



**Towards a Microcredentials  
Framework for Southern Africa:  
Learning from an Interregional  
Consultation**

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Video available at:

<https://youtu.be/p51O9xMNMvs>

## **Greeting: Dr Britta Zawada, Council on Higher Education South Africa.**

- The interregional consultative forum was held on 13 March 2025, at the National Research Foundation in Pretoria in person, as well as virtually on Microsoft Teams.
- Dr Britta Zawada, the programme director, greeted the attendees and expressed her gratitude to facilitate the event.
- She introduced the PoMiSA project, stating that it is a collaborative endeavour, consisting of countries from Southern Africa and Europe.
- The project aims at exploring and leveraging the transformative potential of microcredentials within the SADC region. The project is funded by the EU.
- The project consists of multiple work packages and the consultative forum is part of Work Package 3, which involves looking at the regional policies, frameworks and strategies that can inform how the SADC region should take on microcredentials.
- Dr Zawada stated that Work Package 3 is led by the Council on Higher Education in South Africa, in collaboration with a number of partners across the region. A desktop study, and a study interviewing key experts on microcredentials had been done by Work Package 3, which has resulted in two working papers.
- Dr Zawada thanked Miss Wendy Qampi who conducted the research for the two working papers. She also acknowledged Mr Ntokozo Bhengu and Mr Collins Baloyi who have been ensuring that logistics run smoothly.
- She welcomed Dr Whitfield Green, the Chief Executive Officer at the Council on Higher Education to welcome the attendees.

# Welcome and Purpose: Dr W Green, Council on Higher Education South Africa

## Introduction:

- Dr Whitfield Green welcomed all the participants, and panellists to the interregional consultative forum.
- He stated that the forum is part of a collaborative project that is exploring the potential of microcredentials in Southern Africa.
- The project involves participation from universities, qualification authorities, education organisations, and quality councils from 7 countries across the globe: Belgian Flanders, Estonia, Lesotho, Ireland, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa.
- The PoMiSA project is supported by a grant through the European Union's Erasmus+ capacity building in high education programme, and Dr Green expressed his gratitude for their support.

## Key points:

- Microcredentials can serve multiple purposes: personal, social and economic, and are seen as important vehicles that offer responsive, flexible and agile learning pathways. In the context of lifelong and lifewide learning needs, microcredentials can provide complementary learning opportunities to those currently available and importantly, for audiences and potential students that struggle to access traditional pathways. Microcredentials' potential to provide access to enhance the workplace is strongly recognised.
- These are important aspects to take into consideration in a region where access to learning opportunities are limited and where a significant unemployment problem exists.
- The protocol of the PoMiSA project is to develop an enabling microcredentials framework for the Southern African region that is aligned with other frameworks across the globe, those emerging on the continent and in other regions.
- It is in this context, according to Dr Green, that the interregional Consultative Forum was convened to learn from and engage with developments across the

world in a critical manner, so that we can synthesise an approach for the SADC region that suits the regional context.

- Some research that has been undertaken (by Work Package 3) in the project thus far had led to the forum and had assisted the team to identify a range of questions on topics that need addressing as the framework begins to emerge, and the forum was to allow for interaction with those questions.

### **Conclusion:**

- Dr Green concluded his address by stating that he was looking forward to the inputs from the panellists, and to engage in the ideas that they present, which will advance thinking as the development of an approach to microcredentials for the region occurs.
- He thanked the participants for listening.

## **Introduction of panellists: Dr Britta Zawada, Council on Higher Education South Africa**

- Dr Zawada introduced the panellists for the forum and read their comprehensive bios.
- These panellists were: Ms Coleen Jaftha (SADC region), Mr Nicholas Patrici (OBREAL Global), Dr Jako Olivier (Commonwealth of Learning), Mr Koen Nomden and Ms Isabele Ladron-Arroyo (EHEA), and Dr Borhene Chakroun (UNESCO).
- Dr Zawada explained that the programme going forward was to consist of a presentation from each of the panellists, and then there would be a discussion facilitated by Dr James Keevy.
- The first panellist, Ms Coleen Jaftha, was introduced to deliver her presentation.

## A SADC perspective: Ms Coleen Jaftha, African Continental Qualifications Framework

### Introduction:

- Ms Coleen Jaftha expressed her excitement to be part of the PoMiSA initiative.
- She informed the attendees that after studying many documents on microcredentials, her presentation was going to unpack the phenomenon in the best way that she could from a SADC perspective.

### Key points:

- Ms Jaftha began her presentation by stating that there are no policies on microcredentials from the SADC region.
- SADC (Southern African Development Community) consists of 16 countries and there are 5 regional qualifications frameworks that exist in SADC. This was important for Ms Jaftha to mention as the majority of countries within SADC have a 10-level NQF (National Qualifications Framework).

### The microcredential concept is not new to SADC

- Ms Jaftha stated that the concept of microcredentials is not new to SADC and only the term itself is novelty.
- She reflected on hearing stakeholders make the statement that the SADC region does not have microcredentials, however, she made the argument that the region does have microcredentials and that it has been implemented for years in different ways for various purposes.
- There is a lot of misinformation and a lack of understanding as some surveys ask if there are unit standards, training, or microcredentials as if they are different entities, which according to Ms Jaftha, causes confusion.
- Ms Jaftha posed the following questions: What is the purpose of bringing people together to speak about microcredentials? What do we want to achieve? What is the problem we want to solve?

- She advised the attendees at the forum to listen and engage on ideas for a SADC definition of microcredentials, the types and ranges of microcredentials (as it is not one-size-fits-all), and to listen for policy statements from other frameworks and guidelines.

#### Ranges of issues regarding microcredentials

- Is every bit of training a microcredential?
- Do the microcredentials refer to the training itself or only when that training is being recognised for work or study?
- Do microcredentials expire?
- Can microcredentials be declared fraudulent, and if so, who does the declaring?
- In relation to the proliferation and duplication of mandates, can an entity outside of the professional bodies' space present a microcredential in the higher education space?
- If there are microcredentials, are there macrocredentials and mesocredentials?
- The structure of microcredentials is also confusing, according to Ms Jaftha. She stated that when people say that microcredentials should have learning outcomes and articulation, microcredentials are being looked at through the lens of a qualification.
- She stated that there are also unclear criteria for quality assurance. She made the example of social media advertising certification to its users, and questions the authenticity of these certifications.
- Are smaller providers of microcredentials (as opposed to universities) valid?
- When foreign providers of microcredentials claim, "an internationally accredited qualification/certification", what does this mean?
- The public must be protected through trustworthy microcredentials that have verifiable information.
- Looking at the costing of microcredentials, will the costing of the certification itself be taken into consideration? Will the cost of the quality assurance be taken into

consideration? There is also the cost of developing a register of trustworthy providers.

### Questions on the approach to microcredentials?

- When posing the question on whether or not microcredentials are about its size, Ms Jafftha stated that size does matter.
- In order to understand what “micro” is, one needs to understand what is “macro”.

### Macros:

- Are national, full or whole qualifications.
- Are 120 credits or more.
- Are registered on the NQF; allocated on an NQF level.
- Have specific structure and components.
- Are aligned to national legislation and policies.
- Can be achieved in full through RPL (120 credits or more).
- Ms Jafftha highlighted that in terms of macrocredentials, there are protected terms that come with it such as “national”; “registered on the NQF”; “NQF level”; “credits”; and “provider”. She expressed that understanding the macro-environment helps to understand the micro-environment. If a microcredential is to be on a certain NQF level and offers a certain amount of credits, then it needs to clearly show the system in which it has been integrated.
- For example, if a microcredential in South Africa offered at NQF level 3 for 30 credits, is the accreditation from the QCTO (Quality Council for Trades & Occupations) or Umalusi? Universities cannot operate at that NQF level as the legislature strictly states that they only operate from level 5 to level 10.

### Proposed microcredentials approach:

- Ms Jafftha stated that from 0 to 119 credits is the micro-ecosystem. Zero credits can occur through training that do not result in a credit.

- She stated that “microcredential” is an umbrella term for a range of things:
  1. There are microcredentials in the NQF space which follow the legislature of macrocredentials.
    - Protected terms from the NQF are utilised (i.e. “credits”; “NQF level”; “national”).
    - The microcredentials are quality assured and can be revoked.
    - There are records of these credentials and the learners who have achieved them.
    - National legislature takes precedence.
- Ms Jaftha acknowledged that although unit standards are being phased out, the history of unit standards needs to be taken into consideration.
- She made the argument that part-qualifications are microcredentials. According to the SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) searchable database (2025), a part-qualifications are an assessed unit of learning that is registered as part of a qualification. For example, a part-qualification can be a module, a unit standard etc.
- Ms Jaftha stated that the SAQA database shows that there has been the existence of microcredentials in the past. In the annual report of SAQA 2021-2022, there were more than 115 million part-qualification achievements.
- In general education and training, there are single subjects, which the presenter asked whether or not these are microcredentials.
- Higher education credits accumulated for specific modules of a whole qualification may be considered as a microcredential. Registering a qualification involves modules that have credits attached to them.
- The achievement of part-qualifications, unit standards and credit-bearing courses in VET, TVET, and trades and occupations; single subjects; and higher education credits through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), should also be something to be considered in relation to what constitutes a microcredential.

- Ms Jafftha stated that when being asked about the stackability of microcredentials, she responds by asking whether or not the stackability in question is occurring within the NQF space (which they can be), or outside of the NQF space.

2. There are microcredentials partly in the NQF space:

- Professional designations and all microcredentials related to the maintenance of the designation: assessments, Bar/board exams, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (measured in points)
- Ms Jafftha stated that these "microcredentials" could be partly in the NQF space as there is some kind of regulation that occurs. There is regulation by professional body/professional council legislation and policies.
- There are records of these achievements.
- She questioned where learnerships and internships fall in in the microcredential ecosystem.
- She included the trades and microcredentials related to artisan training, which are also regulated by a body.
- She also included evaluated foreign qualifications, which are not found on the NQF, but can be found comparable.

