NO.8/2020

RECOGNISING SKILLS THROUGH MICRO-CREDENTIALS

HRDF INDUSTRY INTELLIGENCE REPORT

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT FUND
PEMBANGUNAN SUMBER MANUSIA BERHAD
Agency under the purview of Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia

1800-88-4800 | www.hrdf.com.my | support@hrdf.com.my

INTRODUCTION

Education has been playing a huge role in signalling employability in the modern, industrialised world. Education in higher learning institution has always been regarded as a more prominent recognition of formal learning. With private education players in place, formal education has been widely commercialised as a product for signalling knowledge and skills.

Nonetheless, with the current digitisation and rapid growth of technology, sticking to the macro-credentials like diploma, degree and so on may not be accurate indicators of a person's latest skills and competencies. The skills and knowledge acquired in university in the past may be overtaken by technological advances and new methodologies. A new model of learning, known as micro-credentials has emerged to fulfill the needs of upskiling and retraining in the modern day labour market. As such, this report is intended to introduce micro-credentials concept adapted by Malaysia and other countries as well as HRDF's views on micro-credentials concept.

What are micro-credentials?

Micro-credential has been defined as "...term that encompasses various forms of certifications, including 'nano-degrees', 'micro-masters' credentials', 'certificates', 'badges', 'licences' and 'endorsements'. Micro-credentials focus on much smaller modules of learning than those covered in conventional academic awards, which often allow learners to complete the required work over a shorter period. Micro-credentials also represent more than mere recognition of smaller modules of learning (source: UNESCO 2018).

The need for flexibility in education.

The constantly changing digital economy and dependence on technological tools in any role have created a strong demand for education, retraining and upskilling in the workforce. This is to fulfil the labour market demand for workers to be competent in multiple disciplines. For example, to become a good journalist, not only does the individual need to write well for articles, but they also need to have a good grasp of social media.

Due to these reasons, employers are having a hard time filling job vacancies even if there are 610.5 thousand people unemployed (Source: Department of Statistics, May 2020). One of the main factors influencing unemployment is a "lack of skills" whereby there is a skills mismatch with employers' expectations and what universities are producing.

THE FUTURE OF LEARNING IN MALAYSIA

In a world that is demanding a greater level of flexibility, Malaysia Qualifications Agency (MQA) had taken steps to make studying far more accessible to a broader range of people in a short time. This initiative has led to the establishment of a new model of learning, known as micro-credentialing, an initiative to fulfil the urgent need for upskilling and retraining in this digital economy. Offering micro-credentials is not about replacing the current methods of traditional education, but rather offers a flexible option to those interested in earning a formal qualificaton through a flexible education system.

To support this initiative, the MQA has launched the "Guideline on Micro-credentials" in March 2019 to provide Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) and other stakeholders with information on the principles and good practices in the implementation of micro-credentials.

What does a micro-credential look like?

Below are the basic principles in designing and developing a credible micro-credential.

Outcome-based
Micro-credentials should articulate the overall micro-credentials and constituent module outcomes i.e: knowledge, skills, attitudes or competencies clearly and in a measurable manner.

Secure and Shareable
The micro-credentials should ideally be based on technologies that preserve the identity of the learners and protect the certification from misuse / alterations to ensure user trust.

Personalised
The providers must design micro-credentials that allow the learners to select modules /courses that cater to their needs, interests and work within the context of the overall objectives.

Transparent
The providers of micro-credentials should furnish complete information on the modules in a readable and accessible way in covering course objectives, outcome, mode of delivery, hour of learning, content, assessment, etc.

On Demand / Industry Driven
Micro-credentials should be designed and delivered in response to the demands of the learners / industries for shorter and focused skill-sets, knowledge and technologies which are required for upskilling and reskilling of the workforce in preparation for the 4th industrial revolution.

Naming the Micro-Credentials
Micro-credentials offered by any HLIs should be appropriately named based on the purpose, delivery, content, assessment and scope.

MICRO-CREDENTIALS: LEARNING FROM AUSTRALIA, UNITED KINGDOM AND NEW ZEALAND

Many countries are increasingly recognising micro-credentials. Australia, United Kingdom and New Zealand are among the countries that actively adapt with micro-credentials in their education and learning system. Based on the implementation within these countries, it can be concluded that there are two broad types of micro-credentials. One is credit bearing, incorporating an assessment component and contributing to a formal qualification. The other is a non credit bearing which comes in the form of an in-house credential, such as a "digital badge" or a "massive open online course (MOOC)". This non credit bearing may still require assessment, but does not contribute to a formal qualification or necessarily adhere to a set academic standards. The non credit bearing micro-credentials contributes to lifelong learning.

