

Using the development of micro-credentials to improve diplomas and degrees

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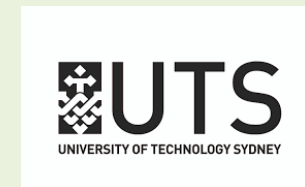
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My context

- Deakin University
 - founded as both a f2f and distance university
 - A third of ~50,000 students study in the cloud
 - One of the most innovative universities in Australia with high student satisfaction
 - A pioneer in the integration of digital learning
- My centre undertakes research on assessment and digital learning in higher education

Outline

1. What are micro-credentials?
2. What is the problem micro-credentials are meant to address?
3. What strategies have been adopted?
4. What are some mistakes of early adopters?

Q&A

5. The requirements of any assessment
6. Articulating micro-credentials with existing qualifications?
7. Serious implications for existing programs

Q&A

8. What do we need to make micro-credentials work as credentials?
9. Implications for existing qualifications

Q&A

Takeaways

- Micro-credentials have much to offer, but we need to question them more robustly
- Their big potential is in articulation into more substantial credentials
- A focus on micro-credentials exposes worrying features of existing qualifications
- We need to ensure both micro- and macro-credentials meet threshold standards of quality



Making micro-credentials work *for learners, employers and providers*

Emeritus Professor Beverley Oliver
Deakin University

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1. What are micro-credentials?

“Micro-credentials are mini-qualifications that demonstrate skills, knowledge, and/or experience in a given subject area or capability. [They] tend to be narrower in range than traditional qualifications like diplomas or degrees.”

Represented as digital credentials that can be attached to LinkedIn profiles or CVs. Clicking on them shows the learning outcomes attained, how they were validated and by which organisation.

What is essentially needed for a micro-credential?

- A claim for what a micro-credential will offer
- A limited program of study (in any form, context or environment)
- A form of assessment that judges whether the claim has been met by the learner
- A way of communicating what has been attained

2. What problems are they meant to address?

- Degrees and diplomas are too long. Many learners only want parts of them and don't want to enrol in an entire program
- Learners want formal recognition for brief periods of study
- Providers want to attract learners to larger programs through taster units of activity without locking in a prior commitment

3. What useful approaches have been adopted?

- Avoid free-standing micro-credentials that don't articulate with anything
- Design them to be stackable, ie. they can be added together in coherent ways to
 - form a substantial award of their own, or
 - be part of a pathway to lead to a conventional credential.

4. Some mistakes of early adopters

- Turning anything that moves into a micro-credential as a cheap marketing device
- Badging trivial amounts of study
- Splitting existing course units into incoherent sub-sets
- Not thinking through the consequences for stackability and linking with existing credentials
- Neglecting what is needed for assessment (the outcomes of any kind of credential must be assured)
- Overlooking the resource demands of providing units whose costs can't be met from the income

Pause for Q&A

5. The requirements of any assessment

As part of the world-wide move towards a standards-based framework for any qualification:

- Statement of the learning outcomes or competencies being addressed
- What standards and criteria will be used for assessment purposes?
- What processes will assure that learning outcomes or competencies have been met at a threshold level for all successful completions?
- How will individual achievements be represented in a transparent form?

6. Articulation with existing qualifications

- How will the micro-credential articulate with other credentials? Not doing so up-front generates many problems
- What is the minimum size of a micro-credential—not too too small. How many micros fit into a macro?
- Don't have different sized micro-units—they become difficult to combine
- Create conversion tables—what combination of micros is needed for what kind of equivalent?

An example:

Using or splitting an existing course unit

- Are there clearly identifiable learning outcomes or competencies for each part?
- Are the different learning outcomes able to be separated?
 - For instruction, for assessment purposes?
- Will they fit together again?
- Will anyone want to do all the parts?

Big issues for existing programs

- Do all existing course units have clearly defined learning outcomes or competencies to indicate what a learner will do for successful completion?
- Is the threshold—minimum standard—for successful achievement for each clearly defined?
- Does the assessment ensure that all graduates of the unit meet the minimum requirements for all outcomes?

Pause for Q&A

8. What do we need to make micro-credentials/ macro-credentials work as credentials?

- Each element needs to be mapped on to the learning outcomes/competencies of an overall program
- All specified learning outcomes are met
- Assessment assures that all outcomes are met for both

9. Implications for existing qualifications

- Are they described in terms of limited numbers of learning outcomes/competencies?
- Is the attainment of all specified outcomes assured through distinct assessments?
- Do the learning outcomes/competencies of each part of the qualification map directly on to the overall learning outcomes/competencies?
- Are student results recorded for each learning outcome/competency and not by course/credential?

So what?

- Micro-credentials, if well-designed, provide a fundamental challenge to existing course design
- They reveal how poorly constructed existing qualifications are
- Do we take our sloppy design of mainstream awards into micro-credentials, in which case they will be worthless?
- Or do we use this as a wake-up call to take assessment more seriously and work out what assessment is really trying to do?

Final Q&As

Takeaways

- Micro-credentials have much to offer, but we need to question them more robustly
- Their big potential is in articulation into more substantial credentials
- A focus on micro-credentials exposes worrying features of existing qualifications
- We need to ensure both micro- and macro-credentials meet threshold standards of quality

References

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Legal obligations will proliferate, for example:

‘These Standards represent the minimum acceptable requirements for the provision of higher education in or from Australia by higher education providers registered under the TEQSA Act 2011.’

‘1.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment

The expected learning outcomes for each course of study are specified, consistent with the level and field of education of the qualification awarded, and informed by national and international comparators.

...

Methods of assessment are consistent with the learning outcomes being assessed, are capable of confirming that all specified learning outcomes are achieved and that grades awarded reflect the level of student attainment.