2026

Deliverable D2.4

Micro-Credential Integration Pathways in European Hospitality

INTEGRATION OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS INTO
HOSPITALITY EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT SYSTEMS

Co-funded by
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1 Executive Summary

Purpose and Scope

Deliverable D2.4 is the third and final analytical stage of the MCEU-Hospitality research programme. It addresses one question: how can short-term learning experiences leading to a micro-credential be integrated into existing education, training and employment systems in ways that are usable, credible and sustainable? The analysis covers integration scenarios, usage logic, operational conditions, ownership and governance, and long-term sustainability. It does not extend to redesigning policy frameworks, accreditation systems or EU governance models. Findings from Years 1 and 2 are used as context only.

Evidence Base

The study uses a mixed-methods design. The quantitative strand (Survey 3) gathered 1,044 responses across four stakeholder segments: Students (n = 66), Employed (n = 351), Unemployed (n = 325) and Employers (n = 302). The sample is concentrated in France, Italy and Spain (A01). The qualitative strand comprises 12 semi-structured interviews (INT-01 to INT-12) with programme directors, career advisors and curriculum designers from universities, VET providers and lifelong learning institutions in seven European countries. None of the interviewees is an Employer. The two strands sample different populations, so they are read as complementary rather than statistically comparable.

Key Findings

Integration pathways.

- Evidence: Every segment prefers entry points embedded in existing structures over freestanding options. The preferred points are internships/practical training for Students (33.3%, A08), on-the-job learning for Employed respondents (23.6%, A09), active job-search programmes for Unemployed respondents (33.5%, A10), and internal training programmes for Employers (37.1%, A11). "I don't know exactly" is consistently the second- or third-ranked response (15–24%). Eleven of twelve interviewees described curricula, credit-recognition schemes or short-course infrastructure that already works much like the micro-credential model without using the term.

- Interpretation: Preferences about *where* integration should happen are well formed. *How* it would work operationally is unresolved at both individual and institutional level.

Usage logic.

- Evidence: Professional and competence-based value dominates. The leading expected uses are skill specialisation for Students (59.1%, A14) and evidencing specific competencies for Employed respondents (57.6%, A15). Professional value was raised in eleven of twelve interviews. However, 53.0% of Students expect micro-credentials to complement their academic profile (A14), while only three interviewees raised academic credit-banking, and each described it as not yet realised. On verification, Employers show no dominant mechanism, and external accreditation is the least favoured option (11.9%, A18). Interviewees report that no unified, trusted verification or validation body exists at EU or national level.

- Interpretation: Student demand for academically integrated credentials appears to be ahead of institutional capacity to deliver it. The fragmented verification picture has a plausible structural explanation in the absence of a common validation body.

Operational conditions.

- Evidence: Perceived compatibility is moderately positive and narrowly banded, from 3.53 (Students, A19) to 3.68 (Unemployed, A21).
    - Cost/budget is the top barrier for Unemployed (28.3%) and Students (24.2%), and Time for Employed respondents (22.8%) (A23).
    - Regulatory/accreditation constraints are among the least-cited barriers (5.2%–7.6% by segment, A23).
    - Institutional readiness varies widely, from an institution actively developing credentialing pathways within an international alliance to paper-based certification with no digital credentialing mechanism.
    - Interviewees repeatedly identified cost and resourcing, the absence of a unified verification body, and administrative infrastructure designed for in-person delivery as barriers.
- Interpretation: The narrow individual-level scores mask a much wider spread of institutional readiness. Individual respondents probably have limited visibility into governance-level bottlenecks. Cost and resourcing is the barrier on which both strands agree most directly; administrative complexity also appears in both.

Ownership and governance.

- Evidence: Employers are the preferred lead for integration overall (34.1%, A25), rising to 38.6% among Employed and 38.3% among Employer respondents (A25.1). In the interviews, no interviewee described an employer as initiating, approving or holding accreditation authority for integration. Decision authority sits either within autonomous institutions (e.g. INT-01, INT-08, INT-10, INT-11) or with external ministries, regional authorities or EU-level bodies (e.g. INT-03, INT-07, INT-09). Ten of twelve interviewees described some dependence on an external party.

- Interpretation: This is the most significant divergence in the deliverable. Two readings remain open and are not mutually exclusive:
    - the employer-led model is an aspiration rather than current practice; or
    - employer influence is currently exercised informally, through demand signalling.

- Institutional governance autonomy is the strongest visible predictor of how confidently an institution can move on integration.

Sustainability.

- Evidence: The plurality preference is for formal embedding in existing structures (37.0%), ahead of recognised-but-optional (32.2%) and independent (18.2%) (A28). Conditions for durability were raised in eleven of twelve interviews:

    - sustained EU-level backing;
    - a binding mandate paired with funding;

    - awareness among professionals.
- One interviewee reported a funded regional pilot that appears to have lapsed without a clear institutional owner (INT-09). Another framed micro-credentials as a rebrand of an earlier EU initiative with limited follow-through (INT-06).

- Interpretation: Formal embedding is a necessary but not sufficient condition for sustainability.

Answer to the research question.

- On usability, integration is most readily achieved through existing structures (internships, on-the-job learning, job-search programmes and internal training), but how it would work operationally remains unresolved for a meaningful minority of respondents and for several institutions, with cost and time as the leading practical barriers.

- On credibility, the main constraint is the absence of a unified, trusted verification or validation body, reflected in fragmented employer verification practice.

- On sustainability, formal embedding is the preferred route, but durability depends on pairing it with a binding mandate, funding and an explicit institutional owner.

The gap between preferred and described governance cuts across all three dimensions and remains the main open question.

Recommendations

1. Design integration around existing structures (internships, on-the-job learning, job-search programmes, internal training) rather than standalone credentials.
2. Close the operational-mechanics gap by providing practical, institution-level implementation guidance, rather than relying on further awareness-raising alone.
3. Address verification fragmentation directly, since a unified, trusted verification or validation body is a precondition for credibility.
4. Clarify the employer's actual role in governance before formalising it. Establish whether employer influence is best formalised as decision authority or as a structured demand-signalling mechanism.
5. Pair formal embedding with funding and an explicit institutional owner for continuity beyond the initial funding period.
6. Prioritise support for issuance, maintenance and staff-training costs, the operational barrier on which individuals and institutions agree most directly.

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. 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 project also works towards a digital system for issuing and verifying these credentials, drawing on existing EU tools — including Europass, European Digital Credentials for Learning, and the European Blockchain Services Infrastructure (EBSI) — to support their portability and transparency across

countries, in line with Action 4 of the EU Skills Agenda on the modernisation of vocational education and training.

This deliverable (D2.4) represents the third and final analytical stage of the project's three-year research programme. Year 1 identified the skills needs of the hospitality workforce; Year 2 examined the recognition and legitimacy of micro-credentials among industry and policymakers; Year 3 — the focus of this report — concentrates exclusively on their practical integration into existing education, training and employment systems. Findings from Years 1 and 2 are referenced only to provide context and are not treated as evidence for the conclusions presented here.

The policy context for micro-credentials dates back to 16 June 2022, when the Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability. The European Commission summarises the concept as follows:

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

European Commission, "A European approach to micro-credentials", European Education Area, https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/micro-credentials (last updated 19 December 2024).

The Recommendation also outlined quality, transparency, and portability principles for micro-credentials, and encouraged Member States to explore their integration into national education and training systems. While the present study does not directly test awareness or formal implementation of this Recommendation, its focus on integration scenarios, operational conditions, and ownership of the integration process provides empirical evidence directly relevant to the conditions that may support or hinder its uptake in the hospitality sector.

Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, CELEX:32022H0627(02), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(02).

2.1 Report Objective

Deliverable 2.4 addresses the following core research question: *How can short-term learning experiences leading to a micro-credential be integrated into existing education, training and employment systems in ways that are usable, credible and sustainable?*

The scope of the analysis covers integration scenarios, usage logic, operational conditions, ownership and governance, constraints and enablers, and long-term sustainability; it does not extend to redesigning policy frameworks, accreditation systems, or EU governance models.

3 Methodology

The study follows a mixed-method design combining primary quantitative analysis and primary qualitative inquiry. The quantitative strand (Survey 3) gathered 1,044 responses — against a target of 1,000 — from current full-time hospitality students, hospitality professionals and recent graduates (both employed and unemployed), and employers or HR representatives directly involved in hiring or training decisions. The qualitative strand comprised 12 semi-structured interviews — conducted via Zoom and recorded for analysis purposes — with seven programme directors, three career advisors and two curriculum designers from universities, VET providers and lifelong learning institutions, focused on institutional flexibility, integration pathways, decision ownership, operational conditions, constraints and enablers, and the conditions for practical continuity over time. The qualitative findings

are used to explain and contextualise the quantitative patterns rather than to override them.

