Creating Flexible Pathways for Innovation

Community for Educational Innovation (CEI)

September 15, 2026

European Commission | CEI

About CEI

Community for Educational Innovation

Created by the Directorate General for Education, Youth Sport and Culture (DG EAC) of the European Commission.



1,600+
Members



100+
Countries



55%
Higher education
+ other stakeholders

Connects

Higher education, industry, public sector and civil society

Advances

Educational innovation and entrepreneurial mindsets across Europe

Synergies

HEInnovate and EHESO (European Higher Education Sector Observatory) Strategic Transformation Toolbox.

Thematic strands 2025-2026



2025 - I

Thematic Strand 1
Entrepreneurial Skills and Mindsets in Education



2025 - II

Thematic Strand 2
Bridging the Innovation Gap in Higher Education



2026 - I

Thematic Strand 3
Education for Green and Digital Innovation



2026 - II

Thematic Strand 4
Lifelong Learning for an Innovative Workforce

Report on Thematic Strand 1 available!

Report on Thematic Strand 2 available!

Report on Thematic Strand 3 coming soon!

Thematic strand 4

Lifelong Learning for an Innovative Workforce



Webinar topics:

- Creating Flexible Pathways for Innovation (Sept. 15)
- Partnerships for Skills – Building Bridges Across Sectors (Oct. 14)
- Empowering Learners for Workforce Transitions (Dec. 02)



Calls for good practices & polls

- Share your good practices on lifelong learning.
- Take our quick semester poll and share yourinsights.



Study visit

- Polytechnic University of Viana do Castelo, Portugal (Nov. 2026).



Thematic report

- Summarises thematic strand activities.

Agenda

10:30	Welcome & introduction
10:40	**Intervention 1 –** Recognition of Prior Learning: Creating Flexible Pathways into and through Higher Education Dr. Ciara Staunton
11:00	**Intervention 2 –** Flexible Formats for Innovation in Lifelong Learning - The Micro Credentials at Leibniz University Hannover. Prof. Dr. Elke Katharina Wittich
11:20	CEI Poll
11:25	**Intervention 3 –** Creating Flexible Pathways for Innovation – INGENIUM European University. Dr. Eeva Kuoppala
11:55	Closing remarks

Objective

Explores how education providers can create flexible pathways for changing learner and skills needs.

Key objectives

- Supporting access and progression through recognition of prior learning.
- Combining short and modular learning into broader pathways.
- Using micro-credentials to respond to future skills needs.



Dr. Ciara Staunton

Director, National RPL in Higher Education Project in Ireland

Presentation 1

Recognition of Prior Learning: Creating Flexible Pathways into and through Higher Education

- Ireland's National Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Higher Education Project is a collaborative initiative involving 14 higher education institutions, co-sponsored by the Technological Universities Association and the Irish Universities Association
- Over 20 years' experience in higher education and adult learning, with particular expertise in lifelong learning, widening participation and the recognition of prior learning
- Works closely with higher education institutions, national agencies and international partners to embed RPL across the sector
- Active member of the European RPL Network, supporting collaboration and knowledge exchange across Europe

Recognition of Prior Learning

Your Learning Counts

RPL in Higher Education Project

Project Management Team

Dr Ciara Staunton
Director, RPL in Higher Education Project

Dr Clare Walsh,
Head of Staff Development

Maria Casey,
Communications & Engagement Lead

Orla Kelly,
Project Liaison Officer



Human Capital Initiative

IRISH UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION

TUA Technological Universities Association

priorlearning.ie

Over the past five years, we've learned a great deal about what helps—and what doesn't—when embedding Recognition of Prior Learning across a higher education sector. I'd like to share a few of those reflections with you.



Sustainable Development Goal 4

and the changing lifelong learning landscape

- **SDG 4** - Inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.
- **Profound societal change** — demographic shifts, migration, technology, AI, sustainability and changing patterns of participation — is reshaping lifelong learning (OECD, 2025).
- **Flexible learning pathways** and effective recognition of knowledge, skills and competences across formal, non-formal and informal learning are increasingly essential (Cedefop, 2023; 2026; OECD, 2022).
- **Higher education** must become more flexible and learner-centred, recognising the knowledge, capabilities and experiences — or learning incomes — learners bring with them (De LaGarza & Staunton, 2025).



