

# Facilitating Micro-Credential Recognition in the European Hospitality Sector

**DELIVERABLE 2.3 – REPORT ON MICRO-CREDENTIAL  
RECOGNITION IN THE EUROPEAN HOSPITALITY SECTOR**



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## 1 Executive Summary

The MCEU Hospitality project is an EU-funded initiative that seeks to support hospitality professionals in adapting to evolving skills needs through targeted skill-building. The focus of the project is on micro-credentials — flexible learning experiences with industry-relevant credentials, designed for the modern hospitality professional.

The project was conceived as a 36-month programme. Year 1 involved data collection on the existing skills held and valued by professionals in the European Union (EU) and Schengen area. Year 2 focused on describing the current state of micro-credential recognition within the EU hospitality sector and to identify key factors influencing their wider adoption. A mixed-methods study was conducted to provide an evidence-based overview of how micro-credentials are currently perceived and recognised by workforce participants, employers, and policymakers.

The research for Year 2 was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 involved analysis of quantitative data from questions embedded in the 2024 Year 1 survey, administered to 3,810 hospitality professionals (employed, unemployed, and students) across the EU. Phase 2 consisted of qualitative interviews conducted in late 2025 with 14 industry and policy stakeholders, exploring institutional perspectives on recognition, trust, and implementation conditions.

The quantitative findings were promising, indicating a workforce actively engaged in continuous learning — over 72% of respondents across all segments reported having participated in short-course training. At the same time, awareness of micro-credentials was found to be limited, among hiring decision-makers as well as among respondents who have never taken a short course. In terms of qualitative context, interviewees consistently highlighted trust, quality assurance, and the lack of standardisation in micro-credential content as central challenges affecting recognition. And while they broadly converged on the importance of addressing these issues, their perspectives varied by stakeholder role, with industry actors emphasising practical HR usability and policymakers focusing on systemic and regulatory constraints.

Across the analysis, three cross-cutting themes recurred: trust, interoperability, and conditions for micro-credential adoption. These themes are used in this report as an analytical lens to structure the interpretation of the findings, rather than as prescriptive recommendations.

## 2 Introduction

The MCEU-Hospitality project is an Erasmus+ initiative that seeks to support the hospitality sector in building the skills necessary for the EU's green and digital transition plans. As job uncertainty and evolving regulations continue to characterise the industry, targeted short-format learning modules can help busy hospitality professionals gain the skill upgrades they need while on the go.

The policy context for micro-credentials dates back to June 2022, when the Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials (MCs) for lifelong learning and employability. A definition of micro-credentials was determined as follows:

*Micro-credentials certify the learning outcomes of short-term learning experiences, such as a short course or training. They offer a flexible, targeted way to help people develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need for their personal and professional development.*

The Recommendation also outlined quality, transparency, and portability principles for micro-credentials, and encouraged Member States to explore the integration of MCs into national education and training systems. While the present study did not explicitly test awareness or implementation of this Recommendation, it provides relevant empirical insights into the conditions that may support or hinder its uptake in the hospitality sector.

## 2.1 Project Roadmap and Report Objective

The MCEU-Hospitality project follows a three-year research sequence:

- Year 1: Skills needs assessment
- Year 2: Analysis of recognition and perception of micro-credentials
- Year 3: Exploration of integration pathways into training systems

The objective of the Year 2 report is to analyse current recognition practices and perceived barriers based on quantitative and qualitative evidence, and to contextualise these findings within the broader MCEU project trajectory.

## 3 Methodology

The Year 2 research employed a mixed-methods design combining secondary quantitative analysis and primary qualitative inquiry. The objective was to capture both workforce-level perceptions and institutional perspectives on micro-credential recognition.

### 3.1 Phase 1: Quantitative Analysis of Workforce Perceptions

The quantitative component of the Year 2 draws on a subset of questions included in the Year 1 (2024) MCEU hospitality skills survey and analysed here for the first time. These items focus on training participation, barriers, awareness of micro-credentials, and perceived benefits of micro-credentials.

The dataset includes responses from 3,810 participants across 31 EU and Schengen countries, segmented into employed professionals, unemployed individuals, and full-time students. Analysis is descriptive, with cross-tabulations used to explore differences across respondent groups.

### 3.2 Phase 2: Qualitative Inquiry with Industry and Policymakers

The qualitative phase consists of semi-structured interviews with 14 stakeholders (5 industry professionals and 9 policymakers) conducted between September and November 2025.

Interviews were held online via Zoom (n=12) or completed via written responses (n=2). Interview transcripts were anonymised using a standardised coding structure (Interviewee number – stakeholder type – country). Then, a framework thematic analysis was applied using

Google Gemini to identify recurring themes, with particular attention given to similarities and contrasts between industry and policymakers perspectives.

### Transition from Methodology to Findings

Building on the mixed-methods design outlined above, the following sections present the empirical findings of the Year 2 analysis. The quantitative results are presented first to establish baseline patterns in learning behaviour, awareness, and perceived value across the hospitality workforce. The qualitative analysis that comes after explores how these patterns are interpreted and addressed at the institutional and policy levels.

## 4 Phase 1: Quantitative Findings on Micro-Credential Perceptions

This section describes a key pattern observed in the survey data: hospitality professionals across segments report high participation in short-course learning, yet awareness of the term “micro-credential” remains limited. This suggests that while the underlying learning behaviour is widespread, the credential concept and what it signifies are not broadly recognised yet.

For clarity, this section is structured around four areas: (i) participation and barriers, (ii) awareness, (iii) perceived and experienced benefits, and (iv) implications for recognition.