The objective was to capture both workforce-level perceptions and institutional perspectives on the practical integration of micro-credentials into existing education, training and employment systems.

AI tools (Claude and ChatGPT) were used as research assistants under human supervision to support data organisation, descriptive analysis, qualitative coding, drafting and quality assurance. AI tools did not act as autonomous researchers or replace human judgement. All statistics are traceable to the verified Survey 3 dataset, and all quotations are traceable to the interview transcripts through the coded excerpts register, which records the interview identifier and timestamp for each excerpt. No interpretation, table, figure or recommendation was treated as final until reviewed and approved by the D2.4 lead.

3.1 Transition from Methodology to Findings

Building on the mixed-methods design outlined above, the following sections present the empirical findings of the Year 3 analysis. The quantitative results are presented first, establishing baseline patterns in integration preferences, operational compatibility, and ownership expectations across the four hospitality stakeholder segments surveyed (Students, Employed, Unemployed, Employers). The qualitative analysis that follows explores how these patterns are interpreted and addressed at the institutional level, drawing on the perspectives of programme directors, career advisors and curriculum designers involved in decisions on integration pathways.

4 Quantitative Findings on Micro-Credential Integration

This section describes a key pattern observed in the Survey 3 data: hospitality professionals across all four segments show a clear preference for integration entry points embedded within existing, familiar structures — internships and practical training for students, on-the-job learning for employed respondents, active job-search programmes for unemployed respondents, and internal training programmes for employers — rather than standalone or freestanding options. At the same time, a consistent share of respondents in every segment (roughly 15–24%) report not knowing exactly how such integration would work in practice. This suggests that while preferences for *where* integration should happen are reasonably well formed, *how* it would function operationally remains unclear to a meaningful minority.

For clarity, this section is structured around the four survey core blocks:

(i) integration scenarios — where short-term learning experiences leading to a micro-credential could realistically fit within existing systems;

(ii) usage logic — how respondents would practically use and, where relevant, verify micro-credentials;

(iii) operational conditions — compatibility with existing workload, procedures and organisational structures; and

(iv) ownership mapping — who would need to initiate and sustain integration.

Questions Q9 to Q15 exclude the 15 respondents who answered at Q8.2 that integration would not be feasible in their context, as these respondents were routed directly to the closing items (Table 9.2c). Because they are the respondents most sceptical about integration, results for Q9 to Q15, in

particular the compatibility and readiness means (Tables A19–A22 and A27), are likely to be slightly optimistic.

4.1 Survey Demographics and Stakeholders

Country of residence (Q1)

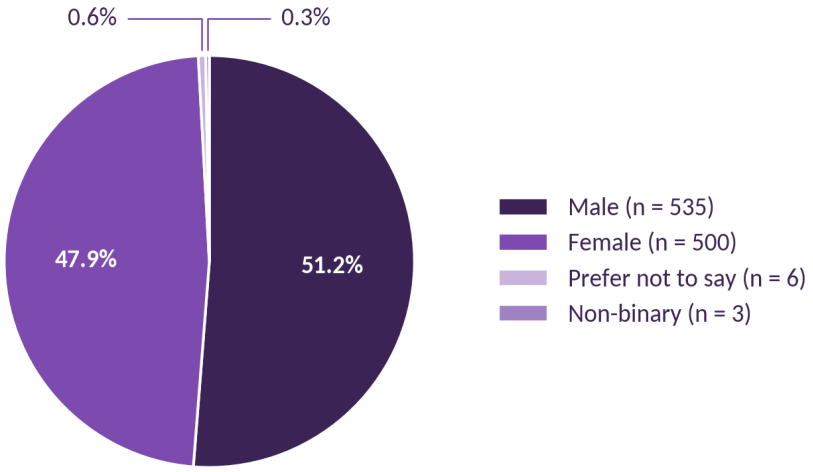
Table A01 — Q1 (overall, n = 1,044)

Country	n	%
France	448	42.9%
Italy	249	23.9%
Spain	154	14.8%
Portugal	38	3.6%
Switzerland	27	2.6%
Belgium	21	2.0%
Germany	15	1.4%
Netherlands	12	1.1%
Greece	9	0.9%
Ireland	8	0.8%
Malta	8	0.8%
Romania	7	0.7%
Sweden	7	0.7%
Luxembourg	5	0.5%
Croatia	5	0.5%
Poland	4	0.4%
Austria	4	0.4%
Cyprus	4	0.4%
Denmark	4	0.4%
Bulgaria	3	0.3%
Iceland	3	0.3%
Finland	3	0.3%
Hungary	3	0.3%
Latvia	1	0.1%
Estonia	1	0.1%
Slovakia	1	0.1%

The achieved sample is concentrated in three countries — France, Italy and Spain together account for more than four-fifths of respondents (A01) — which limits the extent to which the analysis can be read as representative of all 26 countries present in the data.

Gender identity (Q2)

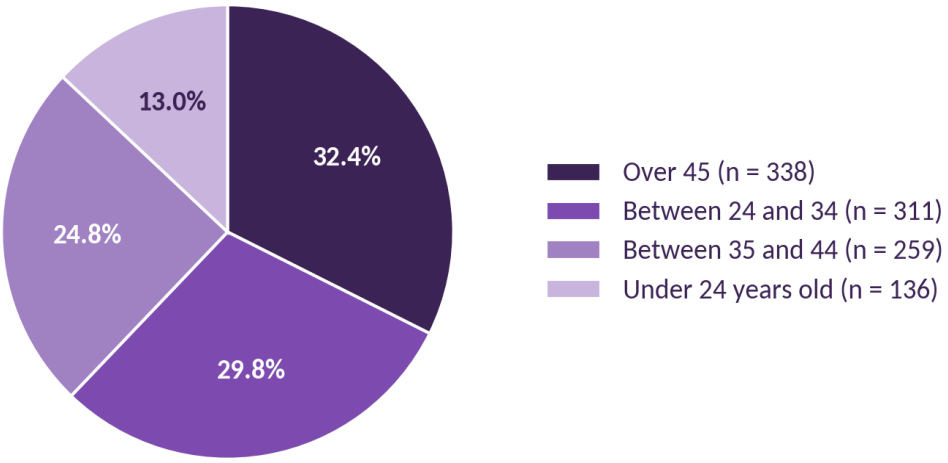
Table A02 — Q2 (overall, n = 1,044)



Gender distribution is close to even overall (51.2% male, 47.9% female; A02), and this balance holds across current-status groups (A06).

A03 — Age profile (Q3)

Table A03 — Q3 (overall, n = 1,044)



A04 — Education profile (Q4)

Table A04 — Q4 (overall, n = 1,044)

Category	n	%
Higher Education (bachelor's, master's, doctoral)	677	64.8%
Vocational School	152	14.6%
Secondary School	152	14.6%
Other	50	4.8%
Primary School	13	1.2%

A05 — Career stage (Q5)

Table A05 — Q5 (overall, n = 1,044)

Category	n	%
Senior professional (over 10 years)	424	40.6%
Mid-level professional (6–10 years)	205	19.6%
Entry-level professional (0–2 years)	224	21.5%
Young professional (3–5 years)	191	18.3%

A06 — Current status (Q6)

Table A06 — Q6 (overall, n = 1,044)

Group	n	%
Employed (any type of contract)	542	51.9%
Employed and studying	111	10.6%
Not yet entered the labour market	21	2%
Studying full-time (Vocational educational training, Undergrad, Master, PhD, etc.)	66	6.3%
Unemployed	304	29.1%

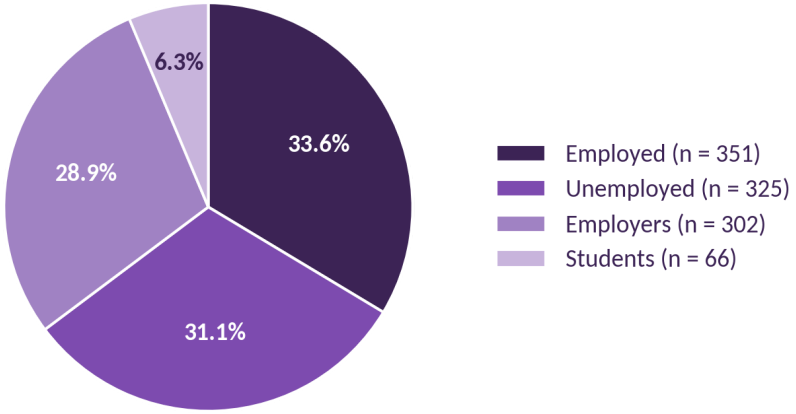
Career stage is skewed towards senior professionals (40.6% overall; A05), and this skew is concentrated in the Employed group (47.2% senior), while the Employed-and-studying and Not-yet-entered-labour-market groups skew heavily towards entry-level (37.8% and 57.1% respectively).

