

# Framework for Joint Una Europa Micro-credentials



Task 10.3 Una.Futura Work Package 10 'Building the Backbone of the European Campus'

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# 1 Objective of the framework

The aim of this framework is to align the development and implementation of new courses leading to joint Una Europa micro-credentials. The framework sets the definition of Una Europa micro-credentials, describes the processes and workflows, and identifies the responsible actors.

The framework consists of the following building blocks:

1. Definition and description of Una Europa joint micro-credentials.
2. The processes from establishing the course to issuing the joint micro-credential. This section covers needs analysis, course design, and assessment modality selection. It also includes guidelines related to the financial model of the micro-credential, the workflows related to (joint) student administration and the recruitment strategy.
3. Quality Assurance. This segment addresses how we can ensure the quality of courses leading to a joint micro-credential.
4. Legal Requirements. The fourth part outlines the essential commitments from all partners regarding the creation of joint micro-credentials. These commitments need to be agreed upon by all partners in a Consortium Agreement.

# 2 Description of an Una Europa micro-credential

## 2.1 European definition

In a rapidly changing world, new skills and competences are essential. To deliver knowledge, skills and competences that meet current personal, societal and labour market needs, the European Union emphasizes the crucial role of lifelong learning and 'micro-credentials'. As part of the European Skills Agenda, the Council of the European Union has adopted a recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability. The European approach to micro-credentials provides a common definition:

“A micro-credential is the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined standards. Courses 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. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be standalone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.”<sup>1</sup>

The European standard elements to describe a micro-credential include the following eleven mandatory elements:

1. identification of the learner
2. title of the micro-credential
3. country(ies)/region(s) of the issuer
4. awarding body(ies)
5. date of issuing
6. learning outcomes
7. notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System – ECTS, wherever possible)
8. level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (European Qualifications Framework, Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area), if applicable
9. type of assessment
10. form of participation in the learning activity
11. type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential

According to the definition, micro-credentials are not considered as educational formats. Instead they represent the record of learning outcomes after a small volume of learning. However, the term micro-credential has quickly gained attention in higher education, as well as in vocational education and training (VET), being used for both the learning format and the credential issued after successfully completing the learning format. This means that you can pursue a micro-credential (i.e. educational format) and also earn a micro-credential (i.e. credential).

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<sup>1</sup> Council of the European Union (2022). Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability – Adoption. *Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council.*

## 2.2 Requirements for Una Europa micro-credentials

In this framework we adhere to the definition of micro-credentials outlined in the European approach. However, the purpose of the framework is broader: the objective of this framework is to facilitate the development and implementation of new courses that lead to micro-credentials within the Una Europa alliance. In essence the framework outlines processes, workflows and guidelines for courses that offer credentials, measured in ECTS.

Three key considerations must be taken into account when applying this approach:

1. **Small volume of learning.** The European Council Recommendation does not specify a precise duration for micro-credentials. They only point at ‘a small volume of learning’. Ongoing national discussions indicate that defining a precise duration and volume remains a topic of debate. In the Una Europa framework, we refrain from imposing additional restrictions, especially considering the ongoing national discussions.<sup>2</sup> A fixed amount of ECTS for Joint Una Europa micro-credentials is not specified.

Requirements regarding amount of credits for micro-credentials (dd. September 2024) : <b><i>Under Review</i></b>		
Country	Institution	Requirements regarding minimum and maximum amount of credits
Germany	Freie Universität Berlin	No national legal regulations regarding the minimum and maximum for Micro-credentials. However, a module (comprising a set of courses) within an existing degree programme should be at least 5 ECTS.
Italy	Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna	At present no national or institutional requirements regarding the amount of credits. At Unibo there is an ongoing project about micro-credentials which should end with the development of a model.
Ireland	University College Dublin	UCD Context NFQ L8 and L9 2.5 (level 9 only), 5 and 10 ECTS- The majority are 5 with a few 2.5 and only 4 are 10 credit.

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<sup>2</sup> Public policies for effective micro-credential learning, *OECD* (2023): “(...) a general trend is to have relatively broad definitions that identify upper and lower bounds. For instance, in Australia, the size range of micro-credentials is from a minimum volume of learning of one hour to less than an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) award qualification. Similarly, in Ireland and the Netherlands, micro-credentials are considered to be between 1-30, and 3-30 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) respectively”

		<p>National MicroCreds Project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Level 6-9 on National Framework of Qualifications</li> <li>• Credits in the range of 1-30 ECTS</li> <li>• Our micro-credentials are underpinned by quality assured teaching, learning and assessment</li> <li>• Some micro-credentials may be stacked into larger credentials over time</li> </ul>
Scotland	University of Edinburgh	No UK-wide restriction on upper and lower limits on module size, but most micro-credentials are between 5-40 credits. The total number of credits should be below what would normally constitute an award in its own right according to the Qualifications Frameworks.
Finland	Helsingin yliopisto	No national or legal requirements, nor institutional ones (at least not for the time being).
Poland	Uniwersytet Jagielloński	No national or legal requirements, nor institutional ones (at least not for the time being).
The Netherlands	Universiteit Leiden	No formal national law yet. Pilot running with a 3-30 ECTS range. Universiteit Leiden prefers a 15 ECTS maximum. Under debate whether minimum in pilot should be lowered to 1 ECTS.
Belgium	KU Leuven	No national legal requirements regarding the minimum and maximum. However, a course within an existing degree program should be at least 3 ECTS.
Spain	Universidad Complutense de Madrid	National decree: Less than 15 ECTS
France	Université Paris 1 Panthéon – Sorbonne	No national or legal requirements, nor institutional ones (at least not for the time being).
Switzerland	Universität Zürich	Micro-credentials should be provided at UZH, particularly at the continuing education level; in discussions with Swiss universities, UZH is working towards increasing the upper limit from 9 to 25

		ECTS so that CAS programmes can also be included under this new universal label.
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2. **Marketing Strategy.** This document provides guidelines for all short courses leading to credentials (meeting the minimal requirements – see below) irrespective of whether they are marketed as micro-credentials ('Una.Micro') towards learners. The decision on whether to market a short course leading to a credential as an Una.Micro 'micro-credential' will be addressed in the 'recruitment strategy' section.
3. **Target Audience.** Courses leading to credentials can be offered to various target groups. When developing a new course, it is crucial to contemplate the target audience. Una Europa joint micro-credentials, may focus on Una Europa students or be extended to a broader audience, including professionals, or life-long learners. Aligning with the European approach on micro-credentials, which aims to narrow the skills gap for lifelong learners, it is vital to ensure that the necessary procedures are in place for each micro-credential's target audience within this framework. (For target audience: see also below).

In addition to the suggested approach outlined above (which encompasses processes, workflows and guidelines for courses leading to credentials), **there are minimal requirements for Joint Una Europa micro-credentials:**

- They are credit-bearing (are measured in ECTS)
- They are associated with one of Una Europa's focus areas, and consequently, they highly value interdisciplinary approaches.
- The learning outcomes are aligned with a level of the European Qualifications Framework.
- They are created by at least 3 Una Europa universities
- They offer teaching and learning opportunities in several languages as much as possible.
- They are flexible and designed according to the needs of the target audience.
- If relevant and applicable they can be stackable into larger credentials (for ex. within a degree programme offered in one of the Una Europa member universities).
- They include an assessment of the learning.
- They are underpinned by quality assurance processes.
- They are leading to the award of a joint certificate, containing all elements listed in the Council Recommendation (i.e. identification of the learner, title of the micro-credential, country of the issuer, awarding body, date of issuing, learning outcomes, notional workload in ECTS, level (and cycle) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (based on EQF), type of assessment, form of participation in the learning activity and type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential).

To qualify as a joint Una Europa micro-credential, adherence to these minimal requirements and principles is needed. Existing educational formats such as Summer Schools, Winter Schools and lifelong learning certificates that adhere to the requirements and are credit-bearing can be considered as 'micro-credentials' and utilize the guidelines and processes that are being described in this framework.



## 2.3 Added value

### *Added value of micro-credentials in an international context*

Micro-credentials can have several benefits for higher education institutions, including attracting new target groups. Specifically in an international context, two key elements 'recognition' and 'clarity' are of importance.

The European approach towards micro-credentials plays a role in harmonizing educational systems and promoting mobility across European member states. Therefore, micro-credentials provide several advantages:

- EU-wide recognition. Micro-credentials serve as the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning (cfr. European Approach). By adhering to the common European framework, these credentials meet specific standards enabling their recognition across borders. This recognition supports learners in reskilling or changing career paths within Europe.
- Clarity for Learners. Across several Member States the term 'micro-credential' is being used both for the short course as well as the associated credentials. The proliferation of the term 'micro-credentials' across borders (adhering to the same criteria of the European approach) can facilitate the understanding of 'micro-credentials' by learners.