3. There are microcredentials not in the NQF space:

- Industry/employer training (such as employee development programmes; training for reskilling/upskilling linked to job descriptions; and induction/orientation for successful candidates).
- Training for members of trade unions/labour organisations.
- Language courses including TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language).
- Training related to qualifications (for example, IT-related training, such as coding courses).
- Training for unemployed individuals.
- Volunteer training.

- Driving courses

An example of non-credit bearing short courses from the Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA)

- Ms Jafftha provided an example from the Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA) of their non-credit bearing short courses.
- On their website, the BQA publishes a list of non-credit bearing short courses. The courses are critical to the development and upskilling of human resources; and designed to meet the need for skilled persons in highly specialised areas, or train employees to apply new technologies or operate new machinery.
- These courses do not fall within the scope of the Botswana National Credit and Qualifications Framework (NCQF). However, it is critical that these courses are subjected to the rigours of quality assurance and approval processes although they do not lead to a full or part-qualification.
- To ensure the quality of these non-credit bearing short courses, the Botswana Qualifications Authority has criteria and guidelines for non-credit bearing short courses; and criteria and guidelines for accreditation of non-NCQF learning programmes.
- The BQA recognises non-credit bearing short courses that meet the quality requirements. To protect the public, the BQA publishes a list of recognised non-credit bearing short courses, and a list of expired non-credit bearing short courses.

**Conclusion:**

- We already have microcredentials, we need to reflect on our context.
- Her presentation ended with various questions to ponder on:
  - How do we regulate microcredentials?
  - How do we protect the public?
  - What policy statements must be included in a framework/guideline for microcredentials in SADC?

# An African (HAQAA) Perspective: Mr Nicholas Patrici, OBREAL Global

## Introduction:

- Mr Nicholas Patrici thanked the organisers for the invitation to present at the consultative forum.
- He began his presentation by introducing OBREAL Global.
- OBREAL Global is an association of higher education institutions and research centres based in Barcelona. It has members from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, India and Europe, Southeast Asia.
- The association aims to foster interregional cooperation in higher education.

## The HAQAA initiative

- The HAQAA (Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation) initiative belongs to the European Commission and the African Union, and OBREAL Global are the implementers of the initiative.
- Other involved organisations include the African Association of Universities, ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), and the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), together with several strategic partners, both in Africa and in Europe.
- HAQAA is an initiative that has been running in Africa for quite a long time, and the initiative is in its third stage.
- The initiative has one general objective: to harmonise higher education in Africa, at a continental level through the harmonisation of quality assurance procedures and standards in order to promote recognition, enhanced mobility, etc.
- The third phase of the HAQAA initiative basically works on different areas with different objectives. None of them directly tackle the problem of microcredentials, but according to Mr Patrici, the implementation of HAQAA and the discussion of HAQAA promotes them both politically and technically at the continental level,

which is extremely important to pave the way to a better understanding of microcredentials.

- Mr Patrici stated that microcredentials is a topic that is being broadly discussed not only in Africa but across the world. OBREAL believes that microcredentials have been existing in various forms for many years at the university landscape in different regions of the world.
- The scheme of microcredentials needs to be structured more, as it is linked to other processes such as the modularisation of courses.
- Microcredentials promotes the discussions around trade and can be a very important tool to facilitate not only access, but be a better link to higher education and economic development.
- According to the presenter, HAQAA can be an initiative that can serve as a good framework, from a policy level and the technical level, to frame the discussion around microcredentials.
- HAQAA is a continental initiative, however, it is being implemented through different projects that are looking at the different sub-regional structures and problems. The initiative works with SADC, the UCA, the Eastern African Community, and Francophone Africa.
- The initiative tries to get all the actors together, discussing the problem of recognition in Africa, and then there is the promotion, at a policy level, the buy-in of the different regions in order to guarantee the transparency of qualifications and the recognition of those qualifications. An example of this is the African Credit Transfer System.
- At the technical level, HAQAA is contributing with two elements that can be of strategic importance for the discussion of microcredentials.
  - The first technical element is the work that HAQAA is doing in trying to promote and harmonise quality assurance standards in Africa, where they work with an agency to try to adapt the standards and the quality assurance mechanisms that are implemented through their institutions against the African Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance.

- Where there is no agency, HAQAA works with a group of experts in trying to promote the same procedures. This is more complex in some African regions.
  - The second technical element is data collection. Over the years, it has been noted that there is a scattered approach to data and problems for collection in different regions.
  - The harmonisation of indicators across the continent or the reliability of indicators is something that is complicated. HAQAA is making the effort to complement existing data collection processes in Africa by enhancing what subregions are doing when discussing indicators and mechanisms to collect data, including the capacity building process, where the capacities are needed across the continent.
  - The third technical element, although not directly linked to specific discussions on microcredentials in SADC, is important to create the conditions for a better discussion of microcredentials and the role of universities. This third element is the African Credit Transfer System. HAQAA has been working on this for the last 5 years, taking up all of the work that the previous European Commission initiatives on the topic have been doing, and basically refraining from the former Tuning Project approach in Africa.
  - HAQAA has been reformulating the approach to credits and trying to look much more at the problem from the recognition side and the problem that institutions have in order to recognise trends. This is to enhance the capacity of both agencies and higher education institutions.
- According to Mr Patrici, combining these three elements together, as well as a discussion on policy, provides the basic elements in which the discussion of microcredentials should be inserted.
  - However, there is another element, which is the link of educational skilling, which is something that HAQAA is not directly tackling but it is something that is present in every policy discussion that HAQAA promotes in Africa. This includes how to

create more attractive and impactful programmes linked to economic development, employability, skilling of the African Youth.

### **Conclusion:**

- The standpoint that HAQAA takes in this discussion on microcredentials in Africa is to generate and promote broader conditions on the issues of harmonisation of higher education in Africa through various capacity building actions and elements, and engaging key actors in the discussion on African higher education and skilling problems, both at the technical and political level.
- Mr Patrici stated that HAQAA has been working with UNESCO discussing recognition and issues around the work that they have been doing in Africa for quite a long time.
- HAQAA has also been working a lot in Latin America. Microcredentials in Latin America do not exist under the name of “microcredentials”. In the last couple of years, there has been important discussions around the “microcredentialisation” of programmes and the modularisation of programmes in universities.
- This is a challenge that is probably similar in the Southern African context: how universities can work in making their programmes more flexible, either through promoting microcredentials or simply by modularising the programmes in order to make them more accessible which is more of a link to the economic development in the region.
- Mr Patrici thanked the audience for listening to his presentation.

## **A Commonwealth of Learning perspective: Dr Jako Olivier, Commonwealth of Learning**

### **Introduction:**

- Dr Jako Olivier greeted the attendees and the collaborators on the PoMiSA project.

- He introduced himself, stating that he is the Advisor for Higher Education at the Commonwealth of Learning, based in Vancouver, Canada.
- The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation, specifically concerned with the development of distance education, open learning, and has a mission to help governments, institutions and organisations to expand and scale the efficiency and quality of learning by using appropriate open distance and technology-based approaches.
- COL is "owned" by the 56 countries of the Commonwealth, and amongst many things, are also interested in microcredentials.
- COL has a centre in New Delhi and has regional centres, for example in SADC, which is located in Botswana.
- The purpose of COL is that it was created to create and widen access to opportunities for learning, especially by making use of distance education methodologies and technologies. And specifically in terms of its memorandum of understanding, one of the objectives of the Commonwealth planning is specifically to establish and maintain procedures for the recognition of academic credit.
- Even when the heads of government from the Commonwealth decided to create the COL, the idea of the recognition of academic credit, especially across borders, was part of their thinking. Hence, COL is specifically mandated to engage on matters related to microcredentials as well as issues around credit transfer and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); and work in this regard has been done by COL in the Southern Africa region.

### **Key points:**

- According to Dr Olivier, the COL defines microcredentials (according to their open distance key terms and definitions for 2023) as: "a digital certification such as a 'digital badge' that provides valid evidence of achievement of specific knowledge, skills or competencies after going through a structured learning experience. Microcredentials can be shared on social media and verified by others, including employers".

- Although COL aligns itself with the UNESCO definition of microcredentials, he stated that the COL's definition is slightly narrower and does not emphasise on technology as much. COL is cognisant of alternative definitions where it may also refer to a specific combination of both a credential and a learning experience.
- Dr Olivier provided the example of the British Columbia province in Canada where they used the term "microcredential programme" quite often, and it always refers to the credential together with the course.
- In his opinion, a microcredential has the word "credential", it is something that reflects what has been learned. However, he acknowledged that in other contexts, when people refer to microcredentials, they are referring to the course. To Dr Olivier, this brings about some complications as there is a need to have a clear sense of what is being spoken of when the subject is on microcredentials, although it is easier said than done.

#### Earlier work on microcredentials

- At COL, microcredentials are not a new topic as the organisation has been in the space for a while and has been working on the issue for a long time.
- COL has a publication on *Designing and Implementing Microcredentials as a Guide for Practitioners (2019)*.
- COL has also been involved in national capacity building and policy development in Malawi and Zambia, and institutional level work has been done in Namibia.
- COL has been involved in supporting and funding regional initiatives together with the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) for the Caribbean and they are also COL's partners in a microcredentials project.
- In the Pacific, COL has done some work with microcredentials for flexible learning, both in the higher education sector and also in the TVET sector. According to Dr Olivier, the Pacific and Caribbean regions are very unique contexts.
- He expressed that he was glad that Southern Africa is also taking a regional approach. In the Pacific and the Caribbean regions, a regional approach is the

only approach that is viable because of the nature of the countries and the education systems.