A07 — Stakeholders size (derived from Q6 and Q7 branching rules)

Q6 (All): "What is your current status?"

Q7 (Workers only): "Are you currently involved in hiring decisions?"

Table A07 (overall, n = 1,044)



4.2 Integration Scenarios

Table A08 — Where micro-credentials could fit (Students, Q8_ST, n = 66)

Category	n	%
Linked to internships or practical training	22	33.3%
I don't know exactly	15	22.7%
As an extracurricular certified course	12	18.2%
As part of a mandatory module	11	16.7%
As an optional module	4	6.1%
It would not fit	2	3.0%

Table A09 — Where micro-credentials could fit (Employed, Q8_EMP, n = 351)

Category	n	%
As part of on-the-job learning	83	23.6%
Employer-supported training	65	18.5%
I don't know exactly	58	16.5%
Linked to reskilling or role change	58	16.5%
As voluntary professional development	46	13.1%
As part of promotion requirements	30	8.5%
It would not fit	11	3.1%

A10 — Where micro-credentials could fit (Unemployed, Q8_UN, n = 325)

Category	n	%
As part of active job-search support programmes	109	33.5%
I don't know exactly	78	24.0%
As self-funded upskilling	51	15.7%
Through public employment services	39	12.0%
Through vocational training institutions	36	11.1%

It would not be relevant	12	3.7%

A11 — Where micro-credentials could fit (Employers, Q8_ER, n = 302)

Category	n	%
Internal training programmes	112	37.1%
Onboarding processes	57	18.9%
I don't know exactly	51	16.9%
Reskilling initiatives	41	13.6%
Promotion frameworks	23	7.6%
It would not fit	18	6.0%

Across all four segments, **the modal preferred integration point is embedded, structured settings rather than freestanding options**: internships/practical training for Students (33.3%, A08), on-the-job learning for Employed respondents (23.6%, A09), active job-search support programmes for Unemployed respondents (33.5%, A10), and internal training programmes for Employers (37.1%, A11). In each segment, **"I don't know exactly" is consistently the second- or third-ranked response** (15–24% range), **indicating a substantial pocket of uncertainty about integration pathways alongside the clearer preferences.**

Among the 43 respondents who considered integration not to fit (A12/A13), opinion on whether integration could still work if the barrier were addressed is split close to evenly three ways (34.9% possibly with adjustments, 34.9% not feasible, 30.2% feasible). This divides differently by segment: Employed negative respondents lean towards "possibly, with adjustments" (63.6%) and none selected "feasible", while Unemployed negative respondents lean towards "feasible" (50.0%).

Full survey question wording:

Q8.1: "Why would a micro-credential learning experience not fit in your current context?"

Table A12 — Q8.1 (negative respondents overall, ranked, n = 43)

Category	%	n
Would require significant structural/procedural changes	23.3%	10
Other	18.6%	8
Does not align with current education/career stage	18.6%	8
No formal pathway within existing structures	16.3%	7
Not enough information to assess	11.6%	5
Regulatory/accreditation constraints	7%	3
Not supported within institution/organisation	4.7%	2

Full survey question wording:

Q8.2: "Based on your answers, do you believe that integration of micro-credentials is realistically possible in your current context?"

Table A13 — Q8.2 (negative respondents overall, n = 43)

Category	n	%
Possibly, but only with significant adjustments	15	34.9%
No, integration would not be feasible	15	34.9%
Yes, integration would be feasible	13	30.2%

4.3 Usage Logics

The dominant expected use of micro-credentials differs by segment: skill specialisation for Students (59.1%, A14), evidencing specific competencies for Employed respondents (57.6%, A15), supporting a career change for Unemployed respondents (48.6%, A16), and validating specific technical skills for Employers when ranked (mean rank 2.2, the lowest/best rank in A17).

For credential verification, Employers show no single dominant mechanism: digital credential platforms (26.8%), internal validation (25.8%) and recognised qualification frameworks (21.4%) are closely spaced, with external accreditation notably less favoured (11.9%; A18).

Full survey question wording:

Q9_ST (Students): "If integrated, how would you most likely use a micro-credential?"

Percentages are of respondents (multi-select; may sum >100%)

Table A14 — Expected use students (overall, n = 66, multi-select)

Category	n	%
To specialise in a specific skill area	39	59.1%
To complement my academic profile	35	53.0%
To prepare for a transition to employment	29	43.9%
To meet internship requirements	20	30.3%
I don't know exactly	9	13.6%

Full survey question wording:

Q9_EMP (Employed): "In your professional context, micro-credentials would most likely function as:"

Percentages are of respondents (multi-select; may sum >100%)

Table A15 — Expected use employed (overall, n = 347, multi-select)

Category	n	%
Evidence of specific competencies	200	57.6%
Part of a structured career pathway	196	56.5%
A requirement for internal progression	175	50.4%
External certification only	69	19.9%
I don't know exactly	54	15.6%

Base for this table (n = 347) excludes the 4 Employed respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (see Table 9.2c). The full Employed segment size is n = 351 (Table A07).

Full survey question wording:

Q9_UN (Unemployed): "In your situation, micro-credentials would most likely help by:"

Percentages are of respondents (multi-select; may sum >100%)

Table A16 — Expected use unemployed (overall, n = 321, multi-select)

Category	n	%
Supporting a career change	156	48.6%
Structuring personal upskilling	151	47.0%
Demonstrating updated skills to employers	146	45.5%
Meeting the requirements of job programmes	118	36.8%
I don't know exactly	71	22.1%

Base for this table (n = 321) excludes the 4 Unemployed respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (see Table 9.2c). The full Unemployed segment size is n = 325 (Table A07).

Full survey question wording:

Q9_ER (Employers): "In your organisation, micro-credentials would be most relevant for:"

Table A17 — Expected use Employers (overall, n = 295, mean rank)

Category	Mean rank
Validating specific technical skills	2.2
Structuring internal development pathways	2.35
Supporting reskilling initiatives	2.87
Standardising onboarding	3.45
Signalling specialised competence	4.13

Base for this table (n = 295) excludes the 7 Employers respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (see Table 9.2c). The full Employers segment size is n = 302 (Table A07).

Full survey question wording:

Q9.1 (Employers): "How would your organisation most likely verify a micro-credential?"

Table A18 — Employers micro-credentials validation (overall, n = 295)

Category	n	%
Through digital credential platforms	79	26.8%
Through internal validation	76	25.8%
Through recognised qualification frameworks	63	21.4%
Through external accreditation	35	11.9%
I don't know exactly	30	10.2%
Verification would not be required	12	4.1%

Base for this table (n = 295) excludes the 7 Employers respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (see Table 9.2c). The full Employers segment size is n = 302 (Table A07).

4.4 Operational Conditions

Perceived compatibility with existing structures (1–5 scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree, without major disruption) is broadly similar and moderately positive across all four segments, with means clustering narrowly between 3.53 (Students, A19) and 3.68 (Unemployed, A21). Within the Employed segment, agreement rises with seniority (mean 3.47 at entry-level to 3.77 at senior level; A20.1).

Full survey question wording:

Q10_ST (Students): "Short-term learning leading to a micro-credential could be integrated into my current study structure without major disruption."

Table A19 — Operational compatibility, Students (overall, n = 66)

n (valid)	Scale 1	Scale 2	Scale 3	Scale 4	Scale 5	Mean
66	2 (3.0%)	7 (10.6%)	26 (39.4%)	16 (24.2%)	15 (22.7%)	3.53

Full survey question wording:

Q10_EMP (Employed): "Short-term learning leading to a micro-credential could be integrated into my current work structure without major disruption."