### *Added value of micro-credentials created in the Una Europa alliance*

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, micro-credentials within Una Europa hold the following assigned value in serving various purposes and objectives:

- Upskill or reskill professionals and the society on emerging skills of direct use for the labour market
- Transfer the most recent knowledge on a specific topic (based on the research developed within the research intensive higher education institutions of Una Europa) to a broad audience
- Contribute to the professional, personal and/or cultural development of learners
- Internationalise and contribute to the interdisciplinarity of the curriculum of degree-seeking students at Una Europa universities
- Bridge Una Europa degrees and jointly attract learners to university
- Deepen and broaden academic collaboration between Una Europa member institutions through joint programmes and joint collaborative online international learning activities (COIL)

Further, Una Europa micro-credentials are developed according to Una Europa guiding questions which are,

- To promote and stimulate multilingualism;
- To facilitate multidisciplinary education;
- To foster integration between education, research and innovation;
- To create an international learning space in which physical and virtual presence are seamlessly integrated;
- To stimulate and integrate peer-to-peer learning and collaboration;
- To involve local communities in the educational practice;
- To stimulate active and deep-level learning by implementing high impact pedagogies (e.g. student co-creation, service-learning, internships).

And they contribute to Una Europa general learning goals, which are:

- The development of European common values;
- The development of a set of transversal skills:

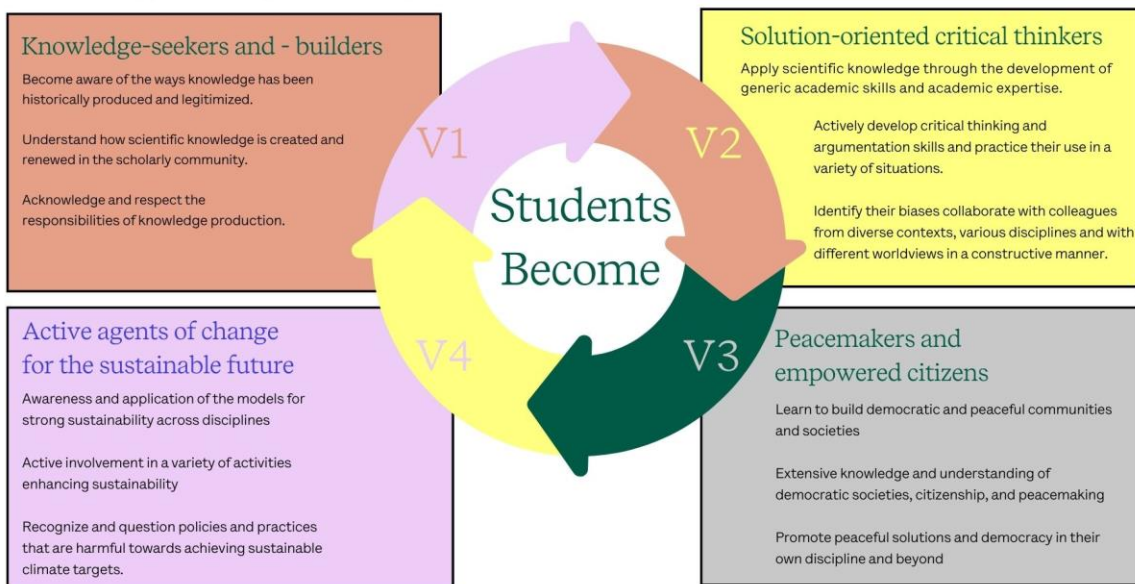
- intercultural awareness
- problem solving and critical thinking,
- entrepreneurial skills
- social skills
- civic and global skills.

Micro-credentials should also be developed according to the guiding principles of the vision for student-centred and research driving teaching and learning informed by cultural and linguistic awareness:

1. Students as knowledge-seekers and knowledge builders
2. Students as solution-oriented critical thinkers
3. Students as peacemakers and empowered citizens
4. Students as active agents of change for the sustainable future

Figure 1. Vision guiding principles and corresponding general learning objectives

## Vision guiding principles



# 3 Micro-credentials: from idea through issuance to the recognition of joint micro-credentials

## 3.1 General procedure to develop new joint educational formats within Una Europa

To support the collaborative design and effective development of new joint educational formats across the alliance, Una Europa has defined structures and workflows. These structures and workflows also apply for the development of joint Una Europa micro-credentials.

Obtaining Una Europa approval to start designing a new joint Una Europa micro-credential:

- Joint Una Europa micro-credentials that were listed within the Self-Steering Committees' strategies and action plans, are already approved by the Una.Futura Executive Committee. The development of these educational activities can immediately start and benefit from the Una Europa support structures and services.
- Additional joint Una Europa micro-credentials, that were not listed in the Self-steering Committees' action plans, could also be developed and supported by Una Europa. The interested Self-steering Committees shall inform the relevant Una.Futura WP lead of their intention, who will then inform the relevant Una Europa groups of the Self-steering Committee's plan.

Work Package	Contact details (dd. November 2024)
WP4 – Una Europa for Researchers	una-europa@bb.leidenuniv.nl
WP5 – Una Europa for Learners	Amandine.duraz@universite-paris1.fr
WP6 – Una Europa for Society	unaeuropa@zedat.fu-berlin.de

The development of new Una Europa joint micro-credentials shall happen through 4 steps:

- Creation of a Project Team: the Project Team consists of academics from at least 3 different Una Europa partners and the relevant professional staff from the lead university (local Una Europa staff, local members of clusters of professionals, local representative in the micro-credential project team, communications leads, etc.).
- Conceptualisation of the project: the Project Team shall draft a "project format", outlining roughly the main characteristics of the envisaged joint micro-credential, with suggested budget and implementation timeline. The project format, once approved by the Project Team, shall be shared with the relevant Senior Project Lead by the lead of the project team (cfr. Supra)

- Implementation of the project: the micro-credential is developed using Una Europa's Project Team Approach, which ensures that relevant issues are dealt with by the relevant Una Europa support structures (clusters, working groups, etc.). *Important note: Before recruiting learners and launching communications, the Una Europa Board of Directors must approve the Consortium Agreement. The relevant Senior Project Lead remains at the disposal of the Project Team lead for guidance and support.*
- Evaluation: After the full implementation of the project, the Project Team shall evaluate the educational activity and share best practices and lessons learned with the Una Europa community.

The Una Europa guide for the development and implementation of initiatives led by the Self-steering Committees (PowerPoint) provides further information on these steps, a schematic description of the Project Team Approach and an overview of existing clusters and working groups.<sup>3</sup>

## 3.2 Planning the course

The process of planning, designing and developing short courses (that can lead to micro-credentials) might not differ much from designing and developing other types of higher education courses and programmes. However, with micro-credentials being **at the crossroads of initial and continuing education, some aspects must be addressed from a different or broader perspective.**

### 3.2.1 Define the purpose, learning objectives and learning outcomes

Defining the purpose, learning objectives and learning outcomes is the first step to the development of a course.

First, **articulating and justifying the overarching objectives of the course** is essential. During this phase, conducting a **needs analysis** is recommended. For instance, collaboration with public and private employers or engagement with alumni can facilitate the identification of existing gaps within the field and the labour market. However, it is also possible to offer micro-credentials based on the **latest research outcomes** from the Una Europa partners (research – intensive higher educations) that are not necessarily identified as a need in the field or the labour market.

After deciding upon the overall purpose and learning objectives, it is essential to **write clear learning outcomes** of the short course. The learning outcomes should clearly describe the skills, competences and knowledge that students should be able to demonstrate after completing the course. **These learning outcomes should be aligned to the overall learning objective of the micro-credential.** Furthermore, given that all partners in the Una Europa alliance are research-intensive higher education institutions, all Una Europa micro-credentials must provide strong evidence of being based on the latest research insights.

The **learning outcomes of the short course shall be aligned with the European Qualifications Framework.** Una Europa joint micro-credentials can be offered from the Level 5 to the Level 8 EQF. Choosing the level of the programme will have an impact on the types of learners that will be eligible for the course or programme, and on the pre-requisites to enrol and succeed in the programme.

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<sup>3</sup> For a visual representation on the project team approach: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tN\\_yxbqNNgo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tN_yxbqNNgo)

## 3.2.2 Identify the target audience

Micro-credentials can be opened and followed by a broad audience. The group of learners targeted by the micro-credential programme or course might therefore be quite diverse: students, professionals, job seekers, retirees, etc. Depending on the learning objectives, learning outcomes and level of the course, it might be necessary to specify the ideal profile of the learner to whom the course would be the most relevant and beneficial, and which pre-requisites and prior knowledge are necessary to follow the course or programme. The course or programme, even open to a broader audience, would benefit from this clarification and this would facilitate the marketing and recruitment process. In addition to determining prerequisites and prior knowledge, the Project Team should also evaluate whether additional admission criteria are necessary. For instance, when offering a short course that leads to a micro-credential on campus implementing a numerus clausus could be beneficial.

## 3.2.3 Align the course with the needs of the labour market and of society

Depending on the objectives of the course or programme, it is recommended to align the learning outcomes with the needs of the labour market and of society. While Una Europa teachers and researchers might have a quite comprehensive overview of those needs, developing the micro-credential programme or course together with a third party might help aligning the learning outcomes with the concrete needs. Involving external partners can also have a beneficial impact on the recruitment of participants and strengthen the ties between Una Europa and its local ecosystems.

