The Spinning of the Micro-credential: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?

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African Continental
Qualifications Framework

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Professor Mark Brown

Dublin City University

21st April 2022

Photo by Sam Carter on Unsplash

Sheep in New Zealand

Year ended June 1935–2020, millions

Provider: Stats NZ

June 1935–2020, millions

1982
70,301,461

25 M
in 2021

Micro-credentials Untethered: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?

Micro-credentials are the latest shiny new thing attracting educators' increasing attention. Indeed, 2021 may become known as the year of micro-credentials. On the surface, the micro-credentialling movement offers great promise in helping to redesign and even reimagine more future-fit and complementary credential frameworks to enhance employability, continuous professional development, and the goal of a thriving learning society. But is there a danger that the micro-credential may be a wolf in sheep's clothing?

https://irelandseducationyearbook.ie

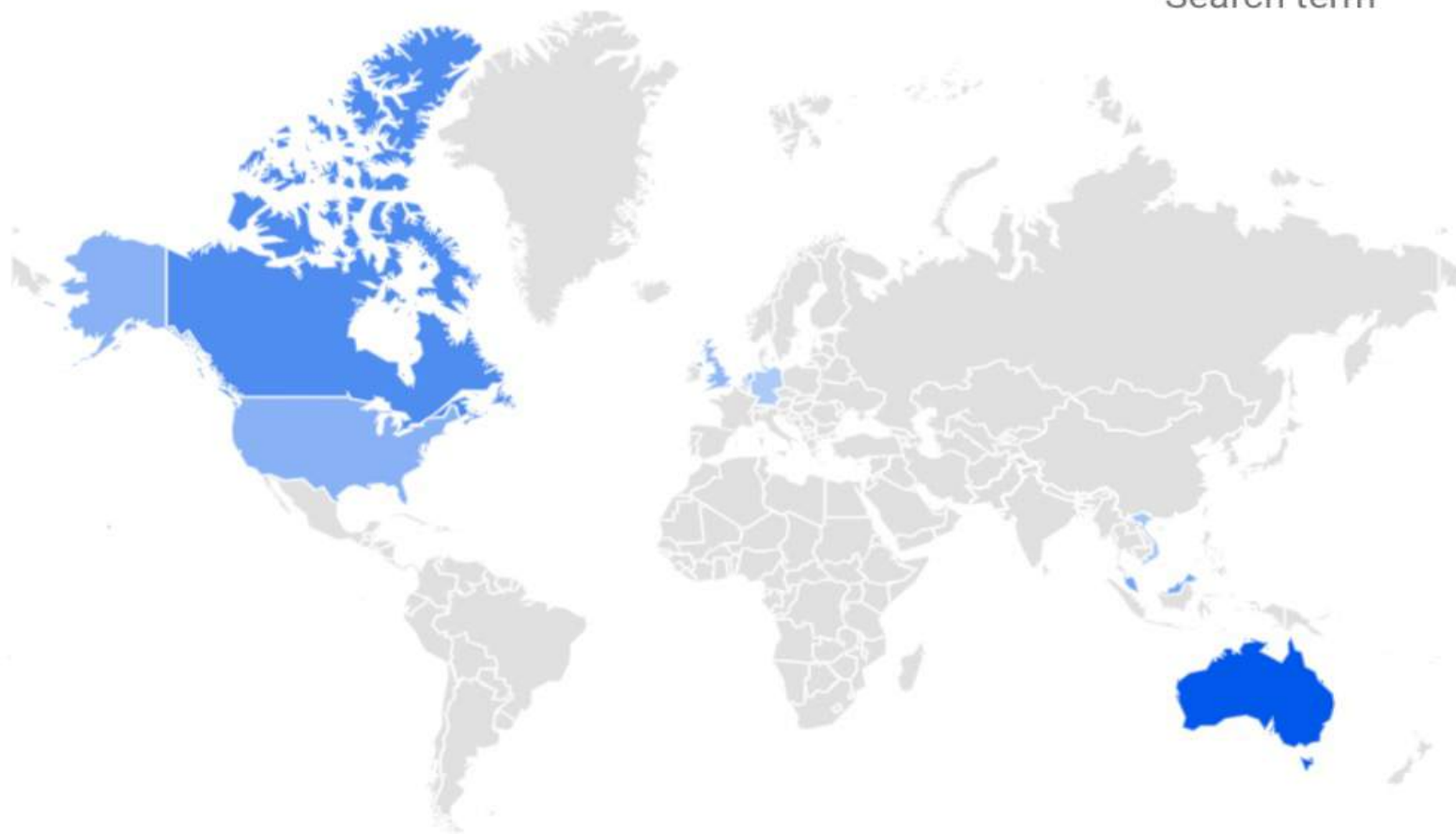# Is 2022 The Year of the Micro-credential?
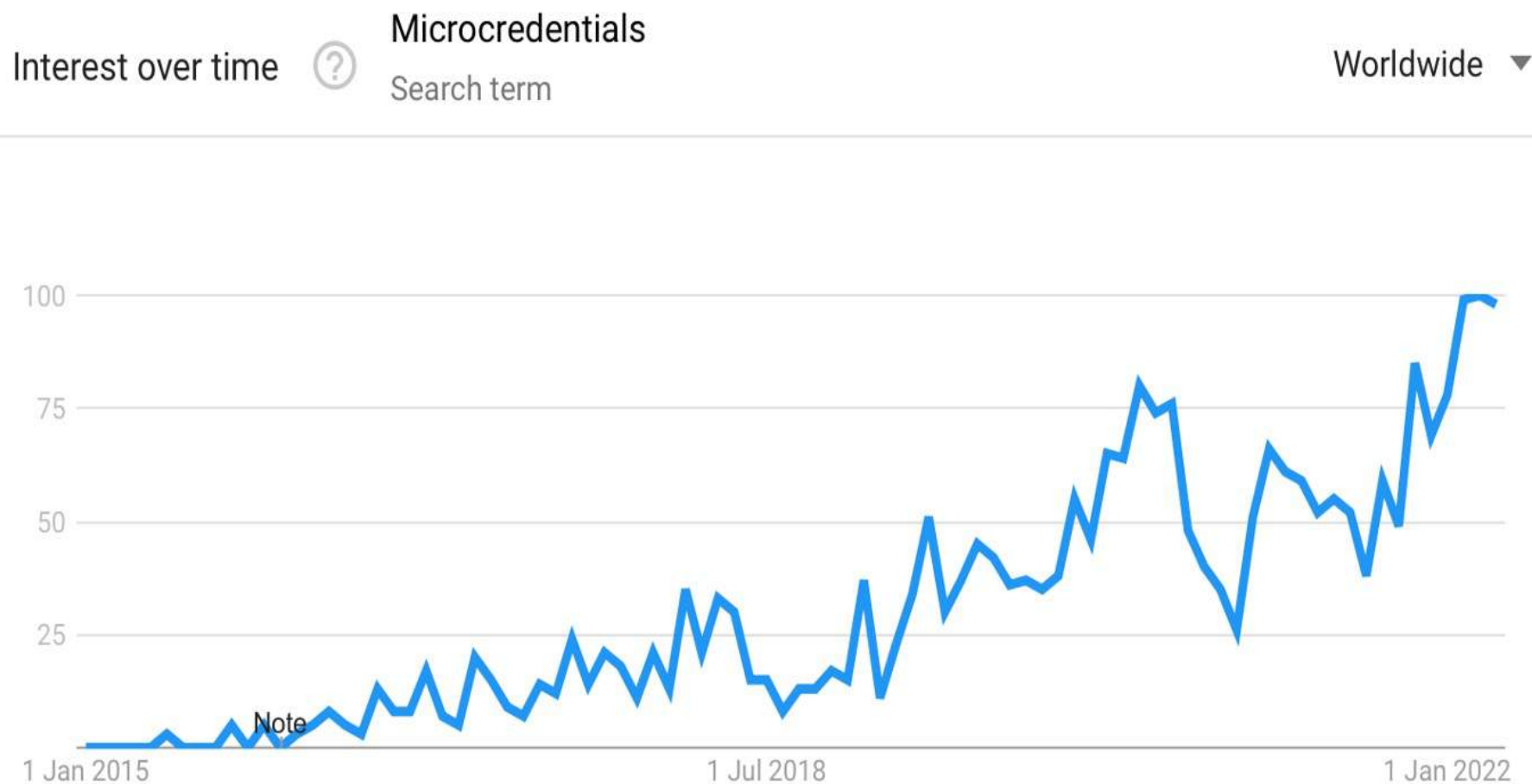
Growth of micro-credentials evidenced by Google search traffic

Is 2022 The Year of the Micro-credential?