Table A20 — Operational compatibility, Employed (overall, n = 347)

n (valid)	Scale 1	Scale 2	Scale 3	Scale 4	Scale 5	Mean
347	15 (4.3%)	23 (6.6%)	118 (34.0%)	115 (33.1%)	76 (21.9%)	3.62

Base for this table (n = 347) excludes the 4 Employed respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (see Table 9.2c). The full Employed segment size is n = 351 (Table A07)

Table A20.1 — Cross-tabulation by Q5 career stage (overall, n = 347)

Group	Base n	Valid n	Scale 1	Scale 2	Scale 3	Scale 4	Scale 5	Mean
Senior (over 10 yrs)	122	120	5 (4%)	4 (3%)	35 (29%)	46 (38%)	30 (25%)	3.77
Mid-level (6–10 yrs)	75	74	3 (4%)	6 (8%)	25 (34%)	20 (27%)	20 (27%)	3.65
Young professional (3–5 yrs)	78	77	3 (4%)	7 (9%)	29 (38%)	25 (33%)	13 (17%)	3.49
Entry-level (0–2 yrs)	76	76	4 (5%)	6 (8%)	29 (38%)	24 (32%)	13 (17%)	3.47

Base for this table (n = 347) excludes the 4 Employed respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (see Table 9.2c). The full Employed segment size is n = 351 (Table A07).

Full survey question wording:

Q10_UN (Unemployed): "Short-term learning leading to a micro-credential could be integrated into my current situation without major disruption."

Table A21 — Operational compatibility, Unemployed (overall, n = 321)

n (valid)	Scale 1	Scale 2	Scale 3	Scale 4	Scale 5	Mean
321	21 (6.5%)	17 (5.3%)	103 (32.1%)	83 (25.9%)	97 (30.2%)	3.68

Base for this table (n = 321) excludes the 4 Unemployed respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (see Table 9.2c). The full Unemployed segment size is n = 325 (Table A07).

Full survey question wording:

Q10_ER (Employers): "Short-term learning leading to a micro-credential could be integrated into my current organisational structure without major disruption."

Table A22 — Operational compatibility, Employers (overall, n = 295)

n (valid)	Scale 1	Scale 2	Scale 3	Scale 4	Scale 5	Mean
295	11 (3.7%)	16 (5.4%)	104 (35.3%)	102 (34.6%)	62 (21.0%)	3.64

Base for this table (n = 295) excludes the 7 Employers respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (see Table 9.2c). The full Employers segment size is n = 302 (Table A07).

Cost/budget limitations are the most commonly cited operational barrier overall, but the ranking differs by segment (A23): it is the top barrier for Unemployed (28.3%) and Students (24.2%) respondents, while Time constraints rank first for Employed respondents (22.8%). On the scale of structural change required (A24), responses are fairly evenly spread across "minor adjustments" (26.1%) through to "complete restructuring" (15.7%), with Employed respondents leaning furthest towards "minor adjustments" (32.0%) and Unemployed respondents showing the most weight at the "complete restructuring" end (19.9%).

Full survey question wording:

Q11 (All segments): "What would be the main operational barrier to integration in your context?"

Table A23 — Cross-tabulation by stakeholder segment

Group	Base n	Cost/budget	Time	Admin. complexity	Not enough info	No barrier	Lack of support	Regulatory	Misalign-ment
Students	66	16 (24.2%)	12 (18.2%)	9 (13.6%)	7 (10.6%)	7 (10.6%)	6 (9.1%)	5 (7.6%)	4 (6.1%)
Employers	295	62 (21.0%)	51 (17.3%)	43 (14.6%)	39 (13.2%)	33 (11.2%)	26 (8.8%)	21 (7.1%)	20 (6.8%)
Unemployed	321	91 (28.3%)	33 (10.3%)	26 (8.1%)	56 (17.4%)	44 (13.7%)	39 (12.1%)	22 (6.9%)	10 (3.1%)
Employed	347	59 (17.0%)	79 (22.8%)	33 (9.5%)	60 (17.3%)	39 (11.2%)	39 (11.2%)	18 (5.2%)	20 (5.8%)

Bases for the Employed (n = 347), Unemployed (n = 321) and Employers (n = 295) rows exclude the 15 respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (4, 4 and 7 respectively; see Table 9.2c). Full segment sizes are n = 351, 325 and 302 (Table A07).

Full survey question wording:

Q12 (All segments): "For integration to be feasible in your context, it would require:"

Table A24 — Cross-tabulation by stakeholder segment

Group	Base n	Moderate procedural	Minor adjustments	Major redesign	No significant change	Complete restructuring
Students	66	18 (27.3%)	14 (21.2%)	14 (21.2%)	11 (16.7%)	9 (13.6%)
Employers	295	85 (28.8%)	75 (25.4%)	47 (15.9%)	48 (16.3%)	40 (13.6%)
Unemployed	321	72 (22.4%)	69 (21.5%)	50 (15.6%)	66 (20.6%)	64 (19.9%)
Employed	347	82 (23.6%)	111 (32.0%)	55 (15.9%)	50 (14.4%)	49 (14.1%)

Bases for the Employed (n = 347), Unemployed (n = 321) and Employers (n = 295) rows exclude the 15 respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (4, 4 and 7 respectively; see Table 9.2c). Full segment sizes are n = 351, 325 and 302 (Table A07).

4.5 Ownership Mapping

This section addresses the Ownership Mapping block of Survey 3: who should initiate and sustain the integration of micro-credentials into hospitality education, training and employment systems. It is presented in two parts. The governance analysis (4.5.1) examines who respondents identify as the appropriate lead actor for integration, including cases of shared responsibility, and employers' own readiness for the policy adjustments this would require. The sustainability analysis (4.5.2) then considers the conditions under which respondents believe integration could persist over time — specifically, whether micro-credentials should be formally embedded within existing structures, recognised but remain optional, or stay independent of them.

4.5.1 Governance

Employers are seen as the primary lead for integration overall (34.1%, A25), and this view is strongest among Employed (38.6%) and Employer (38.3%) respondents themselves (A25.1).

Full survey question wording:

Q13: "Who should primarily initiate the integration of micro-credentials within existing systems?"

Table A25 — Q13 (overall)

Category	n	%
Employers	351	34.1%
Shared responsibility	217	21.1%
Public authorities	134	13.0%
Education providers	129	12.5%
Individuals	126	12.2%
Sector bodies	72	7.0%

Base for this table (n = 1,029) excludes the 15 respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (see Table 9.2c). The full sample size is n = 1,044 (Table A07).

Table A25.1 — Cross-tabulation by stakeholder segment

Group	n	Education providers	Employers	Shared responsibility	Public authorities	Individuals	Sector bodies
Students	66	14 (21.2%)	14 (21.2%)	13 (19.7%)	11 (16.7%)	7 (10.6%)	7 (10.6%)
Employers	295	34 (11.5%)	113 (38.3%)	67 (22.7%)	29 (9.8%)	35 (11.9%)	17 (5.8%)
Unemployed	321	44 (13.7%)	90 (28.0%)	65 (20.2%)	52 (16.2%)	39 (12.1%)	31 (9.7%)
Employed	347	37 (10.7%)	134 (38.6%)	72 (20.7%)	42 (12.1%)	45 (13.0%)	17 (4.9%)

Bases for the Employed (n = 347), Unemployed (n = 321) and Employers (n = 295) rows exclude the 15 respondents who answered "No" at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (4, 4 and 7 respectively; see Table 9.2c). Full segment sizes are n = 351, 325 and 302 (Table A07).

Where respondents specified a shared-responsibility model (n = 217), in table A26 Employers again feature most (64.5%), followed by Individuals (42.4%) and Public authorities (35.0%).

Full survey question wording:

Q13.1: "Please be more specific, a shared responsibility among which of the actors below?"

Percentages are of respondents in the shared-responsibility base, in which respondents were asked to choose two of the listed options (multi-select may sum >100%).

Table A26 — Q13.1 (overall) — Shared governance composition

Category	n	%
Employers	140	64.5%
Individuals	92	42.4%
Public authorities	76	35.0%
Education providers	74	34.1%
Sector bodies	52	24.0%

Employer readiness for the formal HR policy adjustments that integration would require is moderately positive (mean 3.64 on the 1–5 scale, close to the mean recorded for general operational compatibility among Employers in A22; A27).

Full survey question wording:

Q14 (Employers only): "Integration of micro-credentials in my organisation would require formal HR policy adjustments."

Table A27 — HR policy readiness, Employers (n = 295)

n (valid)	Scale 1	Scale 2	Scale 3	Scale 4	Scale 5	Mean
295	11 (3.7%)	24 (8.1%)	93 (31.5%)	98 (33.2%)	69 (23.4%)	3.64

Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

Base for this table (n = 295) excludes the 7 Employers respondents who answered “No” at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (see Table 9.2c). The full Employers segment size is n = 302 (Table A07).