In Australia, the current review of the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) is considering the role of micro-credentials in Australia's formal credential architecture. The management of the AQF is delivered through the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment in consultation with the states and territories through the Standing Council of Tertiary Education Skills and Employment comprises of i) Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), ii) State and territory government authorised statutory bodies of respective states/territories, iii) AQF qualification in vocational education and training authorised by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), and iv) Non-self accrediting / self-accrediting universities and higher education providers authorised by the Tertiary Education on Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). In June 2020, the Australian Government has announced that a total of $4.3 million has been allocated to build and run a one-stop-shop online marketplace for micro-credentials to help students / employees identify educational opportunities. This marketplace will be designed to provide a nationally consistent platform to allow students / employees to compare course outcomes, duration, mode of delivery, and credit point value. Through this platform, the student / employee as well as the industry can assure that the investment put in is consistent with the current needs of technology within a short time period.

In United Kingdom, training related to micro-credentials are commonly obtained via a national approved MOOC platform known as "FutureLearn". The platform is recognised by its National Qualification Framework (NQF) as well as European Qualification Framework (EQF). As of June 2020, there are more than 175 industry-leading institutions and 10 million learners around the world involved in FutureLearn. Based on the review, FutureLearn has been chosen as the outstanding online degree and free certification course in the world. Earn & Young (EY's) inhouse apprenticeship programme is one successful initiative in the UK, adopting a micro-credential style targeted skills development program leading to greater workplace performance.
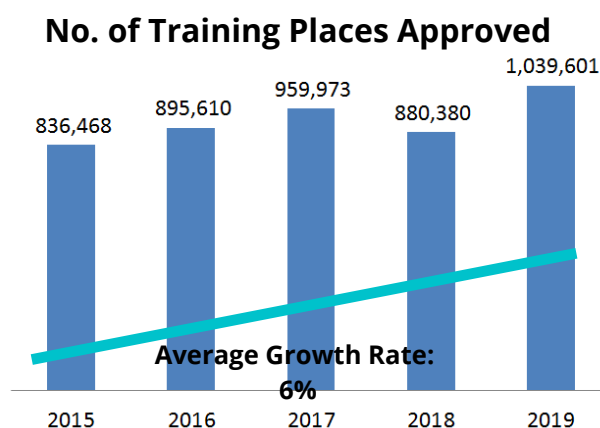
The New Zealand Qualification Authority (NZQA) has introduced a micro-credential system as part of New Zealand's regulated education and training system. The NZQA administers the New Zealand Qualification Framework (NZQF), which is the definitive source for accurate information on all quality assured qualifications. There are three (3) types of micro-credentials offered in NZ: i) nano degree that covers deep learning, computer vision and related to automotive hardware skills, ii) Edubits that recognise sets of skills and knowledge to enable just-in-time workforce upskilling and reskilling and iii) apprenticeship. With this system in place, it presents an opportunity for short course providers to extend their offering of education products. This system also allows employees to develop up-to-date skills giving them the opportunity to explore multiple careers throughout their lifetime.

IMPROVING EMPLOYABILITY

The flexibility of future learning not only focuses in recognition of credentials, but the training system as well. The training system needs to be enhanced to respond more promptly to emerging skills demands. Micro-credentials is one of the initiatives to allow training providers and the industry to work together to retrain workers, bridge skill gaps and certify prior learning.

The Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) is an agency under the purview of Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia that manages training funds for employers across three (3) main economic sectors, Manufacturing, Services, and Mining & Quarrying sectors. Since its establishment, HRDF has implemented various programmes and initiatives to accommodate the training needs of 31,704 registered employers, comprising of more than 2.5 million employees.

Cumulatively, based on the five (5) years trend of approved training places, the numbers have increased by 6% respectively which has exceeded 1 million last year, in 2019. The trainings attended were in different levels of certifications across 35 skill areas endorsed by HRDF. The statistics indicate that 96% of the programmes are non-certification programmes whereby trainee attended the training with the objective to build their capacity off a specialty area of practice or set of skills, rather than to recognise their professional through that training.

No. of Training Places Approved

Year	No. of Training Places Approved
2015	836,468
2016	895,610
2017	959,973
2018	880,380
2019	1,039,601

Average Growth Rate: 6%

In the year 2017, the World Bank Group (WBG) assessed the effectiveness of HRDF where the report indicated that the productivity in respective organisations increased by 3% with every 1% of employee trained. This shows that effective training can help the organisation increase productivity regardless of certification or non-certification programmes. In this sense, as Malaysia has recognised micro-credential, it is timely for the training courses to be aligned with micro-credential requirements. Trainees who attended multiple courses may accumulate them into a micro-credential accreditation that would enable them to obtain recognised qualification from higher learning institutions in order to improve their level of employability.

CONCLUSION

Micro-credential programmes are not new initiatives for other countries. More countries including Malaysia are now exploring micro-credentials as a way for teachers or trainers to demonstrate their teaching and leadership skills. By creating a constructive module or course of learning into smaller portions within a short timeframe, micro-credentials are opening the doors to facilitate greater fluidity in recognising learning that happens in the workplace.