The European Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) reference framework can also be a very useful tool to define the most relevant and needed skills in the EU. This framework describes key competences and skills and shows for which occupation they are relevant. Defined at European level, it ensures an alignment of the skills and facilitates the transferability and the mobility of workers across the EU.

## 3.2.4 Design a flexible course

Micro-credentials aim to offer new short and flexible learning opportunities. The structure of the content should therefore respond to the needs of the target group. Taking this into account micro-credentials can be offered **completely online, on-campus, hybrid or blended**.

If, due to the needs of the target group, the decision is made to offer online courses, (both asynchronous or synchronous) MOOCs, SPOCs, or even a combination of MOOCs and SPOCs can be utilized. The Una Europa Educational Design and Technology cluster offers pedagogical support and training for the design of online courses. The Una Europa MOOC Checklist is also an important resource for designing courses open to a large audience. The Una Europa Cluster for Educational Design and Technology can be contacted to co-design the course with the academics and advise on the best pedagogies for online courses. It is recommended that the lead academic involves the home university's representative in the Educational Design and Technology Cluster as soon as the idea for a micro-credential is being discussed.

It is recommended to keep the **course quite light in terms of workload**, to make sure that it is feasible to finish the entire course within a reasonable amount of time. Learners might have other duties to fulfil while taking up the course or programme (job, studies, family, ...). Before enrolling in the course or programme, the learners must be informed and aware of the workload of the programme.

When it comes to the **content**, depending on the available resources, it is worth considering **co-designing the programme with students, the target audience and/or a relevant focus group**. This methodology has been used for Una Europa micro-credential pilot programme and it has proven

to be a success. Una Europa students were invited to participate in a workshop where they met with the teaching staff and discussed the structure and content of the different parts of the programme.

To make the programme truly **flexible and adapted to the individual training needs and interests** of the learners, programmes can include a set of courses/ modules among which learners can choose from (**'electives'**). This is for example the philosophy underpinning Una Europa micro-credential programme in Sustainability: next to an introductory course, the programme offers 3 different pillars. The learners must take at least a course in 2 different pillars, and they can also choose among different courses within each pillar. This gives the opportunity for the learners to focus on the skills and knowledge which are the most relevant to their career and personal needs.

### 3.2.5 Examine the possibility of integrating the micro-credential into curricula

When designing a micro-credential it is crucial to consider whether or not the micro-credential could be integrated into curricula of the institutions involved. Depending on the needs and goals of the programme, the micro-credential can be offered as an elective/optional or compulsory course.

Possible benefits of curriculum integration include:

- **Increased attractiveness to students:** Integrating the micro-credential into the curriculum would make the planned micro-credential more attractive to degree-seeking students since it features in the curriculum of their degree.
- **Secure basic funding:** Curriculum integration could ensure at least some amount of basic funding for covering the cost of teaching since many universities' funding model is based on curriculum-related activities.
- **Quality Assurance:** The quality assurance of the micro-credential may be covered by the standard practices employed in the quality assurance of the degree programmes and their curricula. This means that the micro-credential would benefit from the established quality assurance mechanisms, ensuring that it meets the high standards expected of all courses within the institution.
- **Attractiveness for students and learners outside Una Europa universities.** Curriculum integration could also make the micro-credential more attractive for learners from outside the Una Europa universities, as the integration of credits and courses obtained in possible future degree studies would be more guaranteed.

It is highly recommended to start discussing curriculum integration with potential degree programmes at an early stage of planning. Timely negotiations will guarantee the input and views of both the organizers of the micro-credential and the degree programme are aligned. The following questions can help in the discussions discussed between the organizers of the micro-credential and the programme committees:

- **Learning Objectives:** How can the learning objectives of the course contribute to the learning outcomes of the programme?
- **Added value:** How can the micro-credential bring added value to the existing degree programme? What are the unique benefits and opportunities that the micro-credential provides for the learners, ensuring that it compliments and enhances the existing curriculum.

- Course type: Should the micro-credential be offered as an elective/optional or compulsory part of the curriculum? This decision can have an impact on student enrollment as well as the overall structure of the degree programme.

### 3.2.6 Include stackability as a feature

An important feature of micro-credentials mentioned by the European Council Recommendation is 'stackability'. This means that a learner can have the possibility, after obtaining a micro-credential, to take additional programmes and be awarded a larger micro-credential or even a degree. However, it is not mandatory for every micro-credential to be inherently stackable. Some micro-credentials can be offered as stand-alone qualifications. The most important aspect is that when micro-credentials are designed to be stackable, careful thought is given to what they can be stacked toward. The decision regarding 'stackability' should be agreed upon by all partners. The following options are possible regarding stackability:

- (1) No 'stackability': Micro-credentials are offered as a stand-alone qualification.
- (2) Micro-credentials that are stackable. Here two ways exist to ensure stackability:
  - Design the programme independently from any other micro-credential or degree programme. During the designing phase of the micro-credentials, identify which degree programmes could potentially recognize the micro-credential within a degree programme. The degree programme director might recognize the micro-credentials as being aligned with some learning outcomes of the programme and be ready to grant exemptions to learners which will have obtained the micro-credentials. If a degree programme director is not approached before the award of the micro-credential to the learners, this does not mean that the micro-credential cannot be recognised within a degree programme. However, this would probably result in letting the students ask for the recognition of their micro-credential. This would leave the burden to the students – within Una Europa, it should be aimed to facilitate this process and already identify at least one programme.
  - Use existing degree courses to design the programme, or offer degree courses as micro-credentials. The recognition within a larger credential would thus be quasi automatic. To do this, it is necessary to check the requirements for opening degree courses to external audiences. The University of Helsinki and KU Leuven for example have already experience in opening up degree courses to external audiences (at KU Leuven, it is done via the so-called 'credit contract'). The challenge of designing such programmes is to ensure the pedagogical and content consistency of the final micro-credential programme. A precise analysis of the learning outcomes should be done – an academic micro-credential programme board shall undertake this job.

The length of a micro-credential course might also have an impact on the stackable character of the micro-credential course: some universities require a certain number of ECTS to qualify a study unit as a course. At KU Leuven for example, due to legislation, a course must be of minimum 3 ECTS; at the University of Edinburgh, it must be a multiple of 5 (5, 10 or 15 ECTS). For the Freie Universität Berlin, a study unit is called a module and it comprises several courses. The assessment is organized at the module level, and a module leads to the award of 5, 10 or 15 ECTS.

### 3.2.7 Assessment

One of the eleven mandatory elements from the European Council Recommendation to describe a micro-credential is the 'type of assessment'. The assessment of a short course leading to a micro-credential, must be reliable and valid. Partners should agree on a common approach to the examination methods to assess the learner's performance. **The assessment method should align**

**with the intended learning outcomes of the short course.** When choosing a specific assessment method several elements should be taken into account, including the intended learning outcomes, level of study, the delivery mode of the short course, and the pedagogical approach.

### *Objective and Scope*

The objective of this assessment strategy is to ensure that all Una Europa micro-credentials accurately reflect the learning outcomes achieved by participants. Incorporating proven practices from existing MOOCs within the alliance (cf. MOOC Checklist), the strategy aims to provide an inclusive and scalable assessment system.

### *Types of Assessments*

The strategy includes several types of assessments aligned with educational goals: Course organizers must take into account the distinction between exams conducted on-site and those held online. Online exams and assessments using e-learning solutions require special attention to the credibility of the assessment and the reliability of the examination process. For on-site exams, already established and recognized university standards should be applied.

In the future, Una Europa campuses may host exams for micro-credentials, even if they do not organize the courses themselves.

Various types of assessments can be distinguished during the courses; regardless of whether it is formative or summative, the format must be tailored to the scale of the course, content, and expected learning outcomes.

Particular attention should be paid to clear communication directed at participants, explaining the assessment rules using sample exams and additional instructions, especially if advanced technologies like proctoring are employed.

For online exams, participant identification and exam credibility are fundamental to fair assessment. To achieve this, the team organizing the examination should select methods that ensure these standards, such as proctored exams or oral exams.

For exams involving long responses, such as open-book exams, care should be taken to individualize the topics.

Online assessment, as a rule, should be conducted using various tools and should not rely solely on a single event, such as the final exam. Consideration can be given to participation during online sessions, involvement in tasks on the online platform, as well as attendance in classes.

### *Implementation of Automated and Scalable Assessment Tools*

To manage the extensive scale of participation within Una Europa micro-credentials efficiently, automation of assessment should be considered.

### **Feedback Mechanisms**

Essential to sound pedagogy, feedback mechanisms should be incorporated:

- **Immediate, Automated Feedback:** For immediate reinforcement of concepts following quizzes and automated assessments.
- **Instructor Feedback (if possible):** Provides detailed insights on more complex assignments to enhance learner understanding and development.
- **Peer Feedback:** Encourages richer interaction within the learning community through shared critiques and discussions.