4.5.2 Sustainability

The plurality preference overall is for micro-credentials to be formally embedded in existing structures (37.0%, A28), narrowly ahead of being recognised but remaining optional (32.2%). This pattern is not uniform across segments: Employed respondents show the strongest preference for formal embedding (42.9%), while Employers show comparatively more support for micro-credentials remaining independent from formal systems (22.4%) than any other segment (A28.1).

Full survey question wording:

Q15 (All segments): "For integration to be sustainable, micro-credentials would need to:"

Table A28 — Q15 overall (n = 1,024)

Category	n	%
Be formally embedded in existing structures	379	37.0%
Be recognised but remain optional	330	32.2%
Remain independent from formal systems	186	18.2%
Replace existing components	129	12.6%

Base for this table (n = 1,024) excludes the 15 respondents who answered “No” at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15, and 5 Student responses recorded with a value that is not a Q15 option (see Table 9.2c). The full sample size is n = 1,044 (Table A07).

Table A28.1 — Cross-tabulation by stakeholder segment

Group	Base n	Be recognised, optional	Be formally embedded	Remain independent	Replace existing
Students	61	23 (37.7%)	20 (32.8%)	10 (16.4%)	8 (13.1%)
Employed	347	113 (32.6%)	149 (42.9%)	52 (15.0%)	33 (9.5%)
Unemployed	321	113 (35.2%)	113 (35.2%)	58 (18.1%)	37 (11.5%)
Employers	295	81 (27.5%)	97 (32.9%)	66 (22.4%)	51 (17.3%)

Base for the Students row (n = 61) reflects valid responses only; 5 respondents in the Students segment did not provide a valid response to this item and are excluded. The full Students segment size is n = 66 (Table A07). Bases for the Employed (n = 347), Unemployed (n = 321) and Employers (n = 295) rows exclude the 15 respondents who answered “No” at Q8.2 and were therefore not asked Q9–Q15 (see Table 9.2c).

5 Qualitative Findings on Micro-Credential Integration

This section presents evidence from 12 semi-structured interviews, conducted via Zoom and recorded for analysis, with programme directors (seven), career advisors (three) and curriculum designers (two) working across universities, vocational education and training (VET) providers, and lifelong learning institutions in the European hospitality sector. Interviewees were based across seven European countries. Seven interviews were conducted in consortium partner countries (Spain, Iceland and Denmark, with a concentration in Spain and Iceland), while five interviews secured wider comparative coverage through the project's broader interview outreach (Ireland, Cyprus, Italy and Switzerland). Institutional governance types ranged from fully autonomous, self-accrediting

institutions to institutions with no independent decision authority over adoption of new certification standards

Two interviews additionally reflect the perspectives of a workplace-based training provider and a national funding and policy intermediary; these are retained within the sample as they contribute directly to the questions of institutional flexibility, integration pathways, decision ownership, operational conditions, and sustainability that structure this section, and their distinct vantage points are noted explicitly where relevant.

A key pattern observed across the interviews is that **institutional governance autonomy — rather than sector, country, or institution size — is the strongest visible predictor of how confidently, and how quickly, an institution describes itself as able to move on micro-credential integration**. Interviewees also converged, independently and repeatedly, on where integration would need to fit within existing structures and on what would operationally block it, even where they diverged sharply on how ready, sceptical, or urgent they considered the underlying case to be.

> *"'Micro-credentials' is really just a new term. Micro-credentials have been around for decades"*
>
> — Programme Director (INT-01)

5.1 Quantified Summary of Interview Patterns

A full frequency breakdown of coded themes is provided in the appendix. This subsection summarises the recurring patterns in prose, ordered from the most to the least pervasive across the 12 interviews.

5.1.1 Universal Patterns

Two themes were present in every one of the 12 interviews. First, all interviewees engaged with the question of how a micro-credential would map onto existing credit or qualification structures — most often the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) or an equivalent national framework, but also assessment methodology, credential format, and practical verification requirements. Second, every interview surfaced some account of where the authority to adopt or reject micro-credentials would sit, with answers ranging from full internal autonomy to no institutional discretion at all (see Section 5.5.1).

5.1.2 Near-universal Patterns

Operational barriers were raised in ten of the twelve interviews and were, in aggregate, the most frequently coded theme in the register. These barriers cluster into several distinct sub-patterns rather than a single dominant obstacle: cost and resourcing, the absence of a unified verification or validation body at EU or national level, administrative and technical infrastructure built for in-person delivery, non-mandatory scheme design that reduces actual credential uptake, and a weak link

between credential attainment and commensurate reward. Reliance on external or shared governance arrangements — regional authorities, national quality agencies, or alliance partner institutions — was also raised in ten of the twelve interviews.

Conditions for long-term sustainability were raised in eleven of the twelve interviews (all but one). Recurring conditions include sustained EU-level institutional backing, a binding regulatory mandate paired with funding, general awareness and visibility among professionals, and, in one case, direct evidence that a prior funded pilot appears to have lapsed without a clear institutional owner for its continuation. Professional value — chiefly recognition of prior learning and cross-border portability — was the most common value framing, raised in eleven of the twelve interviews (all but one), more often than academic credit-banking or employer-side value specifically.

A further pattern raised in eleven of the twelve interviews (all but one) is that institutions frequently already operate curricula, credit-recognition schemes, or short-course infrastructure that function in a manner very close to the micro-credential model, despite not using that terminology internally. This convergence, observed independently across institutions of different types and in different countries, is treated as an interpretation-level finding of some significance: it suggests that meaningful "shadow" or precursor micro-credential infrastructure may already be in place across a large part of the sector, ahead of formal recognition.

5.1.3 Moderate and Narrower Patterns

Structural constraints specific to an institution's own rules (ten of twelve interviews), current institutional flexibility or positioning (eight of twelve), and readiness signals such as active piloting or strategic alignment (eight of twelve) were each raised by a clear majority but not the near-totality of interviewees. Narrower still were concrete entry points such as EU-funded pilot or research projects acting as the trigger for exploring micro-credentials (six of twelve), employer-side value (five of twelve), and academic credit-banking toward a further award (three of twelve, concentrated among interviewees from higher-education settings).

Two limitations should be read across all of the above. First, because none of the twelve interviewees are Employers, and the interview guide did not include employer-specific questions of this kind, every statement in the qualitative evidence base about employer-side demand or value is an institutional respondent's inference about employer behaviour, not a first-hand employer account; it should be read alongside, and not substituted for, the Employer segment of the quantitative strand. Second, the HR Policies code was not applied across the strand, consistent with the standing project decision that none of the interviewees are Employers and none were asked an HR-policy-related question in the interview guide.

5.2 Integration Pathways

Interviewees described a wide range of existing structures into which a micro-credential could realistically be integrated, several of which were framed as already functioning in a manner very close to the micro-credential model without using that label.

> *"Yes, we have… In the [alliance]… developing different kinds of short-term courses… we are developing 20 learning pathways leading to micro-credentials"*
>
> — Programme Director (INT-12)

- Existing short-course, summer-school, or continuing-education schemes that already convalidate a capped number of credits toward a degree were described by several higher-education interviewees as carrying "the spirit" of a micro-credential under a different name (INT-01, INT-11).
- Regional or national prior-learning accreditation schemes that bundle non-formal training and work experience into a certification package were described independently, and in some cases evidently in reference to the same or closely related regional scheme, by several interviewees across vocational and higher-education settings (INT-01, INT-03, INT-07, INT-11).
- Vocational curricula already structured as discrete, assessable competence units mapping to modules were reported as a pre-existing modular architecture well suited in principle to unbundled credentialing, even where no unit-level certification currently exists (INT-07, INT-09).
- EU-funded pilot or research projects were repeatedly identified as the concrete trigger through which an institution first began exploring micro-credentials, rather than an internally originated initiative (INT-01, INT-05, INT-06, INT-09, INT-11, INT-12).
- One interviewee described the most operationally advanced entry point in the sample: an actively developed set of named learning pathways, each combining short-form content with a separate, assessment-gated credentialing step, operating across a multi-institution international alliance (INT-12).

A recurring compatibility gap concerns geographic and jurisdictional scope: several interviewees noted that their institution's existing accreditation is recognised nationally or regionally but not at EU level, which is precisely the gap the micro-credential model is intended to close (INT-01, INT-08). A further recurring pattern, observed independently in two different national contexts, is a two-tier structure in which shorter or non-accredited courses receive only an attendance certificate or in-house attestation, while only longer or criteria-meeting courses qualify for externally recognised accreditation (INT-08, INT-09) — suggesting this may be a structural feature of how short-course provision typically evolves, rather than an institution-specific choice.

5.3 Usage Logics

Where interviewees articulated a practical value case for micro-credentials, professional and individual value was the dominant framing, considerably more so than academic credit-banking or employer-side value specifically.

