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Micro-credentials & Quality Assurance in Irish Tertiary Education

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External QA

- External quality assurance of education and training by QQI
  :
- At **institutional** level, for all VET and HE providers, public and private, covering education, training, research and related activities
- At **programme** level, as an awarding body, for all FET providers and private HE providers
  - Public HEIs (universities) have full autonomy to design and award credentials

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NFQ

- NFQ launched in 2003, based on learning outcomes
- "*The single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards.*"

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NFQ and micro-credentials

- Includes different classes of awards
  - Major (example, bachelors degree, at least one year study)
  - Minor (module(s) from major that form coherent package)
  - Special purpose (specially designed programmes)
  - Supplemental (obtained after major) – (rarely used)

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Private HEIs – QQI Awards

- Small share (<10%) of HE provision generally, may have been earlier movers in micro-credentials than universities because of funding
- early-exploration-into-micro-credentials-in-higher-education-2014-20.pdf (qqi.ie)

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QQI Awards

Table 3.1 - Number of QQI HE validated programmes leading to micro-credentials by class, NFQ level and ECTS credits

	Minor						Special purpose					
	5 ECTS	10 ECTS	15 ECTS	20 ECTS	30 ECTS	Total	5 ECTS	10 ECTS	15 ECTS	20 ECTS	30 ECTS	Total
Level 6	1	5	1	5	6	18		4	1	2	10	17
Level 7	4	4	1			9	1	5	6	6	3	21
Level 8			3	3	2	8	1	7	6	6	4	24
Level 9		1		1	2	4	1	3	1	1	1	7
Total	5	10	5	9	10	39	3	19	14	15	18	69

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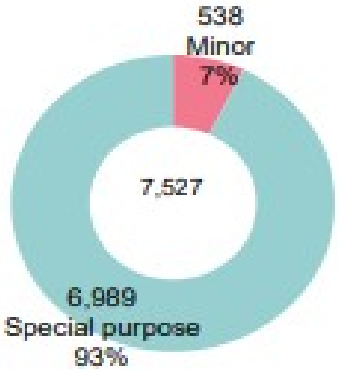
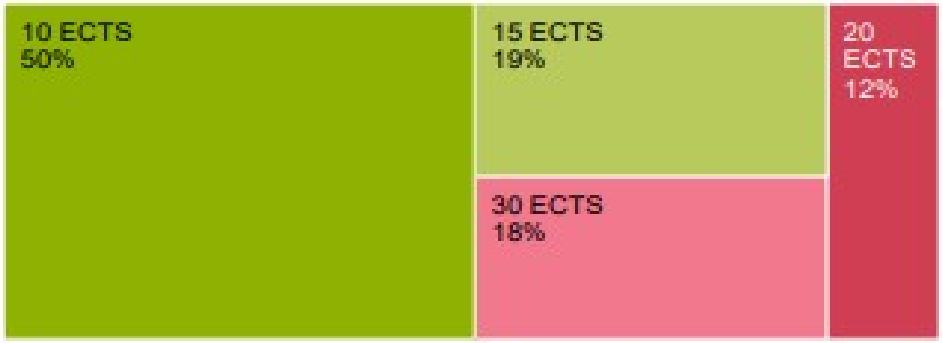
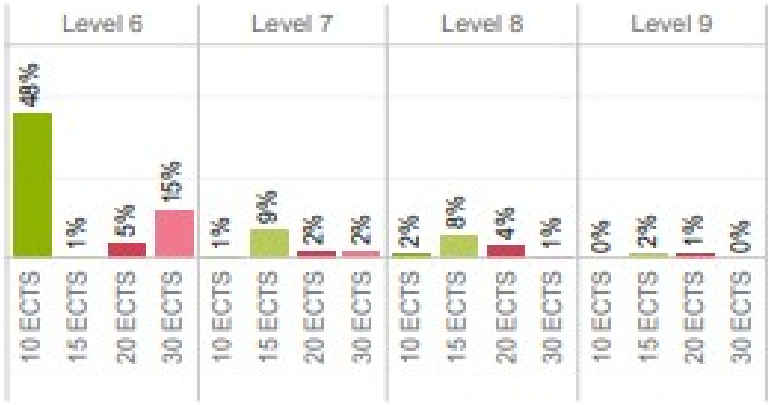
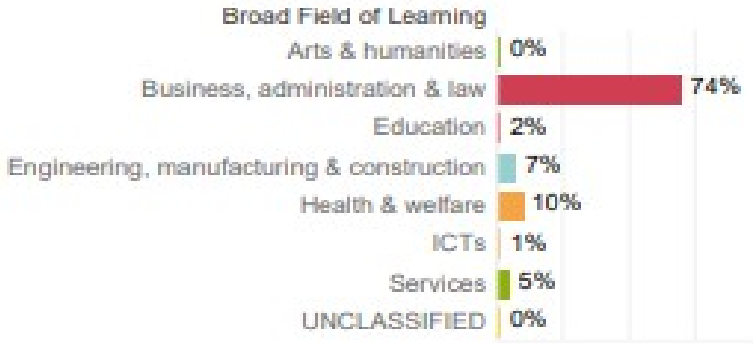
Dashboard 4 – Overview – Total number of QQI learners achieving micro-credentials 2014–2020









