MICROCREDENTIALS:
THE RACE BETWEEN INNOVATION AND PUBLIC REGULATION

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OECD
BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OECD 37 Member countries and 5 key partners represent about 80% of world trade and investment

We are an intergovernmental organisation that for 60 years has worked to establish evidence-based international standards and to find solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges. We provide a unique forum and knowledge hub for data and analysis, exchange of experiences, best-practice sharing, and advice on public policies and international standard-setting.

We support Education Ministries across the OECD

Is your system raising the **right level** of resource, and are those resources **allocated effectively**?

Are you supporting institutions and educators in making **effective use of digital technologies**?

Does your system offer **high-quality learning, well adapted** to learner needs, the economy and society?

How we answer

Data collection and monitoring

Policy Analysis

Peer Learning

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MICROCREDENTIALS ON THE RISE

We are building knowledge on this rapidly evolving area

| **Past** | **Present** | **Future** |

Initial analysis of non-degree credentials in HE

Analysis to inform the work of the EC

Peer learning and policy advice for member countries

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/a-european-approach-to-micro-credentials_en

BUT WHAT EXACTLY ARE MICROCREDENTIALS?

The BS degree: venerable, but fully standardised?

Legend:
- Three years (blue)
- Four years (green)
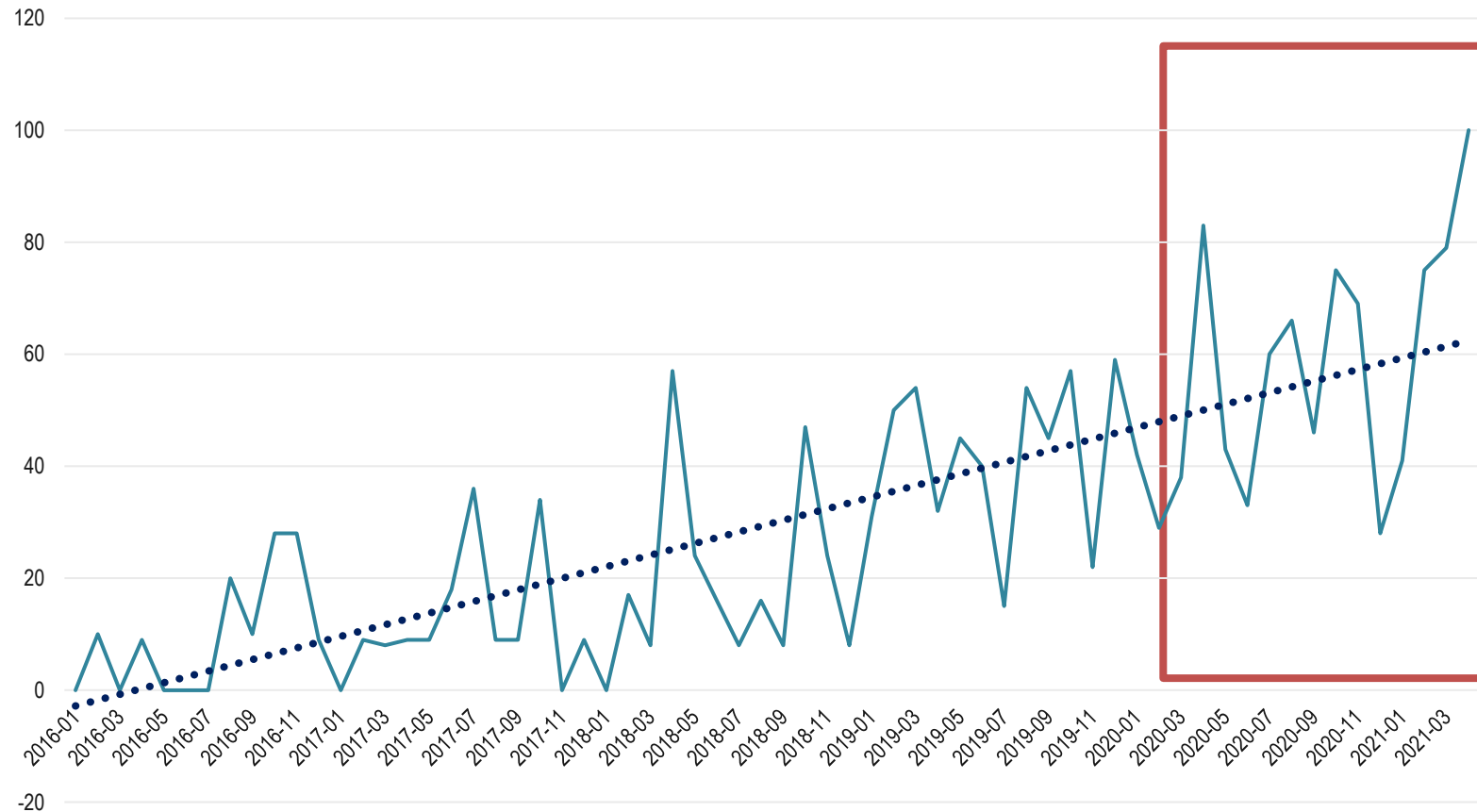- Five years (orange)
- Six years (red)
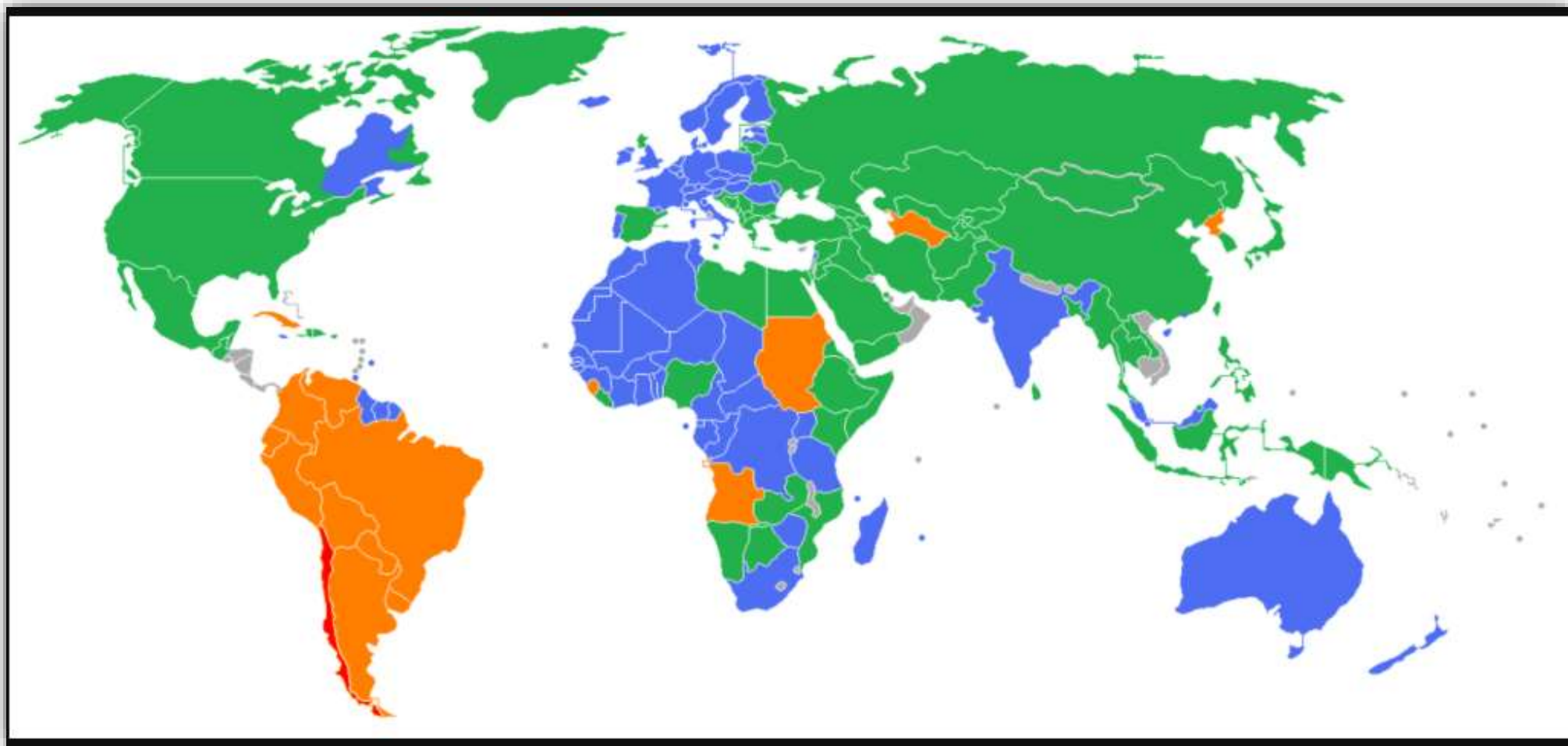
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BS_time.png

Growing recognition and use of the term microcredential

Worldwide Google searches for "microcredentials"

Numbers represent keyword searches typed by Internet users in relation to the total number of searches carried out on Google over a given period and region.