Interest by region

Microcredentials
Search term

Is 2022 The Year of the Micro-credential?

https://www.menti.com/bjqb1n4rbi

The voting code **3824 9424**

Questions...

1. Why micro-credentials?

2. What is a micro-credential?

3. How do you implement micro-credentials?

Photo by Sam Carter on Unsplash

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State of the Art Literature Review on Micro-credentials

Research Question	Thematic Focus				
	Why	What	Who	How	Where
1. What is the problem that micro-credentials are seeking to address?	🟩	🟩			
2. What are the underlying drivers and attractors of the micro-credential movement?	🟩	🟩			
3. How are micro-credentials being positioned within the credential ecology?		🟩		🟩	
4. How are different stakeholders responding to the micro-credentials movement?			🟩	🟩	
5. What are the main benefits arising from the development of micro-credentials?	🟩		🟩		🟩
6. What are the benefits of adopting a European-wide approach to micro-credentials?	🟩				🟩
7. What are the major barriers for the successful implementation of micro-credentials?				🟩	🟩
8. What are the major enablers for the successful implementation of micro-credentials?				🟩	🟩
9. What evidence is there that further development of micro-credentials will contribute to a more future-fit education system?				🟩	🟩
10. What evidence is there that further investment in micro-credentials will contribute to tangible individual and societal benefits?			🟩		🟩

https://www.dcu.ie/nidl

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Micro-credential Observatory

The NIDL's Micro-credentials Observatory provides a regularly updated collection of major reports, policy initiatives and research related publications on the growth, development and impact of micro-credentials in higher education and lifelong learning more generally.

- ○ NIDL Activities
  - ○ NIDL Research
  - ○ Major Policy Initiatives
  - ○ National & International Reports
  - ○ Useful Journal Articles
  - ○ Events, Conferences and Webinars

NIDL Quicklinks

Research Outputs

Research Projects

Research Links

Resource Bank

Micro-credentials

87% of
sample already
in MC Observatory

(Brown et al., 2021)

Distribution of publications by year

Year	All publications		Highly Relevant	
	n	%	n	%
2015	4	2.7	0	0.0
2016	10	6.8	1	2.2
2017	13	8.8	0	0.0
2018	15	10.1	2	4.4
2019	26	17.6	7	15.6
2020	46	31.1	19	42.2
2021	34	23.0	16	35.6

54%

Distribution of publications by Country and Year (All Publications)

Year	Australia		Canada		Europe		United States	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
2021	6	25.0	9	50.0	13	28.3	5	9.4
2020	5	20.8	7	38.9	21	45.7	12	22.6
2019	7	29.2	2	11.1	8	17.4	7	13.2
2018	1	4.2	0	0.0	3	6.5	8	15.1
2017	2	8.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	11	20.8
2016	3	12.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	13.2
2015	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	2.2	3	5.7

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Distribution of publications by focus or sector

Sector	All publications		Highly Relevant	
	n	%	*n*	%
Higher Education	126	85.1	42	93.3
Vocational and Further Education and Training	42	28.4	12	26.7
Industry / Corporate	26	17.6	15	33.3
MOOC Sector	15	10.1	6	13.3
Community Organisation	2	1.4	1	2.2
K-12 Schools	8	5.4	0	0.0
Employers (i.e., recruitment, training, etc.)	15	10.1	9	20.0
Employees (i.e, CPD, career benefits, etc.)	15	10.1	7	15.6
Societal (i.e., future private and public benefits)	11	7.4	8	17.8
Cross-sector	8	5.4	7	15.6
Other	1	0.7	0	0.0

HEIs ←

MOOCs ←

Employers ←

(Brown et al., 2021)

1. Why micro-credentials?

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Why?

THE HECHINGER REPORT

Covering Innovation & Inequality in Education

TOPICS   ABOUT   DONATE

NEWS

Urgency of getting people back to work gives new momentum to "microcredentials"

Americans seek educations that take months, not years, to help them find new jobs fast

by JON MARCUS   June 2, 2020

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Why?

The Future of Jobs Report 2020

OCTOBER 2020

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Reskilling needs

50%

of all employees will need reskilling by 2025.

Source: Future of Jobs Report 2020, World Economic Forum.

Why?

Trump signs order overhauling federal hiring to focus on skills over college degrees

By Ebony Bowden

June 26, 2020 | 5:56pm

Executive Order on Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates

ECONOMY & JOBS   Issued on: June 26, 2020

★ ★ ★

ALL NEWS

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including section 301 of title 3, United States Code, and sections 1104(a)(1), 3301, and 7301 of title 5, United States Code, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. Purpose. The foundation of our professional merit-based civil service is America's private employers have modernized their recruitment practices to better identify and secure talent through skills- and competency-based hiring. As the modern workforce evolves, the Federal Government requires a more efficient approach to hiring. Employers adopting skills- and competency-based hiring recognize that an overreliance on college degrees excludes capable candidates and undermines labor-market efficiencies. Degree-based hiring is especially likely to exclude qualified candidates for jobs related to emerging technologies and those with weak connections between educational attainment and the skills or competencies required to perform them. Moreover, unnecessary obstacles to opportunity disproportionately burden low-income Americans and decrease economic mobility.

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Why?

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Universities must change or lose their place to alternative education providers: OECD education chief

Sandra Davie
Senior Education Correspondent

PUBLISHED 30 JAN 2022, 8:00 PM SGT   f   y   ...

In the third of a four-part series on the changing role of universities, OECD's education chief Andreas Schleicher talks to The Straits Times' senior education correspondent Sandra Davie on how universities have to evolve to stay relevant.

For some time now, people have been questioning the value of universities. The challenge became more robust in the last two years as the Covid-19 pandemic hit and universities began to deliver their programmes online, said a global education expert.

Why?

Sheepskin Effect

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Why?

Adult participation in learning, 2018
(% of population aged 25-64)

11.1%

ec.europa.eu/**eurostat**
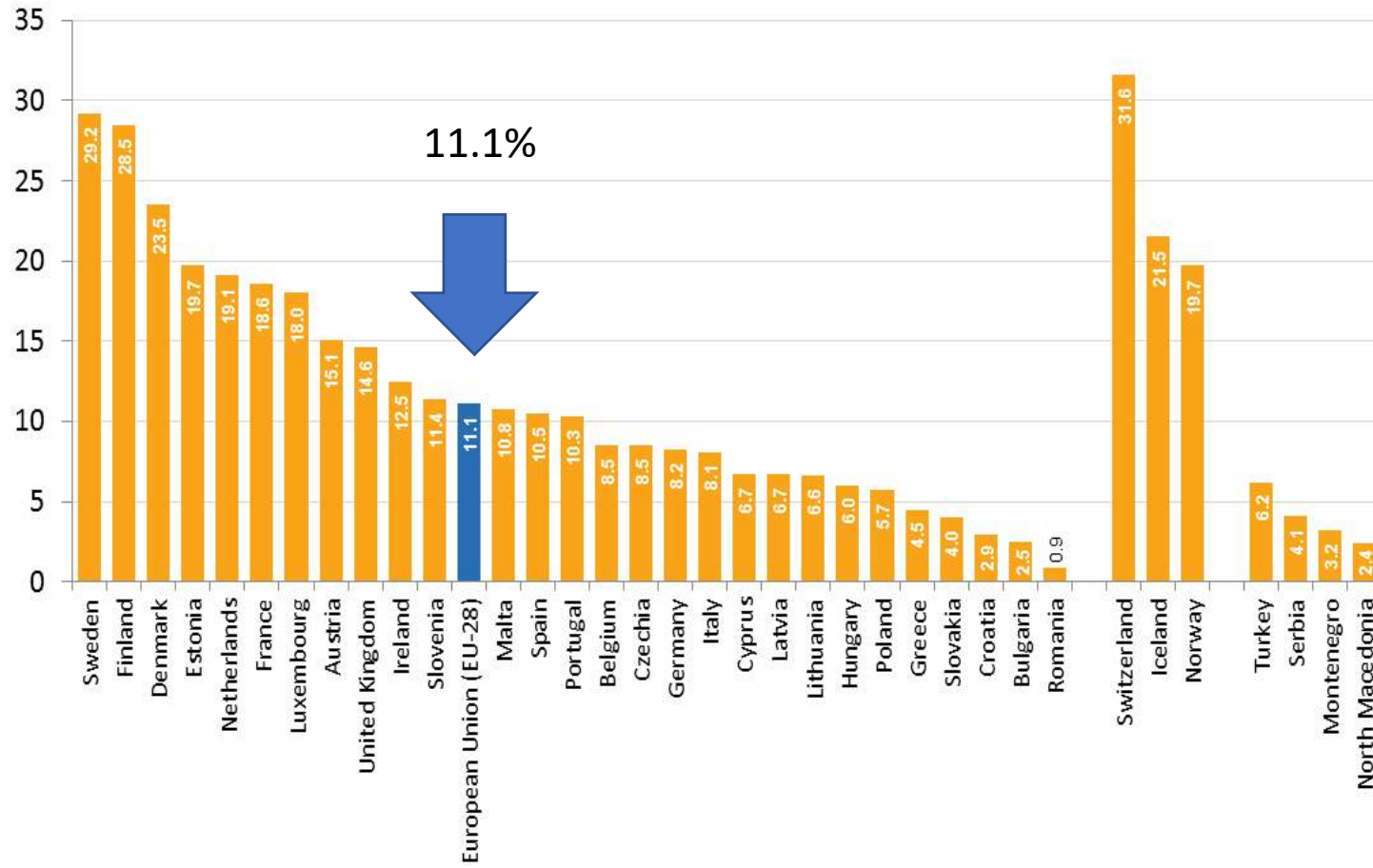
Eurostat Adult Learning Participation Rate