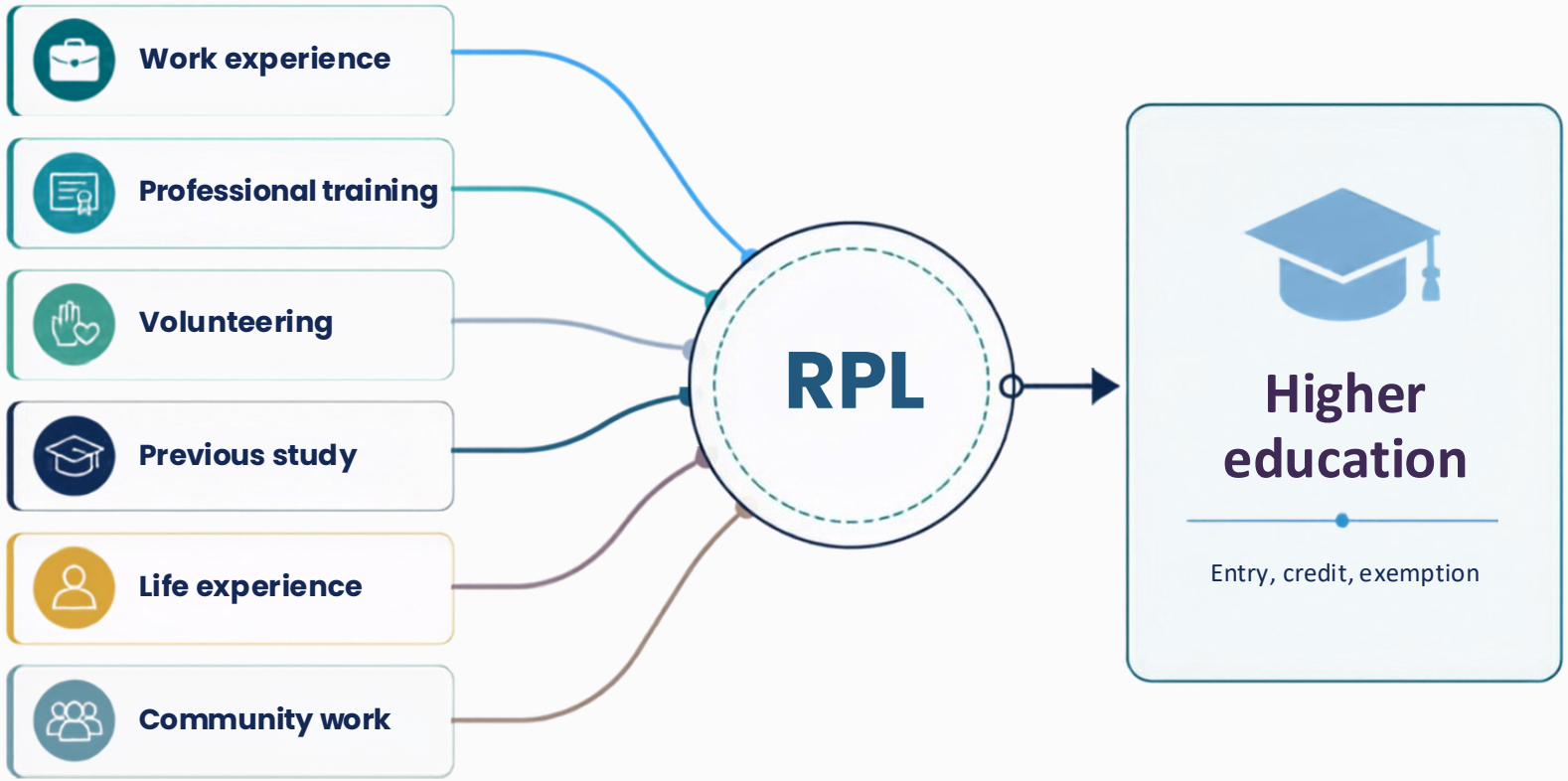


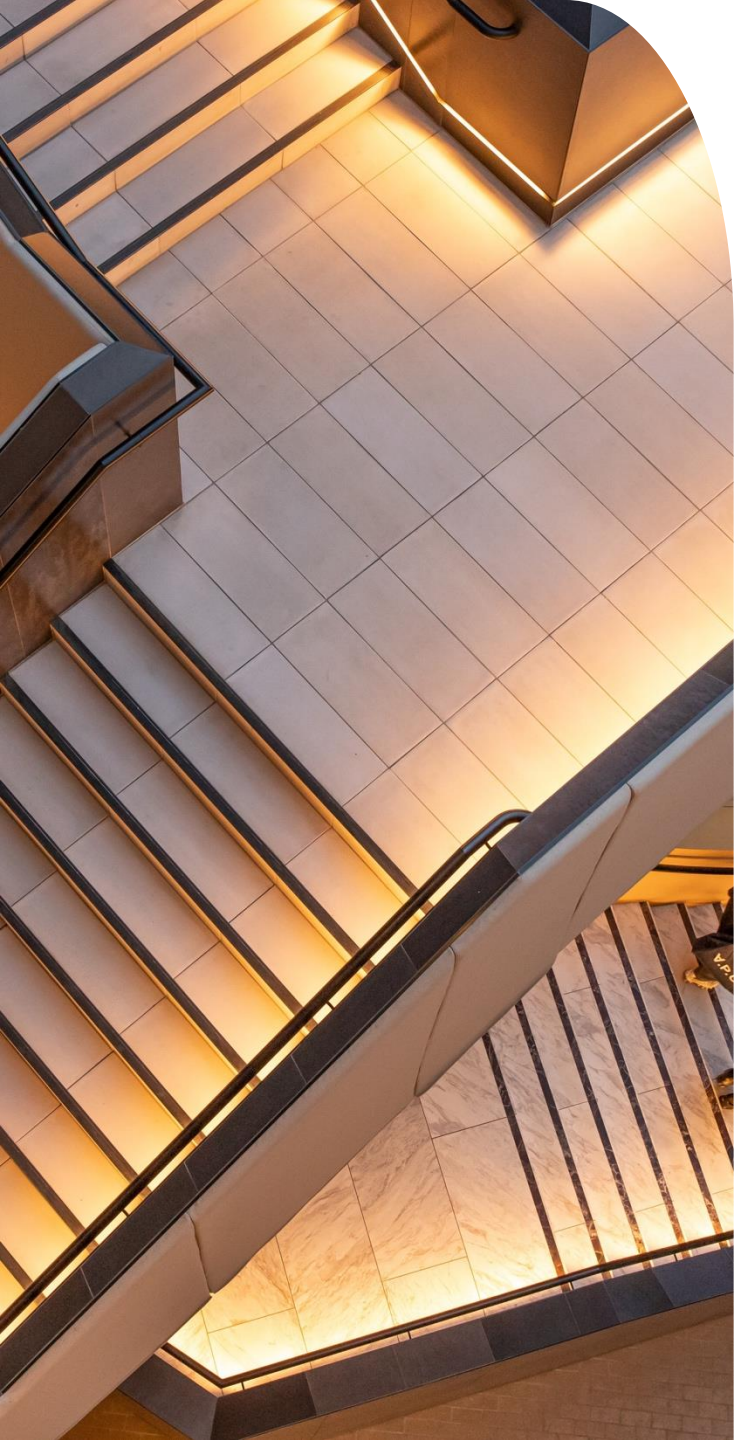
WHY DOES RPL MATTER NOW?

RPL is not the destination-it is one of the mechanisms that enables more responsive higher education institutions.

Context

- more diverse learner populations
- lifelong learning
- flexible learning pathways
- demographic change
- AI and changing work
- widening participation
- recognising learning wherever it occurs





Common Questions and Barriers to RPL

Who can support me?

Does my experience count?

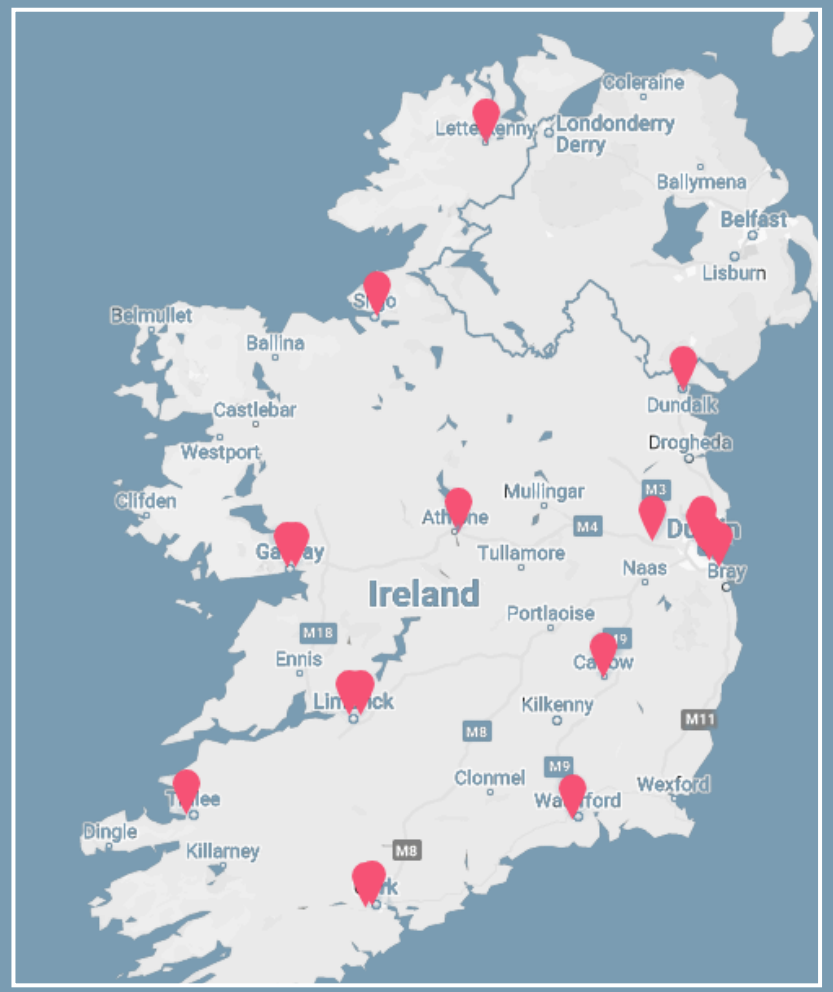
What evidence do I need?

Am I eligible?

What happens next?

These questions can become barriers when information, guidance and processes are difficult to find or understand.

WHAT HAS IRELAND LEARNED?



Trust

National coordination can support, but not replace, institutional responsibility.

Collaboration

National collaboration accelerates institutional change

Shared Resources

To reduce duplication

Framework for RPL in Higher Education
Technical (Data) Definition of RPL

Professional Learning

Communities of practice build confidence

RPL Digital Badge

Institutional Ownership

Essential for RPL

Toolkit for Staff
RPL Exemplars of Practice

These are the transferable lessons.