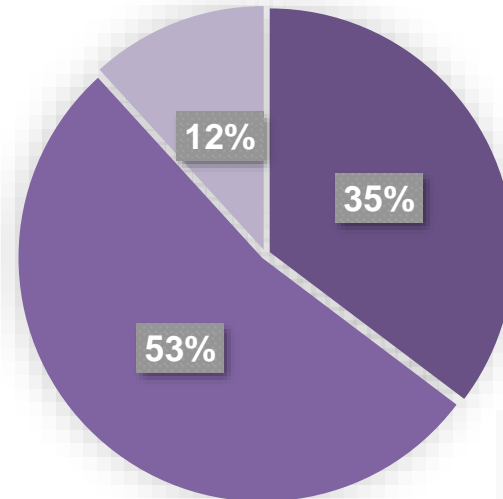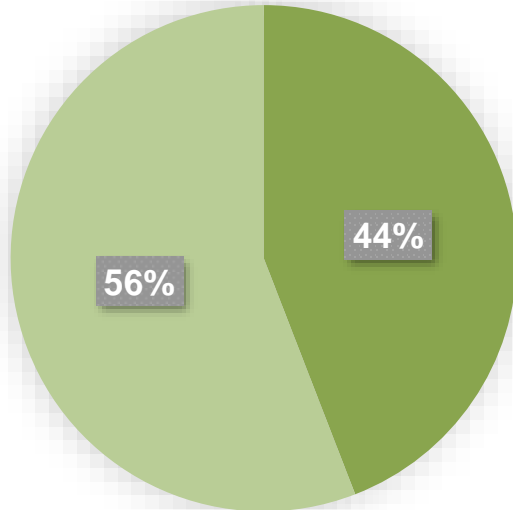A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term.

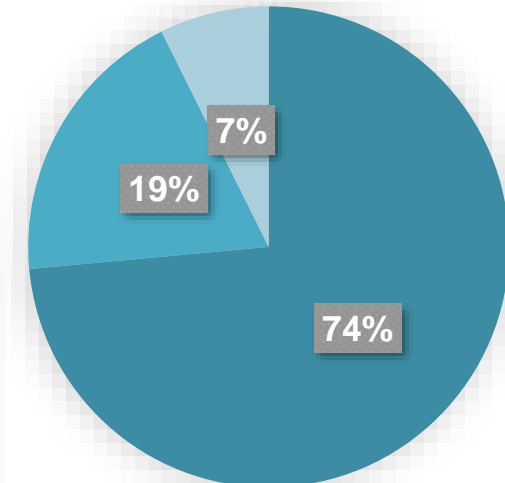# Wide variation, even WITHIN an HEI or system

Micro-Credentials at SUNY

Based on a published sample set of 68 micro-credentials offered across 11 campuses within the State University of New York system (https://system.suny.edu/academic-affairs/microcredentials/)
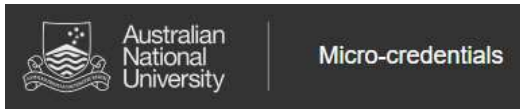
Wide variation WITHIN and AMONG HE systems

Microcredential offerings by HEIs can be

- Initiatives of individual institution
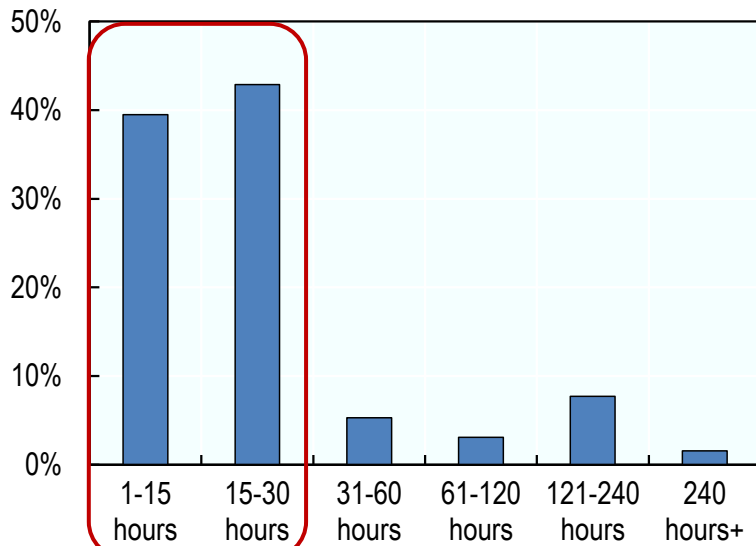- Learning platform
- Government-led