Ireland (2018)		12.5%
EU Average (2018)		11.1%
Ireland (2017)		9%

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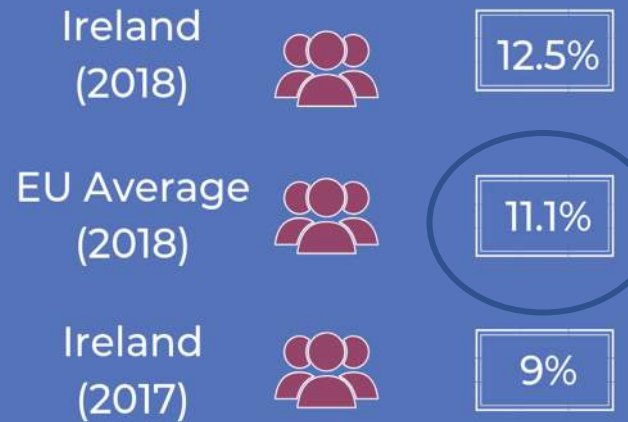
Why?

Figure 4.1. Participation in adult learning, by country

Percentage of 25-65 year-olds who report having participated in adult learning

Why?
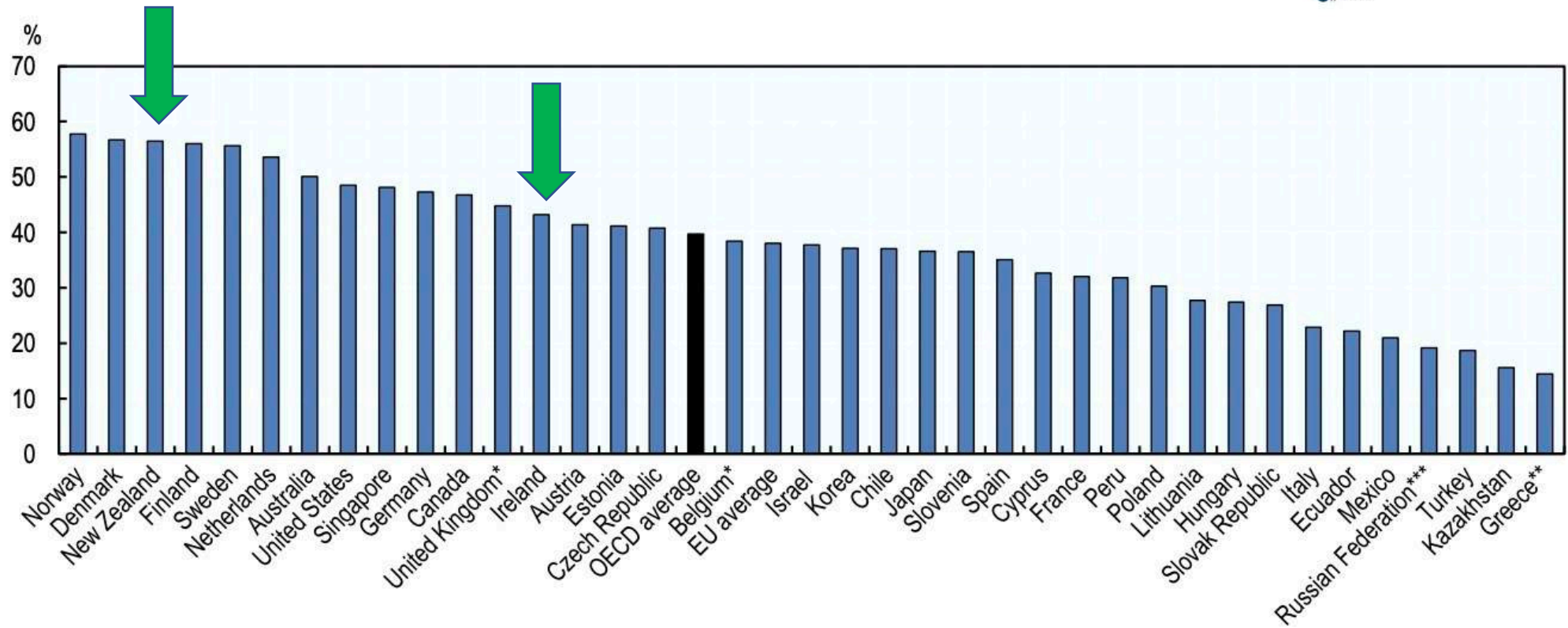
Drivers and Attractors for Micro-credentials

(Brown et al., 2021)

