



ENQA webinar: Micro-credentials and the role of external quality assurance

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The view from a quality assurance agency

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Internationalisation and Recognition of Qualifications



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ANECA's approach to micro-credentials: the agency's "Statement on Short Teaching and Learning Packages and the Recognition of their Credentials"

The Statement is included in the efforts made by ANECA **to give QA advice and support to the Spanish universities** and to potential students interested in applying to **current** such types of short HE courses or those that might be delivered in the **future**. And to think about its **recognition**.

ANECA wishes to **share this reflection** with the international QA community in order to contribute to exchanging practices for such **innovative approaches**.

The **current pandemic** obviously impact on the way we read and understand this document. Although most of it was "thought and discussed in" ANECA **before this health event**, it is inevitable that the situation will give a new context, and even a **new meaning**, to the document.

ANECA's approach to micro-credentials: the agency's "Statement on Short Teaching and Learning Packages and the Recognition of their Credentials"



The Statement focuses on:

- **any kind of HE delivery:** face to face, hybrid or fully online
- independently of the **nature of the provider** behind the HE course: formally established universities and HEI, private corporations or companies, on-line platforms, etc.
- QA procedures **regardless the scope:** programme, institutional...
- **short-term educational packages** leading to a particular credential or **independent modules** or teaching & learning parts belonging to a regular HE programme expressed in terms of achieved LO
- **mechanisms to favour the recognition** of a wide array of credentials coming from a very diverse providers awarding multiple credentials in terms of both **length** and **learning outcomes**

Cross-Border Higher Education



Quality Assurance Agency



Quality Assurance

"Variable geometry" of HE provision

Virtual Learning
Blended Learning

On-line ER:
MOOCs
Nanodegrees
...

CBHE typology:
Branch campus
Twinning
Fanchise
...

Student's protection & Society's expectations

Sustainability from the perspective of a QA Agency



ANECA's approach to micro-credentials: the agency's "Statement on Short Teaching and Learning Packages and the Recognition of their Credentials"

Short term HE courses receive a wide range of names: "modular formats" (**Inside Higher ED**, 2018), "Open Educational Resources" (**European Commission**, 2018), "shorter-term courses" (**van der Hijden**, 2019), "short online courses at higher education levels" (**Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment**, 2020).

These "learning innovations" should not be confronted with its corresponding "QA-procedure", in a **classical stimulus and response reaction**.

These "short teaching and learning" or "**short educational packages**" (SEP) as ANECA calls them, can take part of the broad teaching offer of a HEI but also of a wide range of different providers: the **QA principle underpinning** should be specified and detailed **by the provider** itself.

ANECA's approach to micro-credentials: the agency's "Statement on Short Teaching and Learning Packages and the Recognition of their Credentials"



Flexibility versus rigid learning paths: What does the student need? What does society require?

Beyond the emergence of the MOOCs, nano-degrees and a plethora of educational initiatives based on e-means and online provision, a reflection on a **more flexible academic curricula** is taken place in Spain and across the world.

The **Student-centred learning approach** of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) could also be considered as part of a plea for flexible study programmes broken down in modules towards more internationalised and interdisciplinary diplomas.

The innovative and challenging "**European Universities Initiative**" run by the European Commission could also be benefited from this approach and ANECA is preparing a document to reflect upon from this framework.

QA of Short Teaching and Learning Packages and the Recognition of their Credentials: ANECA Statement



Flexibility versus rigid learning paths: What about QA arrangements?

The immediate response to the QA of a SEP should be:

- considered in terms of "***how it is referred to the internal QA of the HEIs/provider involved***".
- ***to define the QA arrangements in place*** when dealing with any particular educational 'bit' within a bigger picture.
- agreed upon a ***general set of principles and their corresponding guidelines***, in order to look for a balance between autonomy of providers and national regulations,.
- shared with ***regional QA networks and associations could play a crucial part*** looking for general trends and practices.

Key challenges and opportunities for ANECA in addressing micro-credentials



- For online and hybrid learning models, one of the **key mechanism** to safeguard quality lies in **the IQA system**.
- The evaluation of the IQAS at the HEI level allows agencies to assess their **robustness in assuring the quality** of the various learning options and technological modalities used by the institution or provider.
- This approach **shifts** the quality model from purely "**external review**" to "self-monitoring" and "**co-responsibility**" **for the institution**.
- Versatile QA tools are needed to deal with two significant independent variables: (i) protection of the student's solvency in the course in which he/she is enrolled and the the assessment is fair and (ii) the quality of the academic resources and the academic staff that teach it.

