalogues or information sources could take **several steps**:

- Self-evaluation of the course catalogue – the information or aspects (layout, design, language) that are important for the staff of HEI or are required by law/recommendations should be considered publishing in the course catalogue. HEIs may create a checklist including essential features of course catalogue and then conduct an in-depth study of the existing database. The OCTRA project team recommends reference to the fiche developed during the project as a support (see Annex 1).
- Users' survey – understanding the needs of users and the purpose of database is crucial to make the source “user-friendly”; HEIs may develop a short online questionnaire (posted on their course catalogue or website) to gather the opinions of frequent users. HEIs may also use the questionnaire or topics included in the OCTRA Report¹³ for this exercise (Annex 2).
- Analysis of gathered data.
- The implementation of practical measures to improve the course catalogue.

In the context of learning units leading to micro-credentials, additional aspects about the online course catalogues should be considered – could course catalogues be used to also reflect information on learning units leading to micro-credentials?

If a course catalogue was used as a platform for providing information on learning units leading to micro credentials, the following elements should be taken into account:

Firstly, does the course catalogue clearly distinguish formal study programmes, courses and modules from learning units leading to micro-credentials or other educational offerings?

Secondly, when using the same platform for providing information on micro-credentials what changes to existing structures should be made since the information on micro-credentials should include not only the information fields on the content of the learning, but also on further application possibilities, i.e. stacking, combining and recognition both for future learning and if possible, for the labour market (especially in cases when the learning units are designed specifically to meet the demand of the labour market or where they adhere to external/labour market quality standards).

¹³ AIC website. OCTRA Comparative report. Available here https://aic.lv/content/files/OCTRA_report_web.pdf

Information on learning units leading to micro-credentials

Discussions on micro-credentials rarely touch the subject of information provision and the role of public information necessary in the evaluating and recognition of micro-credentials. The OCTRA 2 project study results show that information provision on learning units leading to micro-credentials is often fragmented regarding content of the information, that information platforms are varied and that the long-term availability on previously offered and provided learning units leading to micro-credentials is not ensured.

The results of this project study clearly indicate a lack of common understanding of the term “micro-credential”, especially in countries where there is no national level legislation or where recommendations on the subject have not yet been agreed on. Therefore, the OCTRA 2 project team suggests that on a national level, the **use of the definition given in the Recommendations (2022) should be encouraged:**

““Micro-credential” means the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be stand-alone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.”

Content of the information on learning units leading to micro-credentials

Regarding the purpose of the learning units leading to micro-credentials and their evaluation, two aspects should be taken into account determining the content of the information that should be provided on micro-credentials:

- Content of the information on micro-credentials;
- Purpose of the awarded micro-credential (future possibilities in education and labour market).

In terms of the evaluation of the credentials, the provisions of the Recommendation (2022) should be considered because the document lists the main elements of smaller learning units leading to a micro-credential. This list could be used as a reference by HEIs as regards information that should be published on smaller learning units to foster national and international recognition of micro-credentials offered by HEIs. Information provided on smaller learning units leading to micro-credentials closely resembles information that should be provided on study programmes and courses (see guidelines on online course catalogues) in order to ensure transparency, transferability and easier evaluation of micro-credentials. OCTRA 2 project team proposes including the following elements of information regarding learning units leading to micro-credentials:

- Title of the learning opportunity (including title of the issued credential);
- NQF/EQF level or Bologna cycle;
- Short description (also includes the purpose of the learning; short description of the learning and information if this is part of the existing study programme);

- Workload expressed in measurable manner (hours, if possible, in ECTS/number of credits);
- Learning outcomes;
- Field(s) of study;
- Specific admission requirements (if applicable);
- Mode of learning (in-person/online/blended);
- Assessment (if applicable);
- Grading scale (if applicable);
- Possibilities for further learning/combining/stacking;
- Type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential/learning unit (if possible, link to information on the type of the quality assurance).

The major rationale for the interest about micro-credentials is their flexibility, correspondence to various personal and labour market needs ensuring various lifelong learning pathways. Therefore, general information on validation practices, possibilities to stack or combine micro-credentials or micro-credential interconnectivity (further education possibilities), should be also provided by HEIs.