Project Milestones

2020

Early Capacity Building

- Sector data gap identified
- Onboarding RPL Project Leads at Partner HEIs
- Development of Project RPL Brand Identity
- RPL for Enterprise Pilot launched
- MiLab Service Mapping & Solution Co-creation Book of Discovery

Data Foundations and Framework

- Pilot framework for RPL in HE approved in principle
- Pilot technical definition for RPL in HE approved

2021

Building RPL Foundations

- Institutional RPL Audit & Reviews
- Collective Visioning Workshops
- Development of Project Plan to 2025
- Stakeholder Meetings
- RPL Framework Consultation
- Development of RPL Action Plan

2022

Sector Engagement

- priorlearning.ie formally launched
- RPL for Enterprise Think-In Event
- Iteration 1: RPL Digital Badge (April):

133 Badges Issued 18 Facilitator Badges

- Iteration 2: RPL Digital Badge (Oct)

96 Badges Issued 47 Facilitator Badges



202 4

Building RPL Awareness and Capacity

- Iteration 3: RPL Digital Badge (April):
  87 Badges Issued 13 Facilitator Badges
- 1st RPL Learner Database Compiled

↑ 3,54 Learners used RPL in 2021/22

↑ 3,807 Learners used RPL in 2022/23

↑ 4,518 Learners used RPL in 2023/24

- May: RPL featured in The Irish Times
- Oct: RPL featured on RTÉ Nationwide
- Iteration 4: RPL Digital Badge (Oct):
  45 Badges Issued 4 Facilitator Badges
- Nov: Inaugural RPL month launched
- RPL Guide for Learners launched

2025

Scaling RPL Visibility, Evidence & Learner Engagement

- Iteration 5: RPL Digital Badge (April):
  92 Badges Issued 6 Facilitator Badges
- Capstone Event RPL in 2025: *Outcomes, Reflections and Next Steps*
- External Evaluation of the RPL in HE Project to coincide with the 5-year phase
- Publication: RPL Toolkit for Staff
- Iteration 6: RPL Digital Badge (Oct):
  32 Badges Issued 2 Facilitator Badges

2026

Extension Phase Action Plan and Key Priorities

Increasing RPL Capacity Across HEIs

- Establishment of the RPL Community of Practice
- Co-constuction development and launch of the Asynchronous RPL Digital Badge
- Bespoke Workshops and Training

Awareness Raising & Learner Engagement

- Awareness Raising & Learner Engagement
- Development of RPL Communications Toolkit
- Icreasing RPL Visibility through HEI Communications
- Continuance of RPL Insights Newsletter
- Sustaining priorlearning.ie and RPL Resources
- Reviewing RPL Visibility across HEI websites

Continued RPL Integration

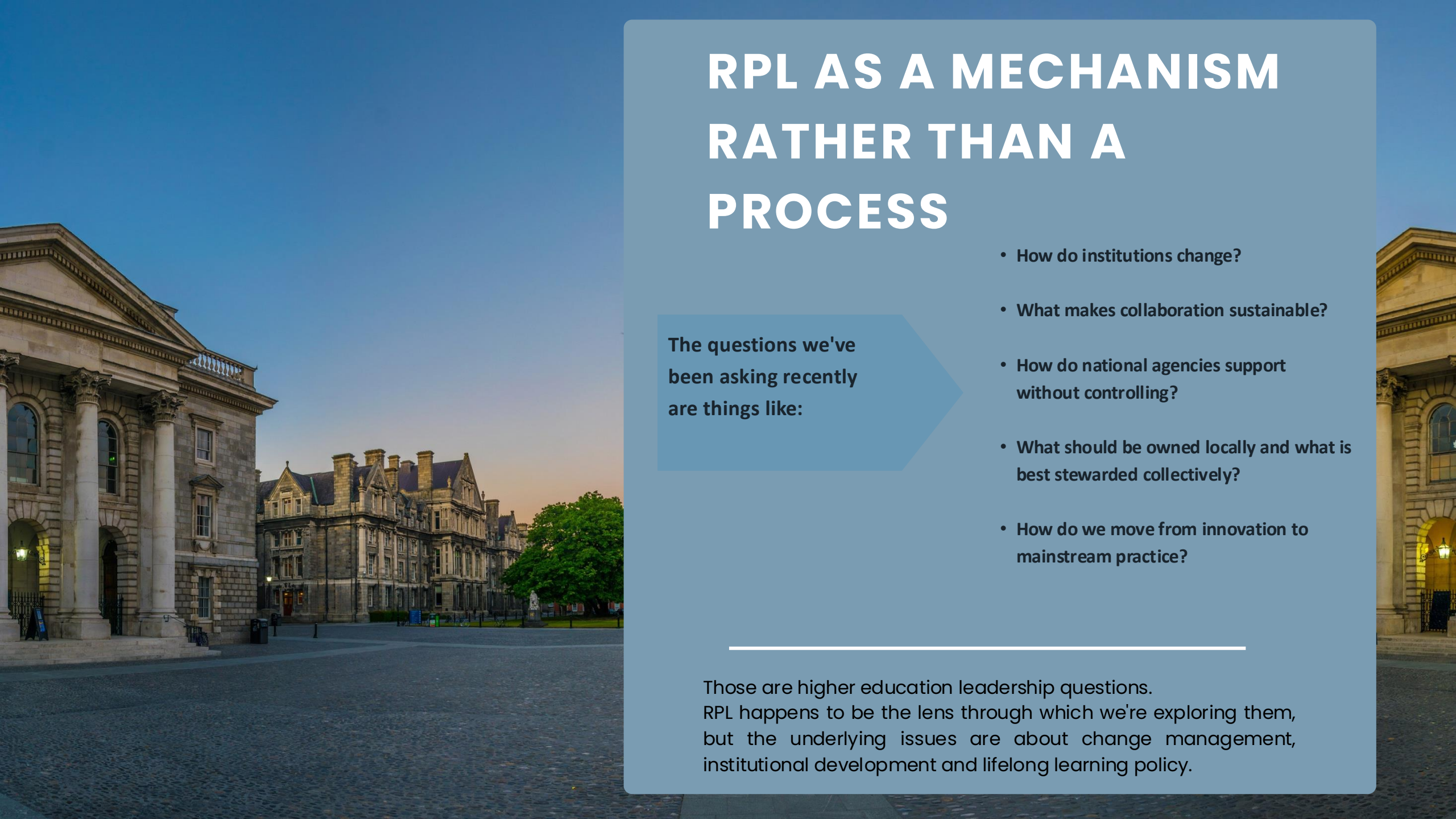
- Strategic Responses & Submissions
- Regional Collaboration
- Extending RPL in Policy & Practice
- Exploring funding mechanisms

Institutional and Stakeholder Engagment

- Consultation with Institutions: co-design, collaboration and knowledge sharing
- Engagment with Industry Representatives
- Engagement and consultation with RPL Steering Group

Targeted Initiatives

- Independent audit of the extended project phase



RPL AS A MECHANISM RATHER THAN A PROCESS

The questions we've been asking recently are things like:

- **How do institutions change?**
- **What makes collaboration sustainable?**
- **How do national agencies support without controlling?**
- **What should be owned locally and what is best stewarded collectively?**
- **How do we move from innovation to mainstream practice?**

Those are higher education leadership questions.
RPL happens to be the lens through which we're exploring them, but the underlying issues are about change management, institutional development and lifelong learning policy.



What comes next?

From Project to Stewardship

Project

Capacity Building

Institutional Ownership

Stewardship

Future Focus: Sustaining Momentum in RPL

Infrastructure

Foundational frameworks for RPL practice

- Project website:
- prior learning ie
- Framework for RPL in Higher Education
- Definition of RPL in Higher Education

Self-Directed RPL Digital Badge

Future capacity building resouce

- Flexible, self-paced learning for staff
- Builds shared understanding of RPL practice
- Supports consistency across institutions



Community of Practice

Knowledge sharing and capacity building through shared resources

- RPL Toolkit for Staff in Higher Education
- RPL Exemplars of Practice (Resource for Staff)
- Monthly LinkedIn Series 'RPL Insights' sharing knowledge and expertise from leaders, experts and HEI Staff

Communications Toolkit

Resources to inform and engage

- Digital RPL 'Quick Guide' for Learners
- Comprehensive RPL Learner Guide
- Quick Animated Explainer
- Video Testimonials from learners
- RPL Guide for Industry and Video Testimonials

Recognition of Prior Learning is not simply about recognising what people already know; it is about recognising who learners are, valuing the diverse pathways they have taken, and creating opportunities for where they can go next.