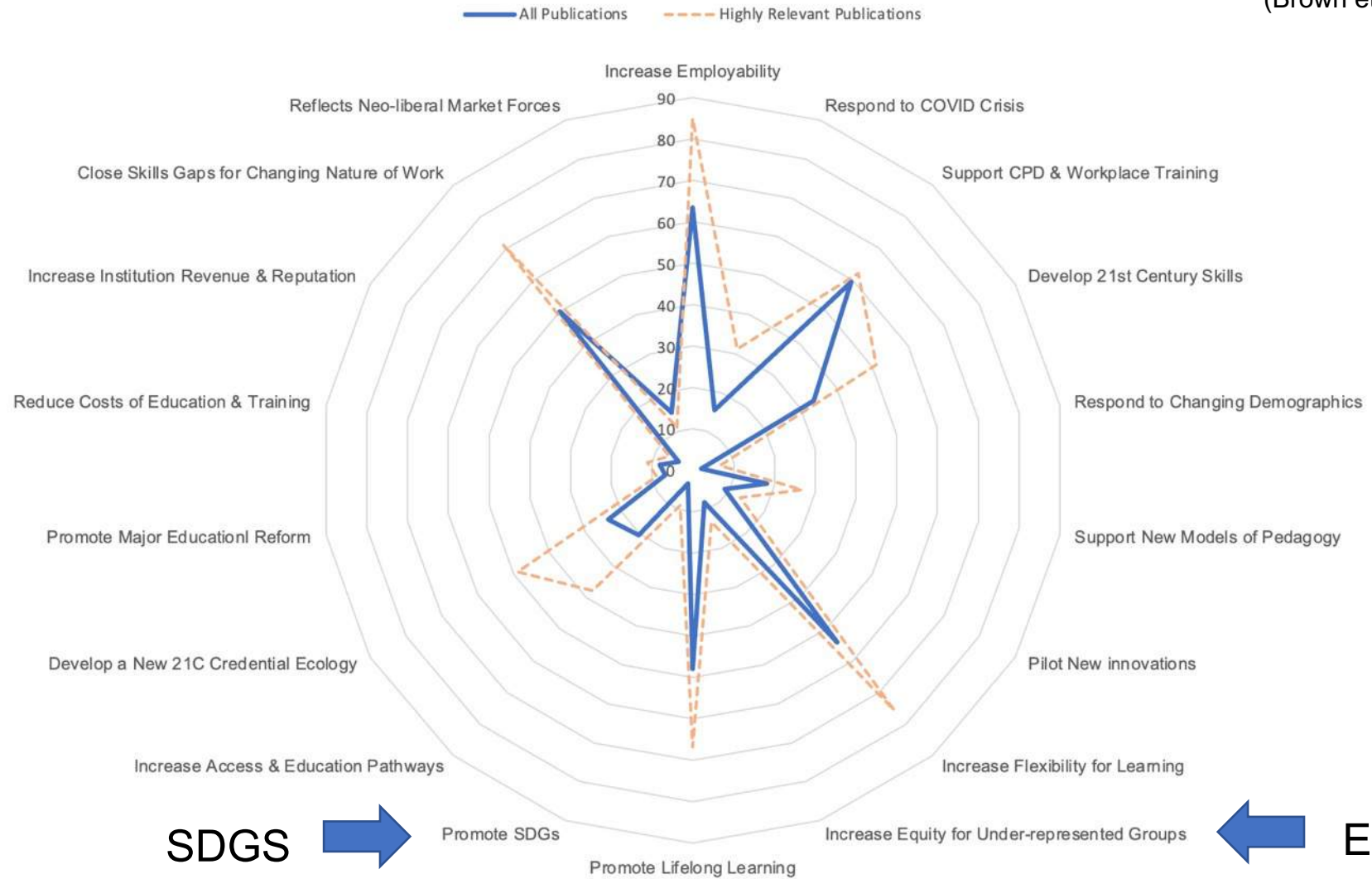|	All Publications		Highly Relevant	
	n	%	n	%
Increase employability	94	63.5	38	84.4
Support CPD and workplace training	88	59.5	28	62.2
Increase flexibility for learning	80	54.1	34	75.6
Close skills gaps in response to changing nature of work	74	50.0	32	71.1
Promote lifelong learning	71	48.0	30	66.7
Develop 21st Century transversal skills	50	33.8	23	51.1
Develop a new 21st Century credential ecology	35	23.6	22	48.9
Increase access and pathways to formal education	30	20.3	17	37.8
Support new models of pedagogy	27	18.2	12	26.7
Respond to COVID crisis	23	15.5	14	31.1
Reflects Neo-liberal market forces	22	14.9	5	11.1
Test innovations and trigger changes	13	8.8	6	13.3
Reduce costs of education and training	12	8.1	5	11.1
Increase equity for under-represented groups	12	8.1	6	13.3

65%
Employability

48%
Lifelong Learning

Why?
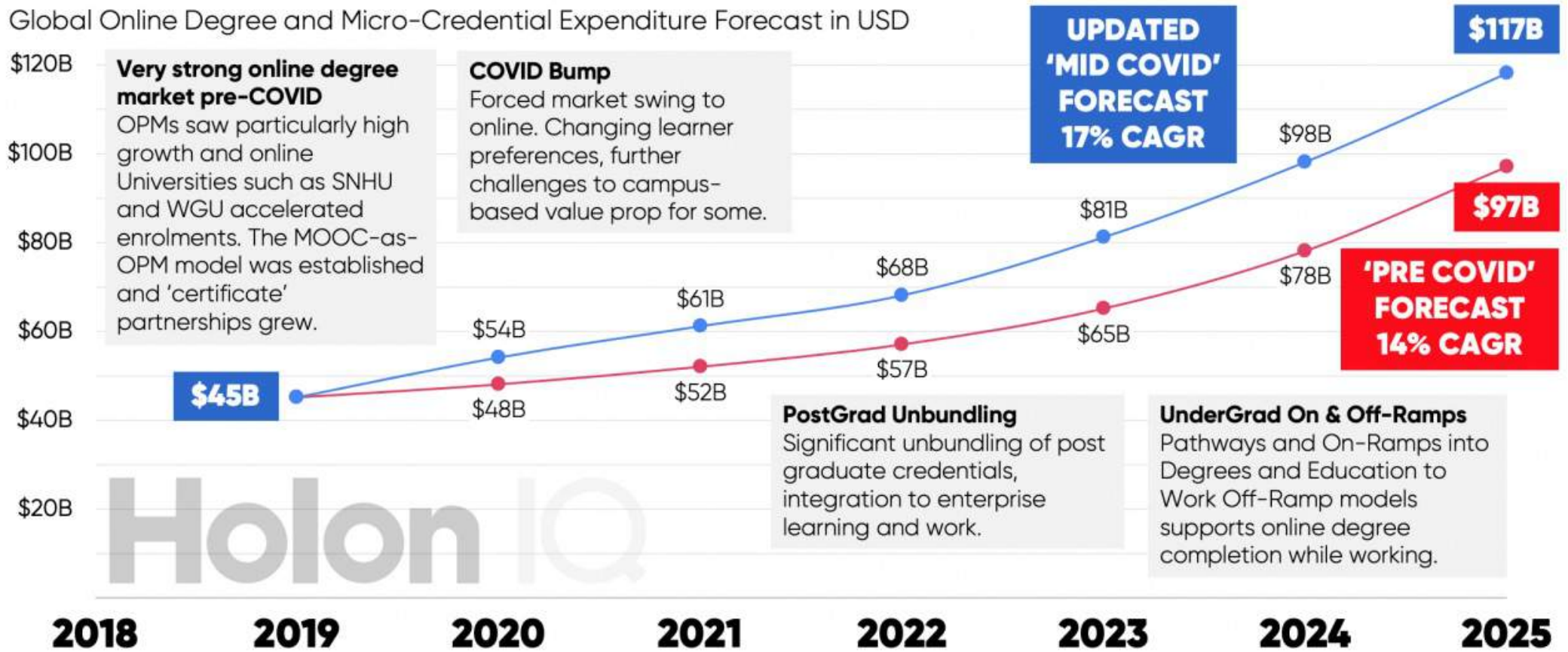

Drivers and Attractors for Micro-credentials

— All Publications   - - - Highly Relevant Publications

(Brown et al., 2021)

SDGS ➡ Promote SDGs

Increase Equity for Under-represented Groups ⬅ Equity

Why?

Why?

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

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Higher Education's Microcredentialing Craze: a Postdigital-Deweyan Critique

Shane J. Ralston[1]