### 4.1 Training Participation and Barriers

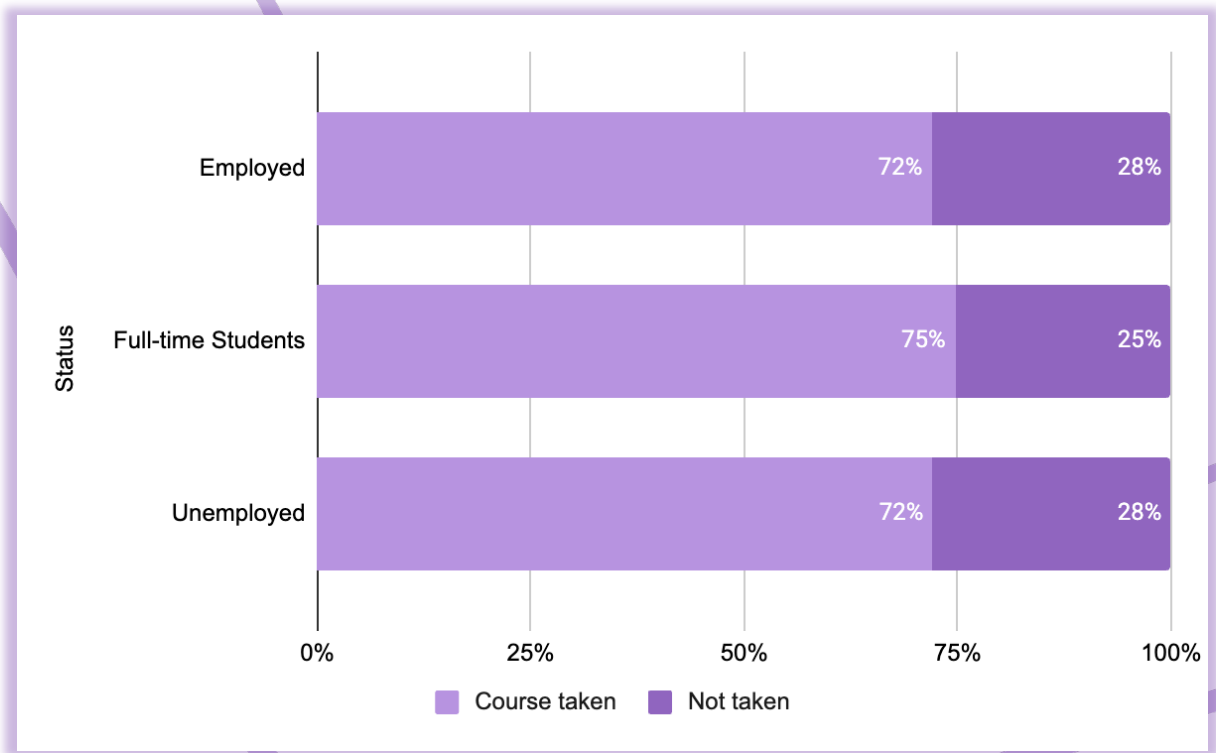


Figure 1: Participation in Short Courses or Training by Employment Status

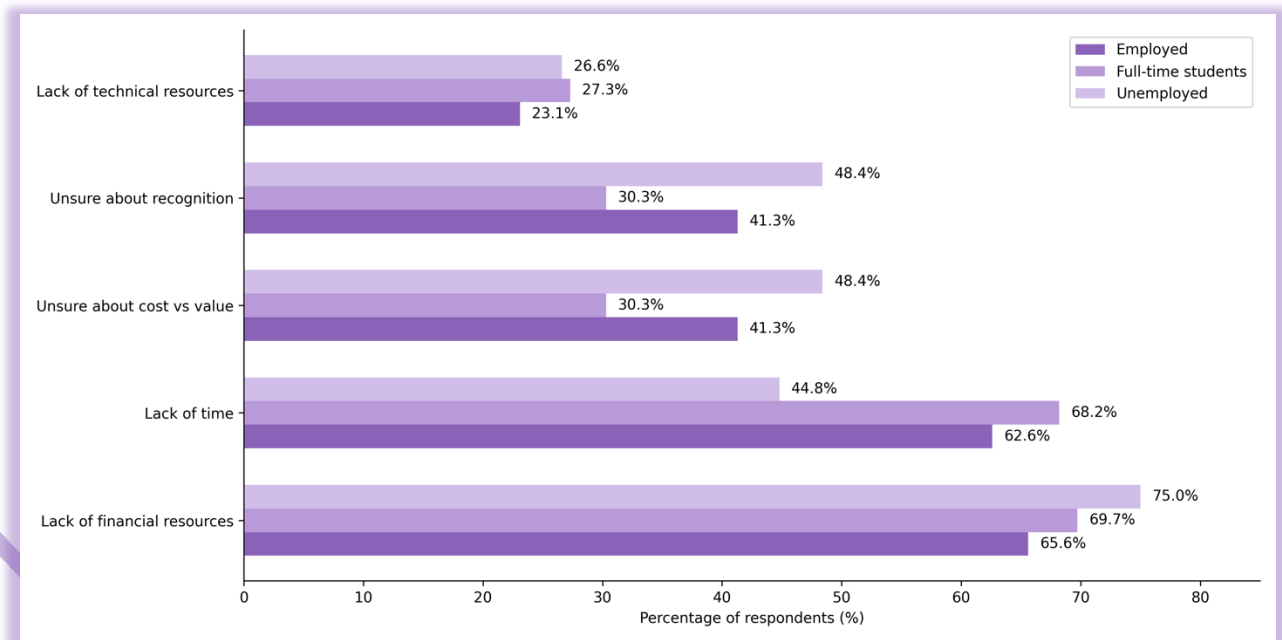


Figure 2: Main Barriers to Training Participation by Employment Status

The survey data indicates that a majority of respondents in every segment have taken a short course or training to improve or learn new skills:

- 72% of employed respondents
- 74.7% of full-time students
- 72.1% of unemployed respondents

This reflects a general desire in the hospitality sector to invest in continuous learning. At the same time, the barriers to learning reported by those who do not participate provide important context for how micro-credentials may need to be positioned and designed.

### Cost as a dominant constraint

Cost emerged as the most frequently cited barrier across all respondent groups. It was reported by 65.6% of employed respondents, 69.7% of students, and 75% of unemployed respondents.

### Time constraints and competing commitments

Time constraints were the second-most frequently mentioned barrier for students (68.2%) and employed respondents (62.6%), compared to 44.8% for unemployed respondents.

### Perceived value and recognition as participation factors

Respondents also indicated concerns related to the perceived value and recognition of short courses. A substantial share of unemployed respondents (48.4%) reported concerns about the value/recognition a short course would offer, compared with 41.3% of employed respondents and 30.3% of students.

### Additional access and engagement factors

Smaller proportions of respondents cited limited access to the technical resources that would

enable learning (23.1% employed; 27.3% students; 26.6% unemployed) and lower interest levels (13.5% employed; 10.6% students; 14.1% unemployed).