References

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- Cedefop (2026) Cedefop updates Skills Forecast: new data to guide Europe's skills and labour market policy to 2035 | CEDEFOP
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- OECD (2022) The recognition of prior learning | OECD
- OECD (2023) Ireland Country Report https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/validation-non-formal-informal-learning/countries/ireland-2023m
- OECD (2025). Education Policy Outlook 2025 | OECD

Recognition of Prior Learning

Your Learning Counts

Thank you

RPL Resources Available at: priorlearning.ie

Human Capital Initiative

IRISH UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION

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Dr. Elke Katharina Wittich

CEO, Central Institute for Lifelong Learning at Leibniz University Hannover

Presentation 2

Flexible Formats for Innovation in Lifelong Learning - The Micro Credentials at Leibniz University Hannover

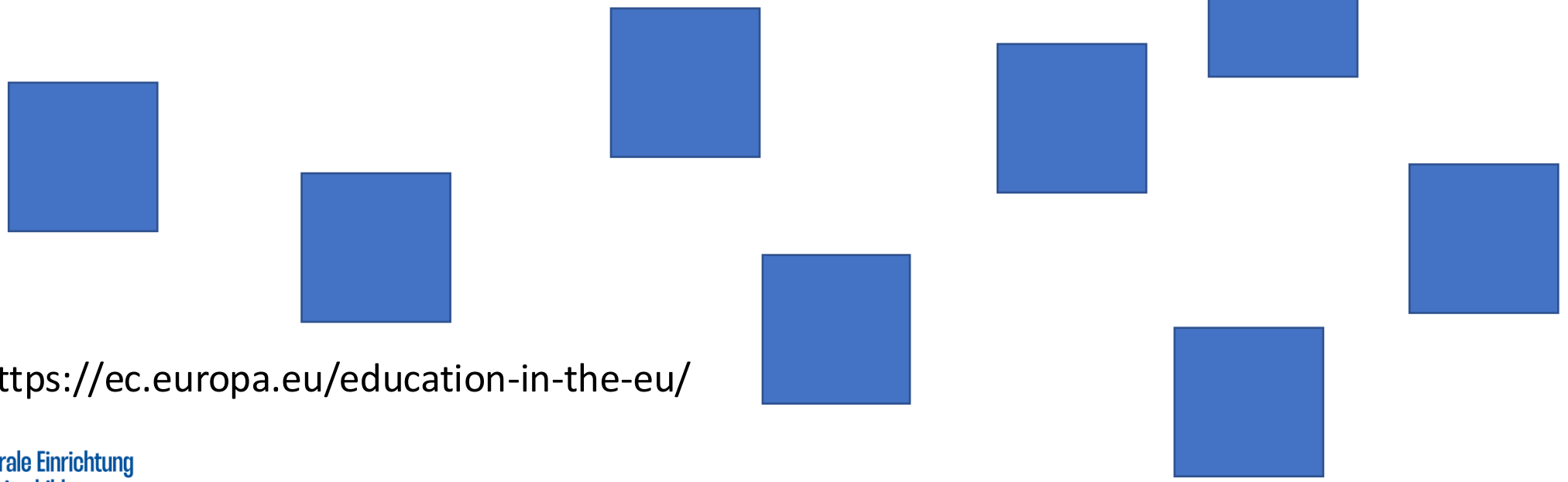
- Studied Art History and Archaeology at the University of Hamburg; completed her PhD at Humboldt University in Berlin
- Founding president of the state-recognised private AMD University of Design in Hamburg
- Professor of the theory and history of architecture and design at Fresenius University of Applied Sciences
- Today CEO of the Central Institute for Lifelong Learning at Leibniz University Hannover

Flexible Formats for Innovation – The Micro Credentials at Leibniz University Hannover

Prof. Dr. Elke Katharina Wittich I CEO of the Central Institute for Lifelong Learning at Leibniz University Hannover

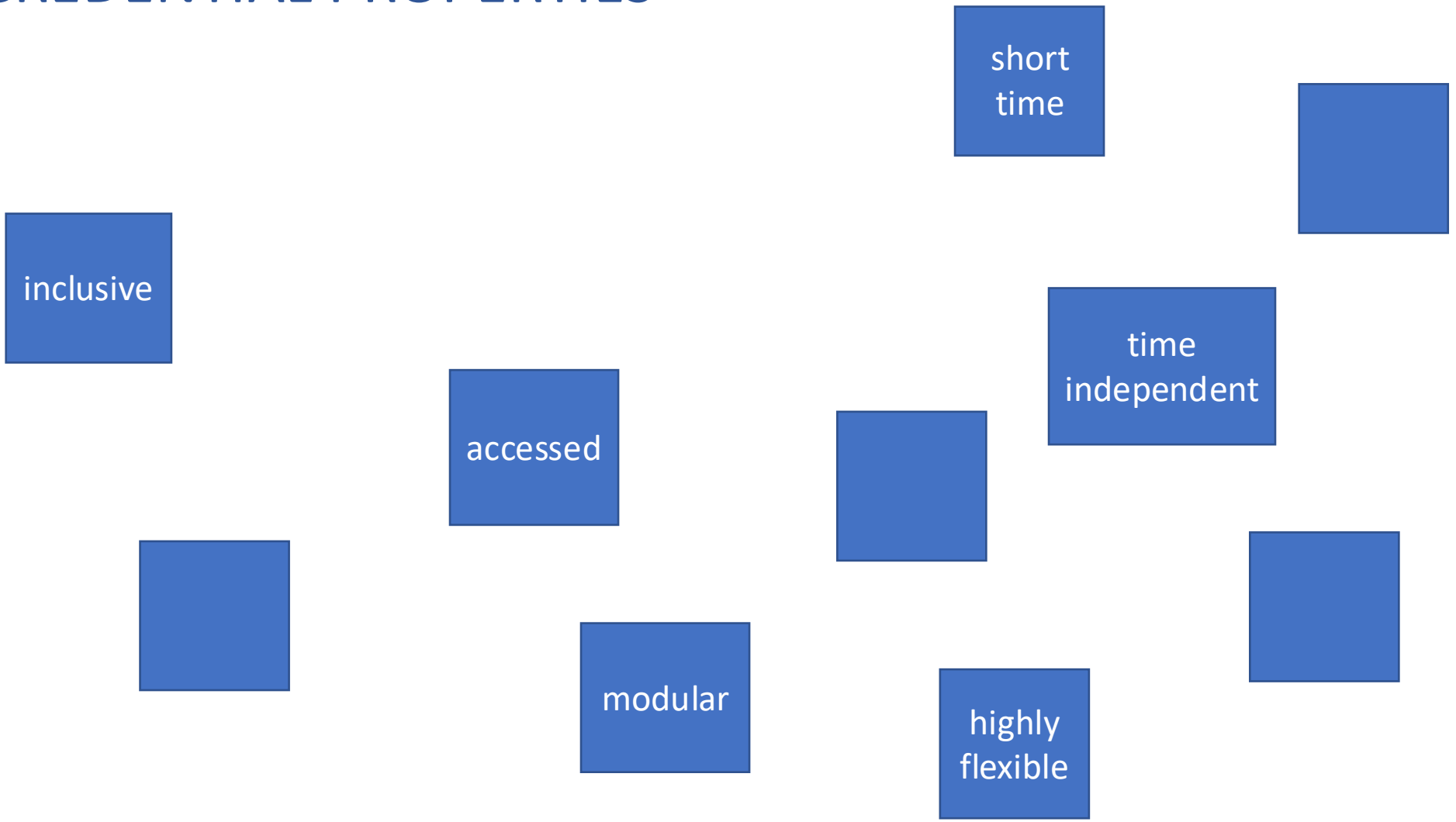
WHAT A STROKE OF LUCK!

MICRO CREDENTIALS =
“a qualification evidencing learning outcomes acquired through a short, transparently-assessed course or module. Micro-credentials may be completed on-site, online or in a blended format.”



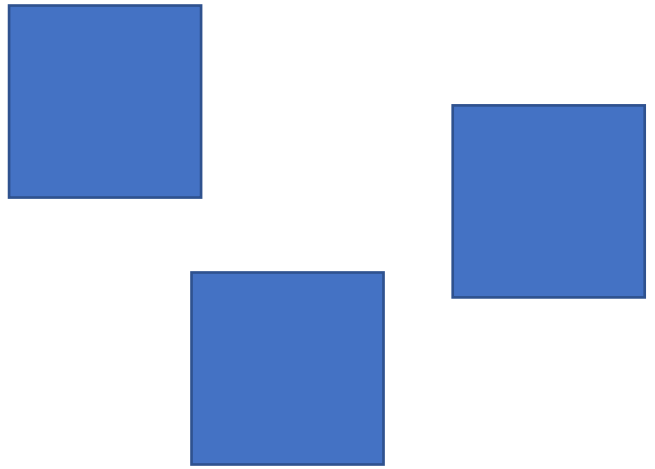
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MICRO CREDENTIAL PROPERTIES



WHAT A STROKE OF LUCK!