### Microcredentials and Digital Identity Wallets (MCDIW)

- COL is in collaboration with the Centre for Connected Learning Foundation (3CL), Malta 2025. They are considered one of COL's regional centres, but they are also fairly independent.
- They are busy with an NGI Sargasso funded programme specifically looking at microcredentials and digital identity wallets. This project seeks to strengthen the collaboration between the EU, USA and Canada in next-generation internet (NGI) technologies.
- This specific project looks at the intersections between digital identity wallets and microcredentials in Canada and in Malta and Europe specifically.
- Dr Jako informed the attendees of the forum that there are interesting developments occurring at a national level pertaining to digital identity wallets. However, the challenge is that in many contexts, the two elements (of digital wallets and microcredentials) do not talk to each other. Microcredentials are often "hijacked" by higher education or education-related government departments, whilst a totally different government department might be involved in digital identity wallets.
- In the British Columbia Province, for example, there is a digital identity wallet that one can have on a phone. It is linked also to a medical profile. A phone can be used as a form of identification to show the records of vaccinations, for example. This wallet, according to Dr Olivier, can be a site for potentially storing microcredentials. However, this has not happened as yet as there has been no linkage between microcredentials providers and those who developed these digital wallets.

### Developing a Commonwealth Credit Transfer Framework: Microcredentials in a digital age

- This is a large project, which commenced in 2024 and will go on until 2027.

- The aim of this project is to develop a common Commonwealth credit transfer framework for microcredentials. The idea of microcredentials supports the mobility of qualifications and that is important to COL, especially across countries. The stacking of short-term training opportunities to acquire qualifications that are recognised for employment in increasingly competitive and globalised technology environments is also important to COL.
- The importance of microcredentials within industry should not be underestimated and any policies and frameworks will have to also consider non-formal and informal learning and how that will fit in.
- According to Dr Olivier, the project on *Developing a Commonwealth Credit Transfer Framework* takes place in five phases, of which the research phase has been completed, and the consultation phase has started. A Southern Africa, Eastern Africa and a Mediterranean regional meeting will be held in Johannesburg on the 24th and 25th of March 2025. COL will have 5 regional consultation meetings involving representatives from all the Member States of the Commonwealth. Further meetings hosted by COL and local partners are planned in Abuja and Nigeria for West Africa, Honiara in the Solomon Islands for the Pacific, Kingston and Jamaica for the Caribbean, and for Asia, a meeting in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.
- For this project and ultimately the Commonwealth Credit Transfer Framework, COL hopes to draw on the important work that the PoMiSA project is doing. Dr Olivier stated that he had seen the reports that have been published and sees them as important and substantial work. Based on COL's own research and regional consultation meetings, they hope to develop the framework to be an inclusive recipe for member states: if they want to start the process of planning for implementation and then implementing microcredentials, they will know what can be done.
- The next phase of the project aims to support 10 Commonwealth governments in developing microcredentials frameworks and registries. 10 universities will also be supported, and those universities will then create 10 microcredentials that will be shared within national registries.

- COL aims to complete the framework in 2027, so that it can be submitted to the Commonwealth Education Ministers meeting in 2027 to receive their endorsement of the framework and that will potentially provide opportunities for recognition across borders.
- Dr Olivier stated that COL has noted that in some places, it might not be a nationally driven exercise but be a regionally driven exercise.
- The project has completed 3 research reports, one related to research, one on technologies and one looking at the status of microcredentials in the Commonwealth. Findings on the status review by governments indicated that:
  - 8 countries have microcredentials policies and strategies in place, while 9 countries have references to microcredentials in other strategies.
  - Microcredentials are of interest to provide flexible learning and employable skills to learners.
  - There is focus on vocational education, however, universities are leading.
  - Microcredentials are mostly linked to National Qualifications Frameworks and offered in-person, but it can be done online and are blended in terms of the course delivery.
  - Skills on developing microcredentials are needed.
  - There are limited resources or infrastructure available.
  - Microcredential lists/directories are only available in some countries.
- Institutional stakeholder feedback:
  - Over 50% of the respondents themselves have acquired one microcredential.
  - There is a high-level awareness of microcredentials.
  - Continuing education focuses on microcredentials.
  - They believe that microcredentials will improve the quality and efficiency of learning.

- Using microcredentials has enabled increased availability of short-term training opportunities.
- A survey was sent to governments and stakeholders. The top 3 barriers from government feedback were the lack of quality assurance; the lack of skills and competencies to develop microcredentials; and incentives available for training providers. The top 3 barriers from stakeholder feedback were the lack of clarity on what a microcredential is; poor understanding about the potential of microcredentials; and the lack of skills and competencies to develop microcredentials.
- The study provided some recommendations, which was shared by the presenter:
  - There is hope that the Commonwealth framework will provide a common understanding about microcredentials. And that is tricky according to Dr Olivier, as there are many issues to tackle such as deciding the number of credits a microcredential should have.
  - More capacity building at national and institutional levels.
  - Quality assurance of microcredentials should be a priority to provide mobility of credentials.
  - A registry of microcredentials is needed.
  - More resources are required to support efforts towards promoting microcredentials.

#### Case example of British Columbia, Canada

- At the end of February 2025, COL had a credit symposium for microcredentials and that involved a number of government officials, university partners, higher education institution, other stakeholders with inputs from Canada, Australia, Scotland, Ireland and the USA.
- From the perspective of the symposium, Dr Jako stated that universities use provincial funding for microcredentials. The province incentivises universities to create microcredentials and courses around it. This requires an ecosystem of key stakeholders, government, industry, education institutions and learners.

- An incremental credentialing model offers strong microcredentials guidelines.
- Microcredentials should extend beyond courses to informal and non-formal learning. An interesting aspect that was raised at this symposium was how microcredentials can recognise diverse learning including indigenous knowledge and there are some very good examples from Thomson Rivers University in British Columbia.

### **Conclusion:**

- Dr Olivier concluded his presentation by providing recommendations such as drawing from existing practises and standards, and to “not reinvent the wheel”.
- He also recommended collaboration beyond the education sector. He urged the participants to think about the work done on digital identity wallets; and to involve industry and the private sectors in meetings on microcredentials in the region.
- He recommended that it should be clear what types and the scale of credit that the system will cover.
- Consideration should be given to where microcredentials can be gained and where it may be transferred to.
- It is important to identify who will implement and who will benefit from microcredentials.
- Standards, recognition and quality assurance processes must be in place, but without student, institutional and industry interest, and buy-in at grassroots level, any discussion on microcredentials remains a key without a lock or lighting a candle in broad daylight.
- Dr Jako thanked the attendees of the forum for listening to his presentation.

## A European Commission Perspective: Mr Koen Nomden and Ms Isabel Ladron-Arroyo, European Commission.

### Introduction:

- Ms Isabel Ladron-Arroyo began the presentation by stating that the European Union (EU) has great interest in boosting and promoting a culture of lifelong learning, and a culture of upskilling and reskilling of people.
- She stated that the EU has set some targets related to skills, for example that by 2030, at least 60% of the adult population should participate in training every year. To reach that 60%, the learning and training on offer has to be flexible and adaptable, and this is where microcredentials have a big role to play.
- Other targets set by the EU are related to digital skills. The aim is that at least 80% of Europeans should at least have basic digital skills; also at least to have 20 million ICT specialists in the EU and there is also a clear goal of gender convergence around this target.

### Microcredentials for the labour market

- The EU considers microcredentials as targeted, relevant learning for the labour market. They are small in volume and short in duration, which is what makes them adaptable and flexible and fit the way that people live, learn and work.
- Microcredentials were already existing: it might be a relatively new word, but it is by no means a new concept. Small training offers have always existed, and the certification received after this small volume of learning has existed, according to Ms Ladron-Arroyo.
- These small trainings have not been regulated and therefore are difficult to understand and sometimes to compare to, and to give trust to.

### A European Approach to Microcredentials for Lifelong Learning and Employability

- The Council Recommendation is a policy tool so that the EU can put some order in the way that countries within the EU approach microcredentials. The relevance and usefulness of microcredentials for the labour market is key.

- The competence for education and training is at a Member State level. This means that every country can regulate that. The EU's role is to support a coordinated approach, which is where the Council Recommendation stems from according to Ms Ladron-Arroyo.
- While there isn't a binding instrument, the EU ensures that countries get together in hopes for a common European approach that can facilitate the mobility and the understanding of microcredentials.
- The rationale of the Council Recommendation is to boost the quality, trust and the uptake of microcredentials. By making microcredentials more transparent, the EU hopes that people would trust them more. And from this trust, there would be an increase in the uptake of microcredentials.
- The overall goal is to boost the mindset of lifelong learning, ensuring that people are upskilling and reskilling, adapting to the needs of society and of the labour market. The whole idea is to make microcredentials easier to compare and easier to understand across the EU.
- The EU Council Recommendation has 3 building blocks according to the presenter:
  1. It proposes a common definition of microcredentials:
    - A record of small learning outcomes
    - Small volume of learning
    - Assessed
    - Owned by the learner
    - Shared and portable
    - Stand-alone or combined
    - Underpinned by quality assurance.
  2. It lists a set of standard elements to include when describing a microcredential (a list of what the microcredential needs to be transparent on):

- The identification of the learner
  - The title of the microcredential
  - Country/region of the issuer
  - Awarding body
  - Date of issuing
  - The learning outcomes
  - The notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in ECTS, wherever possible)
  - Level (and cycle is applicable) of the learning experience leading to the microcredential, (EQF, QF, and EHEA), if applicable
  - Type of assessment
  - Form of participation in the learning activity
  - Type of quality assurance used to underpin the microcredential.
3. It lists and explains a set of principles to follow for the design and issuance of microcredentials. These are:
- Quality; transparency; relevance; valid assessment; learning pathways; recognition; portable; learner centred; authentic; and information and guidance.
- The Council Recommendation has key areas for action that it advises Member States to do:
    1. Develop ecosystems for microcredentials.
    2. Deliver on the potential of microcredentials.
    3. Commission support.
  - The focus of the Council Recommendation is two-fold: education, training and skills policies; and active labour market policies.