Key challenges and opportunities for ANECA in addressing micro-credentials



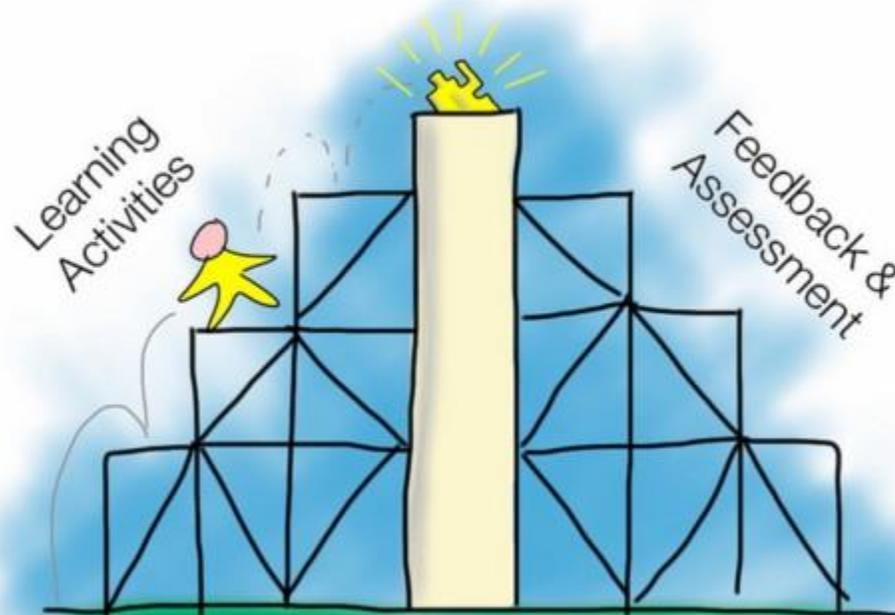
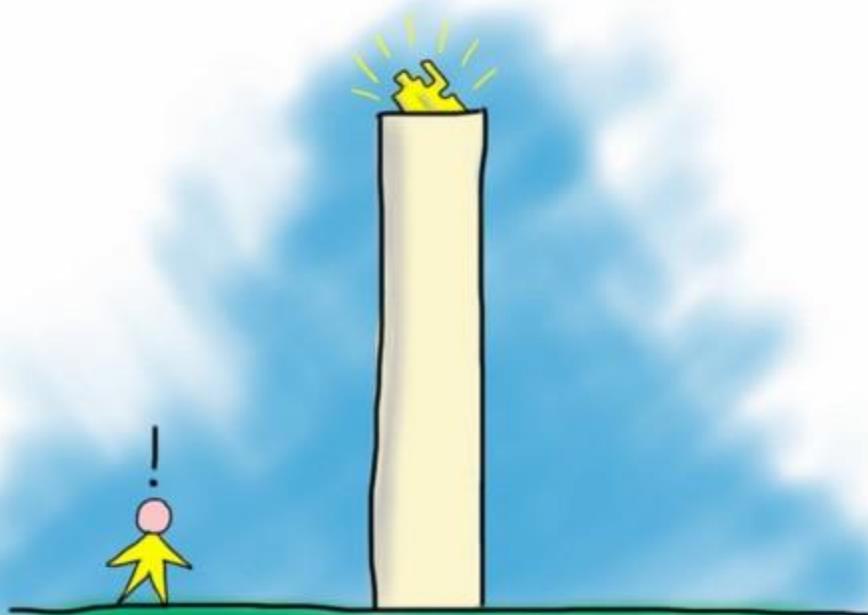
Towards “scaffolding” internal QA practices on Short Educational Packages: an “incremental approach”

- The key to face these challenges from a QA perspective should not be to create "**ad hoc QA devices**" for every technological or educational innovation.
- HEIs and providers that deliver SEPs must have an **explicit QA framework embedded in the institutional Q strategy**.
- The external QA body needs to receive sufficient information about the teaching and learning arrangements between a particular SEP and the student who is defining his/her own learning path or choosing a “learning assembly” with other SEPs, modules in a programme, etc.