### 4.2 Awareness of Micro-Credentials

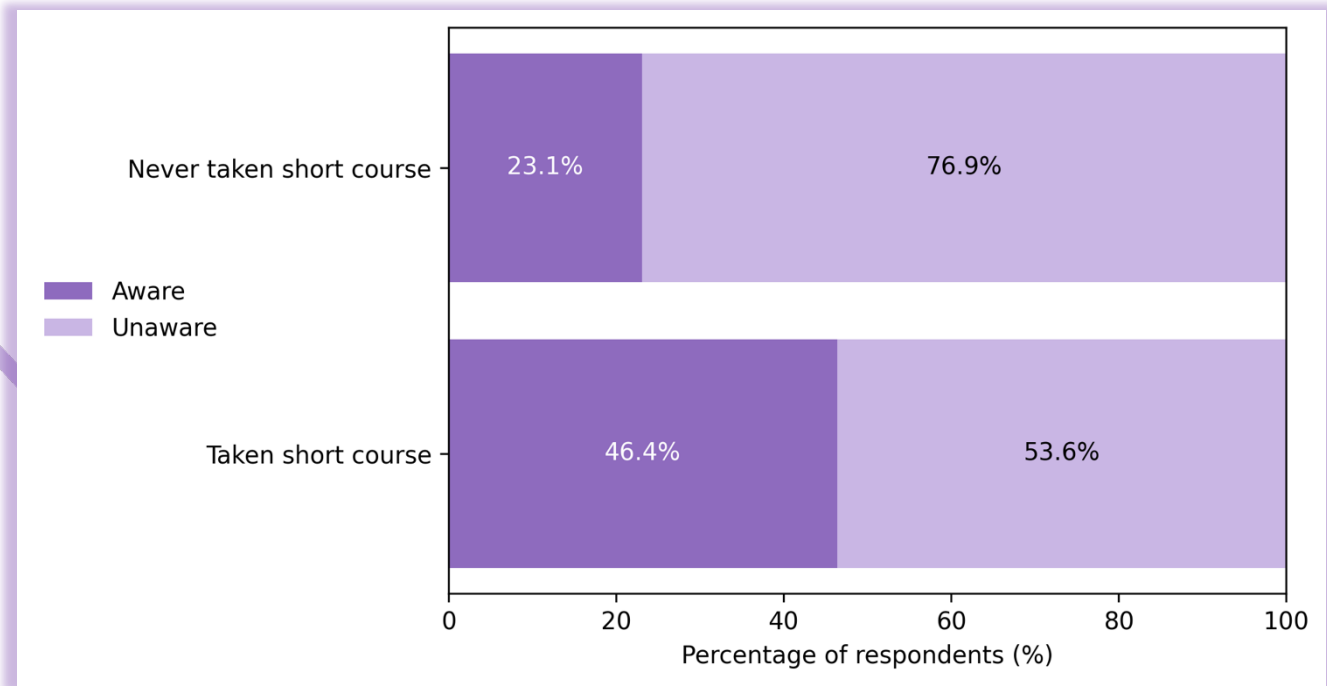


Figure 3: Awareness of Micro-Credentials by Learning Behaviour

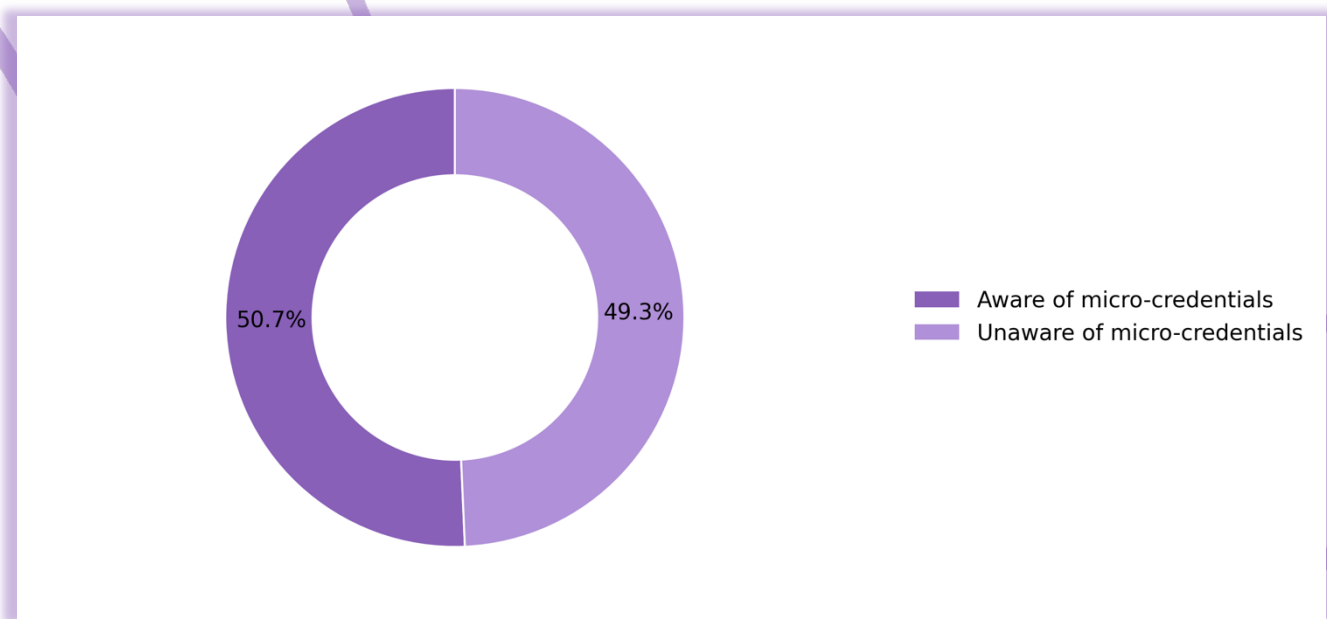


Figure 4: Awareness of Micro-Credentials Among Hiring Decision-Makers

Respondents were provided with a definition of the term “micro-credential” as outlined in section 2.0 above. The data is significant — across all groups, there is limited familiarity with the term. Micro-credentials are meant to function as a signal: if the term is unfamiliar, it is less likely to be interpreted consistently by learners, employers, or intermediaries, and thus less likely to be adopted.

**Awareness by learning behaviour**

Among respondents who had previously taken a short course, 53.6% reported being unfamiliar with micro-credentials. Among respondents who had never taken a short course, this number goes up to 76.9%.

**Awareness among hiring decision-makers**

A narrow majority of hiring decision-makers reported familiarity with micro-credentials (50.7%). Among hiring decision-makers who were aware of micro-credentials, 72.7% reported having considered them in hiring or promotion decisions. Among those unfamiliar, 44.2% indicated they would consider micro-credentials in the future and 46.8% were unsure, while only 9% reported that they would not consider them.