"Microcredentialing is an outgrowth of the neoliberal learning economy. In this economy, education resembles a commodity, a product, or service marketed and sold like any other commodity" (p. 2).
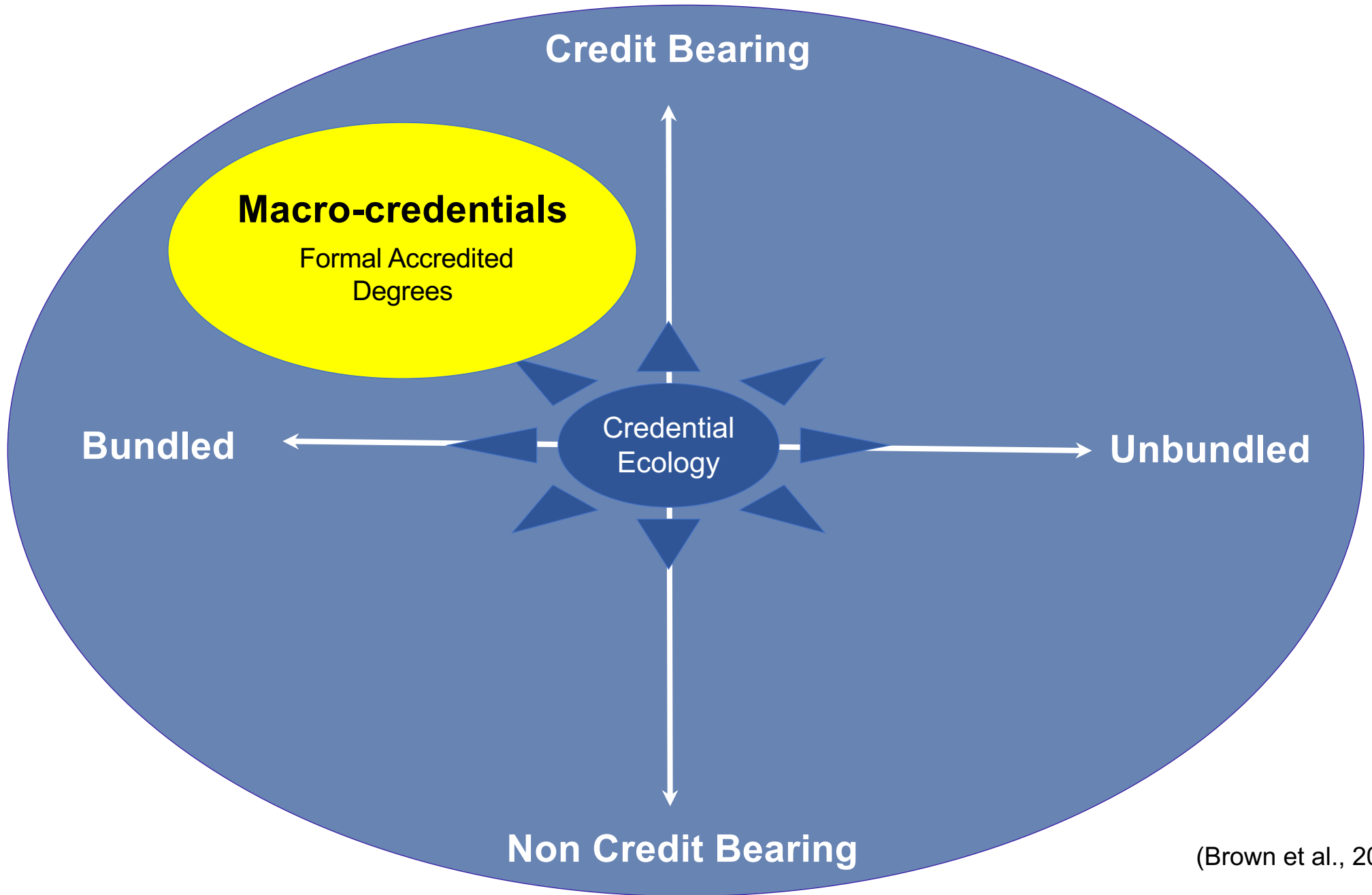
Abstract

As the value of a university degree plummets, the popularity of the digital microcredential has soared. Similar to recent calls for the early adoption of Blockchain technology, the so-called 'microcredentialing craze' could be no more than a fad, marketing hype, or another case of 'learning innovation theater.' Alternatively, the introduction of these compact skills- and competency-based online certificate programs might augur the arrival of a legitimate successor to the four-year university diploma. The thesis of this article is that the craze for microcredentialing reflects (1) administrative urgency to unbundle higher education curricula and degree programs for greater efficiency and profitability and (2) a renascent movement among industry and higher education leaders to reorient the university curriculum towards vocational training.

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Why?

2. What is a micro-credential?

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What?

(Brown et al., 2020)

What?

Credit Bearing

Macro-credentials
Formal Accredited
Degrees

Micro-credentials
Formal & Semi Formal
Accredited & Stackable

Bundled

Credential
Ecology

Unbundled

Non-status Awards
Semi-Formal Courses
Non-Accredited

Nano-credentials
Informal & Non-Formal
Digital Badges & Certificates

Non-Credit Bearing

(Brown et al., 2020)

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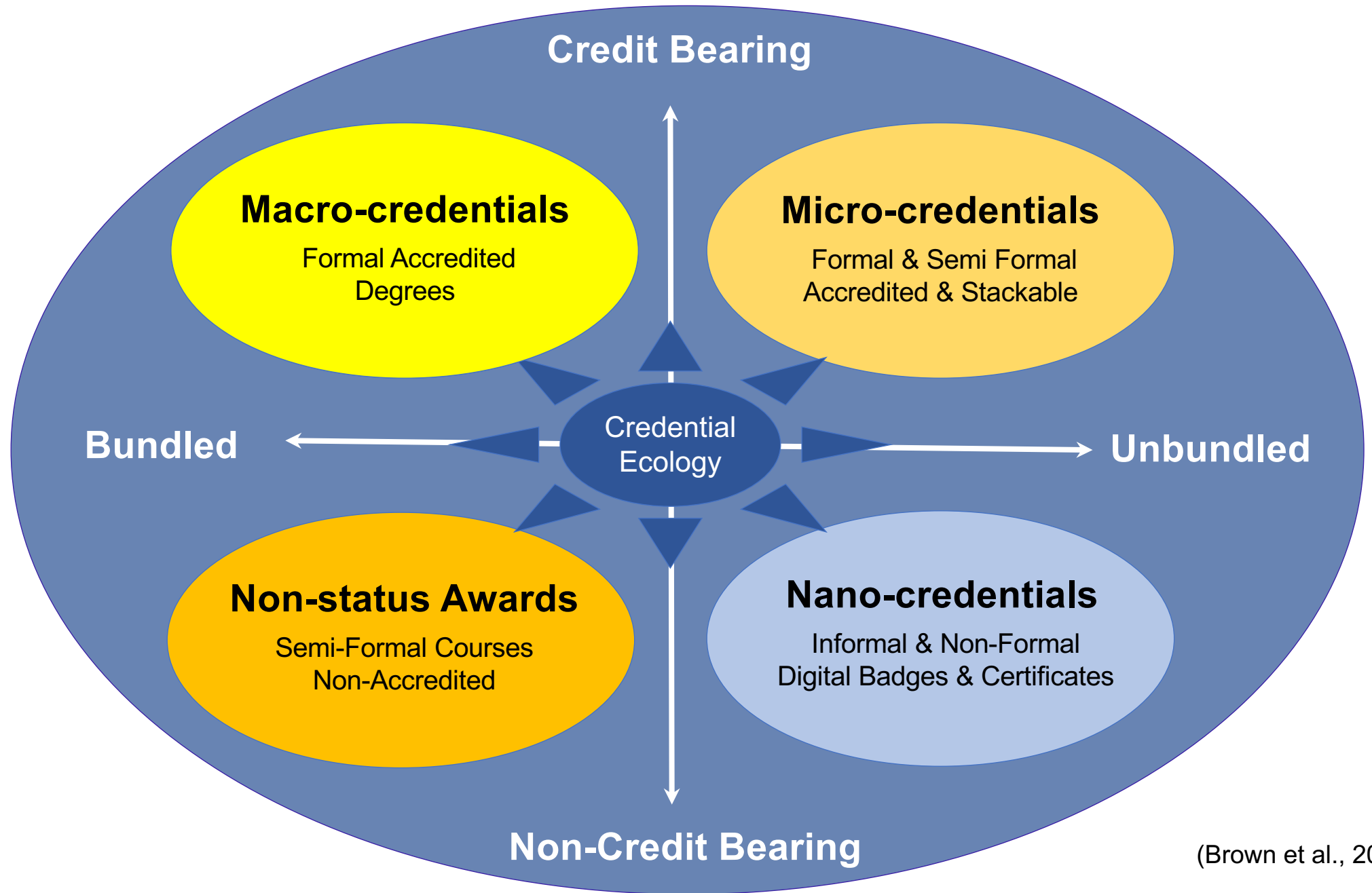
What?