Substantial variation in size

What's common across the OECD: A <u>micro</u>credential implies there is a larger credential of broader scope and duration on offer → but variation in size, for example:

Ontario (Canada)

Microcredentials eligible for the Ontario Student Assistance Program funding

Mostly **less than one US credit hour** (approx. 45 hours)

New Zealand

Microcredentials registered with New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA)
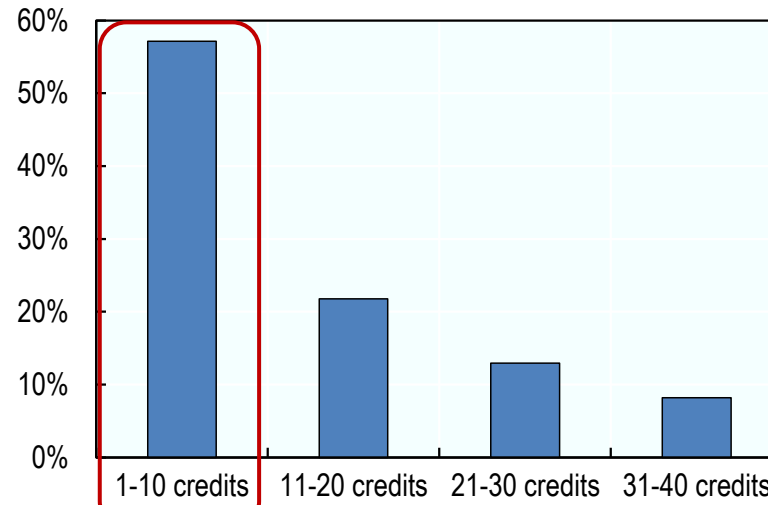
More than half is **one-two US credit hours** (five NZ credits = one US credit)

Flemish Community (Belgium)

A survey conducted by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training
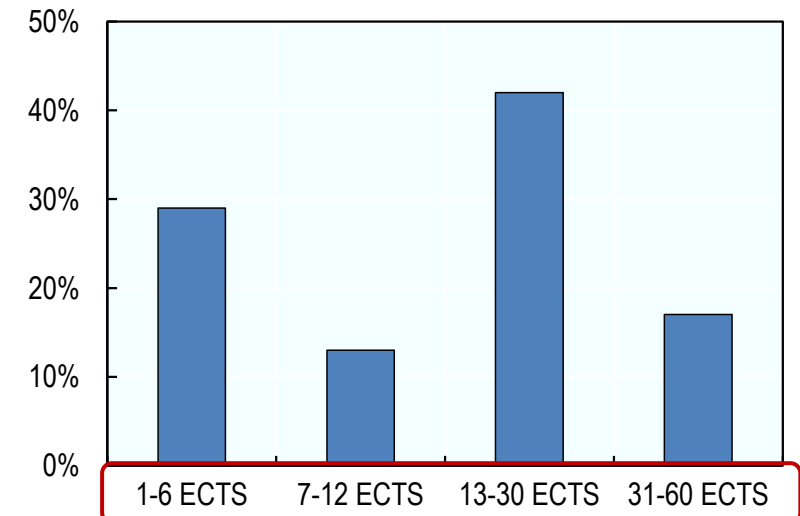
From one to 30 US credit hours (two ECTS = one US credit)