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Rising demand

- Streamlined process for ex-ante validation/accreditation of programmes in private HEIs for micro-credentials
- “Piggy-backs” on regular process for degrees
- Case study - validation of microcredentials | Quality and Qualifications Ireland (qqi.ie)

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IUA MicroCreds project

- New government-funded project with funding of €12.3 million (2020-2025)

1) Develop collective national framework for micro-credentials across IUA universities, 1st in Europe

2) Build & develop dynamic and sustainable model of enterprise engagement for micro-credentials

3) Design & develop a coordinated 'Discovery Platform' online portal to drive awareness of, and access to, micro-credentials (linked to a digital credentialing solution)

4) Develop suite of micro-credential courses

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IUA Microcreds Framework

Nomenclature	Level & NFQ	Credit size	Assessment
Relationship with formal qualification	Awarding body	Quality assurance	Recognition Portability Stackability

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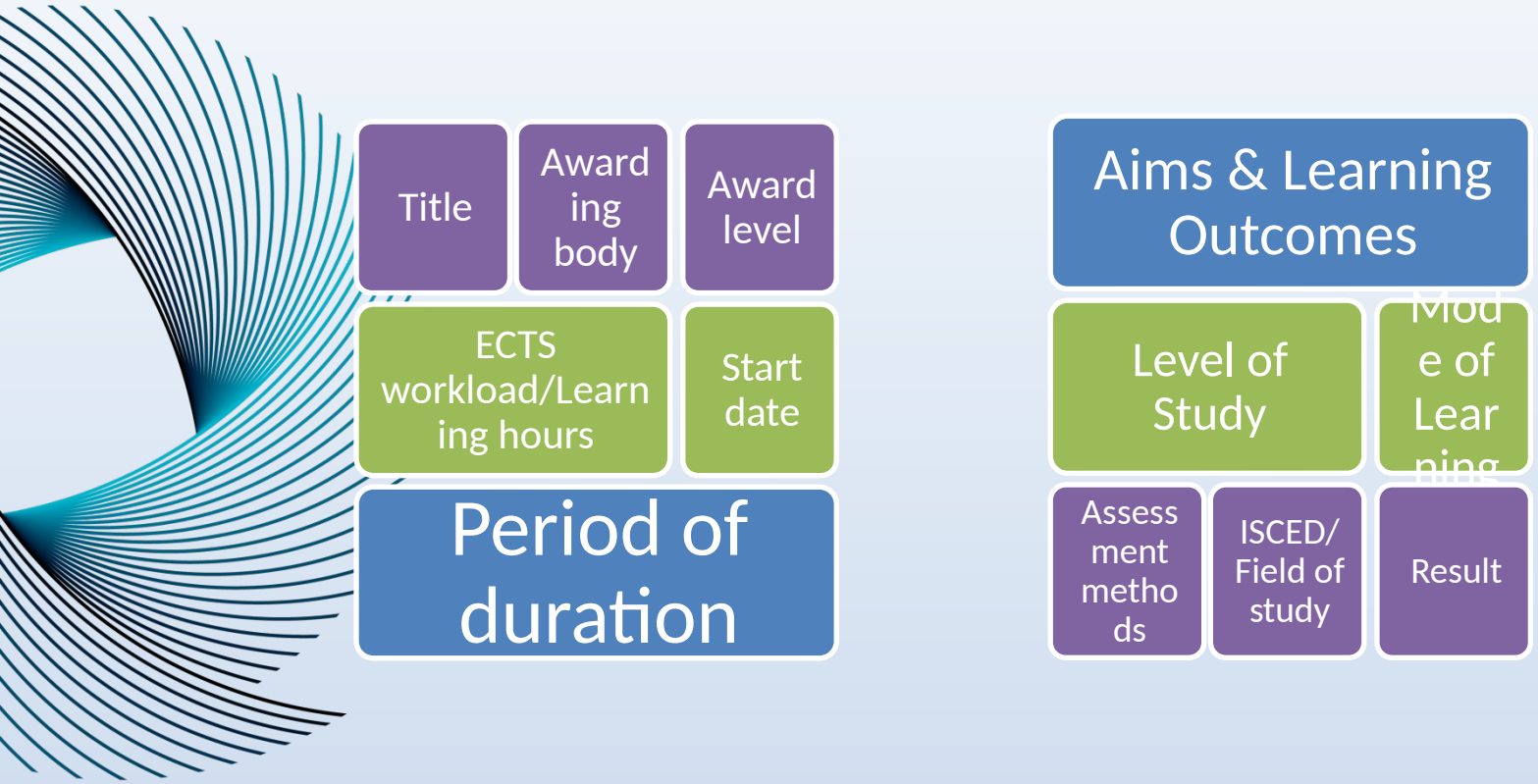
Common supplement



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Different approaches

- Full *ex ante* external programme QA (private HE)
- Supplementary external programme QA (private HE)
- Internal QA within national framework (public universities)

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Conclusions

- Quality assurance operates differently for microcredentials
- Shorter feedback loops than for major awards
  - In development
    - But note stakeholder input time/effort
  - In delivery
    - Lower opportunity cost
  - In impact
    - Learner satisfaction, graduate satisfaction, labour market outcomes, stackability
- Market model is more applicable, but incentives must be aligned to ensure responsiveness