Towards “scaffolding” internal QA practices on Short Educational Packages: an “incremental approach”



Learning Outcome



Key challenges and opportunities for ANECA in addressing micro-credentials



Towards “scaffolding” internal QA practices on Short Educational Packages: an “incremental approach”

- The huge amount of teaching & learning combinations have to be understood within the **evolutionary path** of the learner throughout his or her **lifelong learning process** and have to be identified with their corresponding credentials.
- ANECA recommends to develop an **information tool** that could be turned into a “**QA and recognition statement for SEP**” which should provide a particular a DNA-rooted set of answers to the headlines this document has broken down. (**Blockchain**)
- This approach highlights the experience of each provider through the IQAS in place linked to the specific procedure implemented (**tailored versus one size fits all approach**).

Key challenges and opportunities for ANECA in addressing micro-credentials



Towards “scaffolding” internal QA practices on Short Educational Packages: an “incremental approach”

- The same autonomy and maturity that governs the implementation of an institutional **quality policy** should underpin the actions necessary to **ensure the quality** of the initiatives defined by the **institution** in relation to all types of SEPs offered.
- The only contribution to be made by QA agencies is the **definition of a set of guidelines** aimed at supporting universities and providers in ensuring the quality of SEPs.
- This is a proposal to develop a procedure to promote an **institutional approach to QA** in order to meet national requirements and the internationalisation strategy of the HEIs.

Key challenges and opportunities for ANECA in addressing micro-credentials



What does an “incremental approach” mean?

- The QA development framework for SEPs offered by a HEI, should be understood as an **“incremental QA process”**.
- The term is taken from the theoretical current of Latin American “incremental architecture” exemplified by Chilean architect **Alejandro Aravena**, winner of the 2016 Pritzker Architecture Prize.
- Our model shares Aravena’s idea of reacting to the scarcity of resources and in our case to the enormous evaluative burden following the **“principle of incrementality”**: when not everything can be done, we must focus on that which is “most difficult”, in the sense of what ensures the common good (**institutional welfare**).

Key challenges and opportunities for ANECA in addressing micro-credentials



What does an “incremental approach” mean?

- The implementation of internal QA systems at the HEIs level goes far **beyond the compliance with national or sectoral regulations.**
- It opens a **new dimension to institutional strengthening and new governance** that exceeds academic management of limited human and economic resources.
- Aravena’s statement can be applied to HE : "Architecture can introduce a broader concept of profit: design **as an added value** rather than an additional cost; architecture as a **shortcut to equity.**"
- The HEIs governing bodies can take the information gathered by the IQAS to inform the decisions to develop a **sustainable HE** for the benefit of their academic community, students, graduates and society

Key challenges and opportunities for ANECA in addressing micro-credentials



The recognition of Short Educational Packages' credentials: In trust we trust in the EHEA

The focus on the management of the SEPs within the IQAS of the HEIs provides an immediate **framework of quality management at the institutional level** that ensures :

- compliance with the internal QA mechanisms in terms of design of the educational package,
- delivery of the contents by appropriate academic staff,
- sufficient technical and communicational support where online provision is involved,
- fair assessment system for students and safe and sound identification of students in terms of authentication and protection of personal data,

Key challenges and opportunities for ANECA in addressing micro-credentials



The recognition of Short Educational Packages' credentials: In trust we trust in the EHEA

- number of ECTS or a clear reference to a particular teaching and learning pattern,
- clear assignment of the SEP to a particular level within the National Qualifications Framework or its counterpart in the corresponding level of the UNESCO ISCED level and
- clear identification of the awarding body backing the credential issued, as well as the nature and location of the register or archive where the credential and the data of the student is kept.

The above information could be submitted in a sort of "**credential supplement**" template.

Key challenges and opportunities for ANECA in addressing micro-credentials



- A SEP awarding a credential should not necessarily require the involvement of an external QA body to certify or accredit the course and its credential if a **blockchain-related system** is provided.
- A general agreement on the assumption of an explicit internal **QA procedure dealing with SEPs at the provider level**, could prevent the “automatic” implementation of any external QA procedure.
- A permanently **updated public catalogue or register**, run by every provider should be required for information purposes of futures students and employers and at the disposal of both HE authorities and QA agencies.
- The **National Qualifications Framework** should be involved in order to contribute to the clarification of the level of all SEPs for the sake of student’s protection in recognising the value of these educational bits, but also for international recognition purposes.