### *Accessibility and Inclusion*

All assessments should be designed with accessibility in mind, e.g. necessary accommodations such as alternative formats and accessible web functionalities.

### *Innovative Assessment Practices*

Interactive activities, simulations, and gamified elements can be incorporated to mirror real-world applications and challenges. These innovative assessment methods can make the learning process more engaging and practically relevant.

Incorporating Generative AI technologies in assessment is currently just a vision. Initially aimed at assisting the assessment process, these tools could eventually automate and scale assessment practices. While the technology exists, comprehensive solutions to ethical, political, and juridical challenges must be established first.

### *Ensuring Quality and Integrity*

Quality assurance processes need to be put in place and applied to maintain the integrity and high standards of assessments. This could include periodic reviews, updates to question banks, and possibly the use of advanced plagiarism detection tools to uphold academic honesty.

Through this strategy, Una Europa micro-credentials offer a robust, dynamic, and inclusive assessment framework.

If a Project Team opts for an online assessment, they are advised to consult the Una Europa Guidebook on online assessment. (The Guidebook is currently being updated.)



Una Europa  
Guidebook on Online

## 3.2.8 Consider multilingualism

Having a multilingual policy in place for Una Europa micro-credential courses and programmes is a key aspect. Multilingualism allows to promote the European linguistic and cultural diversity, prepare the learners to work and live in a European and multilingual context, help strengthening intercultural understanding and contribute to promoting European citizenship.

If jointly created micro-credential courses will in most cases probably be prepared and delivered in English, as lingua franca, the partners should nevertheless consider different ways to ensure the greatest accessibility possible, the wider participation of learners possible, and the highest exposure to multiple languages possible.

The partners can for example envisage:

- Providing subtitles and scripts for each video produced – this already should be done to guarantee the accessibility of the content. Videos should at least be provided in the language of instruction of the video, and, whenever possible, offered in other Una Europa languages as well.
- Delivering parts of the courses or programmes in another language than English. If the content is a compulsory study unit, it should be accompanied with at least a translation in English. For example, a video created by the University of Bologna could be realised in Italian and delivered with subtitles and a script in Italian and in English.

- Offering elective courses (or paths) within a micro-credential programme in other languages than English. The learners could then have the choice between studying in English or in another language.
- Offering support to the learners to enrol in a course or programme, and to navigate on the platform(s). In the case where the platform could not be available in the native language of the learner, the learner should be able to ask for help.
- Indicating clearly the recommended or required level in the language(s) of instruction to successfully participate in the course or programme. A level of B1 should be the minimum.
- Plurilingual practices and translanguaging in teaching and learning. This means that the teachers and learners are invited to employ all their linguistic resources and diverse language skills for learning. For example, even if the language of instruction is English, students are encouraged to take notes, seek information, and elaborate on their learning in other languages available for them.

### 3.2.9 Set a clear timeline of the course

Importantly, partners should also agree on the 'lifespan' of the short course. The 'lifespan' refers to the duration for which the programme or course will be available. Is the short course offered only once, or will it be available for an extended period of time? Given that one of the objectives of a micro-credential is to respond to current, actual needs of the society, it should be considered how flexible accessing the course is. Is there an easy, dynamic access for the learners? It is essential for partners to reach a consensus on these aspects. This consideration can also be incorporated into the legal agreement.

## 3.3 Student administration within Una Europa: admission, registration and enrollment, awarding the credential

To successfully award micro-credentials to learners, several steps related to 'student administration' should be followed. For each of the different aspects, the framework outlines recommendations. Additionally it is recommended to adopt the 'project team' approach of Una Europa and to contact the cluster on Student Administration. This cluster consists of experts on the topic of student administration of the different institutions. (*cf. Segment on Project Team approach/guidance from the clusters*)

### 3.3.1 Admission

Micro-credentials can be offered to various different target groups. The organizers can choose to offer the short course (leading to a micro-credential) only to a limited audience. In this case it might be necessary that the consortium agrees on eligibility and on application procedures. If this is the case, to contribute to the perceived jointness of the micro-credential and simplify the application process for the learners, it is recommended that the consortium agrees on a single application and admission procedure. If the short course requires the learners to have some previous knowledge or qualification, an eligibility check for the participants shall be made. The partners should in particular reflect on:

- The necessary language requirements and which proofs of language proficiency they need
- How to verify the prior knowledge of the students:

- Proof of having been awarded a degree at the previous EQF level (ex: if the course/programme is at Level 7 EQF, the learner shall at least have obtained a Level 6 EQF qualification)
- Alternative for learners with non-traditional backgrounds
- Disciplinary knowledge

It is recommended to let one institution check the eligibility of all applications to ensure the equal treatment of the applicants.

Recommendations:

Partners agree on a single application and admission procedure  
One institution is in charge of checking the eligibility of all applications

### 3.3.2 Enrolment and registration

Joint Una Europa micro-credentials should be credit-bearing. In order to obtain micro-credentials it will most likely be needed that participants become 'students' of a university. This refers to the enrollment process, i.e. the process by which you officially become a student of the university. Registration at several institutions might as well be necessary to give access to different platforms of the universities offering the short courses. To illustrate the practical implementation of these processes, we include the example of the Joint Micro-credential in Sustainability:

#### *Box 1: Micro-credential in Sustainability: current workflows and processes regarding student administration*

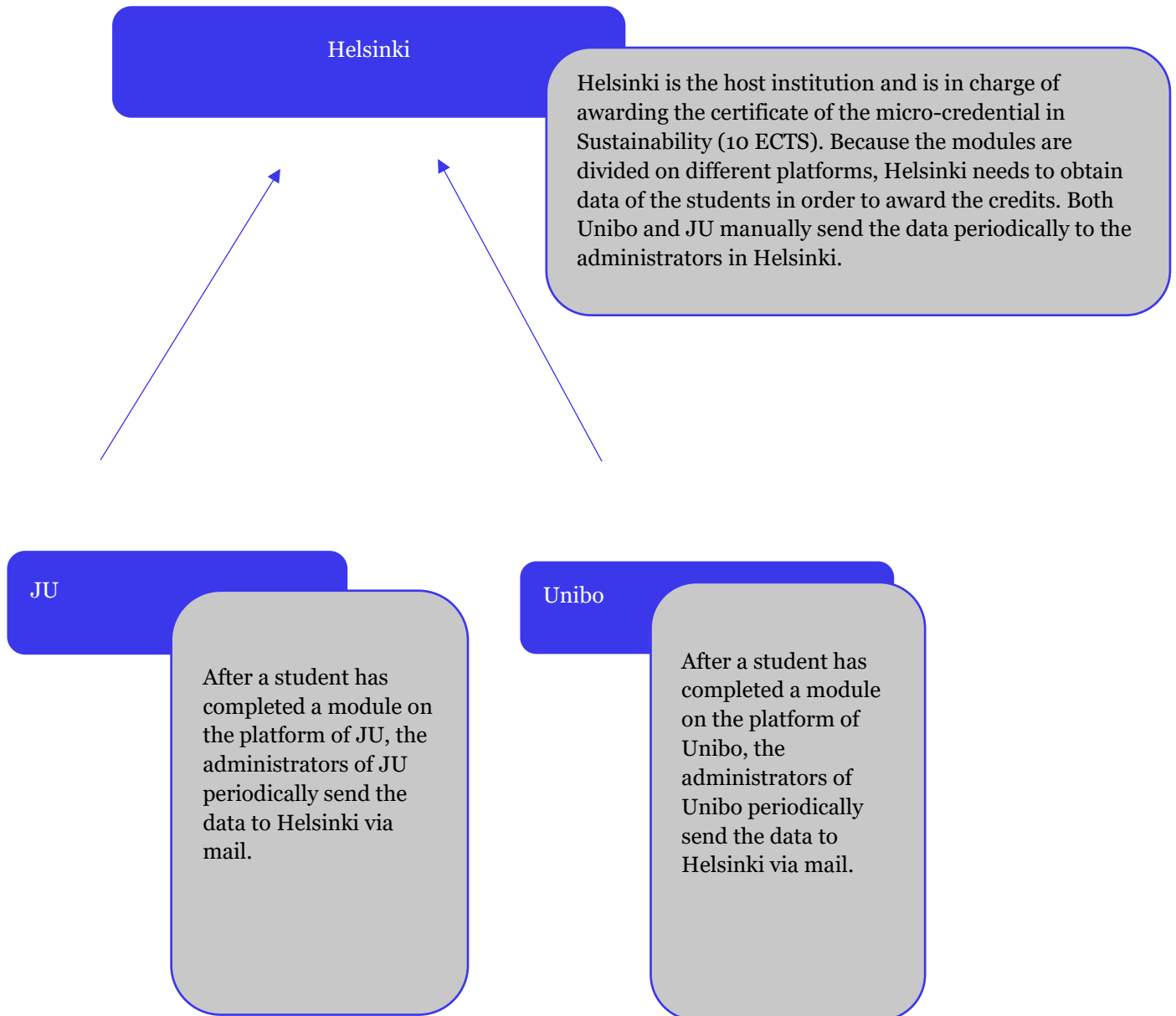
During Una Europa's 1Europe project a Joint Una Europa micro-credential in Sustainability was established. Students of Una Europa partners can earn a specific number of credits by completing modules on different MOOC platforms. The micro-credential in Sustainability serves as a 'pilot' for awarding credits to students participating in a joint short course of Una Europa. To enhance future short course leading to credentials, it is advantageous to visualize the current workflow and the process for students to acquire credits.