## Research on Microcredentials

- After the Council Recommendation, which is the main policy document that guides the work on microcredentials, there are also other institutions that work on the Recommendation. For example, CEDEFOP (The European Centre for the Development of Professional Training is an agency of the European Union), is an agency that does research around vocational education and training in the EU.
- Another example provided by Ms Ladron-Arroyo, is the European Training Foundation, which has developed a guide to help stakeholders in the design issues and recognition of microcredentials.
- Another example is the OECD (the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), which had an implementation project on microcredentials. They focused specifically on four countries and looked at how they are doing on the implementation of microcredentials.

## On-going Work on Microcredentials

- According to Ms Ladron-Arroyo, a report on the implementation of the Council Recommendation by Member States is being finalised and is to be published. The report is to monitor how Member States are doing in implementing what is in the Recommendation and to get good practises and ideas of how the Member State's higher education sector and vocational education training sector are approaching microcredentials through the Recommendation.
- Another way that the European Commission supports the implementation of microcredentials is through funds: with the European social funds, but also with the Erasmus Plus fund. There are 12 forward-looking projects, and 3 Policy Experimentation projects.
- The EU also organises peer learning activities among Member States to share practises, challenges and issues, and how they overcame these issues. Although these peer learning activities are not open to the public, Ms Ladron-Arroyo invited participants who work with microcredentials to be a part of these peer-learning activities.

- Ms Ladron-Arroyo ended her portion of the presentation and invited her colleague, Mr Koen Nomden to continue the presentation.

### The Union of Skills

- Mr Koen Nomden introduced the Union of Skills communication that was adopted by the European Commission in March 2025, which sets a strategy in relation to skills and European Union level for the next years. It also places skills in the context of employability and European competitiveness and the reason for this is that Europe faces the following:
  - Skills shortages and gaps in Europe: Europe does not produce enough skilled workers in both quality and quantity,
  - Transformation speed gaps: education and training systems struggle to keep up with rapid technological transformations and the changing skills needed.
  - Fragmented governance and skills intelligence: there is a multitude of stakeholders with a variety of perspectives and insufficient consolidation and coordination.
- In a Union of Skills everyone in Europe should be empowered to develop skills; competitive companies can find people with the right skills (and microcredentials play a role as they are tools for flexible learning); and skills and qualifications are transparent, trusted and recognised.
- The Union of Skills is based on 4 objectives:
  1. To allow people to build skills for quality lives and for jobs.
  2. Upskilling and reskilling in order to make digital transitions and green transitions.
  3. Circulate skills across the EU for competitiveness.
  4. Attract, develop, and retain talent for Europe's future.

- Part of the Union of Skills is the Skills Portability Initiative, which focuses on addressing barriers to workers mobility and building on existing transparency tools; and promote a common European approach for interoperable digital credentials.
- The Skills Portability Initiative also considers action to further facilitate, expand and modernise the recognition processes for regulated professions.
- The Skills Portability Initiative explores whether to propose common rules for simpler recognition procedures and validation of qualifications and skills for third country nationals.
- The Union of Skills also focuses a lot on microcredentials and suggests expanding the use of microcredentials as flexible learning solutions, and that microcredentials should be linked to national and European qualifications frameworks, also with a focus on more joint microcredentials in the vocational area and in the higher education area.
- The European Commission has been working on comparing the European Qualification Framework with the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework. A comparison report has been prepared, and it should be published in the near future.
- Useful tools for microcredentials include *Europass* (European Digital Credentials for Learning; and European learning Model); ESCO; and Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp).
- According to Mr Nomden, there is a tendency and also a need to adopt more digital credentials. Digital credentials provide security and trust. The European Commission has developed an infrastructure based on the technology of verifiable credentials. Digital credentials can enhance recognition, and they can allow for a better showcase of knowledge and skills.
- He also expressed the importance of skills taxonomies.
- Regarding the infrastructure offered by the European Digital Credentials, it is one ecosystem with registries, personal identity, and allows for the sharing of digital credentials very easily; which also allows for third parties to verify the authenticity

and validity of the credential. This infrastructure is available on the *Europass* platform, but also available as open source.

### **Conclusion:**

- Interoperability, according to Mr Nomden, is crucial within a region like the Southern African region. It is essential also within the European Union, and even globally.
- The European Commission has developed a European Learning Model, which is a data model on semantic standards that is multilingual. In the field of learning, it covers all levels and all forms of learning, it covers the full life cycle of the course, it builds on the European Recommendations on the qualifications framework and also covers microcredentials.
- The European Learning Model is also related to the strategy for data. The policy is on open data, and it is also free for use and publicly accessible. It plays an important role in Europe but even more widely.

## **Towards a Common Definition of Microcredentials: Dr Borhene Chakroun, UNESCO.**

### **Introduction:**

- Dr Borhene Chakroun acknowledged participants from South Africa and the Southern region, as well as the panellists.
- He began his presentation by stating that globally, there is an increasing agenda around more flexible pathways, for learning more, and the recognition of different skills and competencies, which can be seen in all contexts and regions.
- There is a growing landscape of credentialing, which can be considered a proliferation of credentials, but can be seen from a more system perspective.
- There is also attention drawn to how one can trust and value different learning settings and different contexts. There are also different learning outcomes that probably did not exist before that are now being considered.

- Dr Chakroun also stated that there is a need to consider and advance cross-border recognition and how that interoperability and transferability within specific contexts, but also across regions like SADC and the PoMiSA project.
- There is attention from policy makers, scholars, researchers and educators regarding microcredentials. Dr Chakroun described this as a movement, and stated that the consultative forum was a good example of this movement.
- What is interesting to him from the forum is the granularity of learning and learning outcomes, which are quick learning pathways that can help people acquire a set of skills.
- Aspects related to accessibility, alternative pathways, stackability and the technology are important aspects according to Dr Chakroun as this promotes the work on microcredentials that they were trying to understand, define, and provide policy support and assistance that the Member States need to advance in their own agenda.

#### Why do we need a definition of microcredentials?

- The definition proposed was arrived at through consensus by a global expert panel, and what was agreed upon was derived from an initial analysis of other definitions.
- The definition that UNESCO has is not an official definition of UNESCO. It attempts to be regionally and sectionally neutral, and it is meant to be a conversation starter. The definition needs testing by more experts, learning providers, learners and employers.
- Some regions and countries have adopted a clear definition, and it is important to understand where we are heading with a common understanding of the microcredentials and maybe a common language around that that is needed at national, regional and global level.

#### Methodology

- Based on work that UNESCO had done a few years ago on proposing a definition of microcredentials, Dr Chakroun unpacked some analysis of definitions that was done.

- An analysis of definitions related to microcredentials work that his colleagues at the Institute for Planning have done on flexible learning pathways in higher education and some current work, tries to capture a bit of experience across the globe on microcredential policies, programmes, and initiatives.
- Different aspects and characteristics of microcredentials were looked at from 15 definitions, and these included: certification (which was a characteristic mentioned by all selected definitions; purpose; ownership, portability and shareability; relation to other microcredentials; duration; provider; security; outcomes and assessment; mode of delivery; and standards and quality assurance.
- The first version of a definition was proposed to 50 experts, followed by two more rounds of consultations, until a definition was reached that all of the experts are fine with.
- The proposed definition was that a microcredential;
  1. Is a record of focused learning achievement, verifying what a learner knows, understands and can do;
  2. Includes an assessment based on clearly defined standards and is awarded by a trusted provider;
  3. Has standalone value and may also contribute to or complement other micro- or macro- credentials (stackability), including through recognition of prior learning; and
  4. Meets the standards required by relevant quality assurance.
- Dr Chakroun acknowledged Ms Jaftha's earlier point of placing microcredentials within a broad understanding of credentialing and how we understand microcredentials versus macrocredentials.
- He emphasised the importance of the definition, to consider why a microcredential is a microcredential versus a macrocredential.
- Granularity is an important aspect to microcredentials. Time is another important aspect, as well as the access to the microcredential.

- Dr Chakroun stated that there is no necessary link between microcredentials and macrocredentials regarding the stackability, as one can acquire microcredentials without necessarily having an objective of stackability. This depends on the objective of the provider, but also on the learner and the purpose for which they are learning.

#### Less agreed on:

- In relation to coming up with the definition, there was less agreement among the consultation conducted on whether or not the recognition of prior learning should be included or not. It is not everywhere where that recognition by prior learning is an established mechanism, and from the global inventory as well UNESCO's work on higher education, many countries are still reluctant regarding that kind of recognition.
- The Global Convention on Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education does, however, refer to the possibility of recognising prior learning.
- The terms used to refer to the provider such as the "competent organisation", "recognised body", "trusted provider", need their own definitions and agreement, according to Dr Chakroun.
- Regarding quality assurance, how much quality assurance is required? That is the challenge between a flexible and agile learning path and learning outcomes assessment, and a heavy, eventually bureaucratic process of quality assurance.

#### From a jungle of credentials to systems of credentials

- Dr Chakroun stated that we have to consider how to move from a jungle of credentials to a system of credentials.
- We have a wide range of tools that represent learning outcomes and represent credentials in one form or another: from learner records, to badges, to skills, passport to microcredentials and qualifications. And the question for all of us is how we can build a more coherent system? How do we make these different tools to support learners and support the lifelong learning objective? That is what is challenging for us as a community according to Dr Chakroun.

- In some countries you can see the linkages between microcredentials and learner records. That is the case in Australia. You can see the linkage between microcredentials and skills passports, which is the case in British Columbia.