Key challenges and opportunities for ANECA in addressing micro-credentials



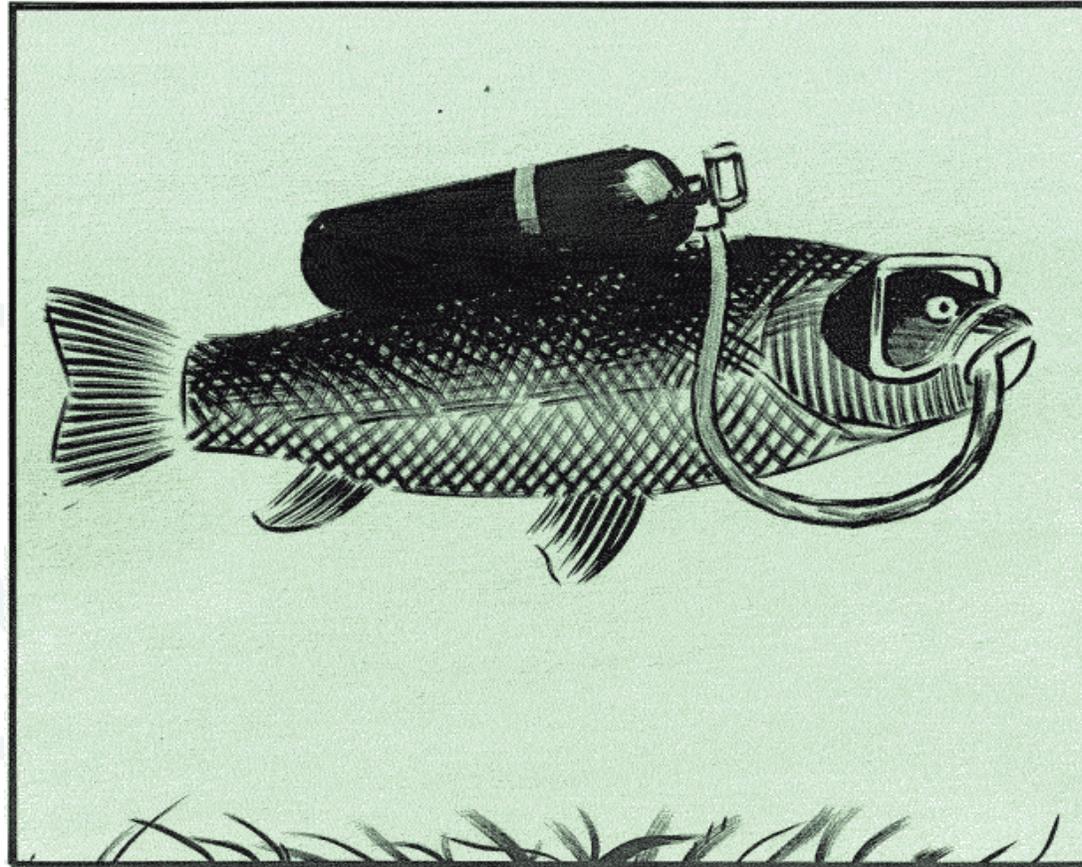
Flexibility of curricula: A new paradigm for internationalisation of higher education?

- The model is **not a closed "procedure"** but it works as a **"built-in" mechanism to the QA of SEP** assumed by the individual learner in his or her particular student-life.
- The model should facilitate its inclusion in the internal QA system to which the programme (or a module if we are dealing with a modularisation pattern) shall respond to, without paralysing or complicating their implementation.
- The QA system should therefore be open and "incremental" according to the needs of either the final programme or modules.
- It is important to establish priorities to implement the necessary combination of different teaching and learning bits and pieces gathered together in an individual learning path.

QA of Short Teaching and Learning Packages and the Recognition of their Credentials



