



QualityLink

# Quality Domains and Indicators

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## Authors

Elena Trepulé (EDEN), Rimantė Čepauskienė (EDEN), Christopher Braun (DHBW), Colin Tück (KIC)

## Contributors

EUF, Mondragon

## Layout

Nuša Karo

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2 - Semantic Mapping of Quality Metrics and Sources in Higher Education

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# 1 Micro-Credential Definition

QualityLink aggregates quality indicators on learning opportunities leading to micro-credentials as defined in the EU Council Recommendation, i.e. a “record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs.”

# 2 Minimum Metadata

Not all the courses should feature in the clearing house, but only those for which reliable metadata is available. Metadata should consist of the mandatory and optional elements of a micro-credential description (see Annex 1 of the Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability;

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf>)

Beyond this minimum metadata, the QualityLink data standards should also encourage providers to publish additional information that may be essential for potential learners, such as the costs of the course or possible starting dates.

# 3 Reference Points and Examples

Other relevant projects/initiatives that define quality indicators for micro-credentials:

- Annex 2 of the Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf>)
- Micro-Evaluator Nuffic (<https://www.nuffic.nl/en/subjects/recognition-projects/the-micro-evaluator>)

# 4 Possible Quality Domains and Indicators for Courses and Micro-Credentials

The following sections outline 5 quality domains that represent different aspects/facets of quality of a course (such as skills intelligence, accreditation information, student evaluations, employer demand etc) together with a description of why they are relevant.

For each of the quality domains, the document provides 2-5 distinct indicators that may be useful in measuring quality under each domain, following initial SMART evaluation.

## 4.1 Content Relevance, Labour Market Demand and Accuracy

### 4.1.1 Relevance

The quality of a course depends on the relevance and accuracy of its content. Courses aligned with employer demand focus on teaching skills and knowledge that are currently sought after in the job market. This helps increase students'/learners' employability. Since information can quickly become obsolete or superseded by new findings, courses need to be updated on a regular basis. When the workforce possesses skills that align with industry demands, industries can contribute to innovation, productivity and competitiveness, thus fostering economic growth.

### 4.1.2 Description and key questions

- Assess whether the course content is up-to-date, accurate, and relevant to the subject matter.
- What is the EQF level of the course?
- Ensure that the information provided is credible and supported by evidence.
- Ensure that the course aligns with European ethical standards.
- Is the course relevant for society (e. g for the green and digital transformation)? Does it cover topics that might be of interest to the student (intrinsic motivation)?
- Does the courses align with employer demand, does it focus on teaching skills and knowledge that are currently sought after in the job market?

### 4.1.3 Indicators

Indicator	Possible sources	Measurable?
Accurate and up-to-date information	Intended skills/learning outcomes published by the micro-credential provider	Are learning outcomes published using a standard ontology such as ESCO? (yes/no)
Demand for skills in micro-	Skills forecast from Cedefop (Skills Intelligence, Skills-	Level of similarity of micro-credential skills/learning

credentials	OVATE, Skills Forecast), individual researchers, IT companies, etc.	outcomes with those identified in forecasts (numeric scale, prerequisite: both skill sets identified with standard ontology, or use of a mapping service)
Specific requests for skills / micro-credentials	Job postings	As above, in most cases a mapping service/tool would be needed as few job postings use ESCO
Stackability	Other education providers	Number of known further learning pathways (e.g. possibilities to stack this specific micro-credentials together with other ones to a larger credential or full degree) and number of education providers that offer these pathways (numeric)
Additional QA / Labels	Label owners - for example EQUIS, AACSB, EUR-ACE, Euro-Inf, etc.	Has a specific label been awarded to the micro-credential, a larger programme it is part of, or the provider offering it? (yes/no)
Quality Assurance (ESG)	(QA deals with how learning outcomes match the EQF level - details see next domain)	EQF level indicated in DEQAR - for programme-level external QA - or by the provider - for institution-level external QA (categorical)

## 4.2 Teaching Methods and Pedagogy

### 4.2.1 Relevance

Effective teaching methods facilitate learning and, thereby, increase the quality of the course. If learning, teaching and assessment methods are fit for purpose in light of the course objectives/learning outcomes, it means the described objectives are reliable and realistic.

### 4.2.2 Description and key questions

- Are the teaching methods employed, such as lectures, interactive sessions, case studies, or practical exercises, fit for purpose in light of the course objectives.

- Evaluate whether the course clearly defines its learning objectives and whether these objectives are met by the end of the course.
- Assess the knowledge and skills participants acquire.
- Assess the level of engagement and interactivity within the course, including discussions, group activities, and feedback mechanisms.
- Evaluate the instructor's expertise, teaching style, responsiveness to queries, and overall support provided to learners.
- Review the assessment methods used in the course, including quizzes, exams, projects, or assignments.
- Assess the quality and variety of resources provided, such as readings, videos, simulations, or supplementary materials. Evaluate whether these resources enhance understanding and learning.
- Assess the time the student will need to successfully complete the course and if the offer is flexible in terms of time management (synchronous vs. asynchronous, online vs. hybrid vs. on-site)

### 4.2.3 Indicators

Indicator	Possible sources	Measurable?
Quality Assurance (ESG)	Based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) - results from the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR, <a href="https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/search/by-institution/">https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/search/by-institution/</a> )	Are the ESG guidelines followed? (Yes/No)  Is the learning provider registered in DEQAR? (Yes/No)
Platform QA	Based on lists of courses that met the QA / Eligibility Policies of major platforms (Coursera, EDX, etc.)	The level of conformity to the policies of the major platforms.
Active methodologies	Published by providers themselves	List of active learning methodologies used (categorical - e.g. challenge-based learning, project-based learning, etc...)