Spectrum of recognition

Academic Credentials

data on paper

Academic Digital Credentials

data, no image

Micro-credentials

image + data

Open Badges

Digital Badges

no data
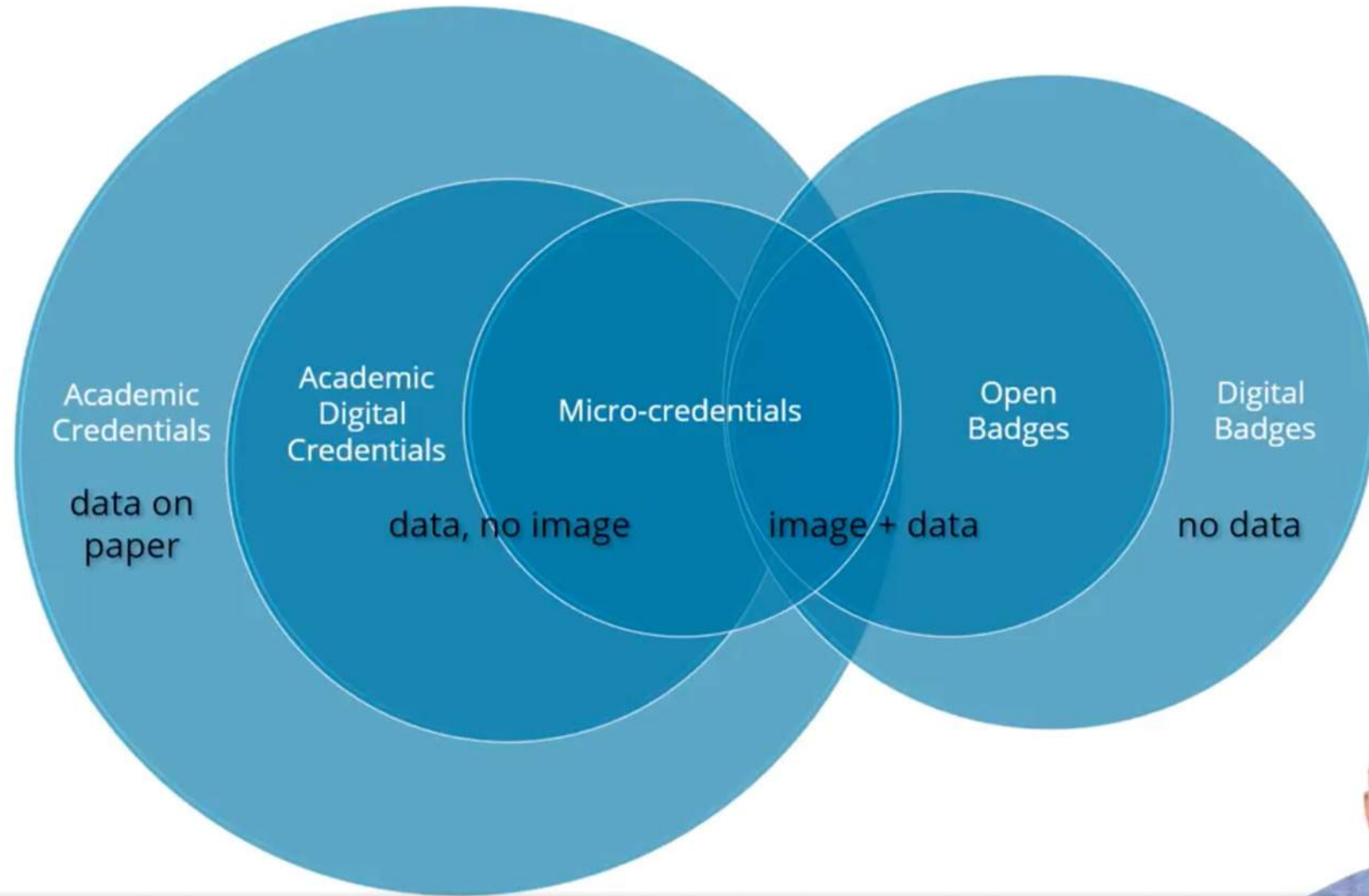
What?

500,000 Canadians annually seek to complete St. John's certificates

Since 1833

What?

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Micro-credentials: huge and hiding in plain sight

June 4, 2021

in | SHARE   🐦 | TWEET   ✉ | EMAIL

They are already big in training

In 2019, there were **2.6m people enrolled** in non-qualification "training bundles" – mainly to meet **regulatory requirements in safety and skills maintenance**.

In a report for the estimable **National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Bryan Palmer** suggests that while only are few are "recognised as a VET skill set, it would appear that industry actors and/or individual students already see many of these bundles as a 'credential' of value, one for which they are willing to pay," – 93 per cent are fee for service.

And all is largely well, with the market "operating effectively" and **meeting regulatory and safety requirements**.

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What?

What?

3.0 Definition and terminology

3.1 Definition

Globally, a range of actors has already responded to the need for more flexible forms of provision of education and lifelong lea...

referencing to qualifications frameworks and the use of credits (where applicable) and measures to ensure portability and stackability.

"A micro-credential is a **proof** of learning outcomes that a learner has acquired after a **short** learning experience. These learning outcomes have been **assessed** against transparent **standards**"

by members of the consultation group on micro-credentials (Larsen, 2020).

A shared and transparent definition of micro-credentials is key to further the development and uptake of micro-credentials as a trusted skills currency. The consultation group have, during their work, concluded that **a shared definition must be valid across sectors of education and the world of work**, and it must mirror the societal mission of higher education institutions.

...er, can be shared, are portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards.
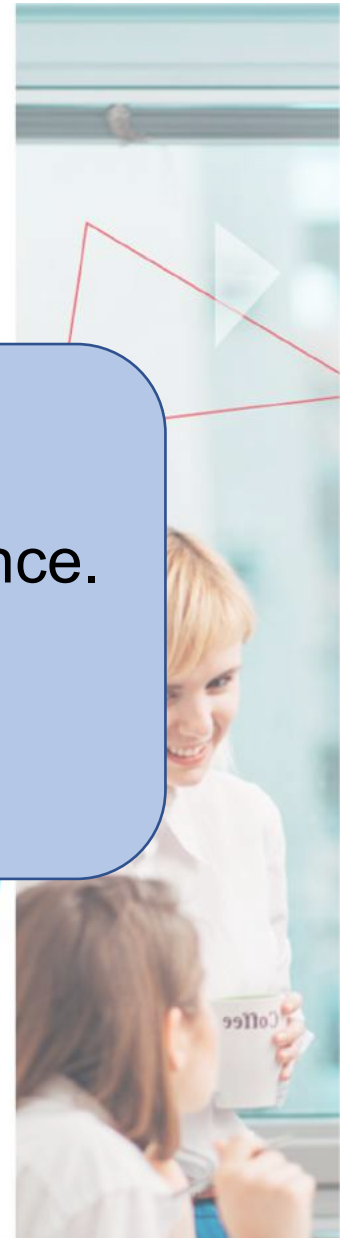
What?   The Positioning of Micro-Credentials   (Brown et al., 2021)

Position	All Publications		Highly Relevant	
	n	%	n	%
Alternative to mainstream education (i.e., operates separately)	20	13.5	3	6.7
A supplement rather than substitute to existing degrees (i.e., co-exists)	46	31.1	8	17.8
Embedded in mainstream education	35	23.6	13	28.9
A new entry pathway to mainstream education	1	0.7	0	0.0
To bridge informal, non formal and formal learning	10	6.8	1	2.2
Reimagined partnership model	1	0.7	0	0.0
Disrupt traditional 19th Century recognition model	3	2.0	1	2.2
Recognises multiple approaches	28	18.9	16	35.6

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What?

What word best encapsulates your view?

3. How do you implement micro-credentials?

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How?

Summary Matrix of Business Models
These business models and the multiple dimensions were validated and improved in respondent interviews.

	Solo Unit	Solo Institution	Peer Consortium	NGO Led	Industry Led
Description	Department or Subsidiary	College or university-wide	Distributed or rotating leadership	Centralized leadership	Large employer or sector body or key domain-specific skill provider (e.g. technology platform)
Examples	Madison ConEd DeakinCo (RPP Credentials) Swinburne Engineering Otago Edubits	Deakin (Hallmarks) RMIT, Curtin	OERu/Edubits University Learning Store Territoires apprenants (FR)	Bestr/CINECA, SURFNet Education Design Lab, Colorado Community College System	IBM Skills Academy, Salesforce Trailhead, Microsoft
Effort	LO	MED	MED	LO	LO
Risk	LO	MED	MED	LO	LO
Speed (Time to Market)	HI	MED	LO	HI	HI
Impact/Benefits Staff, students, LLLs, alumni	LO	MED	MED-HI	MED-HI	MED-HI
Cost	LO	MED	LO-MED Membership fee	LO-MED Membership fee	LO
Autonomy (Flexibility)	HI	HI	MED	LO	LO
Strengths	Potential for most autonomy Fast, flexible, "agile" Emergent practice can inform policy	More, centralized resources, clear branding, clout. Stability, momentum when up and running	Bigger footprint, safety in numbers. Shared values can drive a vibrant community of practice.	More agility due to one decision-maker.	Packaged, tested solution. Brand recognition.
Weaknesses	Branding questions. Inter-departmental fragmentation. Lack of resources, scalability. Vulnerability to policy shifts, loss of senior champion.	Consolidating diverse viewpoints & departments can be slow. Preconceived policies can lead to unsustainable practices.	Peer governance can be s-l-o-w. Can be hard to sustain over time.	Lack of autonomy, control over the agenda, branding. Leadership may destabilize due to political / funding shifts.	Lack of autonomy. Subsidiary identity/branding. Potential for conflicting goals.