MICRO CREDENTIALS =
“The Recommendation provides building blocks including a definition, standard elements for describing micro-credentials, and principles for designing and issuing micro-credentials.”





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MICRO CREDENTIALS =
1 - 5 ECTS

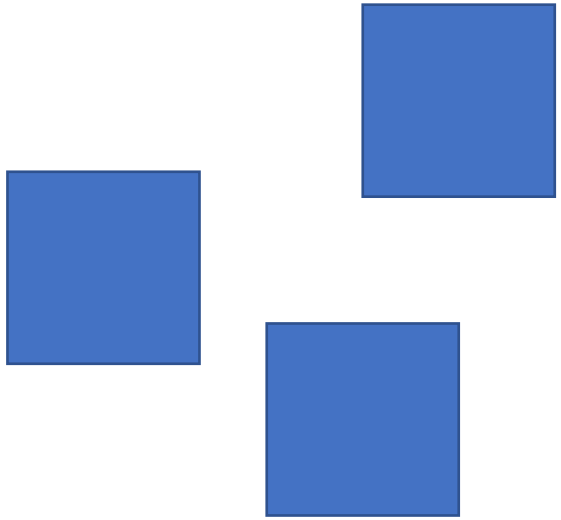
MICRO DEGREE =
(5) 10 - 30 ECTS

The more options there are, the harder it is to decide exactly what a micro-credential should be in terms of

a) scope
b) content and
c) level –
d) for whom and
e) for what purpose!

Thus, the question is

HOW TO BUILD MICRO DEGREE PROGRAMMES?



MICRO CREDENTIALS =

"The Recommendation provides building blocks including a definition, standard elements for describing micro-credentials, and principles for designing and issuing micro-credentials."

DEFINITION

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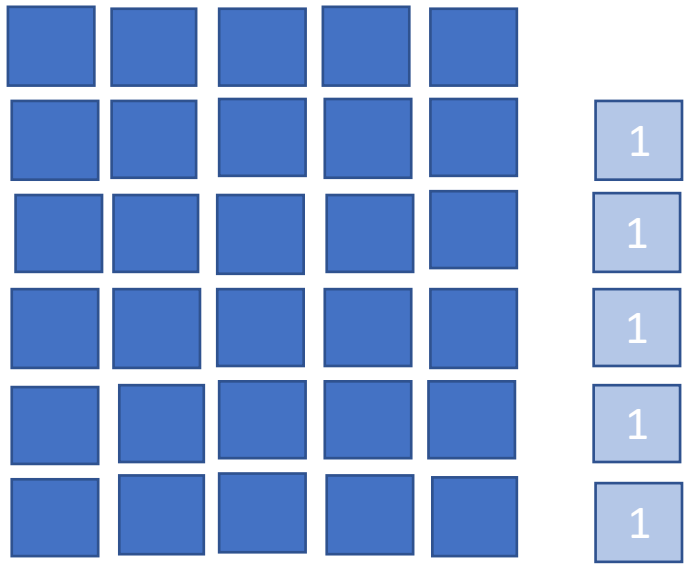
One university might define micro credentials always to be very short (1-2 ECTS),

another university might, on the contrary, define them to have at least 3-5 ECTS.

The decision depends on the a) target group b) content und c) purpose.

If micro degree programmes are designed as additional qualifications,

the university must ensure that they can be completed reliably.



… and more modules =
Bachelor's programme

= additional qualification by micro credentials, here 5 x 1 ECTS

For example: Open T-shape for Sustainability
at the Technical University Hamburg https://t-shape-4sdg.de/

MICRO CREDENTIALS =

"The Recommendation provides building blocks including a definition, standard elements for describing micro-credentials, and principles for designing and issuing micro-credentials."

DEFINITION

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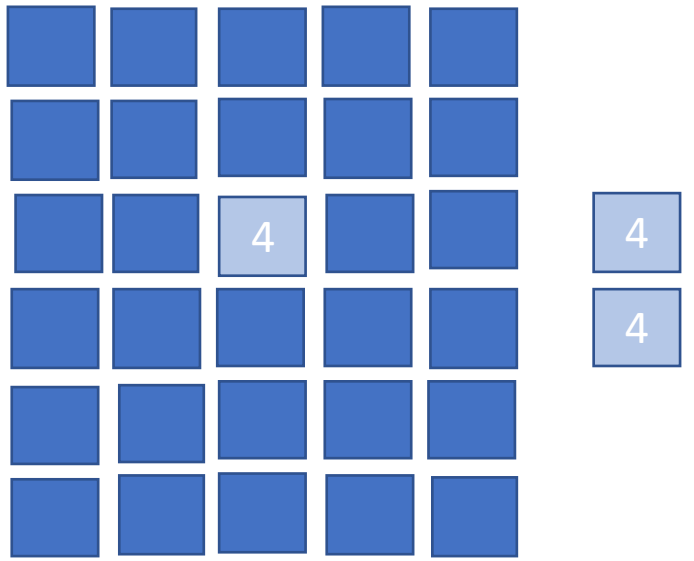
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For example: "AI in Law" of the Faculty of Law at Leibniz University (3 modules à 4 ECTS)



… and more modules =

Bachelor's programme

= additional qualification by micro credentials, here 12 ECTS, 1 module is apart of the Bachelor's programme

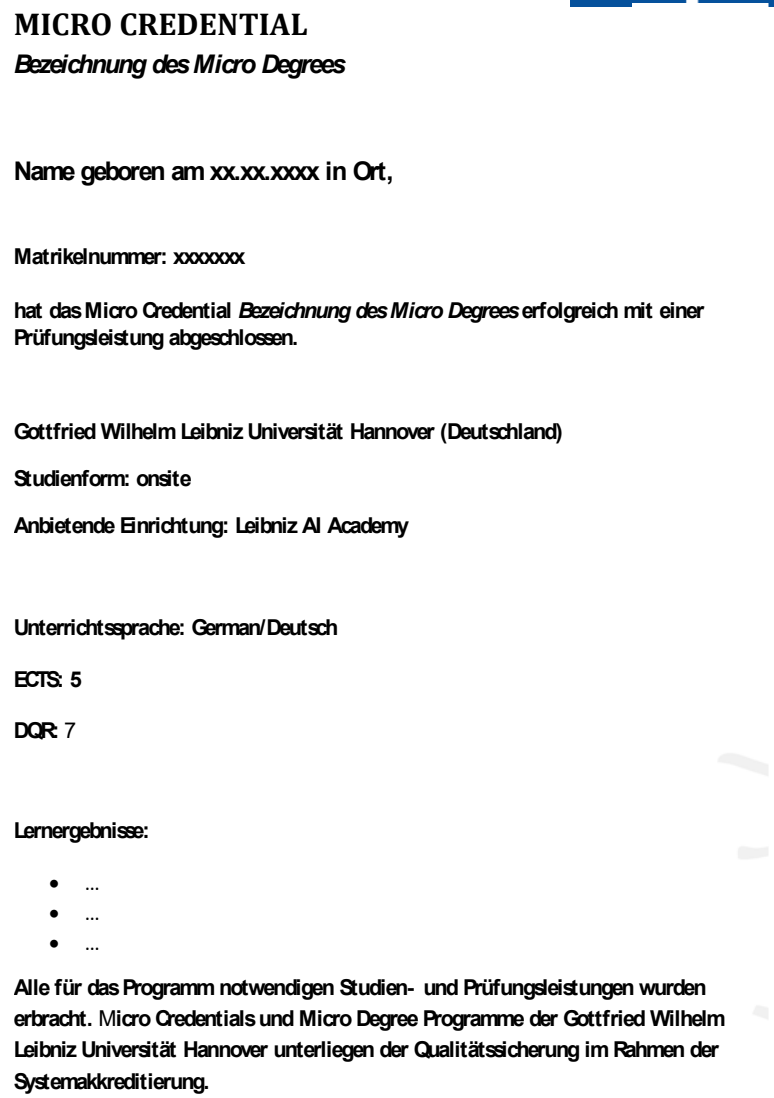
MICRO CREDENTIALS =

“The Recommendation provides building blocks including a definition, standard elements for describing micro-credentials, and principles for designing and issuing micro-credentials.”