Overview:

The micro-credential in Sustainability comprises five MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), collectively granting the learner 10 ECTS upon completion. Following an introductory course, four additional courses delve into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The content of the micro-credential in Sustainability (10 ECTS) is divided into five modules offered on three different platforms (preferred platforms used by Helsinki, Unibo and JU). Students from Una Europa institutions must enroll on various platforms, study the content and achieve a positive assessment for each module. Essentially, the micro-credential in Sustainability involves multiple assessments for each module (short learning programmes) to earn a portion of the overall micro-credential (10 ECTS). Helsinki is responsible for awarding the credits for the MC in Sustainability, 10 ECTS. To do so, Helsinki requires updated data on students who have successfully completed modules on the platforms of Unibo and JU (cfr. 'data overview' figure). Currently, the process of data sharing is largely manual (data transfer via Excel files, via pass-word protected SharePoint of Una Europa), with administrators from different universities periodically sending data to the host institution Helsinki. To streamline this process, JU grants administrators from Helsinki access to the online learning platform of JU.

## Data Transfer



## Introduction

- Title: Introduction to Sustainability
- Amount of ECTS: 3
- Registration procedure for students?  
→ Enrollment for the course after completion on the courses.mooc.fi platform + After completion mooc.fi platform will inform you and give you the relevant enrollment information. Please use the correct link to enroll in order to receive your credits from University of Helsinki.
- Platform: courses.mooc.fi

## Module 1

- Title: Climate. now
- Amount of ECTS: 2
- Registration procedure for students?  
→ Enrollment for the course after completion on the courses.mooc.fi platform + After completion mooc.fi platform will inform you and give you the relevant enrollment information. Please use the correct link to enroll in order to receive your credits from University of Helsinki.

## Module 2

- Title: Biodiversity.now
- Amount of ECTS: 2
- Registration procedure for students?  
→ Enrollment for the course after completion on the courses.mooc.fi platform + After completion mooc.fi platform will inform you and give you the relevant enrollment information. Please use the correct link to enroll in order to receive your credits from University of Helsinki.

## Module 3

- Title: Political Economy of Sustainability
- Amount of ECTS: 2
- Registration procedure for students?  
→ Study the course on the online learning environment. Create a new Copernicus College account or log in.

## Module 4

- Title: Sustainability and the Arts
- Amount of ECTS: 3
- Registration procedure for students?  
→ Study the course on the learning environment. Create a new BOOK Unibo Open Knowledge account or log in.

## Recommendations and Solutions

### Short term solutions

A provisional measure for data-sharing concerning joint micro-credentials is to grant administrators from the host institution access to partner institutions' platform data. However, this approach is not sustainable as it entails significant manual effort to supervise all data. Additionally, not all institutions and platforms permit these rights for administrators from other platforms.

To alleviate the administrative burden on institutions collaborating on joint micro-credentials, a short term-recommendation is to opt for 1 online learning platform. This benefits administrators by eliminating the need to share student data across different platforms and provides a more-user friendly experience for learners with a streamlined enrollment procedure for short learning courses. Within the alliance, guidelines and manuals for professors to upload content to various platforms have already been established. Concerns about copyright for professors' content should be addressed in the consortium agreement during the design and creation of a micro-credential.

### Long term solutions

The alliance has committed to exploring and implementing verifiable credentials (in particular in the European Blockchain Services Infrastructure's Early Adopters Programme) as a strategic long-term solution. Blockchain Technology can play a pivotal role in various aspects of the micro-credential lifecycle. First, blockchain technology can be used in regards to the admission procedure: blockchain technology could help to verify the previous diplomas of students and to prefill the online application form. Second, Blockchain Technology can help with the learner registration and identification, but also with the learner's access to the learning unit on the platform once the student is enrolled and registered. Thirdly, the technology can help to ensure the portability and the recognition of the credentials. Using the verifiable transcript of records and the use of the European Learning Model, the micro-credential can be recognized automatically. Another process that is crucial regarding the storing of the micro-credential. Within the European Council Recommendation it is stated very clearly that the learner should be the one that possesses and stores the micro-credential. The technology can help to the learner to get this micro-credential within a digital wallet so learners can store their micro-credential. Lastly, the technology can help with the automatic recognition of the micro-credential. The technology can ensure the process of verifying a verifiable diploma issued by another university in an automatic way.

To advance the integration of Blockchain Technology within the Alliance, an Una Europa Blockchain Working Group was established in 2021. It is crucial for all partners to collaborate in this working group on Blockchain to optimize procedures for future collaboration on micro-credentials and short learning programmes. At the moment the technology exists for learners to authenticate themselves with the verifiable credentials. There are pilot use cases ready. **However, if we want to implement this in the different partner institutions, in different environments, efforts from all the partners should be made considering the specific peculiarities of the environment of each respective university.**

#### Recommendations

Using one platform from one university for the learning material from one university

*For the Una Europa alliance:* investment in verifiable credentials ; Blockchain Technology can be used in this regard

### 3.3.3 Awarding a micro-credential

Upon successful completion of the short course, the learners shall be awarded a micro-credential. The micro-credential will be granted jointly by the participating partner universities. The Project Team is to decide on **a partner university issuing the certificates on behalf of all partner universities involved**.

Following the Council Recommendation, the micro-credential **certificate should entail** following information:

- Identification of the learner
- Title of the micro-credential
- Country of the issuer
- Awarding bodies: all partner universities that are jointly offering the Micro-Credential.
- Date of issuing
- Learning outcomes
- Notional workload – in ECTS
- Level (and cycle) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (based on EQF)
- Type of assessment
- Form of participation in the learning activity
- Type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential
- A reference to Una Europa, for instance by including the Una Europa logo

In order to ensure the ‘portability’ and ‘recognition’ of the micro-credential certificate it is crucial that the micro-credential clearly outlines the learning outcomes and the level of the learning experience. These elements are needed for the institutional processes related to the recognition of previously obtained academic qualifications. As previously mentioned, Verifiable Credentials and Blockchain Technology can be used to arrange the portability and automatic recognition of micro-credentials.

In addition, it is important that the micro-credential is in line with the European Learning Model. The European Learning Model has been developed based on the recommendations in the Council Recommendation on a European Approach to Micro-credentials and the Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework. It streamlines the description of learning in the Member States.

#### Recommendation

1. Clearly outline the specific elements of the micro-credential (as formulated in the European Council Recommendation on a European Approach to Micro-credentials).
2. For the Una Alliance: Implementation of the results of the work of Una Europa’s Blockchain Working Group in each partner institution.

## 3.4 Financing the micro-credential

In order to implement joint Una Europa micro-credentials, it is crucial to have a clear and sustainable financial model that is agreed upon by all parties involved. The following steps are recommended to create a sustainable financial model:

### 3.4.1 Calculate the full costs of the micro-credential

First, it is crucial to calculate the full costs when creating and implementing a joint micro-credential. This includes: preparatory costs, the running costs and possible additional costs, such as: operational costs for curriculum development, student mobility, IT costs for joint student administration, invited speakers, etc. The **costs calculation template** developed by the Una Europa alliance can be used to that end.

### 3.4.2 Look for the most suitable and sustainable income opportunities

To this date, there is no specific funding scheme for micro-credentials. The guiding principle is that joint micro-credentials should be **financially self-sustaining**. In order to be financially self-sustaining, various funding sources can be explored.

#### 2.1 Tuition Fees

When it comes to covering the costs of the short course, it is possible to charge fees to the participants.

In order to have a fair and sustainable price setting, and be attractive on the market, partners should compare their offer with similar offers in the market: what are other institutions offering regarding the same subject/ for a similar target audience? How much is the fee they charge? By doing this, partners can get an idea of the average price range and the value proposition of their micro-credential.

The amount of the fees can be decided almost in a completely free way, as micro-credentials do not fall within the scope of the legislation about degrees, and as there are only few regulations regarding fees for continuing education within Una Europa. Two universities have rules related to the fee that can be charged from external learners for degree courses:

The University of Helsinki is subject to Finnish regulations on this aspect: according to Finnish law and the University's own regulations, when degree courses are opened to an external audience, a fee of **maximum 15, 30 or 45€/ECTS** can be charged.

KU Leuven follows a similar approach. Degree courses can be opened to an external audience for maximum 12,10€/ECTS. This fee is charged in addition to an entry fee of 253,60€ (for the academic year 2022-2023).