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(Brown et al., 2021)

Business Model	All Publications		Highly Relevant	
	n	%	*n*	%
Solo Institution	107	72.3	35	77.8
Industry-led	34	23.0	17	37.8
Delivery through MOOC Platform	25	16.9	14	31.1
Co-construction with Industry	23	15.5	12	26.7
Professional Body	12	8.1	6	13.3
Peer Consortium (excluding MOOCs)	13	8.8	9	20.0
Create Open Market	10	6.8	4	8.9
N/A	11	7.4	3	6.7

Sole Institution

Photo by Myriam Jessier on Unsplash

How?

Micro-credential online course
Applied Benefit: Cost Analysis

Build your expertise in the world's most widely used economic technique.
Develop the practical skills you need to analyse real projects and policies.
For economists, managers, consultants, students, researchers and policymakers.

Teacher

Professor David Pannell guides you in all aspects of the course

Has delivered dozens of BCA training courses

Developed widely used BCA software

Awards for teaching (UWA), communication (national) and research (international)

Advises many national and international agencies

Student responses

"A fantastic course. It is by far the best course I have been involved in."

"Essential for new BCA users."

"Taught in an engaging way. Many real-world examples to demonstrate the theory and practical application."

"I learned so much and there is still lots to learn from the material you shared so I can return to it when needed."

Benefits

BCA skills are in demand

Improve decision making for management & policy

Improve your spreadsheet & report-writing skills

Outstanding teaching

Fully online - flexible

Live workshop each week with Professor Pannell

Permanent access to all videos after the course

Course can be stand-alone or part of a masters degree

Requirements

No existing knowledge of economics is required

No textbook required - all course materials provided

Around one day of work per week for 12 weeks

Pricing

Details on next page

Generous discount and bursaries available for selected countries

Discount for bulk enrolments

Personal support available

For further details or to enrol see http://appliedbca.org
Course commences 28 February 2022

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Discounts
for students
from developing
countries

Bursaries
for students
from developing
countries

Micro-credential online course
Applied Benefit: Cost Analysis

Pricing	Individual	5+ students
Course	A$990 inc. GST (approx. US$730)	25% discount
Course (discounted)	A$330 inc. GST (approx. US$240)	Additional 25% discount
Course (with bursary)	A$90 inc. GST (approx. US$66)	
Individual support	A$366 per hour inc. GST (approx. US$270)	

Discounts

A special discount is offered for students from countries with GDP per capita below US$10,000, as listed on https://data.worldbank.org/.

This includes most countries in Asia, Africa, Central America and South America, and some former Soviet states, Middle Eastern states, and island states.

To apply for this discount, email ceep@uwa.edu.au

To arrange for the discount for bulk enrolments, email karen.eyles@uwa.edu.au

Bursaries

Ten bursaries are available (half for women).

Conditions:

(a) degree in economics or similar,

(b) sufficient English language skills, and

(c) home country GDP per capita below US$10,000.

To apply, in a letter to ceep@uwa.edu.au address the three conditions and, in no more than 150 words, say why you should receive a bursary. Applications close 4 February 2022.

Support

Obtain individual support from Professor Pannell for a BCA you prepare after completing the course.

Support can include advice on project definition, data elicitation, spreadsheet checking and feedback on draft report.

Three hours of support is suggested.

To book support, email ceep@uwa.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Code: 00126G | PRV12169, Australian University | OF: 8204457

For further details or to enrol see http://appliedbca.org
Course commences 28 February 2022

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

How?

01/12/2021

How?

Figure 11. Number of micro-credentials offered on selected learning platforms, and one-year percentage change
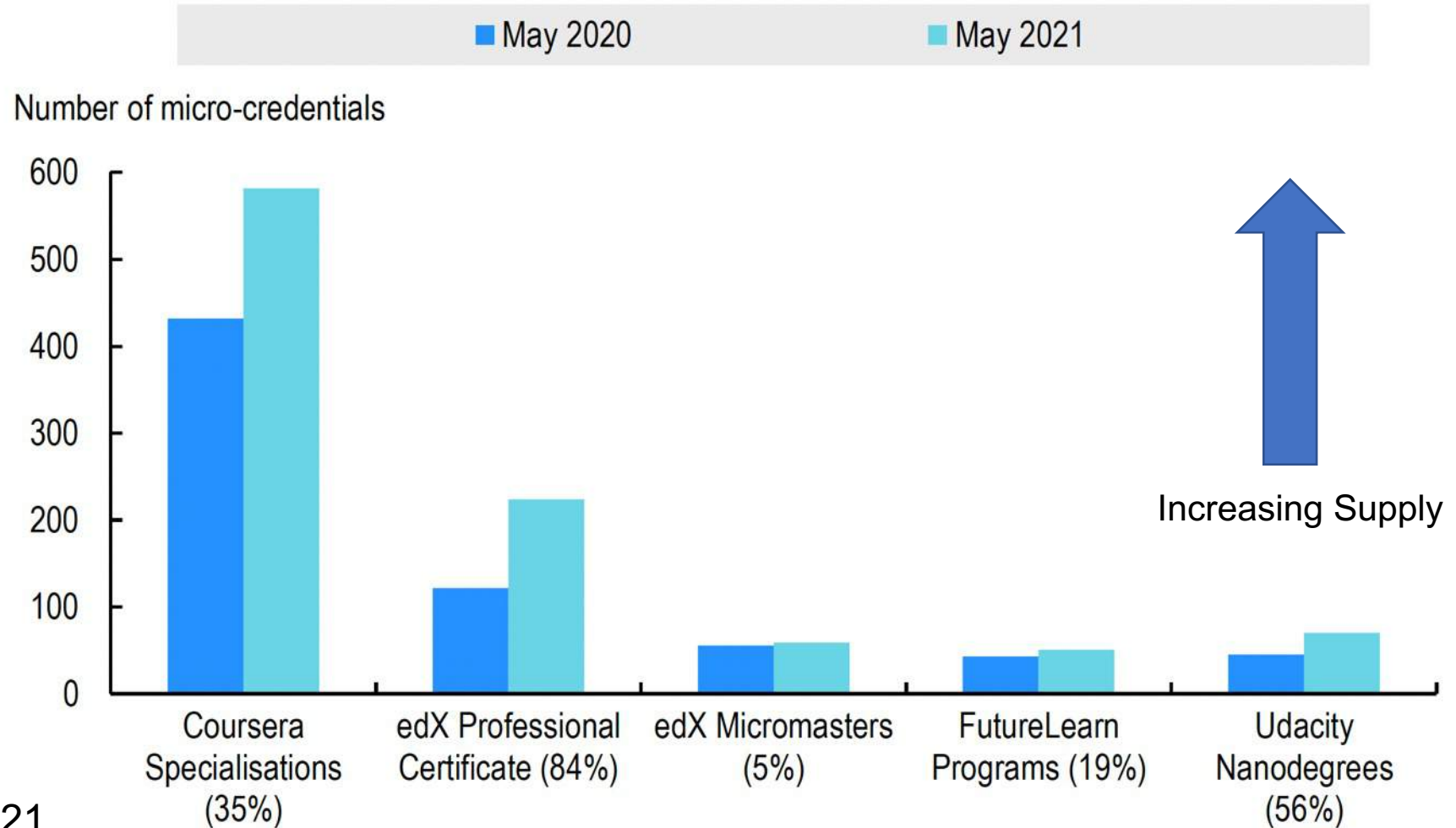
Increasing Supply

How?