4.3 Value and Benefits of Micro-Credentials

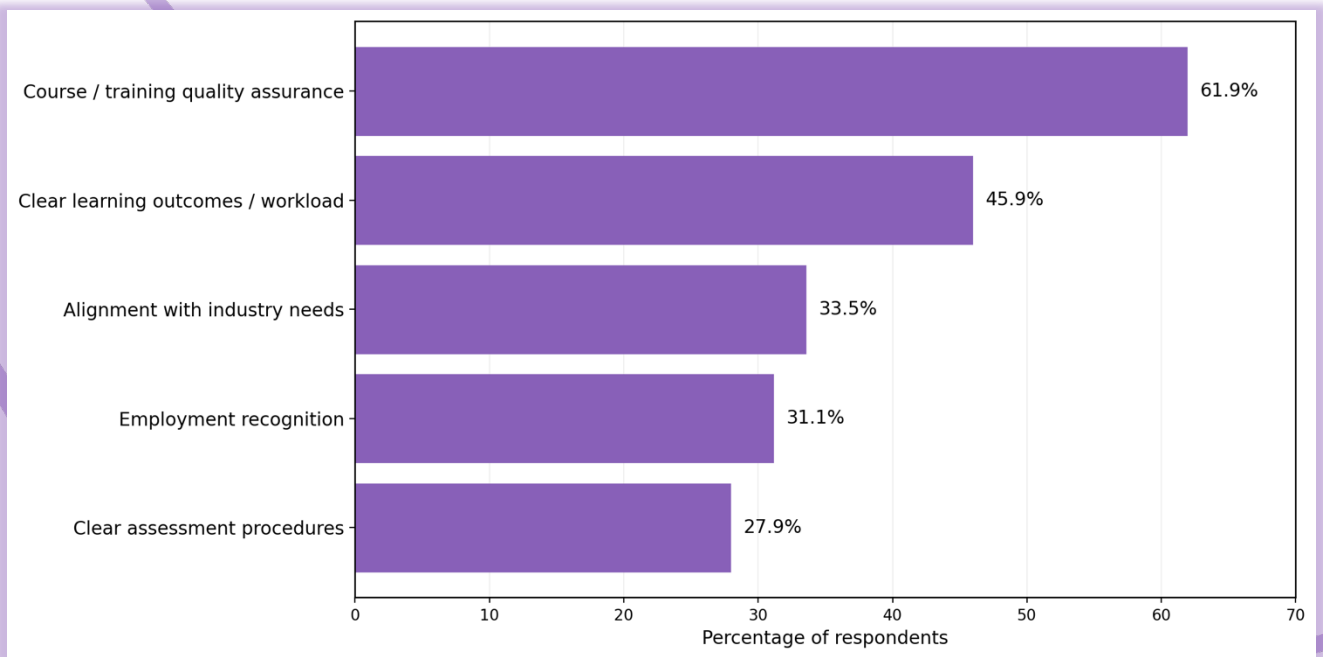


Figure 5: Reported Benefits Among Respondents Who Hold a Micro-Credential

When asked what features they would value most in a micro-credential, respondents prioritised signals linked to trust, clarity, and labour-market relevance. Respondents who indicated they had received a micro-credential (n=623) reported the following most frequently experienced benefits:

- Course/training quality assurance (61.9%)
- Clear communication of learning outcomes/workload (45.9%)

- Alignment with industry needs (33.5%)
- Employment recognition (31.1%)

Additional benefits cited relate to validation of learning experiences and authenticity checks, indicating that credibility is also a meaningful benefit for at least a subset of learners.

#### 4.4 Implications for Micro-Credential Design and Recognition

The quantitative findings imply several conditions that may influence whether micro-credentials can function as recognisable signals of learning in the hospitality labour market:

- **Affordability and feasibility remain foundational.** Cost and time are the most frequently cited constraints, suggesting that the increased adoption of micro-credentials may depend on whether training is financially feasible and practically compatible with work and study schedules.
- **Signalling depends on awareness and interpretability.** Limited familiarity with the term “micro-credential”—including among hiring decision-makers—suggests that signalling value cannot be assumed. There needs to be greater investment in creating awareness around the term and what it means for both learners and employers,
- **Trust and clarity are central to perceived value.** Respondents value quality assurance and employment recognition. In other words, they value knowing that the time and effort invested in completing a micro-credential will pay off in terms of improved prospects. Vitality, micro-credential holders report these as experienced benefits. The quality and recognition thus exist already — the next step involves creating broader awareness around both.

## 5 Phase 2: Qualitative Findings from Industry and Policy Leaders

While the quantitative findings describe patterns in learning behaviour, awareness, and perceived value of micro-credentials, the qualitative interviews provide explanatory context for why recognition of micro-credentials in the industry remains uneven. A recurring set of issues come up in the responses: definitional ambiguity, trust and quality assurance, and fragmentation of recognition approaches.

To support transparency and analytical clarity, this section includes (i) a brief quantified summary of recurring interview patterns and (ii) a thematic synthesis grounded in the interview texts.

### 5.1 Quantified Summary of Interview Patterns (n=14)

Based on the 14 interviews (5 industry professionals and 9 policymakers), several recurring patterns were observed:

1. **Consensus on standardisation (14/14).** All interviewees agreed on the importance of a standardised framework or shared criteria for micro-credential quality and recognition.

2. **Terminology gap among industry participants (4/5).** Most industry participants reported limited familiarity with the formal term “micro-credential,” despite recognising the type of short-format learning it denotes.
3. **Recognition in current processes varies by stakeholder role.** Policymakers largely focused on formal or formalising approaches to integrate micro-credentials (e.g., VET short courses and ECTS-linked learning units), while industry participants more often described informal or internal use in upskilling, with limited formal weight in external recruitment.
4. **Trust and quality assurance as a universal condition (14/14).** All interviewees cited credibility, quality, trust, or quality assurance as a central requirement for micro-credentials.
5. **Frequently cited facilitation levers.** When discussing what could build trust and drive adoption, interviewees most often referenced (i) formal academic/ministry backing, (ii) collaboration and endorsement by industry bodies, (iii) digital verification/interoperability mechanisms, and (iv) financial incentives or funding.

## 5.2 Theme 1: Recognition Status and Definitional Ambiguity

Table 1 illustrates the contrasting ways in which micro-credentials are framed by industry professionals and policymakers, highlighting the definitional ambiguity identified across interviews.

Dimension	Industry professionals (typical framing)	Policymakers (typical framing)
<b>Core understanding</b>	Short, modular learning experiences focused on specific tasks or skills	Structured short learning units designed to certify specific skills
<b>Common terminology used</b>	“Bite-sized learning”, “micro-classes”, “pills”, “micro-workshops”	“Micro-credentials”, “short learning units”, “certified learning outcomes”
<b>Primary emphasis</b>	Size, flexibility, and practical delivery of learning	Alignment with education systems and labour-market needs
<b>Recognition context</b>	Mainly used internally for upskilling and training	Linked to formal or formalising systems (e.g. VET, ECTS, lifelong learning frameworks)
<b>Perceived role</b>	Practical tool for rapid skill acquisition	Bridge between education and employment, supporting portability and recognition

Table 1: Illustrative Comparison of Micro-Credential Framing by Stakeholder Group

A recurring theme in the interview responses is the lack of a shared definition of what constitutes a “micro-credential.” Industry professionals and policymakers tend to approach the concept from different starting points.