5.3.1 Professional Value

Recognition of prior learning for experienced but formally uncredentialed workers recurred across multiple interviews and institution types (INT-01, INT-05, INT-11, INT-12), including one direct personal account in which prior-learning recognition halved the duration of a formal qualification for an experienced professional (INT-11). Portability and cross-border recognition were repeatedly cited as the value proposition that distinguishes a micro-credential from an ordinary certificate, including one account of a recent case in which a graduate had to repeat two years of training abroad rather than have prior qualifications recognised (INT-07).

> *"I think it's an added value… in terms of how that would make our offering and our message and our brand stand out… what's the added value to our current [offering]"*
>
> — Career Advisor (INT-10)

5.3.2 Academic Value

Academic credit-banking toward a further award was the narrowest usage logic in the evidence base, raised by three interviewees, all from higher-education settings. Where it was raised, interviewees expressed a hope that a defined proportion of a degree — one interviewee suggested a figure in the order of 15 to 20 per cent — could eventually be built from recognised micro-credentials, drawing an explicit comparison to credit-transfer systems in other higher-education contexts (INT-11). This aspiration was, in every case, described as not yet realised in the interviewee's own department or programme area (INT-01, INT-06, INT-11).

> *"students then can use those academic credits, which they have gained toward existing qualifications… essentially, they're banking those"*
>
> — Programme Director (INT-01)

5.3.3 Employer Value

Employer-side value was the least directly evidenced usage logic. One interviewee reported that her institution currently perceives no employer or client demand specifically for micro-credentials, since the existing formal credential is treated as sufficient by the public-sector institutions it serves (INT-02). Other interviewees spoke more speculatively about anticipated employer value, generally framed around portability and verifiability rather than reported employer feedback (INT-01, INT-04, INT-09, INT-10). This is an important evidentiary limitation rather than a substantive finding: because none of the twelve interviewees are Employers, every statement about employer-side value in this qualitative strand is an institutional respondent's inference, and should be read together with, not in place of, the Employer segment findings in Section 4.

> *"there hasn't been any discussion about it in the board, or anywhere, because there is no demand for it… nobody is asking for it"*
>
> — Programme Director (INT-02)

5.4 Operational Conditions

Operational conditions — compatibility with existing frameworks and procedures, and the barriers or readiness signals institutions report — were the most heavily discussed subject matter across the interviews as a whole.

5.4.1 Compatibility

Several interviewees from formal higher-education and vocational settings described active use of ECTS or national qualifications-framework levels to size and place credentials, including one interviewee whose institution operates a purpose-built credit calculator shared across a multi-institution international alliance (INT-12), and others describing more informal or partial use of the same logic (INT-01, INT-06, INT-11). Several vocational-education interviewees stressed that hands-on, practical competences, particularly in food preparation and hospitality service, require in-person verification and are not considered adequately assessable through purely digital or remote means (INT-03, INT-08). One higher-education interviewee nuanced this further, arguing from direct teaching experience that format suitability is better explained by learner life-stage than by skill type alone: younger learners showed a marked preference for in-person learning for social and developmental reasons, while working adults favoured online delivery for practical and logistical reasons (INT-11).

> *"we have developed a ECTS calculator… our range between the 9 different European institutions… is from 1 to 30 ECTS… our goal is to keep them from 1 to 5 or 10 ECTS… back-end, we can calculate the amount of ECTS value"*
>
> — Programme Director (INT-12)

5.4.2 Barriers

Barriers raised across the interviews cluster into several distinct sub-patterns:

- Cost and resourcing — issuance and maintenance costs, staff training costs, and the diversion of institutional strategic capacity toward other priorities ahead of digital-credential development (INT-02, INT-03, INT-10).
- Absence of a unified verification or validation body at EU or national level — raised independently by several interviewees, including one with direct professional experience of an earlier, structurally similar EU harmonisation effort that saw comparable difficulty (INT-06), and one whose institution's live implementation is currently blocked specifically by national-level policy inaction despite an existing EU-level recommendation (INT-12).

- Administrative and technical infrastructure built for in-person, cohort-based delivery — reported to conflict with the flexible, on-demand access model micro-credentials require, illustrated concretely by one interviewee's account of a fixed multi-week enrolment delay incompatible with on-demand access (INT-12), and more generally described as bureaucratic friction by others (INT-03, INT-07, INT-08).
- Non-mandatory scheme design — several interviewees reported that learners often do not claim credentials they are entitled to, reducing the practical reach of a scheme regardless of its formal availability (INT-03, INT-04).

> *"Are you going to accredit the micro-credentials? Because even with the ECVET that we reach… decades of discussion, we don't have a lot of countries that they have the verification bodies in order to accept"*
>
> — Programme Director (INT-06)

5.4.3 Readiness

Readiness signals — active piloting, strategic alignment, or growing awareness — were reported by eight of the twelve interviewees, generally as a partial rather than complete state. Signals included institutional strategies already prioritising online learning and flexibility ahead of any formal micro-credential mandate (INT-12), regional authorities actively piloting new assessment methods (INT-09), and a reported increase, though not completion, of institutional awareness of micro-credentials more broadly (INT-05).

> *"I don't think there's one single change… this is a shift in how we work, how we do the learning outcomes, how we write everything and put it out"*
>
> — Programme Director (INT-02)

5.5 Ownership Mapping

This subsection addresses who holds the authority to initiate and sustain micro-credential integration, and what would need to be true for such integration to continue over time. The evidence is organised into two parts: governance (Section 5.5.1) and sustainability (Section 5.5.2), consistent with the structure used in the quantitative strand.

5.5.1 Governance

The clearest and most consistently evidenced axis of variation across the twelve interviews is the degree of institutional autonomy over the decision to adopt micro-credentials. This axis cuts across sector, country, and institution size, and appears more strongly linked to adoption confidence than any other single factor observed in the qualitative evidence.

- Institutions describing full or substantial internal decision authority include one higher-education institution with its own autonomous degree-awarding authority (INT-01), a private culinary education institution with a clear internal executive-to-ownership decision chain (INT-08), a private hospitality education group with board-level approval authority (INT-10), and a higher-education interviewee who explicitly contrasted her own hybrid-governance institution's greater decisional freedom with the comparatively slower mechanisms of purely public universities (INT-11).

  "it would actually be first the head office… executive director of student affairs and enrollment… chief financial officer. I think it should be at executive level… that has to be ultimately approved by the board"

  — Career Advisor (INT-10)

- By contrast, several public vocational-education interviewees described their institutions in terms amounting to compliance-only implementers, with adoption decisions cascading entirely from ministry or regional-government level and no institutional discretion to act independently (INT-03, INT-07, INT-09).

  "it has to be… a university module within the structure of the program… under the supervision and the accreditation of the National Quality Agency… no flexibility… anything extra has to be offered as an extra, not as a part of the degree"

  — Programme Director (INT-06)

- One interviewee's institution illustrates an intermediate case: active strategic alignment and concrete implementation work are already under way, yet national-level policy inaction is reported as currently blocking alignment with an existing EU-level recommendation — demonstrating that institutional readiness and governance authority to act are not the same condition, and that the former does not guarantee the latter (INT-12).

A large majority of interviewees (ten of twelve) additionally described a credentialing or accreditation model that depends, in whole or in part, on an external party rather than resting entirely within the interviewee's own institution. This includes regional or national public authorities operating parallel or overlapping accreditation schemes (INT-01, INT-03, INT-07, INT-08); external technical or commercial partners responsible for issuing the credential itself, in some cases because the institution lacks in-house technical capacity and in others as a deliberate design choice separating content delivery from assessment authority (INT-02, INT-03, INT-12); and multi-level governance cascades running from EU level through national ministry to regional authority to institution, with the institution's role limited to adapting its own course design to externally set standards (INT-05, INT-09).

5.5.2 Sustainability

Interviewees converged on several conditions seen as necessary for micro-credentials to take hold beyond an initial pilot or funding period, while diverging in how likely they judged those conditions to be met.

- Sustained institutional backing from an EU-level body was cited as a precondition without which several interviewees doubted the initiative would hold lasting value or traction (INT-08, INT-12).
- A binding legal or regulatory mandate accompanied by substantial funding, as distinct from an unfunded pilot exercise, was identified as a necessary rather than sufficient condition for durable adoption (INT-03).