Diversity in level of offering and number of credits

Number of courses according to the ISCED level and the number of ECTS associated
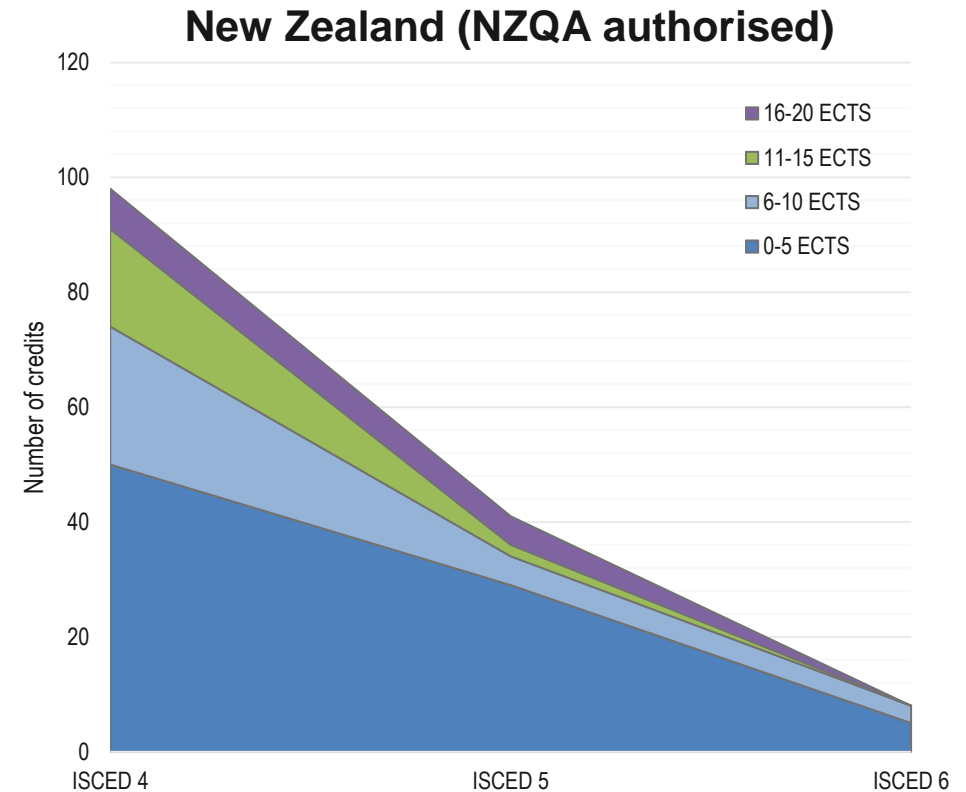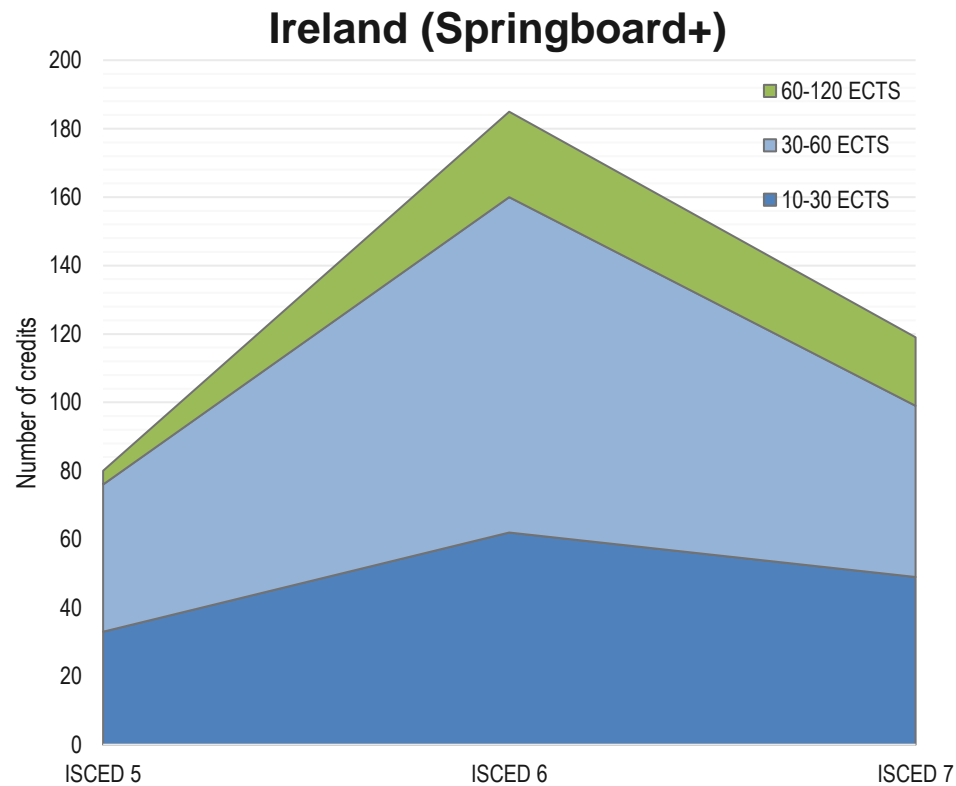
ISCED 5= EQ or GT 2 Years, vocational orientation, may provide pathway to 6 or 7 (some US subbaccalaurete certificates), ISCED 6 = BA/BS, ISCED 7= Masters

What is a microcredential?