Tutoring	Published by providers themselves	Availability of tutoring or mentoring (yes/no)
Student/staff ratio	European Tertiary Education Register (ETER), future European Higher Education Sector Observatory (EHESO)	The ratio of students per academic staff (numeric)
Assessment methods used	Published by providers themselves, part of standard metadata	The provision of exhaustive information on assessment methods
Virtual learning environment available	Based on the course description information on the availability of VLE.	The presence of information on VLE

## 4.3 Accessibility and Inclusivity

### 4.3.1 Relevance

Courses of high quality foster an inclusive learning environment. Moreover, it is a declared policy goal of the EHEA to make higher education more inclusive. It is important for diverse learners to be able to gauge whether a course is likely to cater for their needs.

### 4.3.2 Description and key questions

- Evaluate whether the course is accessible to diverse learners, including those with disabilities/special needs?

### 4.3.3 Indicators

Indicator	Possible sources	Measurable?
Make-up/diversity of the student body	Data self-published by the provider, from social surveys (such as Eurostudent or national surveys), ETER/EHESO	Measurable by specific proxies, e.g. ratio of mature students (numeric) or ratio of students from a disadvantaged socio-economic background (numeric)
Recognition of prior learning	Information by the provider on its policies for recognition/validation of non-formal and informal learning	Although recognition policies cannot be measured, one can identify recognition policies and compare them across the



	towards the micro-credential	providers
Learner support services	Data self-published by the provider	One can determine if the course provider offers learner support services, and if so, which services are available.
Eligibility for grants / loans	Data self-published by the provider	One can determine if the course provider offers grants or loans, and if so, compare the conditions of the grants or loans.

## 4.4 Learner-Centred Approach, Satisfaction and Success

### 4.4.1 Relevance

Student satisfaction is an important indicator of the quality of a course.

### 4.4.2 Description and key questions

- Gather feedback from students about their satisfaction with the course.
- Consider metrics such as completion rates, grade distribution, success in meeting learning goals, and overall student experience.
- Is the course designed to meet the needs of the target group of learners?
- Are learners involved in the internal and external quality assurance processes? Is their feedback taken into account as part of the continuous improvement of the micro-credential?

### 4.4.3 Indicators

Indicator	Possible sources	Measurable?
Student ratings	Published by the provider itself (with micro-credentials) Published by third-party portals	The score of rating
Graduation rate	ETER/EHESO	The ratio of students that successfully graduate (numeric)
Student ratings of	From websites like Rate my	The rating score

educators	professors	
Student/graduate performance	Graduate tracking data published by the provider or from external sources such as LinkedIn	Information on graduate achievements, e.g. percentage of graduates who changed or upgraded their career within a set times from completing the MC
Grade distribution	Published by the provider, possibly using ELM or EWP standards	Described as grade distribution table following ECTS Users' Guide practices (numeric)
Course description	If a learner-centred approach is taken into consideration in the course description	The quality of course description information on approach used.

## 4.5 Institutional Reputation

### 4.5.1 Relevance

The reputation of the institution and of the specific course are both important for learner choice. Even though the institutional reputation might not be directly indicative for the specific course, it is often a relevant factor when learners or employers make choices.

### 4.5.2 Description and key questions

- Ranking
- Expertise of lecturers
- Rating of other providers
- How many websites link to the site / course?

### 4.5.3 Indicators

Indicator	Possible sources	Measurable?
Expertise of Lecturers	Information on lecturers made available by providers, matched against LinkedIn or Scholarly Profiles	Number of scientific publications (numeric) Relevance of lecturers' skills to learning outcomes of the course

Ranking	Consult Multirank / THES / Pearson / QS	Rank of the provider in the specific ranking (numeric)
Networks	Membership lists of relevant networks	Whether provider is a member (yes/no)
Recognition history (direct)	Information on HEIs that have recognised the specific micro-credential, published by HEIs themselves or possibly via existing projects such as <a href="#">Plattform für Inter*nationale Studierendenmobilität (PIM)</a>	Number of HEIs that have recognised the micro-credential, e.g. towards a larger degree programme (numeric, plus links to additional information)
Recognition history (skills)	Information on skills that have been recognised towards a degree programme, published by HEIs themselves or via projects such as <a href="#">DAbeKom - Datenbank zur Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen</a>	Number of HEIs that have previously recognised the skills provided by the micro-credential, e.g. through recognition of prior learning (numeric, plus links to additional information)

## 5 Validation with Target Groups

The quality domains and indicators will be validated with these target groups:

- Students
- Lifelong Learners
- HEIs and education providers
- Employers

The validation will be carried out in the form of focus groups and an online survey.