Micro-credentials might be open to a large audience, composed of both degree students and professionals. It is also possible to charge **different fees depending on the profile of the participants**: Una Europa students could for example always get a free access to the short courses, while other participants (e.g. professionals) could be asked to pay a fee. In France, for example,



employers contribute financially to the continuing education of their employees. Each professional is yearly credited with money to be spent for a training course or programme.

Fees might be charged to cover specific activities within the course, and different practices exist on the market (in particular for online courses):

The participants pay tuition fees to get access to the course. These fees cover their participation in the course, their access to teaching resources, the final assessment and the issuance of the credits and certification.

The participants follow the course for free. If they want to obtain a certificate for their participation in the course, a small fee is charged.

The participants follow the course for free. If they want to obtain a certificate for their participation in the course, a small fee is charged. If they want to obtain ECTS credits, they are asked to pay an additional fee.

If the course is organised physically in different countries, costs might vary depending on the location. In that case, the partners can also consider implementing different fee schemes for the different locations. If this option is chosen by the consortium, the partners should make sure that the participants understand the differentiation of prices, and avoid as much as possible that the participants choose their location depending on the price of the training.

## **2.2 European funding opportunities**

Apart from tuition fees of participants, one can also investigate European funding opportunities. For example: Blended Intensive Programmes (short, intensive programmes that use innovative ways of learning and teaching, and include online cooperation) are funded under the Erasmus+ programme. In order to be eligible for funding by the Erasmus+ Programme, the programme should be developed and implemented by at least 3 higher education institutions (HEIs), the physical mobility must be between 5 and 30 days, the combination of virtual and the physical mobility should provide students with a minimum of 3 ECTS credits. To receive funding, a BIP must involve a minimum of 15 participants. Participants can receive a mobility scholarship under the condition that they are enrolled in a university (as undergraduate, graduate or doctoral students) eligible to Erasmus+ funding. More information on the Erasmus+ opportunities can be found on the EU-website and advice can be provided by the Una Europa mobility cluster.

## **2.3 National, regional and institutional opportunities**

Partners could also explore funding opportunities at the national, regional or institutional level. National funding of micro-credentials can vary widely within Europe. For example, some countries offer specific project funding regarding micro-credentials. Although project funding is not sufficient to ensure the long-term sustainability of joint micro-credentials, it can help with the start-up phase.

Example: In Ireland the government encouraged the development of (policies) on micro-credentials with a nation-wide project that aims at facilitating lifelong learning. The key deliverables of the Microcreds-projects are : 1) a national framework for micro-credentials 2) microcreds innovate: sustainable model for data informed university-enterprise collaboration 3) discovery platform (Europass early adopter) 4) agilely developed and flexibly delivered suit of micro-credentials across partner universities.

## **2.4 Partnerships**

Taking into account that one of the goals of the European approach on micro-credentials is to respond to labour market needs, it can also be considered to collaborate with external sponsors, such

as companies, business sectors or professional organizations to support the creation of micro-credentials.

### 3.4.3 Agree on the financial model

Partners should discuss which partner will cover which costs, and how the revenues will be collected and distributed.

Joint micro-credentials can generate costs regarding joint curriculum development, marketing, assessment, administration, possible mobility, accommodation costs, ... Partners should discuss which institution will bear which cost, for example pay for marketing, joint student recruitment abroad, etc.

Arrangements for cost-sharing and distributing the revenues should be negotiated and agreed upon by all partners. The arrangements must be described in a clear way **in a Consortium Agreement**.

Depending on the format of the programme, different models to redistribute revenues can exist:

1. **Centralised model:** One partner is in charge of collecting and distributing the revenues to the other partners involved. Here, larger sums can be allocated to those partners with more responsibilities and tasks (hence, contributing financially more to the programme). This model is particularly well-suited for jointly co-developed and taught programmes.
2. **Decentralised model:** Each partner pays their own costs and keeps their own income. This model is suited for programmes in which the contribution of each partner is clearly defined (ex: each partner is in charge of one module within the programme).
3. **A mix of a centralised and a decentralised model:** Part of the revenues are collected in a centralised way by one partner for a joint activity, and the other parts of the revenues are collected independently by different partners. The partner collecting the revenues for a joint activity can either redistribute the amount among the partners, or agree with the partners that the benefits from the revenues will be reinjected in the programme in the following years. This model has been tested in the framework of the Europa lifelong learning certificate in Sustainability. The programme consisted of a asynchronous joint online module, and of a physical module organised simultaneously at 3 different locations. Participants paid a fee for the online module to one partner, and a second fee to the partner at which they had chosen to follow the physical module. Different fees were charged by the partners for the physical modules, based on the actual costs at each location. This experience shows that depending on the format of the micro-credential, different solutions can be found to suit the needs of the programme and of the different parties.

## 3.5 Communication, Marketing and student recruitment strategy

Effective communication is essential for ensuring the sustainability of a micro-credential. The Project Team responsible for a specific Una Europa micro-credential must work closely with the institutional marketing and communication departments. These departments possess the expertise to effectively disseminate the information to the target audiences. Following the Project Team Approach, the lead university's marketing and communication departments will lead these collaborative efforts unless otherwise determined. It is the Lead University's responsibility to devise and execute a marketing and student recruitment strategy.

The Project Team should **integrate the local Communications Lead in the Project Team as soon as possible**, and complete the Una Europa Communications and Dissemination brief together. That way, the Una Europa Communication Guidelines can be followed. (Those guidelines include a chapter on communication on 'Una.Micro' with audiences to consider and the available communication channels.) Liaise with your local Una Europa Communications Lead at your earliest convenience.

When communicating about a joint micro-credential, the following aspects should be very clear:

- Target group and objectives: clearly define the intended audience and the specific objectives of the micro-credentials
- Learning outcomes: articulate the skills and competences learners will acquire
- Mode of delivery: specify whether the short course will be online, hybrid, on campus
- Duration: specify the duration of the short course
- Language of the course: indicate the language in which the learning content is delivered
- Enrollment procedure: explain the steps learners need to follow to enrol. Be clear about deadlines.
- Assessment Modalities: describe the assessment methods used to evaluate learner performance
- Contact information: provide relevant contact details for inquiries
- Partners that are offering the micro-credential
- Fees and discounts for Una Europa partners

When promoting a joint micro-credential developed collaboratively, clarity is key. Institutions should explicitly state that these micro-credentials are created within the Una Europa alliance by using a joint disclaimer (e.g. "This format/ micro-credential was created by the Una Europa alliance.") and acknowledging project funding, as applicable. On the Una Europa website visitors will also find a comprehensive overview of all joint educational formats, linking visitors to webpages with more detailed information on each format.

### **Use of term 'Micro-credential'**

Various short courses leading to a credential can utilize the micro-credentials framework, regardless of whether they are marketed as micro-credentials ('Una.Micro') to learners.

The Project Team should decide whether to market a short learning programme as a 'micro-credential' in collaboration with the communication department of the lead institution. For example, a Summer School meeting micro-credential requirements could still be called a 'Summer School' for clarity. The term 'micro-credential' is growing popular in Europe, so it might be advisable to use it for initiatives aimed at upskilling and reskilling learners. In the interest of brand consistency, any deviations in which a local marketing or communications department uses different wording that is more in line with local or national habits and needs, should be discussed between the Project team and the Communications Leads.

# 4 Quality Assurance

The European Approach to micro-credentials underscores the necessity for a clear and transparent quality assurance system for short learning programmes that lead to credentials. Quality Assurance in education, not limited to short courses, is crucial for the Una Europa Joint Education Strategy. Una Europa has an existing quality assurance system for joint education. This part of the framework aims to 1) highlight the Blueprint of Internal Quality Processes for Joint Education in Una Europa, and 2) to elaborate on the existing quality assurance processes, specifically for short learning programmes leading to micro-credentials.

## 4.1 General principles

Una Europa partners crafted a **comprehensive internal quality assurance process for joint education** (pdf). This document outlines an overarching joint system on quality processes, encompassing the following general principles:

1. The principle of verified trust
2. The principle of subsidiarity
3. The principle of (a commitment towards) core practices, i.e. arrangements on the involvement of stakeholders, timing, scope, tools, and communication between partners.

These principles apply to both long-term programmes (such as the Bachelor's in European Studies) and courses that lead to a credential. Beyond these general principles, the blueprint emphasizes the need for clear information and transparent communication regarding the internal quality assurance systems of each partner university. As mentioned earlier, the term 'micro-credential' is used differently in various member states, referring to both the learning format and the credential itself. National and institutional discussions are still ongoing, with each institution and member state deciding its own approach to micro-credentials.<sup>4</sup> However, to ensure the quality of joint Una Europa Micro-credentials, it is beneficial to map the current (2024) national and institutional procedures, that can be complemented by Una Europa guidelines. The table below can facilitate discussions when creating a new micro-credential:

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<sup>4</sup> On 27 March 2024, the European Commission published a higher education package with proposals to support the international cooperation in higher education through a range of initiatives, including proposals regarding a European quality assurance system. One of the initiatives looks at developing a cross-institutional quality assurance approach for sustainable alliances of higher education institutions. In this regard the following is mentioned "As a result, the evaluation, to be carried out by a quality assurance agency selected by the Alliance, should: (a) acknowledge that the cooperation of higher education institutions is an Alliance, within the meaning of this Recommendation; (b) lead to a reduction in the administrative burden for the Alliance by enabling jointly managed activities to be externally quality assured jointly once during a set period of validity, instead of being subject to multiple national external quality assurance systems; and (c) facilitate the quality assurance of joint educational provision by Alliances, for example, joint programmes or **micro-credentials**." Una Europa must closely monitor the higher education package and its proposals, particularly in relation to quality assurance of joint programmes and micro-credentials.