No common definition across the OECD, but <u>a lowest common denominator</u>:

- **Smaller** than those required for academic awards (time, credits)

- **More targeted** bundle of skills or study topics

- **More flexible delivery** than traditional higher education

With differences that reflect distinct, though sometimes overlapping purposes
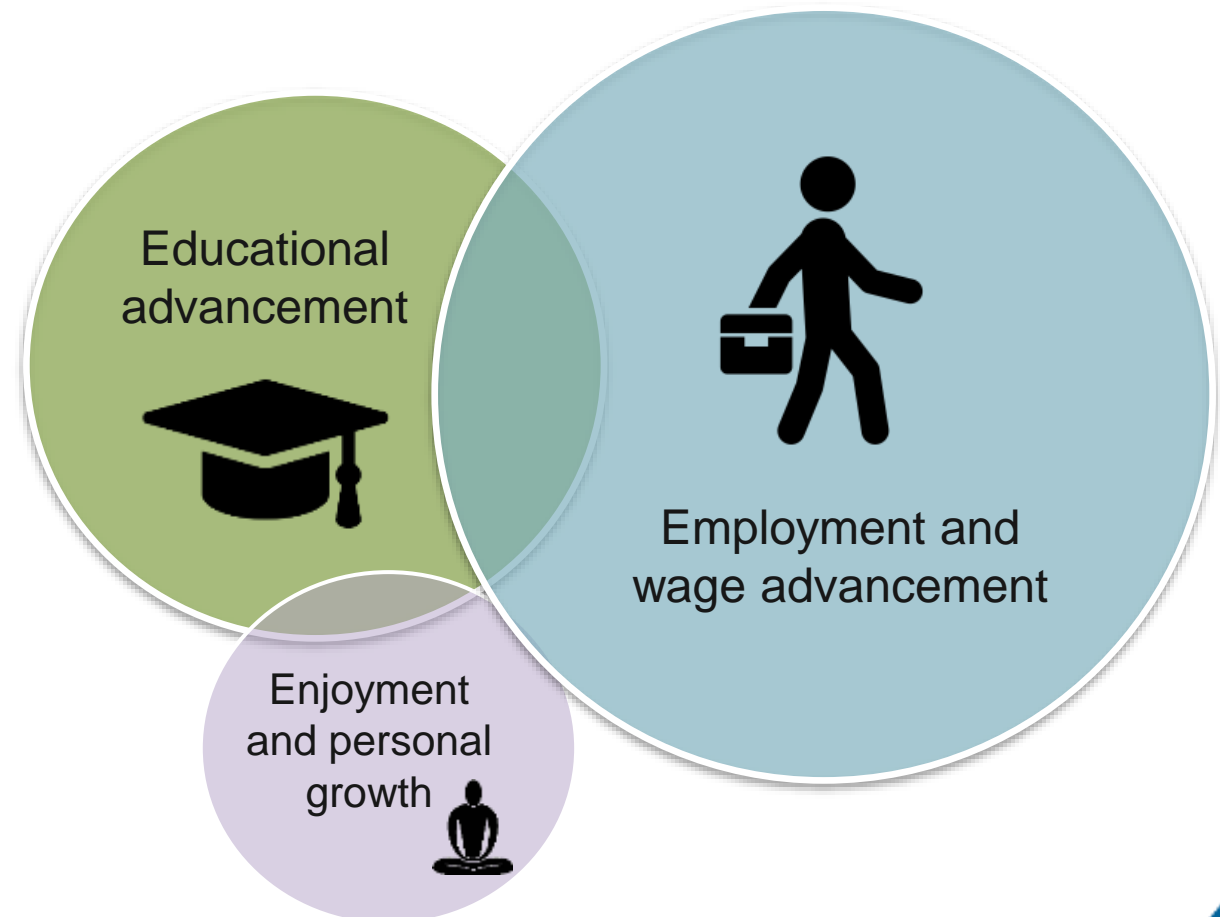
A global scan of *desired* micro-credential attributes

Targeted [breadth]	Rapid [duration]	Flexible [sequencing or timing]
Stackable [within Institution]	Learning outcomes assessed [using sectoral or national assessment framework]	External assurance of programme or provider
Portable [applicable to study programmes in other HEIs]	Study load expressed in credits	Located with National Qualification Framework
Employer role in credential design/approval	Wage and occupation reporting	Self-sovereign digital identity [recipient ownership, vendor independence]

If the purpose is mainly educational…

Targeted [breadth]	Rapid [duration]	Flexible [sequencing or timing]
Stackable [within Institution]	Learning outcomes assessed [using sectoral or national assessment framework]	External assurance of programme or provider
Portable [applicable to study programmes in other HEIs]	Study load expressed in credits	Located with National Qualification Framework
Employer role in credential design/approval	Wage and occupation reporting	Self-sovereign digital identity [recipient ownership, vendor independence]

If the purpose is mainly
to support employment and higher wages...

