



**D06.8 – FRAMEWORK FOR JOINTLY PREPARED
MICRO-CREDENTIAL COURSES OFFERED IN DEGREE
AND CERTIFICATE PROGRAMMES**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This framework aims to develop joint micro-credentials within the Arqus Alliance for all kinds of degree and certificate programmes, enhancing students' opportunities for more flexible and learner-centred forms of education. It will provide an experimental approach for issuing micro-credentials in the Arqus Alliance, addressing internal and external stakeholder needs and expectations.

The prepared document will outline the key components of jointly delivered micro-credentials. This will include the development of legal agreements for sharing tasks and financial obligations with partners; it will also define other jointly carried procedures, such as the administration related to students and learners, their certification and verification of micro-credentials, as well as the quality assurance procedures.

All micro-credentials prepared within the Alliance are foreseen to be designed collaboratively, ensuring relevance through input from partner universities and the labour market. This framework is designed as a fairly open document intended to align the jointly developed micro-credentials with external standards and the internal policies of the providing universities.

The Alliance's technological infrastructure will support the delivery and verification of micro-credentials. To address participant needs, support services, including counselling, career services, and technical support will be provided in each university.

Key stakeholders in the micro-credential development and implementation process benefiting from this document are teaching staff, administrators, students, learners, employers, and other national regulatory bodies (if any).

2. DEFINITION AND LINK TO EXISTING EU REGULATIONS

On 16 June 2022, the Council of the European Union (EU) adopted a **Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability**¹. The Recommendation seeks to support the development, implementation, and recognition of micro-credentials across institutions, businesses, sectors, and borders.

The prepared recommendations defined **micro-credentials as the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning**². These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. **The key features defining micro-credentials are listed below:**

- Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills, and competencies that respond to societal, personal, cultural, or labour market needs.
- Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared, and are portable.
- They may be stand-alone or combined into larger credentials.
- They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.

¹ See the Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(02))

² In the definition of "micro-credentials" included in the Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, an exact volume of learning for micro-credentials is not determined, but is described as "small". However, typically micro-credentials range between 1 and 30 ECTS, depending on the depth of content and learning outcomes.

The Arqus Alliance accepts EU Council recommendations defining:

- The concept of micro-credentials (as described above) and their providers (universities and other training institutions, industry partners)
- The possible learning settings for micro-credential implementation (blended/hybrid/on-campus/off-campus (online))
- The forms of learning (formal/non-formal/informal)
- The possibilities for implementation (stackable/non-stackable)

However, to successfully implement joint micro-credentials, the Alliance distinguishes additional concepts and procedures for their development and implementation:

A joint micro-credential within the Alliance is defined as one aligned with EQF levels 6–8, depending on the complexity and depth of the learning outcomes it aims to certify. The volume of a joint micro-credential can range from 1 to 59 ECTS credits. It is collaboratively developed and implemented by at least two Alliance universities and may also involve partnerships with external stakeholders (e.g., industry, labor market, NGOs or non-Arqus universities). It can be coordinated by a provider appointed through a mutual agreement, which must be signed prior to the start of the micro-credential. The coordinating provider must be a university within the Alliance.

A joint micro-credential in the Alliance can be delivered in accordance with the EU Council recommendations defined above.

3. JOINT MICRO-CREDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Joint micro-credentials prepared in the Alliance should follow such a procedure:

1. Any of the partner universities can initiate the preparation of the joint micro-credential.
2. The university must find at least one other partner in the Alliance (external providers can be involved according to the needs). Representatives of WG06 (see contact information below) can assist in finding a partner and provide support during the further process (if needed).
3. The coordinating provider (which must be a university from the Alliance) should be appointed, and the micro-credential descriptor should be prepared using the recommendations provided in the Arqus Curriculum Enhancement Guidelines.³ The filled micro-credential descriptor should be submitted to the internal management of each provider (Committee/Dean of the Faculty; head of the industry partner).
4. After the micro-credential descriptor is approved, the micro-credential agreement should be prepared.⁴ The heads of each provider involved in micro-credential implementation are responsible for signing the final agreement of micro-credential.
5. The micro-credential is developed and uploaded to the Arqus Learning Management System (LMS) and (if necessary) published in the Arqus Life-Long-Learning Catalogue (LLL Catalogue). The coordinating provider is responsible for sharing all the required information with the responsible Arqus bodies to start advertising the micro-credential. More details are provided in Part 7 of this document, 'Publication and Dissemination'.
6. The micro-credential is implemented and issued as an online certificate to students and learners on behalf of the Alliance. The coordinating provider organises the certificate's issuance. More details are provided in Part 6 of this document, 'Certification and Verification'.