STANDARD ELEMENTS for describing

should be at least: title of the programme, name of the university, date of joining the programme, date of issuing the micro credentials or micro degree, name of participant + ID, level (vocational training, Bachelor or Master, PostDoc), ECTS, learning outcomes, quality assurance.

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MICRO CREDENTIAL

Bezeichnung des Micro Degrees

Name geboren am xx.xx.xxxx in Ort,

Matrikelnummer: xxxxxxx

hat das Micro Credential *Bezeichnung des Micro Degrees* erfolgreich mit einer Prüfungsleistung abgeschlossen.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Universität Hannover (Deutschland)

Studienform: onsite

Anbietende Einrichtung: Leibniz AI Academy

Unterrichtssprache: German/Deutsch

ECTS: 5

DQR 7

Lernergebnisse:

- ...
- ...
- ...

Alle für das Programm notwendigen Studien- und Prüfungsleistungen wurden erbracht. Micro Credentials und Micro Degree Programme der Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Universität Hannover unterliegen der Qualitätssicherung im Rahmen der Systemakkreditierung.

MICRO CREDENTIALS =

“The Recommendation provides building blocks including a definition, standard elements for describing micro-credentials, and principles for designing and issuing micro-credentials.”

PRINCIPLES for designing

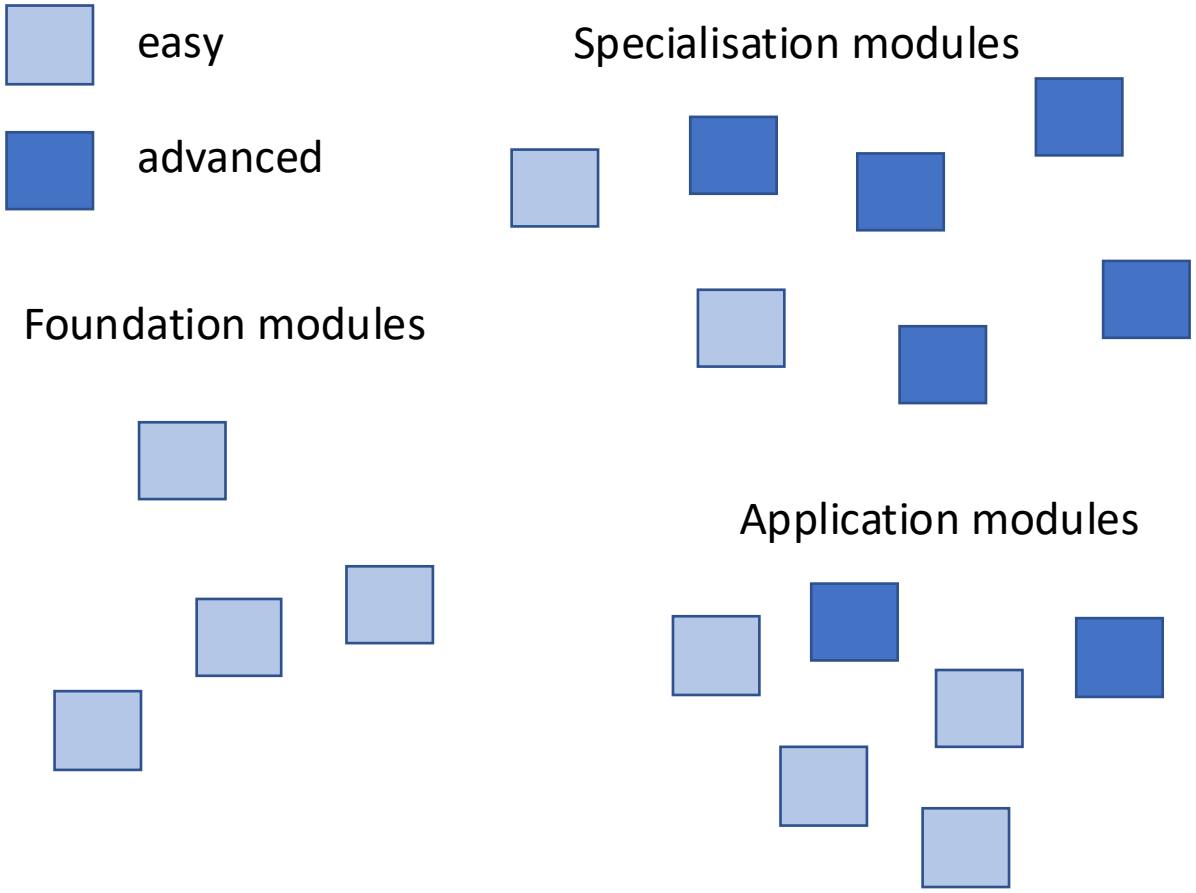
Micro credentials might be designed for

a) a cross-cutting issue such as sustainability
b) a theme close to a study programme, but not included in it
c) a special target group such as alumni who, even after completing their studies, continue to develop new skills – such as AI
d) another special target group such as working people who lack a particular skill required for career progression.

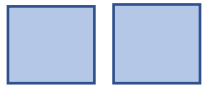
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Example: Micro Degree Programme for the Leibniz AI Academy

Special feature: the courses are inter-faculty and are open to both those with prior knowledge and those without.



CORE MICRO DEGREE in AI = 10 ECTS



BASIC MICRO DEGREE in AI = 15 ECTS



BASIC MICRO DEGREE in AI = 15 ECTS



STANDARD MICRO DEGREE in AI = 20 ECTS



ADVANCED MICRO DEGREE in AI = 25 ECTS

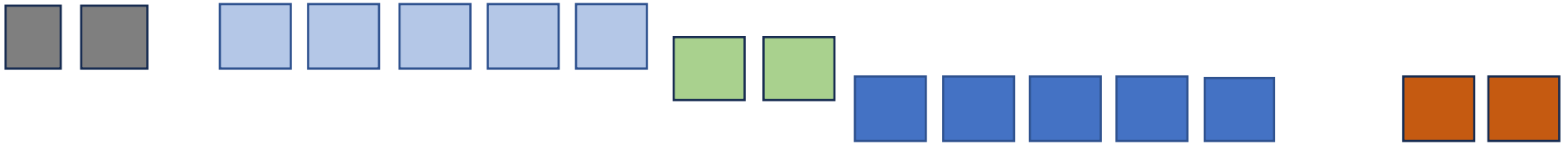


Example: WeiMAT – inklusiv. Lifelong Learning in inclusive Schools

Special educational Micro Degree Programmes for support teachers and teaching assistants

vocational training

study programme



Teaching assistants: help pupils with disabilities on their way to school and with their studies at school. They often have vocational training in social care professions.

Support teachers teachers help class teachers of classes with disabled children to understand the disabilities of those children and to identify suitable resources and measures for use in the classroom.

THANK YOU!

CEI Poll

Share your perspective

Help identify priorities, barriers and opportunities.

From input to insight

Your responses will inform the CEI 2026 Thematic Report.

Supporting action

Contribute to recommendations for education leaders and policymakers.