  “we would definitely fund it… if a training provider would apply for funding, either through Erasmus Plus or through national funds, for setting up micro-credentials, then… we support that project through funding”

  — Programme Director (INT-05)

- General awareness and visibility among professionals and institutions was identified by more than one interviewee as a precondition that must be met before any other adoption factor becomes relevant (INT-02, INT-12).
- One interviewee, drawing on national comparative statistics, distinguished her country's high underlying quality of professional education from its comparatively low formal acknowledgement of micro-credentials specifically, arguing that these are separate variables and that educational quality alone does not guarantee recognition (INT-12).

Two contrasting positions on durability were evident. One interviewee, with direct professional experience predating the micro-credential terminology itself, was notably sceptical, framing the concept as substantially a rebrand of an earlier EU vocational-credit initiative and drawing on that initiative's limited practical follow-through as a cautionary precedent (INT-06). By contrast, another interviewee framed micro-credentials in near-existential terms, as a necessary long-term strategy for universities to remain relevant over a multi-decade horizon in the face of competition from fast-moving non-formal training providers (INT-11). Several other interviewees took a more neutral, operational stance, treating the concept largely as a formalisation of existing continuing-professional-development or short-course practice, without strong scepticism or advocacy either way (INT-01, INT-04). A further, concrete illustration of sustainability risk was offered by one interviewee whose institution's prior regional micro-competence attestation pilot appears to have lapsed after its initial funding period, with no clear institutional owner identified for its continuation (INT-09).

> *“Now there’s a new thing, the micro-credentials, which is for me… It’s exactly the same thing. We tried to find a new name, a new title… this is not a huge innovation”*

— Programme Director (INT-06)

6 Comparative Analysis: Quantitative and Qualitative Convergence

This section identifies where the two strands, quantitative findings of Section 4 and the qualitative findings of Section 5, clarify or challenge one another, and states directly what each point of convergence or divergence means for interpreting the results. Quantitative findings are cited by their originating table reference (Section 4); qualitative findings are cited by interview identifier (Section 5).

6.1 Sample and Interpretive Scope

The two strands sample different populations and should be read as complementary rather than directly comparable at the statistical level. The quantitative strand captures individual perceptions across four stakeholder segments (n = 1,044), concentrated in France, Italy and Spain (A01). The qualitative strand captures institutional representatives — programme directors, career advisors and curriculum designers, including two from adjacent stakeholder types — across seven countries: seven interviews were conducted in consortium partner countries (Spain, Iceland and Denmark, with a concentration in Spain and Iceland) and five through the project's wider interview outreach (Ireland, Cyprus, Italy and Switzerland). No French institutions are represented in the qualitative sample (see Section 9.6). Where the sections below identify agreement or divergence between the strands, this reflects thematic convergence in what is reported, not a statistical match between equivalent populations.

6.2 Integration Pathways

The qualitative evidence supports the quantitative preference for embedded, structured entry points over standalone options (A08–A11): institutions describe building integration around existing programme architecture, credit schemes, and competence-unit curricula rather than freestanding provision (Section 5.2), mirroring what individual respondents intuitively favour.

The interviews also clarify a pattern the survey could only describe, not explain. The consistent 15–24% "I don't know exactly" band across all four segments (A08–A11) has a direct institutional counterpart: several institutions have themselves not resolved how integration would operationally work — one institution described its short-form content as fragmented single-skill units not yet organised into a modular framework (INT-04), another's prior pilot on exactly this question appears to have lapsed without a clear owner for its continuation (Section 5.5.2). Respondent uncertainty about integration mechanics likely reflects a genuine unresolved institutional design question, not only individual unfamiliarity.

6.3 Usage Logics

Both strands agree that professional and competence-based value, rather than academic credit-banking, is the primary use case. The quantitative emphasis on skill specialisation and evidencing competencies (A14, A15) aligns with professional value as the dominant qualitative usage logic, raised in eleven of twelve interviews (Section 5.3.1).

A demand–supply gap emerges specifically on academic value. 53% of Student respondents want micro-credentials to "complement my academic profile" (A14) — implying credit-bearing integration into formal study. Yet only three of the twelve institutional interviewees raised academic credit-banking at all, and in every case described it as an aspiration not yet realised in their own department (Section 5.3.2). Student-facing appetite for academically integrated credentials appears to be running ahead of institutional capacity to deliver it.

The qualitative strand also clarifies a pattern in the Employer data. Employers show no dominant verification mechanism, splitting fairly evenly across digital platforms, internal validation and recognised frameworks, with external accreditation the clear laggard (11.9%, A18). Institutional interviewees independently confirm the structural reason: no widely trusted, unified external verification body currently exists (Sections 5.1.2, 5.4.2), including one account of a national-level policy gap directly blocking alignment with an existing EU recommendation on this point. This gives the low trust recorded in A18 a concrete institutional explanation the survey alone could not supply.

Note: none of the twelve interviewees is an employer, so the qualitative strand cannot independently corroborate or challenge the Employer-segment usage-logic findings (A17, A18) — it can only explain adjacent institutional conditions likely to shape employers' actual experience.

6.4 Operational Conditions

Quantitative compatibility scores are tightly banded and moderately positive across all four segments (3.53–3.68, A19–A22). The qualitative evidence clarifies what this narrow band likely obscures: institutional readiness is considerably more uneven than the survey numbers suggest, ranging from one institution actively developing assessment-gated learning pathways, supported by a shared credit calculator, within a multi-institution alliance (INT-12; Sections 5.2, 5.4.1) to paper-based certification with no digital credentialing mechanism at all in others (INT-09, INT-10). The survey measures perceived personal disruption; the interviews measure institutional operational reality. These are not the same quantity, and the qualitative range indicates the true spread of institutional readiness is wider than the individual-level means imply.

The clearest divergence in this block concerns regulatory and accreditation constraints. Individual respondents place this among their least-cited operational barriers, at 5.2%–7.6% depending on segment (A23); it is the least-cited barrier only among Employed respondents (5.2%), while in the

Student, Employer and Unemployed segments only misalignment with current education or career stage is cited less often.

Institutional interviewees, by contrast, raise the absence of a unified verification or validation body and national-policy gaps blocking alignment with EU-level recommendations as among the most frequently cited barriers in the qualitative register (Section 5.4.2). This divergence is worth stating directly as an interpretation: individual respondents likely have limited visibility into the governance-level bottlenecks that most directly constrain whether their institution can act, so the survey's barrier ranking should not be read as a full picture of what is actually holding integration back at the system level.

Cost and resourcing constraints are the barrier on which the two strands agree most directly: the leading individual-level barrier for Students and Unemployed respondents (A23) is corroborated by a recurring institutional sub-pattern covering issuance, maintenance and staff-training costs (Section 5.4.2). Administrative complexity also appears in both strands, cited by 13.6% of Students and 14.6% of Employers (A23) and reflected in institutional accounts of administrative and technical infrastructure built for in-person delivery (Section 5.4.2).

6.5 Ownership Mapping

6.5.1 Governance

This is the most significant divergence identified anywhere in this deliverable. Respondents overall — and Employed and Employer respondents specifically — nominate Employers as the preferred lead for integration by a clear margin (34.1% overall, rising to about 38% among Employed and Employer respondents themselves; A25, A25.1). Across the twelve institutional interviews, however, **Employers are essentially absent from the governance chains interviewees actually described**. Decision authority is instead located either internally, within the institution's own autonomous governance, or externally, with ministries, regional authorities, or EU-level bodies (Section 5.5.1); no interviewee described an employer as initiating, approving, or holding accreditation authority for integration.

This is interpretation, stated directly because the divergence is load-bearing for how the deliverable's conclusions should be framed: respondents' preference for employer leadership does not correspond to any institutional account of employers actually holding, or being positioned to hold, that role among the institutions interviewed. Two readings are available and are not mutually exclusive — that the "employer-led" model reflects an aspiration rather than current practice, or that employers' influence is currently exercised informally, through demand signalling, rather than through the formal governance chains institutional interviewees described. Either reading has direct implications for any recommendation this deliverable might make about where integration leadership should formally sit.

The qualitative autonomy/compliance axis also gives institutional texture to the survey's fairly even spread of anticipated structural change, from "minor adjustments" to "complete restructuring" (A24): what counts as restructuring depends heavily on an institution's own governance type. Autonomous institutions describe adaptation as an internal process change; compliance-bound institutions describe it as contingent on national or regional policy change entirely outside their own control (Section 5.5.1). The same survey response category likely means materially different things depending on which type of institution a respondent's own organisation is.

6.5.2 Sustainability

The plurality preference for formal embedding over remaining optional or independent (37.0% vs 32.2% vs 18.2%, A28) is broadly supported by qualitative evidence that **several interviewees see a binding mandate paired with funding as a necessary condition for durability** (Section 5.5.2).