Information on general practices of recognition of the prior learning implemented by HEI in some cases may be difficult to fully comprehend by learners, but it is crucial for fair credential evaluation. In addition, availability of this type of quality assured information would encourage people to make grounded decisions and plan their education pathways in a well-informed way. HEIs should be encouraged to provide general description on succeeding aspects:

- National practices of recognition of non-formal and in-formal education¹⁴ (if applicable);
- The HEI's procedures for implementing validation of non-formal and in-formal education (if applicable);
- Credit transfer system and procedures of implementing these practices in HEI;
- Possibilities of stacking or combining smaller learning units for education possibilities in other study programmes offered by HEI;
- Further application(-s) of micro-credential in other education institutions and/or labour market (if applicable);
- Information on recognition of learning units (stacked micro-credentials);
- Information about student support and information systems to encourage enquiry and engagement at local level.

Online information provision platform

According to the results of the study, fragmentation, inconsistency and the short-term availability of the information could be named as main challenges in the information provided about micro-credentials. Two aspects of the technical solutions for ensuring information on micro-credentials should be taken into account:

1. Online platform(-s) where the information is made publicly available;

¹⁴Depending on the national situation – either provide description and implementation practices used by HEIs or/and provide link to national platforms describing or organising recognition of non-formal and in-formal learning.

2. Availability of historic information (e.g. information on previously ensured learning offer).

In the OCTRA 2 project team's opinion, national level discussions or agreement should be initiated on not only on what information should be provided by HEIs, but also where the information should be presented.

Depending on the national situation, there are at least three options that should be explored regarding platform of information provision:

1. The creation of a dedicated section on a HEI's website or online course catalogue¹⁵ for ensuring publicly available information both on learning units leading to micro-credentials, as well as recognition practices of this type of learning (stacking, combining, further education possibilities);
2. If relevant, interlinking, selecting or creating a national platform and considering possibilities of connecting this platform to the Europass platform as proposed by the Recommendation (2022) or other international online information platforms providing information on micro-credentials;
3. If applicable, considering how an international information platform, especially on how access information on micro-credentials, could be reflected on a HEI's website and the HEI's/national practises of recognition of micro-credentials could be made transparent and accessible.

Further development or adaptation of HEIs existing online reference platforms to accommodate information provision on smaller learning units leading to micro-credentials should be considered. Using already existing online platforms would ensure that information on all learning opportunities provided by HEI could be found using one access point. Since not all smaller learning units do and should lead to a micro-credential, HEIs should be encouraged to develop a section of their website dedicated to smaller learning units that lead to micro-credentials. The section should also provide information on eligibility rights of awarded micro-credentials (further education possibilities/stacking/combining). A dedicated section of website would also allow publishing information on micro-credentials previously issued but no longer active, thus, ensuring accessibility of historic information for the purposes of credential evaluation.

When choosing external information platform, the following questions should be addressed:

- Will using an external information platform create extra workload for HEI's staff and hinder long-term maintenance of the information?
- Will using an external information platform require extra funding for HEIs to connect with the external platform for data exchange?
- Is the chosen platform considered a trusted information source?
- Is it possible to adapt the chosen platform to encourage and to share necessary information in a transparent, user-friendly and systematic manner?
- Will the platform ensure availability and sustainability of information in the long-term?
- What is the purpose of platform – sharing trusted information, advertising, implementing online education etc.?

¹⁵ Course catalogues have a potential for a platform where information on micro-credentials could be provided. However, OCTRA 2 project study results show that considering the wide range of credentials offered by HEIs, learning units leading to micro-credentials should be clearly identified by HEIs for the learners and credential evaluators to gain objective information about credentials.

- Does the platform have or can it develop data exchange with Europass platform¹⁶?
- Does the external platform accept data exchange with HEI's internal data systems?

Similar to other qualifications, simplicity and speed of procedures of credential evaluation are highly dependent on information that is made available on the issued credential. In the case of micro-credentials it may be less likely that there will be a national level database on previously issued micro-credentials. The OCTRA 2 project team highly recommends encouraging HEIs to ensure the availability and long-term maintenance of information on smaller learning units leading to micro-credentials.