### Broad versus Specific Definitions

- When looking at definitions again from different contexts and different countries such as from Australia to Jordan to Peru, what came out as important in the analysis of the definitions is how broad and how specific some of the definitions are.
- They can be very broad, like the case of Canada; they can be very specific like the case of New Zealand where they are defining the number of credits, levelling, the assessment, etc. So, the question is, what is more interesting for learners and what is more valuable for recognising those microcredentials?
- A broad definition or specific definition? Context matters, according to Dr Chakroun.

### Elements of Analysis: Context Matters

- Dr Chakroun asked what the elements of analysis are that need to be considered in terms of a microcredential.
- Firstly, the definition is important, but policy strategies and framework are also critical. Why are we setting up a microcredentials? Why are we using microcredentials? From analysis, one can see microcredentials in a macro-strategy. This is the case of Jordan. They are referring to microcredentials in their socio-economic strategy and in their sustainability strategy.
- You can see microcredentials also related to policies on education and training. This is the case in India, and in two Canadian provinces.
- You can see microcredentials from a context of the jurisdictions: federally, and this is the case of Australia, and Canada; nationally and this the case of Jordan; regionally, and this is the case of Peru; and institutionally, universities are having frameworks and strategies.

- The design and delivery is very important: how are the microcredentials designed and who is delivering them, and how are they delivered? Is it online? Is it hybrid? Is it in presence? Is it in workplace learning? The delivery matters.
- The quality assurance, recognition, accreditation matters.
- The employer's perception and how these credentials are valued by employers also matters. Unfortunately, according to Dr Chakroun, there is less evidence about that in case studies and there is less data on this.
- The learners' perception matters, how learners value or consider microcredentials as a tool that is helping them to address their learning needs is also important.
- The perception of providers: is a microcredential something that can help providers increase their programmes and make those programmes more relevant to the demand from individuals or from the labour market? More data is needed on this.
- More data, evidence and public information across countries is needed. According to Dr Chakroun, from the cases that were analysed, only Australia had administrative data on microcredentials, and it was mixed with other awards. Currently, data and evidence that exists yields less information about how many people get microcredentials, in which context and with which quality assurance. The investment on data and evidence of outcomes is something that requires collective engagement. It is also important to consider the public information and how much information is accessible about microcredentials, their value, delivery, and quality assurance. In some contexts, such as British Columbia, there is attention to public information on microcredentials and the support on it.
- Equity and inclusion matters. In some of the cases looked at, there were minority groups. One interesting example mentioned by Dr Chakroun was that of Peru, where a microcredential was found in a WhatsApp group. For 10 to 15 minutes of learning, a microcredential can be awarded. This example of reaching vulnerable populations in less favourable conditions is what amazed him.
- He stated that regarding accessing microcredentials, nobody should be left behind. "We cannot only have a Ferrari for people who already have a Mercedes. You want to have a bike for people who are working with empty hands".

- Innovation and digitalisation also matters, as it is about how technology is leveraged and how AI and other tools that can help to also leverage microcredentials.

### An ecosystem of global and regional conventions

- Dr Chakroun expressed the importance in considering international and regional dialogue and said that the PoMiSA project is quite important in that regard.
- The UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education has 100 countries who have ratified the global and/or regional convention. This means that there is a critical mass of countries who do apply fair, transparent, inclusive recognition of qualifications concerning high education. While there is no defining of microcredentials in those conventions, there is the recognition of partial studies and various forms of qualifications.
- According to the Convention state parties' responsibility includes for them to recognise these partial qualifications that could be understood in different ways, including microcredentials. So, there is a commitment from the state parties to basically engage with microcredentials and to have a fair and transparent recognition of those credentials and microcredentials acquired elsewhere.

### **Conclusion**

#### Potential objectives of the international cooperation and sustainable development agenda (SDGs, including SDG4 and SDG8)

- Sharing and peer learning is needed, as knowledge can be shared, and learning can occur.
- Stakeholders should also work towards a more inclusive framework for fair recognition for all.
- Respect domestic laws and institutional autonomy.
- Facilitate mobility through reference frameworks. It can be common recognition procedures, but it can be a more transparent framework for recognition.

- Dr Chakroun thanked the organisers of the consultative forum, the panellists and attendees, and looked forward to Dr James Keevy's facilitation of the discussion later on.

## **Facilitated panel discussion and questions: Dr James Keevy, JET Education Services.**

- Dr James Keevy welcomed the attendees who were physically and virtually present and began the discussion and questions session of the interregional consultative forum.
- Before the facilitated panel discussion began, Dr Keevy made some introductory points:
  - He stated that there is some continental work on microcredentials occurring through the ACQF (African Continental Qualifications Framework), such as a set of continental guidelines developed by the ACQF on microcredentials.
  - The SADC region is also committed to contributing to microcredentials, He stated that. One of the outcomes of the PoMiSA project will be to support the SADC Secretariat with a set of regional guidelines on microcredentials.
  - He reflected on the presentations conducted by the panellists, including issues around tuning, digital identities, and the advanced state of the European Commission in terms of microcredentials.
- Dr Keevy stated that it was interesting that Dr Chakroun spoke about a jungle of microcredentials; and asked him to elaborate what he meant by a "system of microcredentials", and if it is the same thing as a qualifications framework.
  - Dr Chakroun responded by stating that society is in a situation where economies are changing very fast and where some are not changing at the same pace across regions.
  - When speaking about the digital, the digital divide needs to be taken into consideration as there are 2.6 billion people that are not connected to the

Internet, 1/3 of the students do not have access to devices and computers, and 60% of schools in Africa do not have electricity.

- Dr Chakroun emphasised the importance of contextualising societies and ensuring accessibility. High-tech and low-tech solutions need to be provided.
  - Countries understand that there is a need to offer different schemes for different people and their needs, including more flexible learning pathways and learning systems.
  - Global inventory shows that there are still many countries that are very far from having implemented national qualification frameworks, some countries are still at the early stages of developing a national qualification framework, other countries are in the experimental stage, while others are reviewing and renewing their qualification framework.
  - Why is it important that we think about the jungle, and we think about the system? Firstly, the jungle is not only a jungle of microcredentials, but also a jungle of credentials, and different representation tools.
  - Why do we need to have a system? "System" means interconnectedness, interoperability, and transferability; and this is what needs to be built, according to Dr Chakroun.
  - There is a need for a basis of the system, taking into consideration what the elements that would make a jungle a system. Transparency, trust, and interoperability are three aspects that need to be taken into account.
- Dr Keevy asked Ms Ladron-Arroyo if a credential and a qualification are the same thing, or if they are different.
    - Ms Ladron-Arroyo responded by stating that the line is blurred.
    - She elaborated by expressing that when there is a traditional system (like standardised way) and public authorities are behind it, and a credential is something more flexible and comprehensive that also includes industry and labour market driven...like certified training.
    - A credential is a broader system that is more comprehensive or more flexible term than a qualification. However, definitions keep moving, therefore there is a very thin line.

- At the EU level there is the inclusion of microcredentials in national qualification frameworks, therefore microcredentials are part of it by the very name of these qualification frameworks...like these credentials or these microcredentials, and still, we can say there is a difference. We normally talk about traditional qualifications and then microcredentials or other types of credentials. So, I would say that the lines were moved around.
  
- Dr Keevy asked Dr Olivier if frameworks and platforms are interrelated, or if he thinks that they are very different.
  - Dr Olivier responded by stating that a framework would be something wider, more of a process to be followed by a government or an institution, whilst a platform would be more of a technical thing. A platform would be something like a registry where there is an aggregation of microcredentials that are stored there.
  - He also stated that frameworks and platforms will have an influence on each: a platform might be the one of the deliverables of a framework or something that you would put as a part of the framework.
  
- Dr Keevy asked Dr Olivier a follow-up question on the Virtual University of Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). He asked where the VUSSC is currently and how it relates to the interregional consultative forum.
  - Dr Olivier responded by stating that the idea behind the VUSSC was to create a real virtual university for small states, although he did not think we will get there soon, although the VUSC has got a very important role to play.
  - The progress that has been made in the Caribbean has been specifically due the linkages within the VUSSC. The idea within the Virtual University of Small States was to have a transnational qualifications framework and this has the potential to support the alignment of microcredentials with recognised qualification levels, allowing credit transfer across institutions.

- According to Dr Olivier, the VUSSC has got potential - if there is enough of a drive from the governments who make up that grouping, it could be possible.
- Dr Keevy asked Ms Jaftha if she thinks that a qualifications framework can accommodate non-formal and informal credentials in a country like South Africa, or any one the neighbouring countries.
  - Ms Jaftha responded by stating that she is not sure because at the moment there is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and is not sure how else this should be done.
- Dr Keevy made the comment to Ms Jaftha's response by stating that in his opinion, RPL has become a bit dated, and that it is quite expensive quite difficult. Some international studies including one from the OECD revealed that RPL works, but normally in more of a very specific narrow environment like a regulated environment where you have to upskill on qualifications. He emphasised that in terms of the national systems, RPL can be costly and difficult to implement, and perhaps if there is a system that is more interoperable, RPL can be done through digital means as opposed to a more formal process.
- Dr Keevy asked Mr Nomden on the digital aspect of microcredentials, posing a question on whether all microcredentials should be digital or not; and asked him to link his response to digital identity.
  - Mr Nomden responded to the question by stating context needs to be taken into consideration, but in an ideal situation you would move to digital formats for the way that you obtain the microcredential, which is the certificate.
  - He stated that the European context is currently looking at not only promoting the digitalisation of credentials, but also to link it to digital portfolios that are linked to the digital identity of citizens. There is European law about this: every European should be able to obtain a citizen wallet, it is called a digital citizen wallet, and that would contain not only learning

credentials, but also other credentials such as identity credentials, passport, driving licence, and health insurance.