Table: Overview of the national and institutional procedures

Country	Institution	<b>National Regulations</b> on the quality assurance of <b>micro-credentials</b>  Are there minimum requirements regarding the QA for micro-credentials set by the government or QA agencies?	<b>Institutional Regulations</b> on the quality assurance of micro-credentials or short learning programs?  What are the current requirements and tools regarding the quality assurance of micro-credentials/Short Learning Programmes within the <b>institution</b> ?
Spain	Universidad Complutense de Madrid	ANECA , the national agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation published a framework on the quality assurance of micro-credentials in the Spanish University Systems.  ANECA has decided that the internal QA systems of institutions should integrate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality of the micro-credential, according to the standards established by the European Union</li> <li>• The quality of the learning experience</li> <li>• Feedback from learners on the learner experience</li> <li>• Feedback from stakeholders and other providers on the learning experience</li> </ul> At the moment there is no specific external procedure to review the quality of new micro-credentials.	
Finland	Helsingin yliopisto	At the moment there are no national regulations regarding the QA of the micro-credentials. If a micro-credential is included in the curriculum of a degree programme of the University, the QA system of degree programmes covers also the micro-credential	
Germany	Freie Universität Berlin	At the moment there are no national regulations regarding the QA of micro-credentials.	If a micro-credential is part of the curriculum, the QA system of the degree programme also covers the micro-credential. In perspective, internal quality instruments applied on module level could also be used for micro-credentials

Italy	Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna	At the moment there are no national regulations regarding the QA of micro-credentials.	Unibo is at present developing a framework for micro-credentials, from which an internal model will be developed.
Ireland	University College Dublin	UCD is a Designated Awarding Body (DABs) under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act (2012) We have comprehensive internal and external quality assurance policies and procedures in place which meet national and European standards. The processes put in place for module development are the same as those for micro-credentials.	Further information on the quality processes can be found online.
Scotland	University of Edinburgh	No binding regulations regarding approach to QA for micro-credentials: “A provider's approach to quality assurance and enhancement of micro-credentials should be appropriate and proportionate.”  <a href="https://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/ethemes/resilient-learning-communities/good-practice-guide-for-micro-credentials-and-small-qualifications-in-scotland.pdf?sfvrsn=5ea5af81_2">https://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/ethemes/resilient-learning-communities/good-practice-guide-for-micro-credentials-and-small-qualifications-in-scotland.pdf?sfvrsn=5ea5af81_2</a>	Credit-bearing and non-credit bearing provision is subject to approval by Boards of Studies within Schools and, where appropriate, approval by Colleges
Poland	Uniwersytet Jagielloński	At the moment there are no national regulations regarding the QA of micro-credentials.	If a micro-credential is incorporated as part of the curriculum of a degree programme of the University, the QA system of degree programmes covers also the micro-credential
The Netherlands	Universiteit Leiden	No national formal regulation. Quality assurance via 'kwaliteitskader Npuls' ( <a href="https://npuls.nl/microcredentials-in-hbo-wo/">https://npuls.nl/microcredentials-in-hbo-wo/</a> )	Specific requirements within the institute are currently being developed.
Belgium	KU Leuven	At the moment there are no national regulations regarding the QA of micro-credentials.	KU Leuven provides an internal quality assurance system for the micro-credentials it offers. The quality assurance system for micro-credentials consists of process guidance for the initiators of micro-credentials when starting up a new micro-credential, optimising current micro-credentials and following up at the end of a 'run' of a micro-credential. Most aspects are optional and a minimum is mandatory (e.g. a mandatory survey of participants).
France	Université Paris 1 Panthéon – Sorbonne	At the moment there are no national regulations regarding the QA of micro-credentials.	
Switzerland	Universität Zürich	At the moment there are no national regulations regarding the QA of micro-credentials.	



As of January 2024 it appears that most institutions do not advocate for an additional external accreditation procedure for every new short learning programme leading to a credential. Universities are able to maintain the quality of their academic offerings, compliant with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESGs). **As micro-credentials aim to swiftly address societal and labour market demands, the quality assurance process should be efficient and tailored to meet these specific objectives** rather than being overly cumbersome for institutions. Additional to the general principles of the quality assurance of joint programmes, the following principles have been added for joint Una Europa micro-credentials:

1. **Organizers taking ownership.** The responsibility for the micro-credential should reside with the Project Team overseeing them. Given that micro-credentials involve a small volume of learning and should be flexible to quickly respond to societal and labour market needs, establishing a joint Una Europa micro-credential shouldn't involve burdensome procedures. Nevertheless, the Project Team should continuously monitor the micro-credential by seeking feedback, for example, by distributing questionnaires to be completed by the learners.
2. **Transparent communication towards the learners about micro-credentials.** When communicating about micro-credentials, clarity is crucial. Micro-credentials can be tailored for different groups, so it is essential that learners understand the objective of each micro-credential, and how the processes work.

## 4.2 Actors and responsibilities

To ensure the quality of Joint Micro-credentials within Una Europa, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the required actors and their respective responsibilities for a Joint Una Europa Micro-credential

Responsibilities	Actors
Development of a vision on Joint micro-credentials	Una Europa Board of Directors and Una Europa Teaching and Learning Strategy Group
Ideas for micro-credentials	Self-steering Committees of academics in the different focus areas
Conceptualisation of the project Implementation of the project	Project Team for the micro-credential
Continuously monitoring the quality of the programme	Project Team for the micro-credential
Supporting Material	Clusters provide supporting material
Delivering the credential	Host institution in collaboration with the partner institutions
Legal consortium agreement	The involved partners (institutions) Legal Cluster
Ownership	Project team and the institutions offering the micro-credential

## 4.3 Workflow to guarantee the quality assurance of a micro-credential

At the start of the Una.Futura project, the Self-Steering Committees of academics outlined their action plans, including the development of particular joint micro-credentials. These plans were approved by Una Europa's Board of Directors. Moreover, additional joint Una Europa micro-credentials that were not initially documented, may also be developed.

### **Step 1: Initiating the approval procedure for elaboration of a new joint micro-credential in Una Europa**

- **The Self-Steering Committee should contact the relevant** Una.Futura Senior Project Lead who will initiate the workflows set up by Work Package 4 'Una Europa for Researchers', Work Package 5 'Una Europa for Learners' and Work Package 6 'Una Europa for Society' to ensure support during the conceptualization, development and implementation of the new format.
- **To further refine the idea for a micro-credential, the Project Team Approach is used** within Una Europa. A Project Team consists of the academics involved in the initiative, the professional staff from the lead university and students and will be co-developing the format. The Senior Project Lead regularly liaises with the Project Team lead to provide guidance throughout the process, to facilitate collaboration within the Una Europa structure and to identify issues that need to be brought to the attention of the Una Europa governance. This way the Project Team gets the advice and approval of the management of Una Europa according to the governance agreed on.

### **Step 2: Outlining the main characteristics of the joint micro-credential**

- The Project Team drafts a 'project format' outlining the main features of the joint micro-credential. The project format needs to be shared with the relevant Senior Project Lead by the lead of the Project Team.

### **Step 3: Developing the joint micro-credential, followed by its implementation**

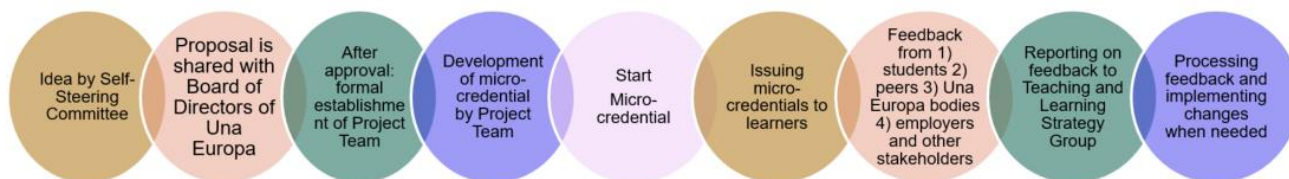
- Throughout this process the Project Team is advised to seek guidance from the clusters of professionals in Una Europa and in the documents and guidelines provided by them. Seeking feedback and support from the Project Team on micro-credentials and the Teaching and Learning Cluster is highly recommended. The lead university's representative in the Project Team on Micro-credentials and in the Teaching and Learning Clusters functions as an intermediary.
- The involved partner universities must adhere to any mandatory procedures set by their home institutions for the installment of micro-credentials. Additionally, the Project Team should carefully consider the criteria Una Europa micro-credentials must meet.
- Furthermore, the Project Team should work closely with the marketing department of the lead university to ensure effective communication about the micro-credential towards learners aligning with the principles of Una Europa Joint Micro-credentials.
- The Project Team is responsible for continually monitoring and improving the quality of the micro-credential. Feedback is given on a) the governance, processes and procedures of the format by the Una Europa clusters and bodies, b) the feasibility of the courses by the students c) content-related and subject-specific aspects by peers, employers and other stakeholders. This feedback should be carefully considered and reported to the Teaching and Learning Strategy Group.