³ The micro-credential descriptor is an overview of a course, offering potential students and learners insights on its content, objectives, and structure. The form for this descriptor is published on the Arqus website.

⁴ The micro-credential agreement is a legally binding arrangement between partners implementing micro-credential. The agreement template is published on the Arqus website.

7. After completing the micro-credential, students and learners are provided with a survey about the quality of the course. The **Internal Quality Assurance System for the Arqus Alliance** provides more details about the implementation of the survey.

4. AGREEMENT FOR JOINT MICRO-CREDENTIALS

Joint micro-credential implementation must be confirmed by signing a written agreement between the providers. The agreement should include the requisites, aim, and study plan of the micro-credential. It should also define learners' selection and admission processes, their coordination and administration, and fees, as well as outline the provision for quality assurance, data protection, and intellectual property policies.

The coordinating provider (or any other provider, depending on the agreement) must organise the signature process after all providers have internally approved the micro-credential. The recommended agreement template is published on the Arqus website.

5. FEE POLICY

The micro-credential tuition fee is mutually agreed upon by providers delivering that micro-credential and described in the micro-credential implementation agreement.

The coordinating provider⁵ is responsible for collecting and distributing fees (if any) for other providers involved in the delivery of micro-credentials.

The fee for a micro-credential can be reduced if the micro-credential is taught to students at any of the micro-credential-providing universities as part of their regular study programme. If one of the providing universities does not charge fees, it must inform the micro-credential coordinator in good time.

6. STUDENTS AND LEARNERS ADMINISTRATION, CERTIFICATION AND VERIFICATION OF COMPETENCIES

The micro-credential coordinating provider is responsible for all administration related to students and learners. The micro-credential agreement describes a detailed procedure.

After completing an Alliance micro-credential, students and learners are awarded a digital certificate issued by the coordinating provider on behalf of all providers involved in the micro-credential. The certificate is issued after student performance data is submitted to the coordinating provider's internal system and the Arqus IT platforms.

The coordinating provider is responsible for issuing certificates with the necessary metadata and a unique identifier. The learner accesses their digital credential through a digital wallet. Employers or educational institutions verify the credentials using a secure QR code.

All student and learner records are securely stored on the coordinating provider's and Arqus's IT platforms.

⁵ Or other provider if agreed differently

7. PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION

All micro-credentials prepared within the Alliance are publicly available in the Arqus Course Catalogue or the Arqus LLL Catalogue. Each provider is responsible for advertising them to potential students and learners via different platforms, including online education portals, professional networks, or social media.

Effective communication strategies, such as webinars, workshops, and collaborations with external partners, further enhance the reach and acceptance of micro-credentials, ultimately fostering a culture of continuous learning and skill development.

8. QA PROCEDURES

Quality Assurance procedures play a crucial role in maintaining and ensuring the quality of micro-credentials. At the Alliance level, the prepared micro-credentials should meet the established standards of excellence and quality characteristics provided in the **Internal Quality Assurance System for the Arqus Alliance**.

Micro-credentials that fulfil the criteria outlined in the Guidelines for Awarding the Arqus Label may be awarded the Arqus label as a seal of excellence in their information and promotional materials.

Students and learners that fulfil the criteria outlined in the **Framework for Awarding Arqus Mention** may be awarded the Arqus Mention to highlight their international experiences, professional performance, and skills, serving as testimony to their active and successful participation in innovative learning experiences within Arqus.

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