- Related to this is the issue of who is issuing the microcredential in the case of digital citizen wallets, which according to Mr Nomden, can only be done by trusted providers. The trusted providers can be determined through national qualification frameworks.
  - What is essential to Mr Nomden, (and the European approach on microcredentials), is to protect citizens, making sure that when learning for a microcredential, it is trustworthy and that the microcredential is value for money.
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- Mr Keevy asked a follow-up question to Mr Nomden on data privacy and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe. He asked Mr Nomden if digital identity is fully compliant with GDPR and for any reflections on this.
    - Mr Nomden responded by stating that Europe's work on digital credentials, GDPR and data privacy plays a very big role and there has to be a design of systems that ensure that individuals agree to the sharing of their data. The European Union has the requirements of the GDPR.
    - He stated that at the same time, people also overstate a bit. When it comes to personal identity, it is GDPR and nothing is possible. It is an issue of proportionality. He also said that an opportunity within a broader context should be sought, and a legal context from a European perspective. This requires a lot of effort also in terms of monitoring.
  
  - Dr Keevy asked Dr Chakroun to speak further on data privacy.
    - Dr Chakroun stated that the question on data privacy is very important. He emphasised that protection is also about the ownership of data by the individuals, which is critical.
    - There is a trade-off: if we do not have access to data, we will not be able to leverage the data. And there is almost a curve that the regulatory aspect has to go in a way that at one point, the innovation and the leveraging intersect. This is where innovation and the protection equation

is very important. It is about human rights, but it is also about the capacity to leverage and develop.

- Protection and privacy is central in terms of human rights. Dr Chakroun urged the importance of thinking how data can be anonymised. There are techniques for this and there is the ability to leverage the data that is available, which is very helpful for individuals, for learners, for communities, for societies and economies.
- Dr Keevy commented on Dr Chakroun's response by stating that in the African and particularly Southern African context, the curve between access to data to develop systems versus data privacy is a risky one and one that is not often discussed, and this has to be part of the conversation on microcredentials.
- Dr Keevy asked Ms Ladron-Arroyo a question on the quality assurance of microcredentials. He explained that generally, there are 3 levels: 1) Self-attested: doing a credential, but nobody has checked or quality assured it; 2) peer mechanism: like on LinkedIn, where somebody had a job and did a course; and 3) the gold standard: which is the formal qualifications framework systems. He asked Ms Ladron-Arroyo where microcredentials fit in, whether she had any views on these quality assurance levels.
  - Ms Ladron Arroyo responded by stating that she thinks microcredentials are diverse and it is a term that is so broad in many sectors that there cannot be one single way to go about the quality assurance of microcredentials. She elaborated that there is no such thing as one thing that will fit it all, as this will compromise on the flexibility and the agility to respond to the labour market demands of microcredentials.
  - The quality assurance for microcredentials that are included in national qualification frameworks, or that are delivered by formal education and training institutions such as such as a vocational education and training centre, or universities, will pass more by the formal tools that already exist.
  - She expressed that she is not sure to what extent should we want to impose set, and sometimes cumbersome quality assurance instruments and mechanisms. For example, to a company that is issuing a microcredential on a certain IT software, for which the quality is assured via the trust of the stakeholders, they then need to recognise it. And then the quality can be assured somehow else in a way that is equally valid.

- What is important for the EU approach according to Ms Ladron-Arroyo is to have quality assurance instruments, whatever they are, and “whatever” does not mean that standards are lost but that there is flexibility on what works for every sector and for every circumstance. What is important is that it is included as a standard element to describe the microcredential, to be transparent on how to ensure the quality of these microcredentials.
  - Like the definitions set, the microcredentials need to be underpinned by quality assurance and you need to be transparent about how you do it and be descriptive about it.
  - She stated that one can easily understand the microcredential without being too rigid [on quality assurance], and therefore being inclusive enough so that the world of microcredentials can keep thriving, and not be destroyed by very strict mechanisms that are understandably important for formal education and training. She emphasised that such mechanisms could destroy the beauty and the potential of microcredentials for being a dial to respond to societal and labour market needs.
- Dr Keevy asked Ms Ladron-Arroyo if she sees a risk of taking away the innovation of microcredentials by trying to make it structured and bureaucratic. He also asked her if there is a risk that the current debate is going to result in microcredentials being sucked into the formal system and that we may lose the agility and innovation that we have at the moment.
    - Ms Ladron-Arroyo agreed that there is definitely a risk, and that there are two different ways to go about them.
    - “One way is that you come from a formal education and training system that has these traditional long qualifications, and when I step into this way of lifelong learning by being agile and flexible and shorter in the type of trainings, more people will jump into your institution. The challenge of this sector is how relevant they are for society and for the labour market and how successful they are in the uptake”.
    - “The other thing that happens is maybe more on the labour market side, and from employment, that is when an actor that has an interest in some skills to be developed and they see that this is not being covered by formal

education and training systems. They set up a training, they cover it, and they certified it...or they don't, they don't care." She stated that in this case, the public administration is steps in to ensure that that microcredential is inclusive; owned by the learner; portable; is of quality; and understood by other stakeholders, so that the learner, after having received this training, can move around and be portable, with their skills.

- Dr Keevy asked Dr Chakroun if he believes that regional policies and guidelines for microcredentials are necessary.
  - Dr Chakroun responded by stating that he believes in the context and the importance of communities...national, regional and the global, and that the important aspect regarding the regional economic communities is that there is a policy objective of economic integration of mobility, of collaboration and cooperation. It is a very important driver for having common agendas, common tools, and a common framework, and according to Dr Chakroun, this is seen in the European Commission, the Asian [or ASEAN] region, the Pacific region, the Caribbean, and other regions like the Commonwealth of Learning.
  - He stated that something that should be taken into account, is that jobs move. One can work for a company in Paris but not be in Paris. Credentials also move. You can learn in Paris a Coursera course which comes from the United States of America. The fluidity of learning, of credentials, and of jobs is a factor that should be included in our thinking of building the system. International and regional agreements, dialogue, collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and peer learning are critical according to Dr Chakroun, otherwise there will be tensions and that are not what an organisation like UNESCO is acting for. It is about multilateralism, respect, cooperation and solidarity.
  
- Dr Keevy asked Mr Patrici to unpack HAQAA and his views on regional policies, guidelines, and continental instruments; and unpack the concept of tuning. He

also asked Mr Patrici to reflect on what he has learned from tuning that can be taken into microcredentials and how that can relate to learning outcomes.

- Mr Patrici responded by clarifying that tuning is not operating anymore as a project in the region and that all the discussions about the African Credit Transfer System has been taken up by HAQAA.
- Regarding regional policies and mechanisms, he agrees with Dr Chakroun in the sense that it is important to generate bridges between the different sub-regions in the case of Africa, in order to try to find readability (make the systems readable among them).
- He stated that Africa is very diverse, so this is in itself a problem, and it is a problem or a complex process when it comes to formal credentials, and to formal education. HAQAA is mainly looking at formal systems or traditional systems. It is a false dichotomy: formal and informal, or formal and non-traditional systems, at the end of the day are learning mechanisms that should have at the centre of all these debates, a question of trust and this is basically what HAQAA is trying to do: build mechanisms, build discussions, build policies that put trust and at the centre and make systems trustful among each other.
- This might have an impact in enhancing mobility, and credentials should be readable among the regions whether these credentials are issued by traditional institutions or by non-traditional institutions. The risk of dividing the discussion between quality assurance mechanisms for traditional learning credentials, or the work done regarding credits, is trying to show that the credential is composed of a certain number of credits that represent certain learning outcomes. At the end of the day a macrocredential is built up by a group of microcredentials.
- Mr Patrici disagreed with Ms Ladron-Arroyo regarding making divisions harsh between traditional bureaucratic mechanisms of quality assurance and more flexible, innovative quality assurance. At the end of the day, whatever the discussion or tool is, it should be around building up trustworthy systems in each region and each country that can take accountability or make the whole credential system transparent for actors, both at the academic, and at the private level. HAQAA is focusing on this and are trying to promote this on behalf of the European Commission: to

promote this idea in different policy discussions in each of the African countries, in particular when it comes to the African Credit Transfer system for formal education.

- He stressed the importance of every government sitting in on this as it is not something that an institution can do alone. Problems from the perspectives from institutions, regions, governments, the continent, and the AU should be looked into.
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- Dr Keevy asked Dr Olivier about a credit transfer system for microcredentials in his region and how does it relate to the discussions at the interregional consultative forum.
    - Dr Ollivier stated that while it is not something that is currently running, the COL is planning to develop a framework that will cover the whole Commonwealth. It will be inclusive, and will cover what has been done already.
    - He highlighted some practices that the COL may draw from, such as from New Zealand to Australia, Canada, and also in places of emergence such as in Southern Africa.
    - This framework will allow for recognition to be done within a wider sphere, and this links to regional policy strategies. Many of COL's partner governments cannot afford the best platforms and registries, so resources need to be combined, and this is when there needs to be talks on scalability and benefiting from the affordance of portability between countries.
    - According to Dr Olivier, countries need to collaborate, and this is happening in the Caribbean, and being considered in the Pacific region, and he hopes that the framework will be of support in these regions. Standardisation can be insisted; credit transfer can be enhanced; and trust from employers can be boosted regarding credentials and collaborations encouraged. There is a lot of potential.
    - In as much as standards and collaboration are very strong when it comes to digital identities, when it comes to microcredentials and for example, the metadata of a microcredential: according to Dr Olivier, there are so many approaches to this. There is no standard yet. There is no worldwide standard

that everyone can say, "this is what we will all do". He elaborated that it is easy in Europe as they have got legislation, which states that all the countries must use X and they use it. However, in Canada, this is done at provincial level, so it is not even national. British Columbia will use Y, Alberta will use R, and so it goes on. So, it gets very tricky if you do not have a broader approach.