Industry professionals frequently described micro-credentials using informal, delivery-oriented terms (e.g., “bite-sized learning,” “micro-classes,” “pills”), emphasising the size or modularity of learning:

- “I would say the first thing is it’s some small amount of knowledge or studies.” (P01, Industry, Iceland)
- “We didn’t call them micro-credentials... They are called ‘píldoras’ [pills], ‘micro-classes’, or ‘micro-workshops’.” (P02, Industry, Spain)

Policymakers more often described micro-credentials as structured short learning units that can support employability and bridge education outcomes with labour-market needs:

- “Short, focused learning units that certify specific skills... a bridge between education and labour market needs.” (P13, Policymaker, Belgium)
- “In Iceland, what is closest to a micro-credential is short courses... registered in the educational system and usually give ECTS credits.” (P05, Policymaker, Iceland)

Several industry participants described short-format learning as used internally for upskilling, but with limited formal weight in external hiring or promotion decisions. Policymakers, by contrast, often referenced ongoing efforts to formalise micro-credential approaches within education or VET contexts, although the extent and maturity of these approaches varies by country.

### 5.3 Theme 2: Trustworthiness and Quality Assurance

Trust and quality assurance emerged as a universal condition for wider recognition.

Industry participants linked credibility with the reputation of the entity issuing the micro-credential and with visible endorsement by major industry actors. They also expressed concern about superficial learning experiences:

- “What would make it trustworthy and reliable is the guarantee of the certificate—who emits it.” (P02, Industry, Spain)
- “Endorsement... by the big international hotel chains... that would give confidence.” (P02, Industry, Spain)

Policymakers more often defined trust in terms of standardised learning outcomes, transparent assessment, quality assurance by recognised bodies, and reliable verification mechanisms:

- “The key elements are clear learning outcomes, clear assessment methods, and making sure the qualification system is quality-assured by a recognised institution.” (P07, Policymaker, EU)
- “What makes a micro-credential trustworthy is the accreditation entity... the quality assurance.” (P14, Policymaker, Spain)

### 5.4 Theme 3: Challenges and Systemic Barriers

Industry participants focused on practical challenges to micro-credential adoption such as evaluating heterogeneous micro-credentials within HR processes, determining legitimacy, and comparing short credentials against formal degrees:

- “You have this lack of trust in what you are seeing on a CV. Is it legit or not? You have to question the quality a lot.” (P01, Industry, Iceland)

- “Formal education will still have the upper hand... for those who seek to climb the career ladder.” (P04, Industry, Denmark)

Policymakers highlighted systemic barriers including fragmented governance, the absence of shared definitions or national frameworks in some contexts, regional and linguistic divisions, uneven funding, and administrative burdens for providers:

- “The most important barrier is the lack of a coherent approach... no single national framework or shared definition yet.” (P13, Policymaker, Belgium)
- “There is a kind of tension between traditional systems and these new, flexible credentials.” (P10, Policymaker, EU)

## 5.5 Theme 4: Standardisation as a Cross-Cutting Condition

All interviewees emphasised the importance of standardisation for recognition and portability of micro-credentials. Industry interviewees stated that standards should be practically applicable and ideally co-defined with industry bodies from the outset:

- “The standardisation is absolutely necessary in the hospitality sector... the functions are almost similar across the EU.” (P02, Industry, Spain)
- “You need to work with them... together... to establish the standards from the beginning.” (P02, Industry, Spain)

Policymakers cited the importance of standardisation elements such as defined learning outcomes, credit/volume indicators (where applicable), metadata requirements, quality criteria, and verification mechanisms.

## 5.6 Theme 5: Facilitation Levers for Adoption

When discussing what would make micro-credentials more trustworthy and drive adoption, interviewees most often referenced two levers: (i) formal academic or ministry-level backing and (ii) industry collaboration and endorsement.

Other facilitation levers included digital verification and interoperability mechanisms, and financial incentives or funding models that reduce cost barriers.

## 5.7 Country-Specific Contexts and Insights

Some countries mentioned having already made progress in formal micro-credential integration.

- Denmark: Participants described a comparatively mature approach in which short-format learning is integrated within formal VET and/or accredited structures.
- Iceland: Participants highlighted safety and risk-management needs as particularly salient, linked to tourism growth, environmental hazards, and high proportions of foreign workers.
- Spain and Belgium: Participants described fragmentation challenges—Spain in terms of employer structure and the prevalence of SMEs, and Belgium in terms of regional and linguistic governance complexity.

## Transition from Findings to Integrated Discussion

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings highlight both convergence and divergence between workforce experiences and institutional perspectives when it comes to micro-credential adoption. The following section brings these parallel strands of evidence into dialogue. By connecting observed behaviours and perceptions with the underlying conditions identified by stakeholders, the Integrated Discussion clarifies how recognition challenges emerge and why they persist across different contexts.

## 6 Integrated Discussion

This section synthesises the quantitative patterns observed in the workforce survey with the qualitative explanations provided by industry and policy stakeholders. Rather than introducing new findings, it brings these two elements into conversation with each other to clarify how perceptions, behaviours, and institutional conditions interact in shaping the current recognition landscape for micro-credentials in hospitality.

The discussion is structured around four analytical lenses:

- barriers and enablers
- trust as a recognition condition
- awareness and signalling, and
- the transition from informal learning to recognised credentials.

Together, these lenses help explain why micro-credentials remain unevenly recognised despite high engagement with short-format learning.

### 6.1 Connecting Barriers and Enablers

The quantitative findings clearly show that cost and time are the most frequently cited barriers to participation in short courses. These constraints apply across employment statuses, though they are particularly pronounced for unemployed respondents in relation to cost and for employed respondents and students in relation to time.

Qualitative interviewees provide contextual insight into how these barriers may be mitigated under certain conditions. Policymakers and industry representatives from contexts with established vocational or publicly supported training structures described models in which short-format learning is subsidised, modular, and aligned with industry-recognised standards. While the present study does not assess policy effectiveness or outcomes, these accounts illustrate how structural enablers—such as public funding, integration with formal education pathways, or employer-supported training—can influence participation.

Importantly, the findings suggest that the barriers to micro-credential are not purely logistical. Perceived value and recognition also influence willingness to engage in training. Survey respondents report concerns about whether short courses can meaningfully improve employment prospects, while interviewees describe uncertainty about how micro-credentials should be interpreted in recruitment and progression decisions. This indicates that participation and recognition are linked: when recognition is unclear, perceived return on investment is diminished, and enthusiasm to participate goes down.