Dr. Eeva Kuoppala

Project Director, INGENIUM European University alliance (Xamk)

Presentation 3

Creating Flexible Pathways for Innovation – INGENIUM European University

- Project Director with extensive experience in higher education development, administration and stakeholder collaboration
- Throughout her career, focused on fostering collaboration and mutual learning between higher education and working life, through practical development initiatives and academic research
- Within the INGENIUM European University alliance, leads Xamk's engagement and advances collaboration between education, working life and research
- Based at South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Xamk), Finland

INGENIUM
European University

Co-funded by
the European Union

Creating Flexible Pathways for Innovation

Community for Educational Innovation webinar
Sep 15th 2026

Project Director, PhD Eeva Kuoppala

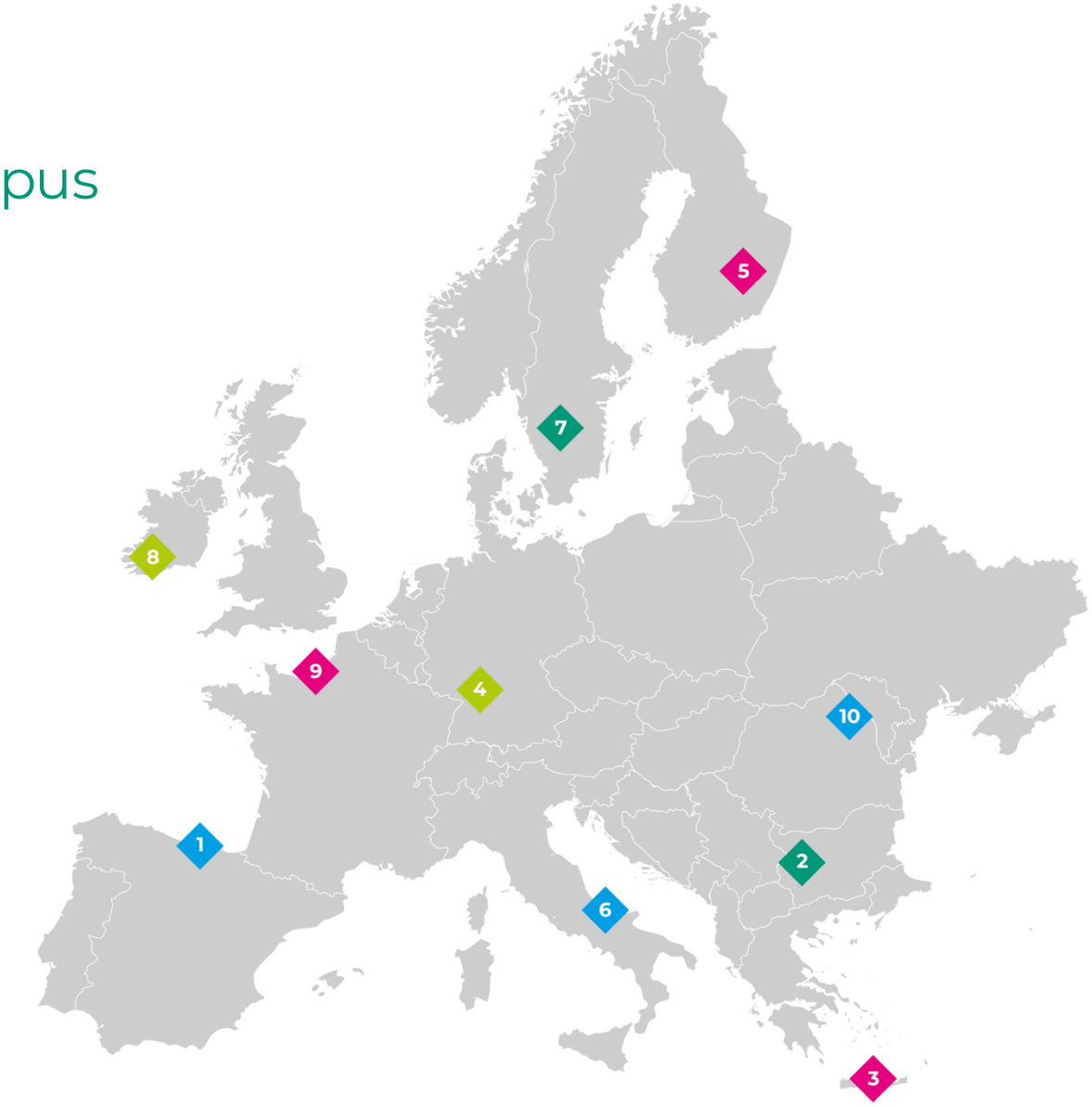
XAMK
South-Eastern Finland
University of Applied Sciences

What is INGENIUM?

10 universities shaping 1 European Campus

INGENIUM is an alliance of **10 universities across Europe**, bringing together **172,000 degree students and 12,000 staff**.

Our mission is to create a shared European Campus where students and staff can **Connect, Share, and Learn** across borders.



1. **University of Oviedo (Spain)**
2. **Medical University of Sofia (Bulgaria)**
3. **University of Crete (Greece)**
4. **Karlsruhe University of Applied Sciences (Germany)**
5. **South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Finland)**
6. **University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti–Pescara (Italy)**
7. **University of Skövde (Sweden)**
8. **Munster Technological University (Ireland)**
9. **University of Rouen-Normandy (France)**
10. **Gheorghe Asachi Technical University of Iasi (Romania)**

INGENIUM Key Actions 2023-2026

Building the INGENIUM European Campus

To make our shared European Campus a reality, we have a set of concrete action plans. Our initiatives aim to transform learning, mobility, and cooperation across our 10 universities.

- **Launch INGENIUM Pathways** → flexible, cross-disciplinary study tracks
- **Develop Joint Programmes** → shared bachelor's & master's degrees, and Doctoral Ecosystems
- **Enhance Mobility** → more exchanges & shared teaching across borders
- **Ensure Automatic Recognition** → credits recognised across all partners
- **Adopt Joint Quality Assurance** → one standard for academic excellence
- **Create Microcredentials** → short, flexible learning for all ages
- **Promote Work-Based & Community Learning** → connect classrooms with society



Why INGENIUM Micro-Credentials?

- Due to the rapid pace of technological development, working life needs focused programmes that respond to knowledge and skills shortages faster than traditional degree programmes allow.
- Micro-credentials are seen as an opportunity to innovate, diversify and enlarge HEIs' education provision while improving access and inclusion for professional development.



Reference: Gaebel, M. & Zhang, T. (2025) Nondegree Education in Europe: Opportunities for Lifelong Learning. International Higher Education, Issue 122.

INGENIUM Micro-Credentials are:

1. **Targeted:** Focused on specific skills or knowledge areas that are of benefit to working life and industry.
2. **Delivered flexibly:** can be online, in-person, or hybrid. But it should be designed to fit the learner's schedule and goals.
3. **Potentially stackable:** Individual Micro-Credentials can be combined into larger entities, creating flexible learning pathways.
4. **Adhere to local legislation:** The EQF level and the ECTS amount follow the lead partner's national requirements or follow the University of Oviedo's model.

The core elements of a Micro-Credential

1. **Clear learning goals and target audience**
2. **Small but focused learning experience(s)**
   - For example, a micro-credential might have several individual units on specific topics.
3. **Flexible delivery and accessible implementation**
   - Providing self-study material to facilitate independent learning alongside any taught content
   - Created using Universal Design for Learning or other accessible approaches
4. **Active and applied learning methods**
   - For example, learning by doing, problem-solving, real-world cases, reflective tasks
5. **Relevant and modern assessment**
   - For example, assessing the learning process rather than traditional exams
6. **Potential for stackability to be combined with other learning pathways**