In case of information provision on learning units leading to micro-credentials, similar **steps** as for Bologna cycle qualifications could be taken by HEIs wishing to **develop or update their practices**:

- Self-evaluation of the information provision practices. The analysis could include the following questions: Where is the information traditionally provided? For how long is the information provided? Does the provided information include all aspects that are necessary to issue a micro-credential? The Fiche (Annex 3) could be used to support the self-evaluation of information provision practices.
- Learner's survey. Two aspects should be explored: 1) How and where have learners found information about learning opportunities? Exploring information sources may aid in choosing information provision platforms that would both address the need for reliable information source and provide information in an attractive source. 2) What is the motivation of learners for applying to particular opportunities? Analysis of the motivation of candidates informs the design and provision of information, builds trust in the offered learning and increases the attractiveness of the offering to potential learners.
- Analysis of gathered data.
- Practical measures to improve the course catalogue or other relevant information source.

The OCTRA 2 project team is aware of practical issues (limited resources, rapid technical developments) related to the design and maintenance of online platforms. With the respect of the autonomy of HEIs, the OCTRA 2 project team encourages HEIs (and other providers of micro-credentials) to refer to these guidelines in order to facilitate transparency and recognition of their qualifications.

¹⁶ Recommendation (2022) encourages the use of Europass platform for sharing information and issuing credentials on an international level. However, at the moment Europass platform does not have capability to provide information on learning opportunities in more than one language. It should also be underlined that developing connection with Europass platform can be time consuming and costly as well as there is a high possibility of format changes for the data exchange; thus, connection to the Europass platform perhaps could be better planned for a national level platform which can ensure long-term maintenance of the data exchange.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Fiche for evaluation of course catalogues

Annex 2. Questionnaire of users on course catalogue

Annex 3. Fiche for evaluation of information provision on learning units leading to micro-credentials

Annex 1

Fiche for evaluation of course catalogues

Higher education institution: _____

Study programme: _____

General information on course catalogue

Evaluation of course catalogues		Yes/No	Description
Overall availability of information	Information is presented with links and additional information is easily accessible		
	Information is presented and some additional information is provided		
	Only title and short description of the course is available		
Course catalogue can be found	Link available on main page		
	Links available on faculty/ study field page		
	Links are hard to find		
Languages	National language		
	English		
	Other		

Information on institution

Content	Yes/No	Description
Name and address		
List of programmes offered		
Admission requirements, including language requirements, and registration procedures		
Arrangement of validation of prior learning (formal, informal and non-formal), and credit transfer		
Arrangements for available academic guidance		
Practical information for incoming mobile students		
Other		

Information on study programmes / study fields

Content	Yes/No	Description
Qualification awarded (and professional qualification if applies)		
Workload in ECTS/other credit points		
Level of qualification (NQF, EQF or/and Bologna cycle)		
Field(-s) of study (main field)		
Type of study (academic or professional study programme)		
Quality assurance or accreditation		
Admission requirements		
Information on validation of prior learning		
Graduation requirements		
Learning outcomes		
Matrix of learning outcomes		
Programme structure diagram with credits (ECTS or other)		
List of compulsory courses		
Mode of study (full-time/part time/e-learning etc.)		
Mode of teaching		
Examination regulations and grading scale		
Obligatory or optional mobility windows		
Obligatory or optional course windows		
Work placement(-s)		
Work-based learning		
Programme coordinator (name, contact information)		
Occupational profiles of graduates		
Length of study programme (minimum time required to receive qualification)		
Other...		

Information on study courses

Content	Yes/No	Description
Course title		
Study programme the course is included		
Field(-s) of study (area/branch)		
Level of programme (Bologna cycle or EQF level)		
Workload in ECTS or other credits		
Language of instruction		
Aim of the course		
Course contents (description)		
Learning outcomes		
Requirements to pass the course (tests, essays, attendance etc.)		
Assessment methods		
Assessment criteria		
Includes information on validation of prior learning		
Course interconnectivity (information on other courses that further explore the same route of study/speciality)		
Visibility of course interconnectivity (information on study programmes that can include particular course)		
Other		

Other information

Other important elements for recognition (if any)	Description

Annex 2

Questionnaire of online course catalogue users

This questionnaire was designed in terms of Erasmus+ project “Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition” (2020-2022) to support higher education institutions and other institutions developing and/or maintaining course catalogues for them to explore the needs of users.