Targeted [breadth]	Rapid [duration]	Flexible [sequencing or timing]
Stackable [within Institution]	Learning outcomes assessed [using sectoral or national assessment framework]	External assurance of programme or provider
Portable [applicable to study programmes in other HEIs]	Study load expressed in credits	Located with National Qualification Framework
Employer role in credential design/approval	Wage and occupation reporting	Self-sovereign digital identity [recipient ownership, vendor independence]

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And if it is to serve both purposes…

Oriented to labour market	Oriented to education advancement	Targeted [breadth]	Rapid [duration]
Flexible [sequencing or timing]	Stackable [within Institution]	Learning outcomes assessed [using sectoral or national assessment framework]	External assurance of programme or provider
Portable [applicable to study programmes in other HEIs]	Study load expressed in credits	Located with National Qualification Framework	Employer role in credential design/approval
	Wage and occupation reporting	Self-sovereign digital identity [recipient ownership, vendor independence]	

HOW HAVE POLICYMAKERS RESPONDED TO INNOVATION?

Oceania and Canada:
Microcredentials with a labour market orientation

Ontario announced in 2020 an investment of CAD 59.5 million to support the development of microcredentials: **an online portal** to access microcredential programmes, support for **49 pilot programmes**, and **financial support to students**.

The Australian federal government announced in 2020 an AUD 4.3 million investment to build and run **an online microcredential portal** for learners.
The Queensland government funded **18 pilot microcredential programmes** for the period of 2019-2022.
The Higher Education Relief Package supported higher education providers to continue teaching, **including through subsidised online, short higher education courses** designed to support workers displaced by COVID-19.

The NZQA **established criteria** for microcredentials in 2018. It **individually evaluates** these credentials and approved those satisfying their quality standards (147 programmes currently)
The NZ Tertiary Education Commission introduced in 2019 a **public funding system for credentials providers.**

Europe:
Microcredentials as a flexible way of learning

The Scottish Funding Council allocated in 2020-2021 additional upskilling funding for microcredentials in proportion to universities existing upskilling allocations.

The Irish Universities Association launched in 2020 a "Multi-Campus Micro-Credentials (MC2)" project, aiming to establish a national framework for credit-bearing, quality assured microcredentials by 2024.

The EC proposed in 2020 a common European space of "trust, recognition, validation and portability" of microcredentials. In 2021, it is preparing a Council Recommendation to support the wider implementation of microcredentials across Europe.

The Accreditation Organisation of Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) reviews HEIs' capability to assure the quality of their educational offering. It has found that half of Flemish HEIs already have internal QA procedures for microcredentials.

Differences in the offer of micro-credentials are driven by different policy visions

	Ireland	New Zealand
Oriented to education advancement	Yes	No
Oriented to labour market	Yes	Yes
Employer role in design/approval	No	Yes
Learning outcomes assessed	Yes	Yes
Labour market outcomes tracked	Yes	Unknown
Level indication	Yes (NQF)	Yes (NQF)
Workload indication	Yes (ECTS)	Yes (NZ credits)
External review of programmes/providers	Yes	Yes
Stackable	In some cases	Possible but not common
Portable	Yes	No

Challenges ahead for policymakers

If MC are employment-focused …

- Getting professional/employer engagement right
- Monitoring occupational and earnings outcomes
- Assuring the quality of providers or programmes
- Communicating clearly to learners
- Adopting learner funding that is fit for purpose

If MC are to promote academic advancement …

- Trust and understanding among educators sufficient to achieve recognition and portability, in an environment where…
  - Comparable, reliable, and valid assessment of learning outcomes is weakly developed
  - Quality assurance processes do not generate high levels of confidence in learning outcomes
  - Concerns among educators [in some countries] that completed education is to be a planned and coherent process, and fragmentation puts its integrity at risk
- Keep in mind: problems of trust and recognition persist among mobile learners in traditional degree-level education