## 6.2 Convergence on Trust as a Recognition Condition

One of the strongest points of convergence between the quantitative and qualitative data relates to trust. Survey respondents consistently identify course quality assurance and employment recognition as the most valued features of micro-credentials. Similarly, every qualitative interviewee references trust, credibility, or quality assurance as a prerequisite for micro-credential recognition.

From the learner perspective, trust appears to function as a proxy for risk reduction. Clear learning outcomes, recognised issuers, and credible signals of quality help learners assess whether a short-format credential is worth their time and financial investment. Among respondents who have already received a micro-credential, reported benefits align closely with these expectations, suggesting that when trust conditions are met, perceived value increases.

From an institutional perspective, the factors for trust-building differ depending on stakeholder role. Industry interviewees emphasise issuer reputation, endorsement by known organisations, and the depth of learning as indicators of credibility. Policymakers emphasise formal quality assurance mechanisms, standardised learning outcomes, assessment transparency, and verifiable credentials. Despite these differences, both perspectives point to the same conclusion: without shared and recognisable trust signals, micro-credentials struggle to function as meaningful labour-market signals.

## 6.3 Explaining the Awareness Gap

The survey data highlights a substantial awareness gap: a majority of respondents are unfamiliar with the term “micro-credential,” including many who actively participate in short-course learning. Awareness is also limited among hiring decision-makers, where familiarity strongly correlates with willingness to consider micro-credentials in recruitment or promotion decisions.

Qualitative insights help to explain this gap. Several interviewees, particularly those referencing highly fragmented hospitality labour markets dominated by SMEs, describe limited exposure to formal credentialing terminology and frameworks. In these contexts, learning may be valued and utilised internally without being labelled or understood as a “micro-credential” specifically. As a result, the underlying learning behaviour exists, but the signalling function of the credential does not.

This distinction is analytically important. The data suggests that lack of awareness does not necessarily reflect resistance or rejection. Rather, it reflects limited diffusion of terminology, standards, and shared reference points. Where hiring decision-makers are familiar with micro-credentials, consideration rates are substantially higher, indicating that awareness is a critical precondition for recognition.

## 6.4 From Informal “Bite-Sized Learning” to Recognised Credentials

A recurring tension identified in the qualitative analysis concerns the relationship between informal, practice-oriented learning and formal recognition structures. Industry interviewees frequently describe micro-credentials as “bite-sized” or modular learning units used for internal

upskilling. Policymakers, on the other hand, focus on formalisation through alignment with qualification frameworks, credit systems, and verification infrastructures.

The findings suggest that this is not a binary choice between informality and formalisation, but rather a design challenge. Micro-credentials that are too informal may lack credibility and portability, while those that are overly rigid may lose the flexibility that makes them an attractive choice in the first place. Recognition appears most feasible where micro-credentials retain accessibility and modularity while incorporating clear learning outcomes, quality assurance, and verifiable trust signals that are interpretable beyond the immediate organisational context.

## 7 Conclusion

The Year 2 findings indicate that micro-credentials are widely perceived as relevant to the hospitality sector's skills needs. At the same time, their recognition remains uneven and contingent on a set of interrelated conditions. Across both quantitative and qualitative evidence, the issue is not a lack of interest in short-format learning, but rather an uncertainty about how such learning should be interpreted, trusted, and used within labour-market and education systems.

This report does not seek to prescribe specific policy actions or learning pathways. Instead, it uses three recurring themes—trust, interoperability, and adoption conditions—as an analytical framework to summarise what stakeholders and respondents repeatedly identify as shaping recognition outcomes.

### 7.1 Trust as a Foundational Condition

Trust emerges as a foundational condition across the evidence base. Survey respondents prioritise quality assurance and employment recognition, while interviewees consistently describe credibility as a prerequisite for acceptance. Trust-building depends on a combination of factors: recognised issuers, transparent learning outcomes, credible assessment, and endorsement by relevant institutions or industry bodies.

The findings suggest that where trust signals are absent or unclear, micro-credentials risk being perceived as informal learning with limited labour-market value. Conversely, where trust is established, micro-credentials are more likely to be interpreted as meaningful indicators of competence.

### 7.2 Interoperability and Portability

Interoperability appears as a necessary condition for recognition in a sector with high labour movement. Interviewees frequently reference the importance of standardisation, shared metadata, and verifiable credentials that can be understood across organisational and national boundaries.

While the study does not assess specific technical solutions to address these, it highlights that portability is closely linked to clarity. In other words, stakeholders need to be able to quickly understand what a micro-credential represents, how it was assessed, and how it

relates to other qualifications. Without such shared reference points, micro-credentials remain context-dependent and difficult to interpret beyond their immediate issuing environment.

### 7.3 Adoption Conditions and Practical Use

Finally, adoption conditions shape whether micro-credentials are likely to be used in practice. Cost, time, and awareness repeatedly surface as constraints in the quantitative data, while interviewees highlight employer usability, incentives, and alignment with existing HR and training practices.

The findings suggest that recognition is not only a matter of formal policy alignment, but also of practical integration into everyday decision-making. Where micro-credentials are easy to access, clearly articulated, and usable within existing workflows, they are more likely to be considered by learners and employers alike.

#### EU Policy Context and Implications

Although the study did not explicitly test awareness of the 2022 Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials, the empirical findings are directly relevant to its emphasis on quality, transparency, and portability. The evidence presented here illustrates the practical conditions under which such principles may—or may not—translate into recognition within a sector characterised by fragmentation, labour mobility, and time constraints.

These insights provide an evidence-based foundation for the MCEU project's Year 3 work on integration pathways, supporting further exploration of how micro-credentials can be embedded in ways that are credible, interpretable, and usable across the European hospitality sector.

## 8 Annexes

### 8.1 Annex A: Survey Questions (Quantitative)

This annex presents the full set of survey questions analysed in Year 2 of the MCEU-Hospitality project. The questions were originally administered as part of the 2024 Year 1 workforce survey and address participation in short-format learning, perceived benefits and barriers, familiarity with micro-credentials, and their perceived value among hospitality professionals and employers.

All multiple-choice questions required respondents to select the specified number of responses. “Other” options were collected as closed-ended responses.

#### Survey Questions – Hospitality Talent

##### Participation in Short Courses or Training

**Question:**

Have you ever taken a short course or training to improve or learn a new skill or competency?

**Response options:**

- Yes, I have
- No, I have not

##### Benefits Experienced After Completing a Short Course or Training

**Question:**

What benefits did you experience after completing the short course or training?