1. What is your role?
 - a. Student
 - b. Potential student
 - c. Teaching staff of HEI
 - d. Administrative staff of HEI
 - e. Credential evaluator
 - f. Other. Please specify:
2. Why do you use this database/course catalogue?
 - a. Education opportunities (looking for a programme/course to apply)
 - b. Studies (looking for information necessary for my present studies)
 - c. Research
 - d. Other. Please specify:
3. How often do you use this database/course catalogue?
 - a. Every day
 - b. Every week
 - c. Every month
 - d. Few times a year
 - e. Once a year
4. Can you find the information you need on the database/course catalogue?
 - a. Yes
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. No
5. Please evaluate from 1-4 points (1 – strongly agree, 4 – strongly disagree) the following statements:
 - a. Information on the database/course catalogue is clear
 - b. Provided information on the database/course catalogue is consistent
 - c. Layout of database/course catalogue is visually attractive
 - d. The database/course catalogue is easy to navigate
 - e. The database/course catalogue is interlinked with other information sources
6. What aspects should be improved in the database/course catalogue?
7. What are the advantages of the database/course catalogue?

Annex 3

Fiche for evaluation of information provision on learning units leading to micro-credentials

Faculty of the higher education institution
(if the information provision is decentralised):

Information on institution

Evaluation of course catalogues		Description
Information provision platform	Information is provided in course catalogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it possible to distinguish information on learning units from full formal study programmes or parts of full study programmes? Does the existing structure of the course catalogue allow providing necessary information? Is there possibility to provide information on recognition practices? How long information on learning units is available?
	Information is provided on HEI's/faculty's website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it possible to distinguish information on smaller learning units from full formal study programmes or parts of full study programmes? Does the existing structure of the course catalogue allow providing necessary information? Is there possibility to provide information on recognition practices? How long information on learning units is available?
	Information is provided on an external platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the benefits of using external information platform? What are potential risks of using an external information platform? Does the existing structure of platform allow providing necessary information? Is information linked to HEI's/faculty's website?
Length of information provision	Information is provided in course catalogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How long information on learning units is available? Is it possible to provide historic information on learning units that no longer are offered by HEI?
	Information is provided on HEI's/faculty's website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How long information on learning units is available? Is it possible to provide historic information on learning units that no longer are offered by HEI?
	Information is provided on external platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How long information on learning units is available? Is it possible to provide historic information on learning units that no longer are offered by HEI?

Information on learning units leading to micro-credentials

Content	Yes/No	Description
Title of the learning opportunity (including title of the issued credential)		
NQF/EQF level or Bologna cycle		

Content	Yes/No	Description
Short description (also include purpose of the learning; short description of the learning and information if this is part of the existing study programme)		
Workload expressed in measurable manner (hours, if possible, in ECTS/number of credits)		
Learning outcomes		
Field(-s) of study		
Specific admission requirements (if applicable)		
Mode of learning (in-person/online/ blended)		
Assessment (if applicable)		
Grading scale (if applicable)		
Possibilities for further learning/combining/ stacking		
Type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential/learning unit (if possible, link to information on the type of the quality assurance)		

Information on practices of prior learning recognition implemented by HEI

Content	Yes/No	Description
National practices of validation of non-formal and in-formal learning (if applicable)		
Procedures for implementing validation of non-formal and in-formal validation in the HEI (if applicable)		
Credit transfer system and procedures of implementing these practices and costs		
Possibilities of stacking or combining learning units for education possibilities in other study programmes offered by HE		
Further application(-s) of micro-credential in other education institutions and/or labour market (if applicable)		
Information on recognition of learning units (stacked micro-credentials)		

Other information

Other important elements for recognition (if any)	Description

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