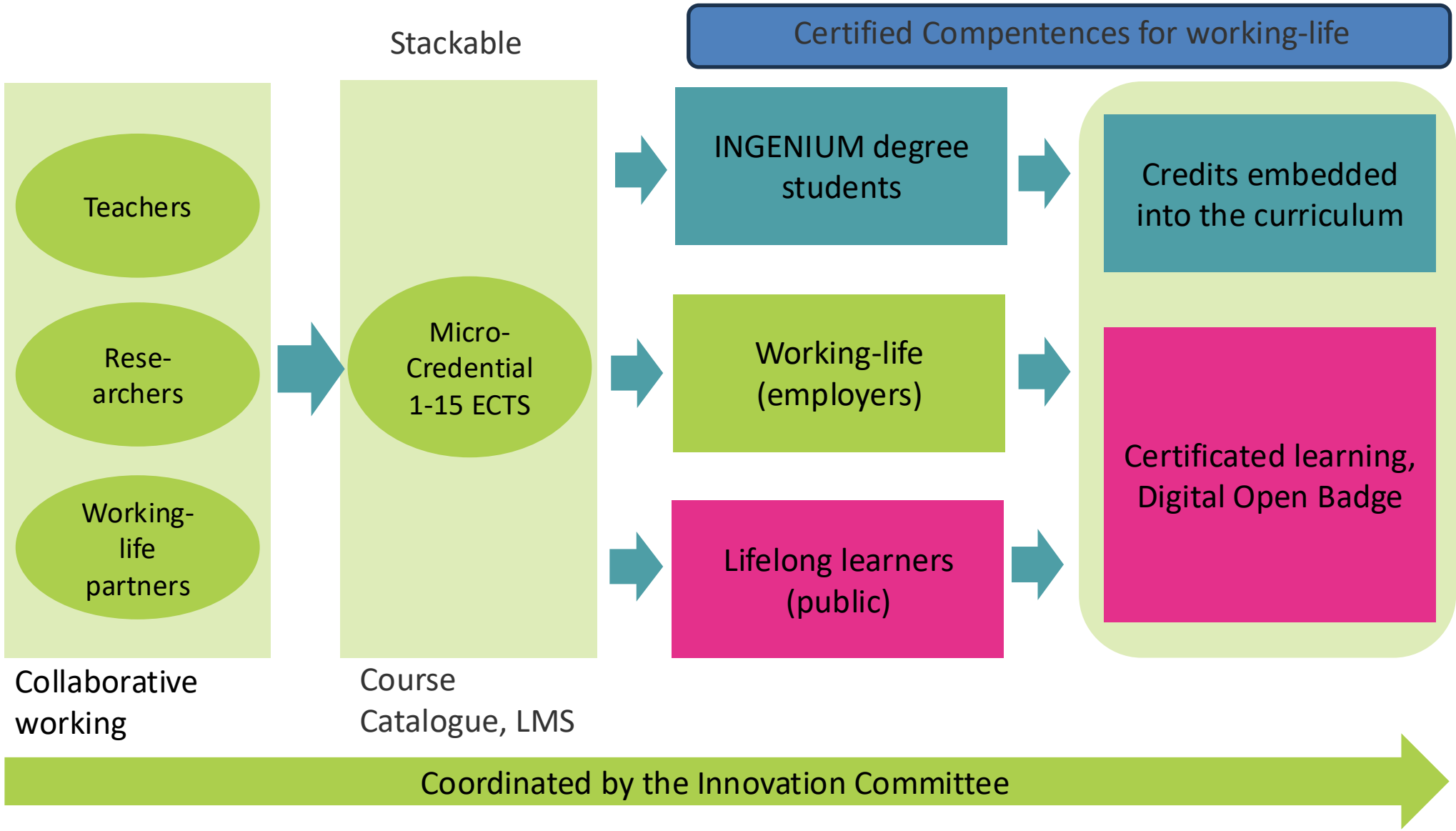
INGENIUM Micro-Credential Models

1. **Jointly-developed Micro-Credential**
   - New Micro-Credentials created through collaborative design and development involving staff from multiple INGENIUM partner institutions.
2. **Realigned Micro-Credential**
   - An existing institutional Micro-Credential, accredited by a partner university, is adapted, harmonized and re-accredited and offered to the INGENIUM alliance.
3. **Decentralized Micro-Credentials**
   - Comprising courses and material delivered by different partner institutions but integrated into a coherent whole, accredited as a broader Micro-Credential.

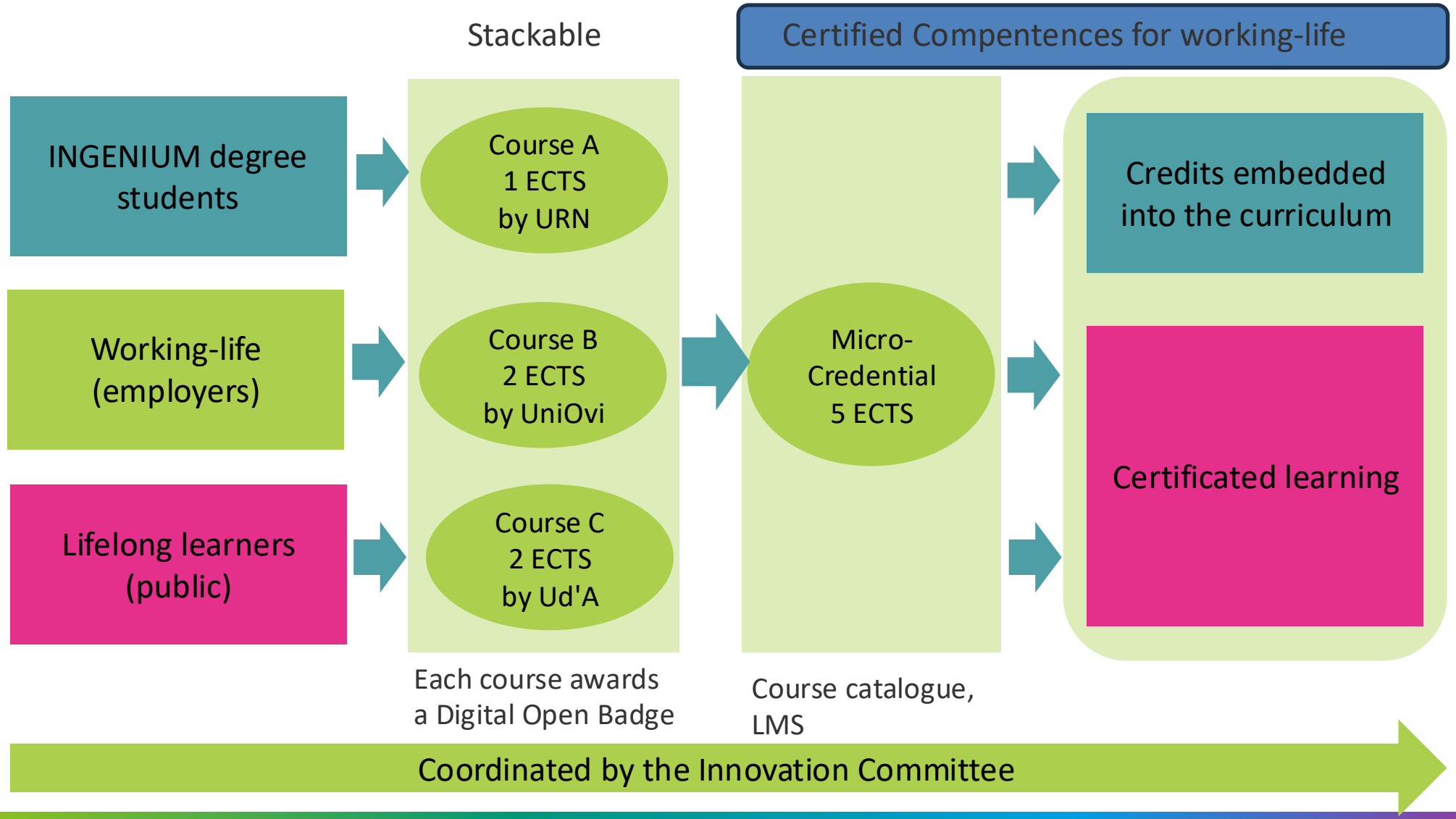
Individual Micro-Credentials can be combined into larger entities, creating flexible learning pathways = stackability

Co-funded by the European Union

Jointly Developed Micro-Credential



Decentralized Micro-Credential



Administrative process

- Idea Proposal
- Innovation Committee Review
- Micro-Credential Creation
- Pedagogical Review
- Descriptor and Finalisation
- Course Catalogue
- Marketing and Promotion
- Completion and Accreditation

Working-life collaboration

- **Validating competence needs**
  - Co-creation with companies helps identify and validate real competence needs for relevant learning outcomes.
- **Collaboration with working-life**
  - Collaboration allows rapid piloting, continuous feedback, and quick adaptation to evolving standards and technologies.
- **Decentralized collaboration**
  - Co-creation, trust, and shared quality frameworks enable effective decentralised collaboration across Europe.
- **Reducing learning barriers**
  - Creating flexible learning tasks and assessment that can be connected to real life cases or a learner’s work.



European Co-operation

INGENIUM Micro-Credentials are not only about delivering flexible learning experiences for learners.

Through cooperation and developing common infrastructure, we are transforming teaching and learning throughout the alliance.

Thank you, Stay Connected with INGENIUM



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Upcoming activities

October 8	October 14	November 3	December 2
HEInnovate Information Session Introduction to HEInnovate tool	**Webinar Partnerships for Skills – Building Bridges Across Sectors**	**CEI Study Visit 2026-II** 15 selected participants. Closed applications.	**Webinar Empowering Learners for Workforce Transitions**

Thank you!

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European Commission