THANK YOU

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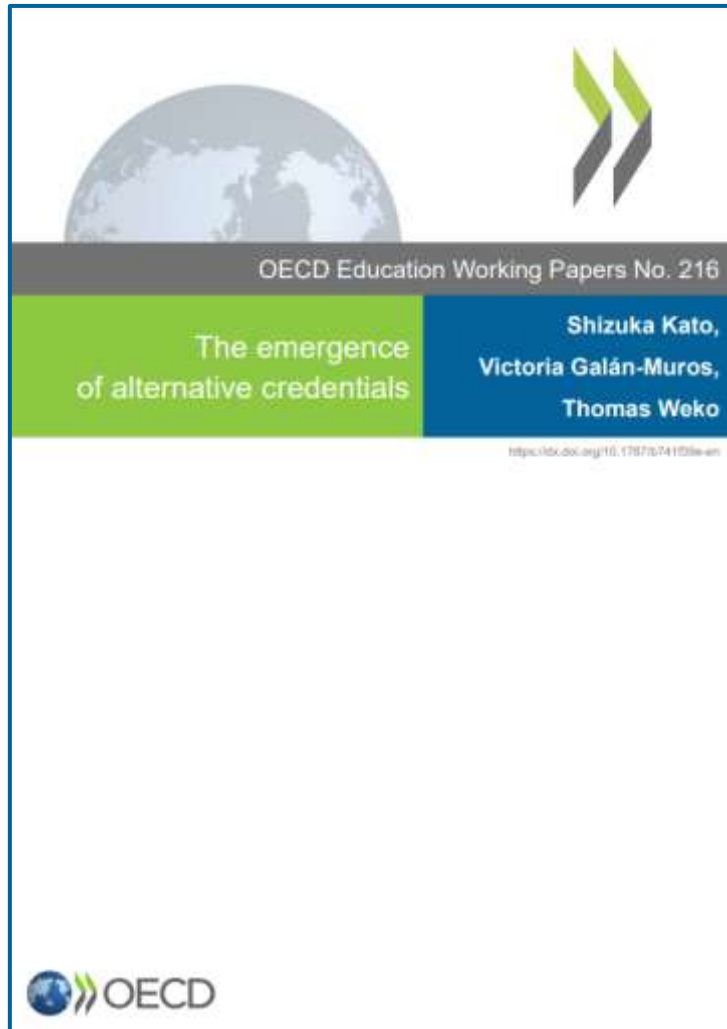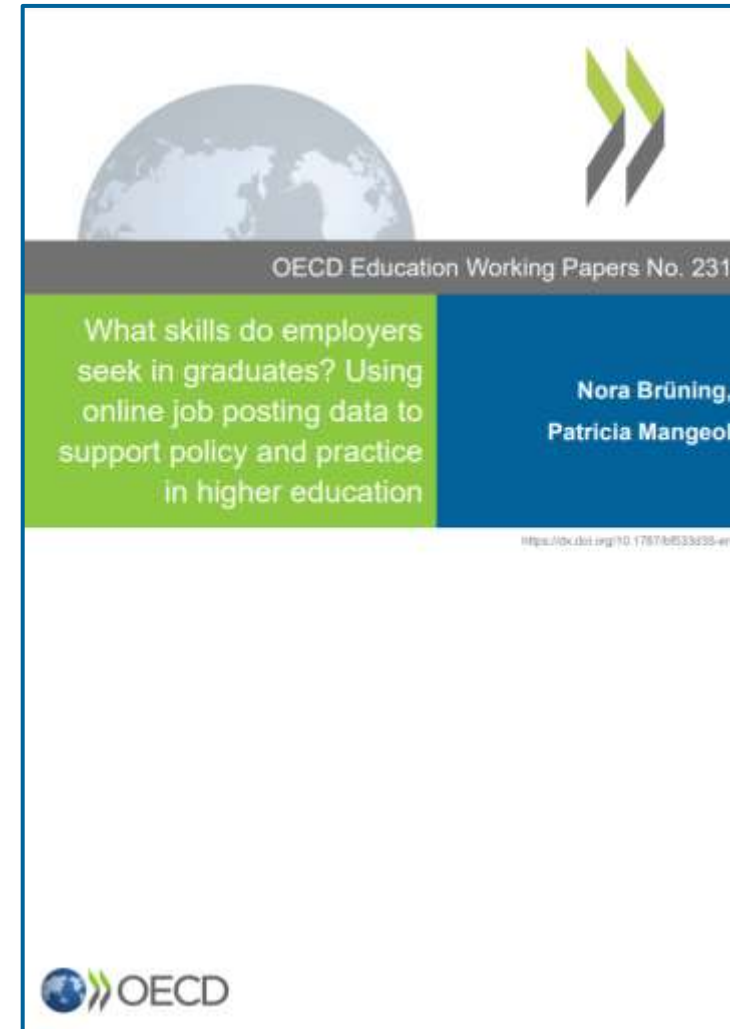Gillian Golden (Gillian.GOLDEN@oecd.org)

https://www.oecd.org/education/higher-education-policy/

APPENDIX

Working Papers published in 2020