The figure below shows the entire workflow for joint micro-credentials, based on the internal quality assurance process for joint education.



**QA during conceptualization and development**

**QA when the joint micro-credential is being offered to learners**



**Compliant to EU criteria for micro-credentials and Una Europa's Vision for Student-Centered Teaching and Learning**

**Continuous and periodical monitoring and enhancement of quality (gathering feedback, processing feedback, reporting about the feedback, implementing changes when needed)**

# 5 Legal Requirements

In order to establish a reliable and well-aligned micro-credential that can carry the Una Europa label, it is necessary to formalize legal agreements among the involved parties. Key elements to incorporate include:

1. The governance structure: clearly defining the roles, decision-making processes and responsibilities within the micro-credential management process. For instance, each institution can specify the responsible 'co-ordinator' and the members of the management committee for the programme.
2. The partners' obligations and responsibilities, particularly the lead university's. Responsibilities cover recruitment, assessment, complaints procedure, quality assurance etc. Also the obligation to provide an online platform for courses can be included.
3. The micro-credential: detailed description of the courses offered. This can be included in the annex/es to the agreement.
4. The regulations for ECTS recognition: given that ECTS credits are to be granted within the micro-credential, the parties involved must establish the criteria under which these credits will be recognized at partner universities, if applicable.
5. The financial arrangement: clearly outline the financial arrangements including the price of the micro-credentials and costs for every partner.
6. Marketing, Publicity and branding (if applicable)
7. The rules of granting and duration of licenses to use parties' logos and names
8. The micro-credential certificate: which form (paper or digital document), what information it should contain, by whom should it be issued, under what conditions etc.
9. Intellectual property (any data, know-how, material or information whatever its form or nature, tangible or intangible): within the courses the parties will probably use copyright-protected materials; perhaps during the implementation of the micro-credential the parties will also create such rights in the future. The agreement should specify the rules for the protection of intellectual property.
10. GDPR Matters: the agreement should include provisions regarding the protection of personal data. However, an agreement has been prepared within Una Europa regarding protection of personal data in various activities within Una Europa. It is needed to compare its provisions. Perhaps it is enough to refer to the GDPR agreement in the Consortium Agreement on the joint micro-credential.
11. The admission process allowing new partners to join the joint micro-credential. Introducing a clause in the Consortium Agreement enables a new partner to join without needing an amendment to the agreement, which typically takes a significant amount of time and requires the signatures of all parties.
12. Term, review, and termination of the legal agreement: some universities cannot sign agreements for periods exceeding 4 years, particularly those of an indefinite duration.
13. Applicable law and dispute resolution

The legal advisors in Una Europa's Legal Cluster have prepared a **template for a Consortium Agreement on an Una Europa Micro-credential** (doc). Each Project Team can rely on the assistance of these legal experts to finalise the Consortium Agreement. The lead university's representative in the Legal Cluster acts as a liaison.

# 6 Appendix

## 6.1 Examples of Joint Una Europa micro-credentials

Example: Micro-credential in Sustainability	
What?	The micro-credential in Sustainability allows learners to build a learning path adapted to their individual needs. It gives a holistic understanding of global sustainability challenges to a large audience.
Lead University?	Helsingin yliopisto/Helsingfors universitet
Partner Universities	Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna, Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie
Open to	Students and learners holding a Bachelor's degree
Multilingual	All courses in English
Innovative	Stackable MOOCs complemented by synchronous teaching in an online international environment, micro-credential recognized and integrated in different programmes at Una Europa universities, joint governance structure
Interdisciplinary	Three multidisciplinary pillars: environment, society and economy  Critical thinking, SDGs, problem solving, holistic understanding of sustainability
International	International learning across the MOOCs offered by several Una Europa universities
Structure	Independent online study, up to 5 MOOCs, up to 10 ECTS
More Information?	<a href="http://www.una-europa.eu/study/microcredential-sustainability">www.una-europa.eu/study/microcredential-sustainability</a>

## 6.2 Guidance from the clusters in Una Europa

Within the structure of Una Europa, several 'Clusters' of professionals are established. These clusters bring together professional experts from the different partner universities on a certain topic. They support the design and the implementation of joint activities. A list of the professionals involved in the Clusters can be found on SharePoint.

Several clusters can help with different aspects of Joint Una Europa micro-credentials:

### 1. Teaching and Learning Cluster

The Teaching and Learning Cluster possesses expertise and extensive experience in developing various joint innovative formats within Una Europa. They can assist in selecting a specific format, such as micro-credentials. Additionally, they provide support during the design and development stages of a joint Una Europa micro-credentials.

### 2. Educational Design and Technology

The Educational Design and Technology Cluster serves as a central hub for higher education pedagogy and educational technology expertise within Una Europa. Cluster members develop and share best practices in learning design, related to either online or in-person teaching. Micro-credentials, whether delivered online or otherwise, benefit from the Cluster's expertise in course development. The Cluster also provides staff training on essential topics such as accessibility, inclusivity, and intercultural awareness. These considerations are critical in the design of micro-credentials, whether viewed as formats or qualifications.

### 3. Legal Affairs

The cluster on legal affairs can give legal advice and support when creating a new joint innovative format. They are the legal experts that can help create a 'consortium agreement' (cfr. Part on Legal Requirements).

### 4. Mobility Cluster

The Mobility Cluster handles all matters related to 'mobility' within the Una Europa alliance. If a micro-credential is organized in-person or in a blended intensive format, the experts from the Mobility Cluster can offer assistance.

### 5. Student Administration

The Student Administration Cluster consists of experts on student administration processes: from admission and registration to the recognition of an educational format. When organizing a joint micro-credential, several student administration processes need to be considered carefully. The Cluster can provide guidance and advice into making these decisions.

### 6. Quality assurance

The Quality Assurance cluster consists of experts on both internal and external Quality assurance processes with regard to education. These specialists can provide guidance on the internal processes required to establish a micro-credential, and possibly external processes (if those are required for the micro-credential).

## 6.3 Glossary

**Accreditation:** Accreditation is defined as 'a formal and independent decision indicating that a programme and/or an institution meet(s) certain predefined quality standards.' (Source: European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education). The process of external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities, and higher education programmes for quality assurance and quality improvement. (Source: Council for Higher Education Accreditation).

**Course:** A course is a coherent set of learning and assessment activities, aimed at reaching goals regarding knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes. (see also <https://www.kuleuven.be/english/education/educational-glossary/educational-glossary-c/course>)

**European Qualifications Framework (EQF):** the EQF defines competence as the ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy. Fostering competences is the object of all educational programmes. Competences are developed in all course units and assessed at different stages of a programme. Some competences are subject-area related (specific to a field of study), others are generic (common to any degree course). It is normally the case that competence development proceeds in an integrated and cyclical manner throughout a programme.

**Interdisciplinarity:** An approach to curriculum integration that generates an understanding of themes and ideas that cut across disciplines and of the connections between different disciplines and their relationship to the real world. It normally emphasizes process and meaning rather than product and content by combining contents, theories, methodologies and perspectives from two or more disciplines.

**Learning outcomes:** Learning outcomes indicate which knowledge, skills and attitudes, or an integration of them in competences, a student should obtain throughout their learning path. The learning outcomes represent the minimum requirements for students graduating from a certain study programme. (educational glossary of KU Leuven: Learning outcomes – Educational glossary (kuleuven.be))

**Multidisciplinarity:** An approach to curriculum integration which focuses primarily on the different disciplines and the diverse perspectives they bring to illustrate a topic, theme or issue. A multidisciplinary curriculum is one in which the same topic is studied from the viewpoint of more than one discipline. Frequently multidisciplinary and crossdisciplinary are used as synonyms describing the aim to cross boundaries between disciplines. Source: UNESCO bureau de l'éducation

**Multilingualism:** Multilingualism is understood as the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives. In this context, a language is defined neutrally as a variant which a group ascribes to itself for use as its habitual code of communication. This includes regional languages, dialects, and sign languages. In addition, the term multilingualism is used for referring to the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical or geo-political area or political entity. Source: European Commission

**Quality assurance:** The process or set of processes adopted nationally and institutionally to ensure the quality of educational programmes and qualifications awarded. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose. Quality assurance is often referred to in the context of a continuous improvement cycle (i.e. assurance and enhancement activities).

Source: UNESCO bureau de l'éducation

## 6.4 Authorship Declaration

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