

ASEM Expert Group Digitalisation – Meeting Minutes 17 March 2022

Welcome and introduction

- David Akrami Flores, Head of Section at DAAD, welcomes all experts.
- With the start of the new working period DAAD sent out a new call to all member countries and stakeholder organisations in order to nominate experts for the group. David especially welcomes all experts who are participating in an EG Digitalisation meeting for the first time.
- At ASEMME8 in December 2021 the ASEM Ministers of Education emphasized that a continued dialogue on the opportunities and challenges of digitalisation in education and the exchange of good practices in digitally enhanced education is important and should be continued.
- Within the framework of this EG the group wants to contribute to this dialogue.
- In order to structure the dialogue, a thematic focus for each meeting will be set and experts/ project leaders will be invited to present their initiatives and share their experiences. Hence the focus of the meetings will be on peer learning. Once the next Ministerial Meeting approaches, the possibility of updating the Working Paper or drafting some other input for the Ministerial Meeting can be reviewed.

Presentation and adoption of Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Expert Group

- Nina Knops briefly presents the draft ToR.
- New members will be added to the list of participating organisations.
- Group members are asked to contact Nina at asem@daad.de in case their institution is missing from the list of participating organisations.
- The ToR are accepted by the group.

Wrap-up

- The coordinator will send a slido link to the members in order to collect proposals for the thematic focus of the next meeting in October. The slido link will be send to the members together with the meeting minutes.

Peer learning exchange on micro-credentials

Introduction to the European approach to Micro-credentials and the Council Recommendation on Micro-credentials, results of the Microbol project

Frederik de Decker, Ghent University, Belgium

EU Council Recommendation on Micro-credentials

- The Recommendation offers a framework to European member countries on how to approach and develop micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability. This approach is embedded in a larger EU agenda which focuses on upskilling and reskilling the workforce. The framework includes all types of providers of micro-credentials (also non-formal providers).

- The Recommendation focuses on offering a common definition and standard elements of how micro-credentials should be used in Europe. The **aim is to establish a common language on how to develop micro-credentials**.
- Definition of a micro-credential: the micro-credential is the record of the learning outcomes the learner has acquired; micro-credentials have to be assessed and quality assured; they are owned by the learner; the learner can decide to share the credential and combine it to a larger credential (stackability).

Microbol (Erasmus+ project)

- The aim of this project is to examine to what extent micro-credentials can be linked to the Bologna key commitments. The project hence looks at micro-credentials from a higher education perspective.
- Desk research by EUA has shown that the understanding of what a micro-credential could be differs a lot even within HEIs.
- Microbol micro-credentials definition: micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, competence or skills; they are small learning units and can rapidly respond to the needs of the learners as well as to that of the labour market; the learner owns the micro-credential; the micro-credential can be combined to a larger credential.
- Collaboration is an important aspect in developing micro-credentials, particularly collaboration between formal and non-formal education providers.

Recommendations of Microbol

- Micro-credentials can be a lever for HEIs with regard to their role in lifelong learning.
- HEIs need a better understanding of what a micro-credential is. There should be agreement/ a common language on how a micro-credential is defined.
- Digitalisation is a crucial element in the success of micro-credentials.
- Micro-credentials need to be quality assured (internal and external QA).
- The Lisbon Recognition Convention can and should be applied to micro-credentials.

Discussion

- ➔ Micro-credential providers (formal and non-formal) need to come to an agreement on the essential elements of a micro-credential in order to avoid challenges with regard to recognition. If a private provider offers a micro-credential without an indication of the workload, no clear description of the learning outcomes etc. the owner of the micro-credential will be confronted with problems. Hence cooperation and a common language are crucial. Formal education providers need to share their knowledge with other providers.
- ➔ Micro-credentials can be helpful instruments for upskilling and reskilling and are hence not limited to the HE sector (they are level agnostic). The initiative of the EU Commission is very broad in referring to micro-credentials, it does not distinguish between micro-credentials in HE and the VET sector. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to position every micro-credential at a certain level within a qualifications framework.
- ➔ What is the advantage of the so called "stackability of micro-credentials, if micro-credentials (according to the EU Commission) should not replace regular degree programmes?
- Example Flanders: For all courses that are part of a BA or MA degree students receive a credit certificate which fulfils the criteria of a micro-credential. Credit certificates from one degree programme can be used as elements of another programme and they fully count to the number of ECTS a student has earned. These certificates can be stacked together with other parts of courses to a broader programme. The institution that issues

the degree programme is responsible for the totality of the certificates which are stacked.