*Please select your top three.*

**Response options:**

- Upgraded my skills as required
- Gained skills for shifting roles within the organisation
- Enhanced my job performance
- Added valuable qualifications to my CV
- Improved my chances of securing a pay increase
- Improved my chances of getting a promotion
- Improved my chances of securing a job
- Other

##### Familiarity with Micro-Credentials

**Question:**

Are you familiar with micro-credentials?

**Definition provided to respondents:**

*Micro-credentials certify the learning outcomes of short-term learning experiences, such as a short course or training. They offer a flexible, targeted way to help people develop the*

*knowledge, skills, and competencies they need for their personal and professional development.*

**Response options:**

- Yes, I know what a micro-credential is
- No, I didn't know what a micro-credential was

### Receipt of a Micro-Credential

**Question:**

Did you receive a micro-credential after completing the course or training?

**Response options:**

- Yes, I did
- No, I didn't

### Benefits Experienced from Micro-Credential-Backed Courses

**Question:**

What benefits have you experienced with courses backed by a micro-credential?  
*Please select your top three.*

**Response options:**

- Course or training quality assurance, ensuring it meets specified standards and stakeholder needs
- Clear communication of learning outcomes, workload, content, level, and learning opportunities
- Alignment with industry needs and labour-market relevance
- Clear assessment procedures enabling demonstration of learning outcomes
- Credential stackability, allowing micro-credentials to build toward larger credentials
- Validation of formal and informal learning experiences
- Academic recognition for formal educational purposes
- Employment recognition for career advancement
- Portability via platforms such as the Europass Digital Wallet
- Authenticity checks verifying both the credential holder and issuing provider
- Other

### Valued Benefits of Micro-Credentials

**Question:**

Which benefits would you value the most if you could obtain a micro-credential after completing a short course or training?  
*Please select your top three.*

**Response options:**  
*(Same as above)*

### Reasons for Not Taking a Short Course or Training

**Question:**

Why have you never taken a short course or training?  
*Please select your three main reasons.*

**Response options:**

- Lack of time
- Lack of necessary technical resources (e.g. computer or internet access)
- Lack of financial resources to cover course costs
- Already enrolled in a degree programme
- Uncertainty about course recognition
- Uncertainty about cost versus value
- Lack of interest
- Other

### Influence of Micro-Credentials on Training Decisions

**Question:**

Would obtaining a micro-credential influence your decision to take a short course or training?

**Response options:**

- Likely
- Not likely

## Survey Questions – Employers

### Familiarity with Micro-Credentials

**Question:**

Are you familiar with micro-credentials?

**Definition provided to respondents:**

*Micro-credentials certify the learning outcomes of short-term learning experiences, such as a short course or training. They offer a flexible, targeted way to help people develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need for their personal and professional development.*

**Response options:**

- Yes, I know what a micro-credential is
- No, I didn't know what a micro-credential was

### Use of Micro-Credentials in Employment Decisions

**Question:**

Have micro-credentials been considered when hiring, promoting, or offering pay increases?

**Response options:**

- Yes, I have considered them
- No, I have not considered them
- Unsure

### Future Consideration of Micro-Credentials

#### Question:

Would you consider micro-credentials when hiring, promoting, or offering pay increases?

#### Response options:

- Yes, I would consider them
- No, I would not consider them
- Unsure

## 8.2 Annex B: Qualitative Interview Guide

This annex presents the interview guide used for the qualitative data collection phase of Survey 2 within the MCEU-Hospitality project. The guide supported semi-structured interviews with industry representatives and policymakers, with the objective of exploring how micro-credentials are currently understood and recognised in the hospitality sector, and what conditions stakeholders consider necessary for wider adoption.

### Methodological Overview

Semi-structured interviews of approximately 45–60 minutes were conducted with representatives from the hospitality industry (employers, HR, learning and development professionals) and from policy, education, and credentialling bodies. Interviews were carried out across several national contexts (including Spain, Denmark, and Iceland), as well as at EU level.

Interviews focused on two overarching areas:

- **Recognition today:** how micro-credentials are currently defined, interpreted, and used in practice
- **Facilitation for the future:** what evidence, tools, or policy levers could support wider recognition and uptake

The qualitative data were analysed using a **Framework Thematic Analysis**, enabling systematic comparison across stakeholder groups and country contexts.

## Interview Guide – Industry Representatives (Employers / HR)

### Understanding and Current Recognition

- What comes to mind when you hear the term *micro-credentials*?
- Does your organisation currently recognise micro-credentials? If so, can you provide examples of how they are used (e.g. hiring, promotion, training, performance management)?

- What weight, if any, do micro-credentials carry at different stages of the HR process (recruitment, promotion, internal training)? Are there any guidelines or procedures in place?

### Challenges, Barriers, and Trust

- What are the main challenges, barriers, or concerns you associate with micro-credentials as an employer?
- What factors would make you hesitant to recognise or accept a micro-credential presented by a candidate or employee?

### Implementation and Quality Requirements

- From a practical perspective, what would you need to see in a micro-credential to feel confident that it reflects the holder's skills?
- What characteristics would make a micro-credential trustworthy and reliable?
- Do you believe a standardised framework or policy for micro-credentials is needed in the hospitality sector? Why or why not? If yes, what elements should be standardised?
- Which hospitality roles or departments do you believe could benefit most from micro-credentials?

### Future Outlook

- What would be required for micro-credentials to represent a worthwhile investment at national or EU industry level?
- What next steps should industry actors and policymakers prioritise to increase enrolment, acceptance, and recognition of micro-credentials?

## Guide – Policymakers and Education Stakeholders

### Current State and Recognition

- What comes to mind when you hear the term *micro-credentials*?
- To what extent are micro-credentials currently recognised within education and training systems, particularly in hospitality?
- How are micro-credentials being considered or incorporated into education or training policies and initiatives?

### Standardisation, Quality Assurance, and Trust

- What are the key quality assurance elements that make a micro-credential trustworthy?
- Do you believe there is a need for a standardised framework or policy for micro-credentials in hospitality? Why or why not? If yes, what aspects should be standardised?

### Challenges and Barriers

- What are the main challenges to adopting micro-credentials within national or EU education and training systems?

- What structural, regulatory, or institutional factors currently limit their uptake?

### Future Outlook and Policy Levers

- What conditions would make micro-credentials a worthwhile investment at national or EU level?
- What policy levers could accelerate the adoption and formal recognition of micro-credentials within education and training ecosystems?

### Language Versions

The interview guide was implemented primarily in English. An equivalent Spanish version was used for interviews conducted in Spain to ensure clarity and consistency of responses. Both versions followed the same thematic structure and analytical logic.

## 8.3 Annex C: Thematic Coding Framework

This annex describes the analytical framework used to interpret the qualitative interview data collected during Year 2 of the MCEU-Hospitality project. It outlines how themes were constructed, applied, and validated across stakeholder groups and country contexts, ensuring transparency and methodological rigour.