How?

Joint Media Release | 22 June 2020

Marketplace for online microcredentials

The Hon Dan Tehan MP
Minister for Education

Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash
Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business

The Morrison Government will provide $4.3 million to build and run a one-stop-shop for microcredentials to help students identify educational opportunities.

The marketplace builds on the success of the Government's microcredential initiative announced as part of its Higher Education Relief Package at Easter. Since the announcement, 54 providers have created 344 short online courses in areas of skills shortage.

Australian government to build AU$4.3 million online microcredentials marketplace

Study Australia
Unlock your employability skills as part of Australia's world-class student experience.
START MY FREE COURSE

How?

https://search.ecampusontario.ca/micro-credential-search

How?

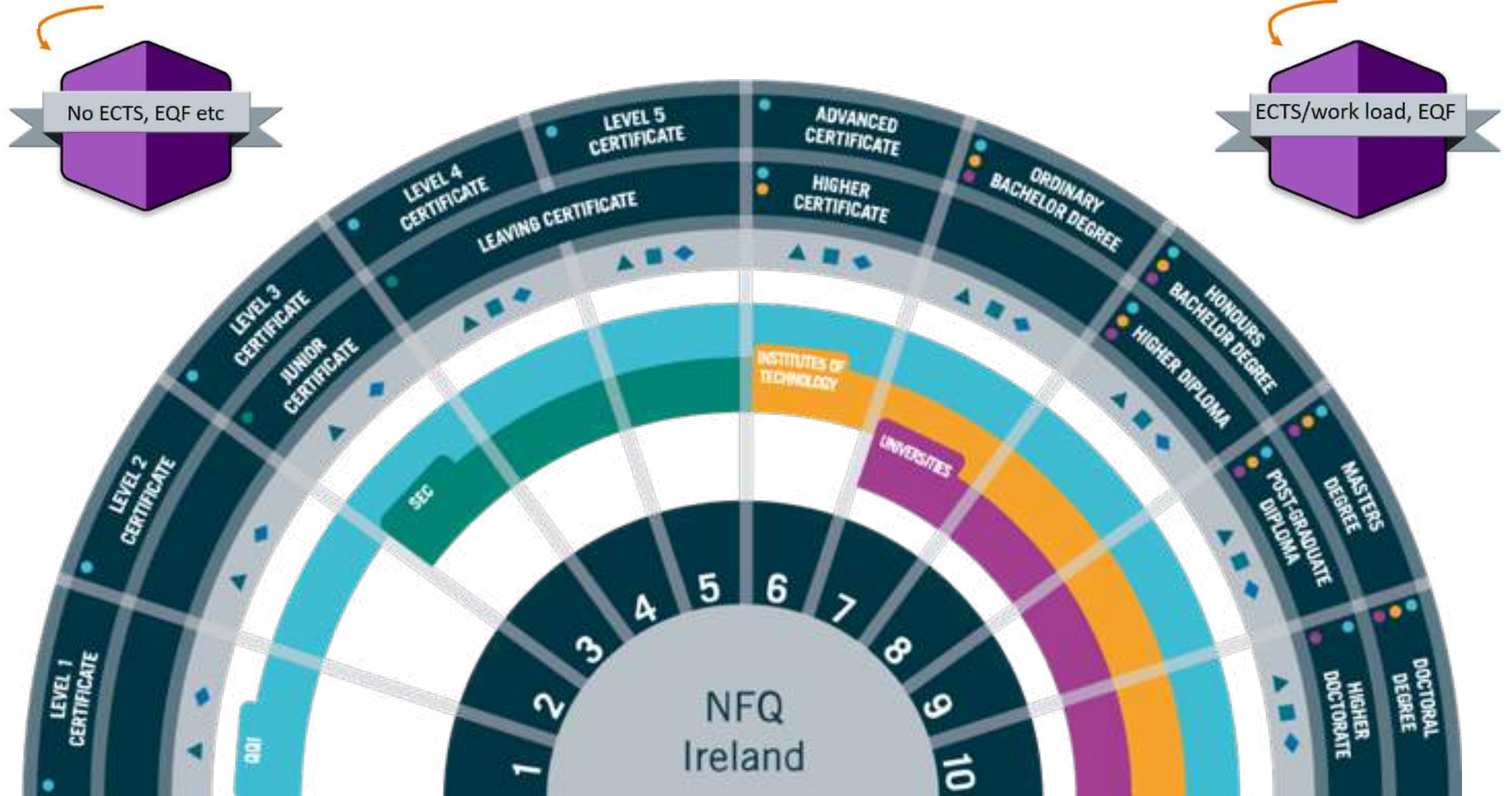Twitter: @IUAMicroCreds   LinkedIn: @MicroCreds   #MicroCredsIE

MicroCreds is an ambitious 5-year, €12.3 million project (2020-2025) led by the IUA in partnership with seven IUA universities: Dublin City University, Trinity College Dublin, Maynooth University, NUI Galway, University College Cork, University College Dublin and University of Limerick. The project funding was awarded following a competitive process under the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science's (DFHERIS) Human Capital Initiative Pillar 3 Innovation and Agility, with funding drawn from the National Training Fund.

OUR WORK

Access

   DARE & HEAR

   Mature Students

   Further Education &
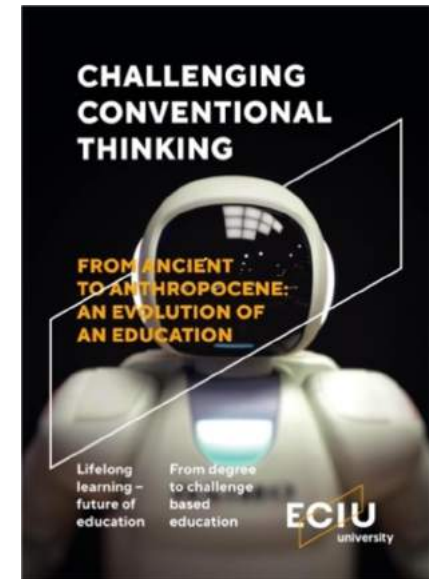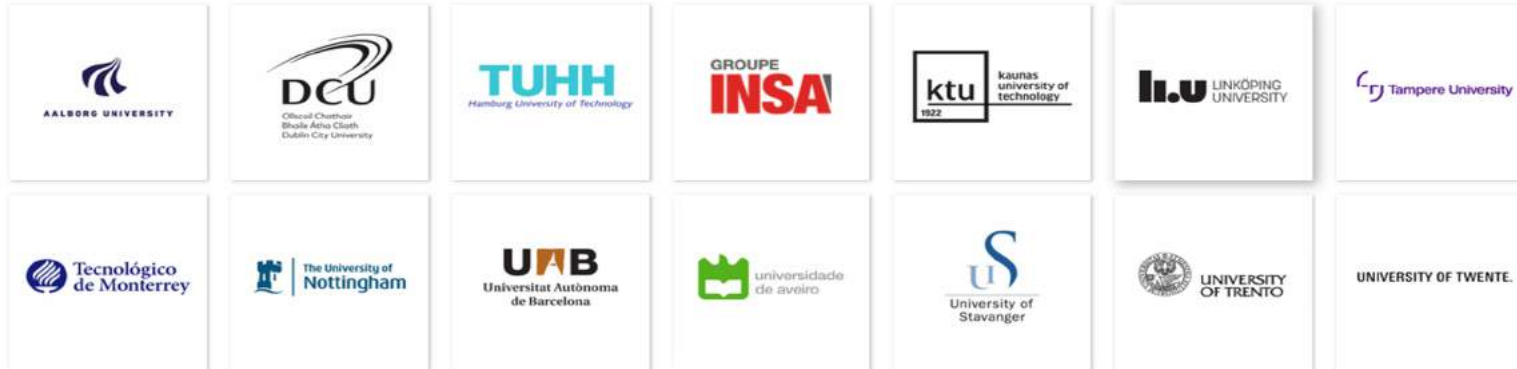
How?

Special Purpose Awards - Credit-bearing

How?

€7m

Final remarks…

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Micro-credentials
should be in the service of
big ideas,
not as a big idea
in itself!

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Link To Poll…

Thank you

Go raibh maith agaibh!