SkillsFuture Singapore

Dr. Gog Soon Joo

- SkillsFuture Singapore is a government agency. The initiative focuses on reskilling and upskilling the workforce and aims at shaping the society in terms of valuing skills more than qualifications. A further aim is to react fast to skills demands and avoid a skills gap.
- Singapore does not have a national qualifications system, but it has a national skills system. This taxonomy can anticipate the skills of the future.
- The mandates of the agency: 1.) Accelerate the process of identifying a skills need for the future economy and ensuring that workers have acquired and can apply this skill; 2.) Remove barriers to reskilling and upskilling (defray the financial barrier and provide subsidies, remove the informational barrier and help the workforce understand which skills they need in order to move forward); 3.) Ensure a high quality and innovative skills ecosystem (quality assurance of the courses, regular surveys).
- The identified skills are shared with key partners (industry, HEIs, training providers) in order to ensure that stakeholders know where and which skills will be needed. The agency also works with private course providers (e.g. big companies like Microsoft, Google).
- COVID-19 pandemic -> in order to make sure that graduates of the classes 2020 and 2021 did not suffer from unemployment, Singapore started an initiative which is focused on quickly creating jobs e.g. traineeships subsidised by the government in the public as well as the private sector.
- Work-study programme -> The programme requires education institutions to rethink how they want to design their pedagogy and their learning design. HEIs must allow that 2/3 of the learning time is taking place at the workplace and 1/3 of the learning time is taking place at the institution. This approach requires rethinking of what a credential is, because a lot of the learning is happening outside the institution.

Discussion

- ➔ Which quality criteria does SkillsFuture apply when identifying provider partners?
 - Does the provider have the expertise in a specific area?
 - How established is the provider?
 - The application base -> does the pedagogy allow individual learners to apply the learning quickly? Can the learning be applied in the workplace?
- ➔ Certification is important, but it is not the most crucial part of the process. The allotted credential tells the employer what a learner has achieved, but most importantly the employee must be able to articulate its skills.
- ➔ Does FutureSkills Singapore have a database in which it validates all credentials that have been issued to participants?
 - Within the SkillsFuture Portal a skills passport exists. All past education of a learner is recorded in this database. It needs improvement in terms of showing the skills of learners.

Digital Mobil

Dr. Juana Salas Poblete and Maximilian Köster, University of Applied Sciences Bielefeld, Germany

- DAAD-funded project, fully operational since January 2020.

- Objective of the programme- > to provide international experiences for all students by combining digitalisation and internationalisation.
- Four fields of action: 1.) develop an international double-degree programme; 2.) transnational teaching (support teachers in virtual exchange course design); 3.) digital infrastructure (linking learning management systems of the partner universities); 4.) simplifying administrative processes.

Micro-credentials programme within Digital Mobil

- The micro-credentials programme has allowed students from FH Bielefeld to gain competences certified in a micro-credential with the possibility of gaining international experience.
- Courses at a low threshold (remote, free of charge, easy enrolment process) which are open to students at FH Bielefeld and to students from partner universities.
- Courses which are offered as micro-credentials already exist at FH Bielefeld and the partner universities. The courses are all online and taught in English. Students get credit points for passing the courses and receive a transcript of records. The credit points are recognised at the student's home institution.
- The transcript of records assures that the course is quality assured, it makes transparent what has been taught in the course (module description).
- To make the courses at FH Bielefeld more attractive to students abroad, the university created a new enrolment status for digital students abroad (lowering the administrative burden for students).
- At FH Bielefeld the offer of micro-credentials was particularly popular among students from work-integrated study programmes.
- Not all students asked for recognition of the credit points. Some students simply select the courses out of interest as they want to gain knowledge (and a certificate for passing the course).

Guiding questions for setting up a micro-credential programme

- Which accredited courses can be offered at your university for virtual students abroad? (not all courses are applicable in this context)
- Can we enrol virtual students from abroad and possibly free of charge? (which administrative hurdles need to be taken?)
- Who can offer support for virtual incoming students?

Micro-credential Programme KMUTT, Thailand

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bundit Thipakorn, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Thailand

- Micro-credentials offer a way for learners to acquire new competences quickly throughout life. They offer personalised and on-demand education.
- Definition micro-credential: a new credential that is situated between a university credential and a professional certificate; a credential that relates to competences and skills.
- Verifying micro-credentials -> at KMUTT the credibility of a micro-credential is not linked to credit hours or the hours students spend in class. Learners must provide evidence that they have acquired a skill/ knowledge in order to earn a micro-credential. At KMUTT micro-credentials are labelled as a "non-degree". They offer an alternative pathway in order to gain more knowledge and skills.

- KMUTT4Life -> offers a customer-centric learning system for life. Learners choose their own pathway and have the opportunity to learn throughout their whole life.
- Micro-credential eco-system -> the learner earns a micro-credential which is issued by KMUTT. The most important part in this eco-system is the process of recognition. The recogniser can for example be a big company which is keen on the competences of the micro-credential holder. Currently KMUTT cannot offer a huge amount of micro-credentials because the amount of staff that is willing to offer micro-credential courses is low.
- KMUTT uses digital badges for its micro-credentials. These digital badges are collected in the platform "Accredible" (a platform which is used by many different universities and companies).

Discussion

- ➔ Establishing an open degree
- KMUTT is experimenting with two systems: 1.) the degree programme and 2.) the non-degree path (offering micro-credentials). KMUTT4Life offers the opportunity that learners do not have to earn a degree within two or four years, they can take a course whenever they need to learn a new skill or gain knowledge in a specific field.