### Analytical Approach

The qualitative analysis followed a **Framework Thematic Analysis** approach, combining a **priori themes** derived from the research objectives with **inductive refinement** based on interview content. This method was selected to allow systematic comparison across stakeholder types (industry professionals and policymakers) and national or regional contexts, while remaining grounded in participants' own language and perspectives.

All interview transcripts and written responses were anonymised prior to analysis. An initial familiarisation phase was conducted to identify recurring concepts, terminology, and points of emphasis. Based on this review, a structured coding framework was applied and iteratively refined.

### Core Analytical Themes

Five core themes were used to organise and interpret the qualitative data:

#### 1. Recognition Status and Definition

This theme captured how micro-credentials are understood, defined, and recognised in practice. It included differences in terminology, levels of formal versus informal recognition, and distinctions between internal use (e.g. for upskilling) and external recognition (e.g. hiring or promotion). Particular attention was given to contrasts between industry and policymaker perspectives.

#### 2. Trustworthiness and Quality Assurance

This theme focused on the conditions under which micro-credentials are perceived as credible. Codes addressed the role of issuing bodies, accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms, assessment transparency, learning outcomes, and industry

endorsement. Safety-related considerations and issuer reputation were also included where relevant.

### 3. **Challenges and Barriers**

This theme captured obstacles to recognition and adoption, including lack of standardisation, limited employer awareness, fragmentation of governance or labour markets, administrative burden, and cultural resistance to non-traditional credentials. Differences between practical HR concerns and systemic or policy-level barriers were explicitly analysed.

### 4. **Need for Standardisation**

This theme examined stakeholder views on whether and how micro-credentials should be standardised. Codes addressed elements such as learning outcomes, credit volume, metadata, verification mechanisms, alignment with qualification frameworks, and cross-border portability. The analysis distinguished between nationally anchored approaches and EU-level coordination needs.

### 5. **Future Outlook and Policy Levers**

This theme focused on forward-looking considerations, including conditions required to scale adoption and recognition. Codes covered public funding and incentives, industry collaboration, awareness-raising, interoperability infrastructures, and the role of national and EU policy frameworks in supporting uptake.

## Cross-Country and Stakeholder Comparison

The coding framework was applied consistently across all interviews, enabling comparison:

- between **industry professionals and policymakers**, and
- across **different national and regional contexts** represented in the sample.

Rather than treating countries as statistically comparable cases, the analysis used country-specific insights to illustrate how contextual factors—such as labour-market structure, governance arrangements, or existing vocational education systems—shape recognition dynamics.

## Use of the Framework in the Report

The thematic framework described here underpins:

- the structure of **Section 5 (Qualitative Findings)**, and
- the synthesis presented in **Section 6 (Integrated Discussion)**.

The framework is used as an **analytical lens**, not as a prescriptive model. It reflects patterns observed in the interview data and supports interpretation of how recognition of micro-credentials currently functions, rather than proposing normative solutions.

## 8.4 Annex D: Methodological Notes

This annex provides additional detail on the methodological foundations of the MCEU-Hospitality project as a whole, with specific reference to the Year 2 research activities reported here. It outlines the multi-year research logic, stakeholder coverage, data collection protocols,

and data handling principles applied across the project to ensure consistency, robustness, and ethical compliance.

### Multi-Year Research Design

The MCEU-Hospitality project follows a **three-year, phased research design**, structured to progressively address the skills, recognition, and integration dimensions of micro-credentials in the hospitality sector:

- **Year 1** focused on identifying priority skills needs across the hospitality workforce through a large-scale quantitative survey.
- **Year 2** examined the recognition, perception, and enabling conditions for micro-credentials, combining secondary analysis of Year 1 quantitative data with primary qualitative interviews.
- **Year 3** builds on these findings to explore pathways for integrating micro-credentials into education, training, and recognition systems.

The Year 2 study therefore constitutes one work package within a broader programme, and its scope is deliberately analytical rather than prescriptive.

### Stakeholder Scope and Sampling Logic

Year 2 research targeted two complementary stakeholder groups:

- **Industry professionals**, defined as employers and professionals working in HR, learning, and talent development functions within the hospitality sector.
- **Policymakers**, defined as representatives of educational institutions, credentialing bodies, public authorities, or organisations involved in qualification frameworks and policy design.

The qualitative sample was designed to capture **diversity of institutional context rather than statistical representativeness**, including participants from Spain, Denmark, Iceland, Belgium, and EU-level organisations. This allowed exploration of how recognition dynamics differ across governance models, labour-market structures, and education systems.

### Data Collection Protocols

Quantitative data analysed in Year 2 were collected as part of the Year 1 workforce survey administered in 2024. Relevant items related to training participation, barriers, micro-credential awareness, and perceived benefits were extracted and analysed descriptively.

Qualitative data were collected between September and November 2025 through:

- semi-structured online interviews conducted via video conferencing, and
- written responses collected through structured online forms where interviews were not feasible.

Interview guides were designed to ensure consistency across respondents while allowing flexibility to probe context-specific issues.

### Data Handling and Anonymisation

All qualitative data were anonymised prior to analysis. Interviewees were assigned descriptive codes indicating stakeholder type and geographic context, without including identifiable personal or organisational information.

Audio recordings were transcribed using AI-assisted transcription tools. Written responses were integrated into the same analytical corpus to ensure equal treatment in the analysis.

Quantitative data were analysed in aggregated form only. No individual-level identifiers were retained in the analytical dataset.

### Ethical Considerations

Participation in both quantitative and qualitative research activities was voluntary. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the research, the use of their data, and the anonymised nature of reporting. Data handling followed principles of confidentiality, proportionality, and purpose limitation in line with applicable data protection standards.

The findings presented in this report are intended to surface **patterns, perceptions, and enabling conditions**, not to evaluate individual organisations, systems, or policies.

### Analytical Scope and Limitations

The findings presented in this report should be interpreted in light of the study's analytical scope. The qualitative component is exploratory in nature and reflects the perspectives of a targeted group of industry and policy stakeholders; it is intended to surface recurring themes and implementation conditions rather than to provide statistically generalisable results.

The quantitative analysis is descriptive and cross-sectional, focusing on patterns of participation, awareness, and perceived value at a specific point in time, and does not seek to establish causal relationships.

National contexts are referenced illustratively to highlight differing institutional and governance settings, rather than for systematic country comparison.

These parameters are consistent with the report's objective of supporting understanding and interpretation of micro-credential recognition dynamics within the hospitality sector, rather than delivering evaluative or prescriptive conclusions.