- The framework aims to achieve this broader approach but with the caveat that it needs to be very inclusive, and it needs to be the Commonwealth's framework, not the Commonwealth of Learning's framework.
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- Dr Keevy asked Mr Nomden if a microcredential is another quick fix, and if from the context of Europe, microcredentials are just taking on that narrative of an easy solution to a difficult problem.
    - Mr Nomden responded by stating that nothing is a quick fix. If you have an IT system and you discover a small thing that needs to be repaired, one may call that a quick fix. However, microcredentials are not a quick fix.
    - He spoke on Jako's point about Europe's legislature. He agreed that there is a European approach and commonalities, but they are not formal in law. This "legislature" are recommendations, but they have been negotiated by Member States so that there is a joint commitment. This therefore means that there are instruments to bring countries to court if they do not do something or comply.
    - Microcredentials are not a quick fix. After almost 20 years of the EQF, and a bit more than 20 out of the 37 countries that have reference to the EQF are now moving towards operational qualifications frameworks. These are processes that simply take time. There is a current tendency that countries that have developed a framework and that have an operational framework, have set this a bit more institutionally. So, it is getting closely linked to education policies, and more countries also adopt frameworks by law.
    - What Mr Nomden sees is a bottom-up, rather than a top-down approach. Quite a few countries are including qualifications that are not from the formal education system. Definitions of microcredentials in national

frameworks, because national frameworks need to be trusted, need to be relevant. They need to be relevant for the learner, but also for the long term. They need to be relevant for the education system, but also for the labour market.

- Dr Keevy asked Ms Jaftha a question on one of the criticisms of microcredentials or smaller units of learning, which is that they cannot be put together as an integrated whole; the “whole” being that of a qualification. People criticise these smaller units of learning as being a smorgasbord of putting a whole lot of smaller modules, unit standards, and smaller parts together, and then they become a whole qualification that has no internal logic. He asked Ms Jaftha for her view on such criticisms.
  - Ms Jaftha stated that there is already a system in place, and it is working. She made the example of needing a specific part of the qualification (and not the whole qualification), then microcredentials in the NQF space already has an internal logic. She made the example that if she needs a specific part of a qualification (and not the whole qualification), then microcredentials in the NQF space already has an internal logic.
  - Nothing is perfect in the trades and qualification and occupational space and there is continuous reviewing of this. Ms Jaftha thinks that there is internal logic in relation to a qualification or the microcredentials in the NQF space.
  - Ms Jaftha questioned if there is nothing else besides wanting to bring microcredentials into the NQF space. She also asked if we want to bring in all microcredentials into to NQF space, and if they are only going to have value when compared to something on the NQF.
  - She expressed that there is the over-preoccupation with bringing microcredentials into the NQF space or comparing it to a qualification, or breaking it down into parts of qualifications when the microcredentials ecosystem is so wide.
  - National microcredentials have an internal logic, and those outside of the NQF space, do not need to look like a qualification, but they still have value
  - When somebody comes in with a foreign qualification and after evaluation says, “but I also have training with the Bill Gates Foundation”, that person

according to Ms Jafftha, wants to use that credential for more money or for more recognition. She emphasised that there is a need to understand what the purpose of a microcredential is. When looking at internal logic, one also needs to look at what the microcredential is serving.

- Dr Keevy commented on Ms Jafftha's response, stating that there will be microcredentials potentially in NQFs, but also microcredentials that are outside. He also stated that microcredentials are actually challenging the idea that all learning matters.
- Dr Keevy asked Mr Patrici about the divides, (formal, non-formal, informal) and his view on them. He also asked Mr Patrici if he thinks that there will be microcredentials in systems and outside systems, or if they will converge.
  - Mr Patrici stated that the division exists and that he argues against these divisions.
  - He argued against the suggestion of having a very strict bureaucratic approach to quality informal education, and a super flexible innovative approach to the creations coming from non-formal education.
  - He argues that credentials need to be transparent. Even if they are taken, because at the end of the day it is the quality of the learning that matters, not the objective of the learner. So even if the learner wants to take a small course on, Spanish to make more money in the Spanish market, what matters to Mr Patrici is the quality and the transparency of that credential and the credibility of that credential.
  - Ms Ladron-Arroyo responded to Mr Patrici's response by stating that microcredentials are not invented as a solution and that they will grow by themselves as a solution: to respond to the formal education and training systems, and to respond to societal and labour market needs which were limited because it was less agile and too bureaucratic to fix. Microcredentials have started to grow exponentially, and the public administration need to step in to put some order so that there is an understanding of them. This, according to Ms Ladron-Arroyo does not mean that all of a sudden, the rationale and work done on organising formal

education and training systems, and traditional qualifications are not useful anymore. Microcredentials are complementary to traditional qualifications as there are good reasons why qualifications are well-regulated, and there are heavy instruments for quality assurance: it provides a foundation and knowledge that probably microcredentials cannot provide.

- While microcredentials are definitely useful and needed, Ms Ladron-Arroyo believes that it does not mean that there should be a complete neglect of the usefulness of the whole system in place around longer, traditional qualifications that provide critical thinking skills and the foundational knowledge that cannot be achieved through a microcredential. Microcredentials are complementary, as a means of topping up skills or for access to education.
  
- Dr Chakroun added to the discussion by stating that the financing aspect of microcredentials was an important part that was not spoken about. He stated that "money talks" and the policies of financing will also determine how far microcredentials could go. In countries such as Canada, France, Singapore, and in Europe, the lifelong learning entitlement are a way for supporting microcredentials, supporting learning for different purposes. One can learn for self-fulfilment or for other objectives other than for the labour market. According to Dr Chakroun, there is a learning entitlement in Australia that helps you get a first level of qualification, and if the government of Australia changes the policy and states that it only funds microcredentials, then the market might follow.
  
- Financing is an important policy lever that needs to be watched closely as that will also determine how microcredentials will evolve.
  
- Mr Patrici commented by stating that he was not criticising the usefulness of microcredentials, and that he was making the argument that quality assurance mechanisms should exist, but the whole the central aspect of the discussion on quality assurance is trust. He stated that there should be a focus on how to build a trustworthy and readable system for microcredentials that can take some of the elements that exist in traditional

formal education quality assurance systems for a microcredential. He acknowledges that this may be complicated, but it should sync with time in order to solve this, and it should not put traditional education and microcredentials in a confrontational manner.

- Dr Keevy asked the panel if microcredentials will still exist in 2030. He asked if microcredentials are a fad or a trend, or will they exist in 5 to 10 years?
  - Ms Ladron-Arroyo responded with a "firm yes". She stated that if we want to boost and to create this mindset of lifelong learning, microcredentials cannot be a long training as one needs to make it compatible with normal life. She stated that the two parts of the term "microcredential" are important: that it is a credential (and certifiable), but also that it is micro. She reiterated the goal of the EU, which is that 60% of adults should be in training every year, and microcredentials will assist with this goal.
  - Dr Olivier responded to the question by stating that there will definitely be something along the lines of microcredentials in 5 years. Whether it will still be called a microcredential is another issue. The need and the use of microcredentials within industry is clear. Certifications from *Google* or *IBM* is very valuable in certain areas. He stated that what universities are doing will definitely be on the radar of qualifications authorities, students, and all stakeholders. There is the issue of unbundling within higher education, which is a very difficult situation; as well as the financial implications of microcredentials. Many institutions will have to adopt this kind of approach to broaden what they can service and what they can do. Dr Olivier reiterated that microcredentials will still exist in 5 years, and how far it will extend will depend on the commitment from governments and also the development around identity wallets.
  - Ms Jaftha agreed that microcredentials we will still exist in 5 years as they have existed in the past. She stated that in the same light, traditional qualifications will never become obsolete because microcredentials are being looked at through a lens of what is on the macro level.

- Mr Patrici responded to the question by stating that microcredentials will exist by themselves and will also be a way to challenge traditional formats of education. He stated that the national system will have the challenge of figuring out how to work together with institutions to help them to transform themselves. He acknowledged that there are discussions that have occurred in the South African context, such as in Stellenbosch University where there has been some discussions about the modularization of education.
  
- Mr Nomden answered said “yes” to microcredentials existing in 5 years' time as there are societal transformations, and transformations of economy that really require microcredentials as a way of flexible learning, but also to make skills more visible. What is important is that learners have access to the information on microcredentials, and on microcredentials they can trust, and then also when needed, good guidance is available to help learners navigate in the increasing complex landscape of learning opportunities, which include microcredentials.
  
- Dr Chakroun agreed with Ms Jafftha on the fact that it is not about if microcredentials would still exist in 5 years, but it is about within which framework, and how that fits with the national qualification framework. Microcredentials will be part of a broader learner record portfolio or system where it interacts with other tools and other resources, and it can be even more advanced. It can also include social records, and can be social protection. He acknowledged that this maybe will not occur by 2030, but is probably something that occur the more technology advances.

#### Questions from attendees:

1. A participant reflected on the consultative forum, commending the quality of the speakers and the moderation. They particularly appreciated Ms Jafftha's insights regarding credits, qualification frameworks, and accreditation, which

were described as "protected terms." The participant recalled past involvement in the tuning project, which aimed to give concrete content and tools to higher education institutions around these very concepts. Building on that, the participant posed a reflective question to the panel, suggesting that microcredentials themselves might need to be treated as protected terms. From their perspective, particularly within the European context, this would align with the European Commission's recommendations, which appear to exclude microcredentials that fall outside the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The participant emphasised the importance of trust in the discussion, noting that this concept had surfaced repeatedly throughout the presentations. In his view, embedding trust-building elements within a regionally or globally agreed framework would strengthen the value of microcredentials. The participant clarified that advocating for protected terminology does not diminish the importance of informal and non-formal learning. Instead, they argued, it highlights the distinctive value of these learning forms when clearly differentiated and properly recognised.