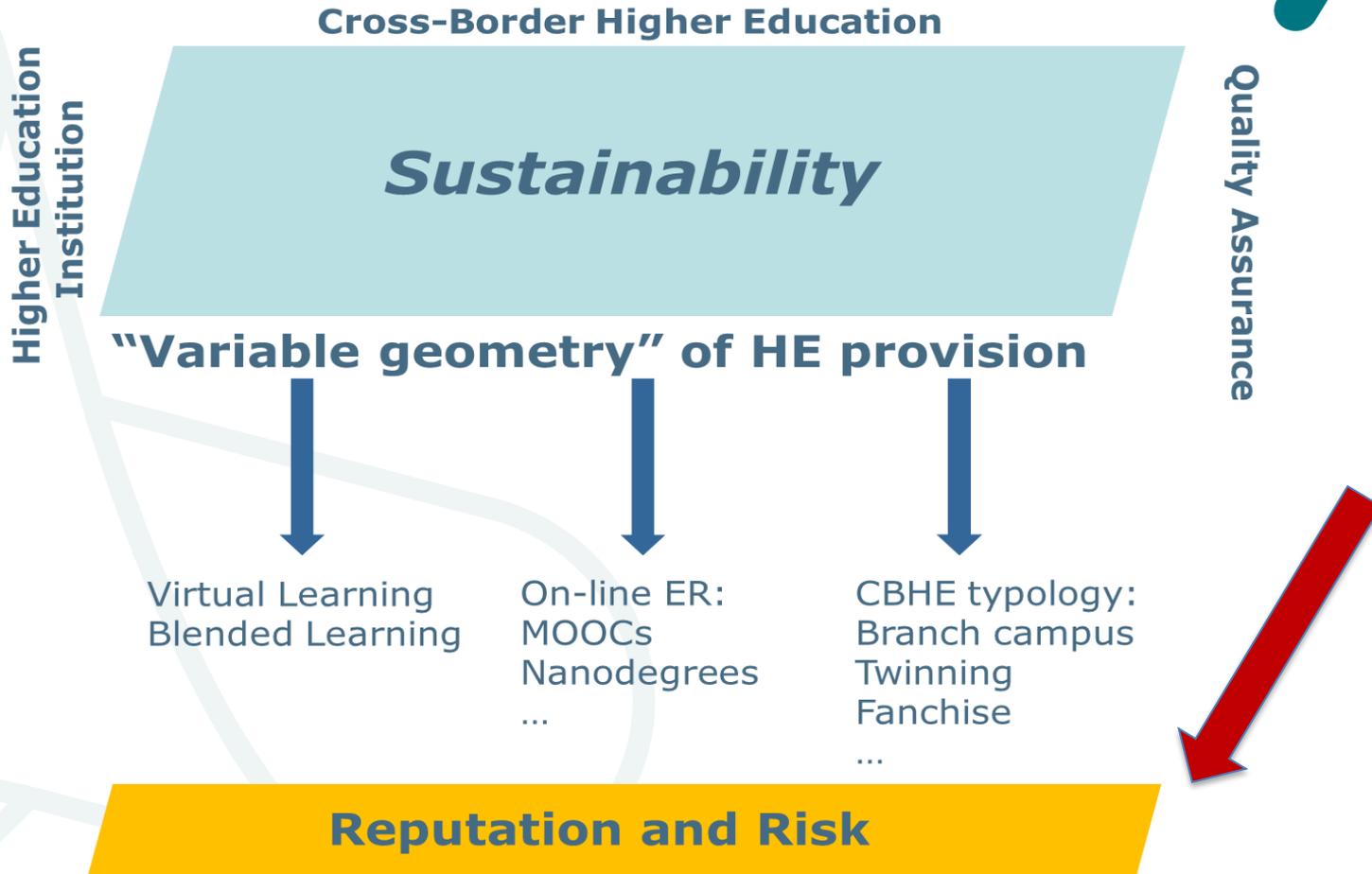
Fit for purpose?



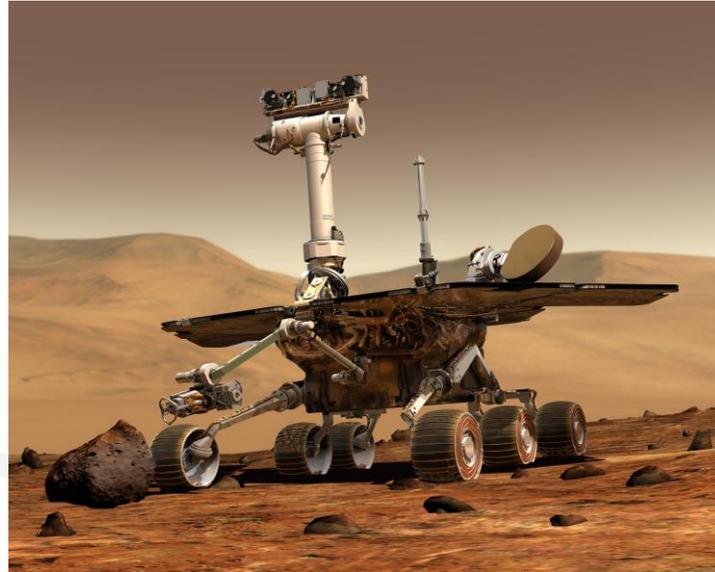
elroto.elpais@gmail.com

Fit to purpose?





Sustainability from the perspective of a HE Institution



Thank you

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