2. A participant commented on earlier remarks made by Dr Chakroun and Ms Jaftha, emphasising the centrality of context and purpose in discussions on microcredentials. The participant made the argument that microcredentials should not be confined solely to National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs). Using the sport sector as an example, she explained that certain fields operate on global standards, governed by international federations, which fall outside the purview of national regulatory systems. In such globally-oriented sectors, microcredentials are often required for professional development and compliance, not necessarily for formal academic recognition. Anti-doping certification, gender-based violence training, and first aid, which have become mandatory for sports coaches in South Africa. These credentials do not always constitute formal qualifications but are essential skills-based certifications, making them prime examples of non-NQF microcredentials. The participant also referenced the Financial Advisors and Intermediary Services Act of 2002 in South Africa, where professionals in the financial services sector were required to accumulate certain credits or credentials annually to continue working. These industry-driven learning requirements were often supported by the Recognition

of Prior Learning (RPL) and formed part of broader qualification pathways. The participant stated that in a developing country such as South Africa, microcredentials must be inclusive and “pro-poor”. These credentials can offer entry points into the learning ecosystem, especially for individuals previously excluded from formal education and employment opportunities.

3. A participant asked, “what does the National Qualifications Framework as a relational construct, or a framework relational framework mean for this conversation?”
  4. A participant reflected on the complexity of the evolving microcredential landscape, particularly the emphasis on digital formats. They expressed concern about this focus within regions affected by a significant digital divide, raising questions around terms like alternative digital credentials and badging, which are prevalent in global reports such as *Educore's Horizon Reports*. She stressed the need to clearly map definitions and distinctions across microcredentials, digital badges, and other learning records to avoid confusion, describing the current situation as a “jungle” like Dr Chakroun did. Additionally, the participant made the argument that non-digital and non-formal learning should not be overlooked and asked how systems could offer “a bicycle instead of a Ferrari” to ensure inclusivity. She stated that all forms of learning, formal, non-formal, or microcredential-based should share a focus on learning outcomes, and proposed creating a system that maps outcomes rather than credentials, allowing learners to enter recognition frameworks based on evidence of what they know and can do. The participant advocated for learner engagement, suggesting that policy and system design should be informed by the lifelong learners themselves, especially those focused on entrepreneurship and economic participation in contexts like South Africa.
- Dr Keevy asked the panellists to provide any concluding remarks.
    - Dr Chakroun stated in his concluding remarks that challenge for everyone will be the human agency, and with the growth of artificial intelligence there will be discussions about “us and our Co-pilot agent”. He stated that human interaction will be something that will determine the way we learn, the way we recognise learning, and the way that we are able to validate

and assess learning. Dr Chakroun stressed the need to revisit and rethink the future of learning and that will determine how we will recognise, validate and assess; and how societies will value learning and learning outcomes. He concluded his remarks by urging the participants to think about what this will mean for humans and how to keep humanity in a situation where there could be interactions with machines.

- In his concluding remarks, Mr Nomden stated that the technology of digital credentials allow us to have more information on credentials. Therefore, skills taxonomies could become more important and play a bigger role, and also linking digital credentials to particular skills, especially if they consist of structured data, can also help the labour market in a better matching. He stated that it is very difficult to predict what will happen with AI, but it is something that people need to keep aware of.
  
- Mr Patrici began his concluding remarks by stating that there are two types of debate on the table: one regarding the mechanisms of guaranteeing the quality, reliability and transparency of credentials; and the other being the skills and the type of role learning will have in the future. Mr Patrici urged the participants to try to come back to the notion of learning and critical questioning. While all formalities are important in order to guarantee transparency, the capacity of human beings being critical and questioning reality is becoming a more relevant issue that people working in education need to take into consideration and take into consideration more seriously in the coming years.
  
- Ms Jafftha stated that she would like to focus her concluding remarks on her passion, which is on the learning outcomes aspect. She stated that microcredentials in the NQF space, those learning outcomes should reflect the whole framework. Outside of the NQF space, if somebody is unemployed and is learning how to be an entrepreneur and work with

tools, there is no NQF level attached to that. So, the learning outcome will be specific to that activity. Even with the learning outcomes, if there is no NQF which cascades from the exit level, down to learning outcomes for specific subjects, outside of that environment, there needs to be some sort of conceptualisation of how to structure that learning outcome.

- Dr Olivier began his concluding remarks by stressing the importance of terminology. In relation to protecting “microcredentials”, as a linguist, he advised that everyone should stick to one term. However, diplomatically, he acknowledged that this cannot happen as there is a need to accommodate different conceptualisations of the term. He also stated that there is the issue of having a key without the lock, and regarding microcredentials, it is a solution for something. There is a definite need for an inclusive and consultative process with inputs, and this starts with students, and lecturers, managers, institutions, qualifications and quality assurance agencies, and industry. These stakeholders must all be consulted according to Dr Olivier, and must be present in discussions on microcredentials as it is not just an issue of breaking down a bit of learning at universities, it is a lot broader than that.
- Ms Ladron-Arroyo began her concluding remarks by would like to elaborate about two points that were raised during the questions session: the protection of the term “microcredential” and its role in promoting inclusivity. On the first point, she noted that the level of regulation should depend on the intended purpose of microcredentials. If the goal is to boost lifelong learning and access to upskilling opportunities, then flexibility should take precedence over strict definitions. In such a case, the emphasis would be on learning outcomes, regardless of how or where the learning took place. Conversely, if the objective is to create a formal structure through which individuals can demonstrate and validate their skills, then there may be a stronger case for protecting and standardising the term. Ms Ladron-Arroyo described this as a dynamic trade-off, particularly within the EU context, where the challenge lies in balancing credibility with innovation. She highlighted that much of adult learning occurs informally, through work, migration, or even parenthood, so the system must be capable of

recognising diverse learning experiences. On the second point on inclusivity, she asserted that the flexible and learner-centred nature of microcredentials makes them inherently more inclusive than traditional education systems. She also argued that microcredentials have the potential to acknowledge and validate informal and non-formal skills, therefore promoting both educational access and social inclusion. By recognising what individuals have learned, regardless of context, society can attribute value to all forms of knowledge and experience, contributing to a more equitable learning ecosystem.

## Summary and way forward: Ms Nolusindiso Kayi, South African Qualifications Authority

- Ms Kayi provided the summary and way forward by firstly highlighting the important points that were raised in the interregional consultative forum:
  - The concept of microcredentials is not new but what is important is responsiveness, and there is a need to respond to labour markets and to innovations.
  - In relation to microcredentials, it is important to unpack quality assurance. Quality assurance needs to be agile.
  - Digital identity and how it links to microcredentials was also an important point derived from the forum, according to Ms Kayi. Subtopics of digital identity was the digital divide, particularly in the SADC region, registry records and certifications, data privacy, privacy, and the rights of learners, the need to build data infrastructure, and the importance of building systems that are self-replicating.
  - Collaborations beyond the education sector and how to involve the industry was another important point from the forum, as well as cross-border collaborations.
  - Building trust, and equity and inclusion were also important points derived from the forum.

- A major point of advice that MS Kayi emphasised was that the sector should not reinvent the wheel. There is a lot of work around the world on frameworks and principles on microcredentials, and the implementation of microcredentials.
- Microcredentials need to be defined, and a common language needs to be developed to facilitate a better understanding of microcredentials. Ms Kayi emphasised that there is a need to clearly identify what the potential of microcredentials are and why they are needed.
- The principles for this framework are also quite important. Examples of these principles are quality assurance, transparency and equity and inclusion. Public protection then becomes very important.
- What is the value for the learner, and how can we ensure that microcredentials are fit for purpose?
- Think about credit transfer from the beginning as the framework is being built.
- The system of interconnectedness around formal and informal learning, and where these are being offered also came out strongly from the forum; and importantly, the topic of transparency.
- In terms of the way forward, the interregional consultative forum was a formal regional stakeholder engagement that is part of the work being done in the PoMiSA project. There is a need to engage lifelong learners and also engaging industry. Ms Kayi advised that there should be thinking around whether there is a need for further engagements with industry stakeholders.
- The development of the regional microcredentials guidelines or framework, that will come out of the forum, needs to inform and support SADC in developing their official regional guidelines.
- There will also have to be a link between what comes out of the regional framework with what countries are developing in their country concepts, as around the interconnectedness and cross-border collaborations.
- Lastly, financing was another important point from the discussions.

## Vote of thanks and closure: Dr Sylvia Demas, Namibia Council on Higher Education

- Dr Sylvia Demas greeted the participants at the forum and expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to provide the vote of thanks.
- She stated that these were very exciting discussions on the intricacies of microcredentials in the respective regions.
- She thanked the European Union for funding the implementation of the project.
- She thanked the Council on Higher Education of South Africa for conducting the field work and for producing the working papers that formed the basis for the discussions which were had in the forum, as well as coordinating and organising the forum.
- She extended her appreciation to Dr James Keevy and JET Education Services for coordinating the PoMiSA project, and to Dr Keevy, who eloquently facilitated the discussion session of the forum.
- She thanked the panel members for their time and the efforts invested in preparing the presentations. Some panel members participated in the interviews that preceded the forum, and Dr Demas expressed appreciation for their insights. The additional lessons learned from the forum will further the development of the framework.
- She thanked the participants who attended the forum physically in Pretoria, as well as those who attended virtually for taking part in the discussions. Their inputs will be relied on for the successful implementation of the PoMiSA project.
- Dr Demas thanked the logistics and the secretarial team for ensuring the smooth running of the forum and also for recording the deliberations.
- She encouraged everyone present to continue engaging on the issue of microcredentials, and to continue participating in future events of the project.
- As the President of SAQAN (Southern African Quality Assurance Network), she stated that she looks forward with excitement to the value that the project will bring to the work of SAQAN.

- She thanked everyone for listening and for their participation and officially declared the interregional consultative forum closed.

## Attendance register



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