This shared preference for embedding should not, however, be read as evidence that embedding, once achieved, would prove durable. The qualitative strand introduces a caution the survey cannot capture on its own: one interviewee's direct professional experience of a structurally similar, decades-old EU initiative with limited practical follow-through, and a separate, concrete account of a funded regional pilot that appears to have lapsed without a clear institutional owner for its continuation (Section 5.5.2), both indicate that formal embedding is a necessary but not sufficient condition for sustainability. The quantitative preference describes what respondents want to happen; the qualitative evidence describes what has, in comparable cases, actually happened when it was tried.

7 Conclusions

- This deliverable examined how short-term learning experiences leading to a micro-credential can be integrated into existing hospitality education, training and employment systems in ways that are usable, credible and sustainable, drawing on a quantitative survey of 1,044 respondents and 12 qualitative interviews with institutional decision-makers.

- On entry points, both strands converge: respondents across all four segments and institutions themselves favour integration that builds on existing, familiar structures — internships, on-the-job learning, job-search programmes and internal training — rather than freestanding provision (Sections 4.2, 5.2, 6.2). A meaningful minority in every segment remains unclear on how such integration would work operationally, and the qualitative evidence indicates this uncertainty is not confined to individuals: several institutions have not themselves resolved the operational mechanics (Section 6.2).

- On usage logic, professional and competence-based value is the dominant framing on both sides, while academic credit-banking shows a demand–supply gap: over half of Student respondents want credentials to complement their academic profile, but institutional uptake of credit-banking remains an unrealised aspiration in the great majority of cases (Section 6.3). Employer verification practice is fragmented, a pattern the qualitative strand traces to the absence of a unified, trusted external verification body (Sections 4.3, 5.4.2, 6.3).

- On operational conditions, individual-level compatibility scores are narrowly banded and moderately positive, but this masks considerably wider variation in institutional readiness, ranging from institutions actively developing credentialing pathways to paper-based certification (Section 6.4). Cost and resourcing constraints are the barrier on which individual respondents and institutions agree most directly, with administrative complexity also present in both strands; regulatory and accreditation constraints are ranked low by individuals but are among the most frequently cited institutional barriers, suggesting that individuals have limited visibility into governance-level bottlenecks (Section 6.4).

- On ownership, the deliverable's sharpest divergence concerns governance: respondents nominate Employers as the preferred lead by a clear margin, yet Employers are essentially absent from the governance chains institutions actually describe (Section 6.5.1). This divergence is load-bearing for how any future governance model is framed, and two readings — aspiration versus informal, demand-side influence — remain open. On sustainability, a plurality favours formal embedding, and qualitative evidence supports embedding paired with a binding mandate and funding as a necessary condition; however, documented cases of comparable initiatives losing momentum after their initial funding period indicate that formal embedding alone is not sufficient to guarantee durability (Section 6.5.2)

In response to the research question, the evidence points to the following. On usability, integration is most readily imagined inside existing structures (internships, on-the-job learning, job-search programmes and internal training), and perceived compatibility is moderately positive across all four segments (3.53 to 3.68); however, how integration would work operationally remains unresolved for a meaningful minority of respondents and for several institutions, and cost and time are the most cited practical barriers (Sections 6.2, 6.4). On credibility, the absence of a unified, trusted verification or validation body is the main constraint: among Employers, verification practice is fragmented and external accreditation is the least favoured option (11.9%) (Sections 5.4.2, 6.3). On sustainability, formal embedding is the plurality preference (37.0%), but the interviews indicate that it is necessary but not sufficient, and that durability depends on a binding mandate, funding and an explicit institutional owner (Section 6.5.2). The divergence between preferred and described governance (Section 6.5.1) cuts across all three dimensions and remains the main open question for future work.

8 Recommendations

The following recommendations follow directly from the findings presented in Sections 4–6 and do not introduce evidence beyond what is reported there.

- Design integration around existing structures. Entry points should build on internships, on-the-job learning, job-search programmes and internal training rather than standalone credentials, reflecting the consistent preference across all four stakeholder segments and confirmed institutional practice (Sections 4.2, 5.2).
- Close the operational-mechanics gap. Because uncertainty about how integration would work in practice is shared by individuals and institutions alike, practical implementation guidance at institutional level is likely to have more impact than further awareness-raising alone (Section 6.2).
- Address verification fragmentation directly. The absence of a unified, trusted verification or validation body is both an institutional barrier and the likely explanation for fragmented employer-side verification practice; resolving this is a precondition for the credibility dimension of the research question (Sections 5.4.2, 6.3, 6.4).
- Clarify the employer's actual role in governance before formalising it. Given the gap between stakeholder preference for employer-led governance and its absence from institutional governance accounts, any governance model should first establish whether employer influence is best formalised as decision authority or as a structured demand-signalling mechanism (Section 6.5.1).
- Pair formal embedding with funding and clear ownership. Sustainability planning should treat formal embedding as necessary but not sufficient, and should assign an explicit institutional owner for continuity beyond the initial funding period, in view of documented cases of comparable initiatives lapsing once funding ended (Section 6.5.2).

- Prioritise cost and resourcing support. As the operational barrier on which individual respondents and institutions agree most directly, targeted support for issuance, maintenance and staff-training costs is likely to yield broadly shared benefit (Section 6.4).

9 Appendix

9.1 Survey 3 Questionnaire Instrument

Table 9.1a — Demographic sorting (Q1–Q7)

Q	Question	Response options	Mode / routing
1	In which country do you reside?	List of 31 countries	Drop-down menu in alphabetical order
2	What's your gender identity?	Male Female Non-binary Prefer not to say	Single answer
3	What is your age?	Under 24 years old Between 24 and 34 Between 35 and 44 Over 45	Single answer
4	What is your highest level of education?	Primary School Secondary School Vocational School Higher Education (bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees) Other	Single answer
5	At what stage of your career are you?	Entry-level professional (0 to 2 years of work experience) Young professional (3 to 5 years of work experience) Mid-level professional (6 to 10 years of work experience) Senior professional (over 10 years of work experience)	Single answer
6	What is your current status?	Unemployed Employed (any type of contract) Employed and studying Studying full-time (Vocational educational training, Undergrad, Master, PhD, etc.) Not yet entered the labour market	Single answer; routes respondents to segment-specific questions (see Section 9.2)
7	Are you currently involved in hiring decisions? Being involved in hiring decisions entails the following: screening candidate CVs; and/or screening candidates through telephone or in-person interviews; and/or making the final hiring decision from a pool of candidates.	Yes, I am. No, I am not.	Single answer. Asked of Employed and Employed-and-studying respondents only. Trigger question to classify the respondent as an employer

Table 9.1b — Block 1: Integration Scenarios (Q8–Q8.2)

Q	Respondent group	Question	Response options
8	Full-time Students	Where could micro-credential learning most realistically fit within your current studies? (Single choice, shown randomised)	As part of a mandatory module As an optional module Linked to internships or practical training As an extracurricular certified course I don't know exactly It would not fit
8	Employed workers	Where could micro-credential learning most realistically fit within your professional context? (Single choice, shown randomised)	Employer-supported training As part of promotion requirements As voluntary professional development As part of on-the-job learning Linked to reskilling or role change I don't know exactly It would not fit
8	Unemployed workers	If available, where would micro-credential learning most realistically fit in your situation? (Single choice, shown randomised)	As part of active job-search support programmes Through public employment services As self-funded upskilling Through vocational training institutions I don't know exactly It would not be relevant
8	Employers	Where could micro-credential learning most realistically be integrated in your organisation? (Single choice, shown randomised)	Internal training programmes Onboarding processes Promotion frameworks Reskilling initiatives I don't know exactly It would not fit
8.1	Respondents who selected "It would not fit" or "It would not be relevant" in Q8	Why would a micro-credential learning experience not fit in your current context? (Single choice)	There is no formal pathway to integrate it within existing structures It would require significant structural or procedural changes It does not align with my current education or career stage It would not be supported within my institution or organisation Regulatory or accreditation constraints would prevent integration I do not have sufficient information to assess Other
8.2	As Q8.1	Based on your answers, do you believe that integration of micro-credentials is realistically possible in your current context? (Single choice)	Yes, integration would be feasible Possibly, but only with significant adjustments No, integration would not be feasible (jumps to Q16)

All other respondents proceed from Q8 directly to Q9.

Table 9.1c — Block 2: Usage Logic (Q9–Q9.1)

Q	Respondent group	Question	Response options
9	Full-time Students	If integrated, how would you most likely use a micro-credential? (Multiple choice, select up to 2)	To complement my academic profile To specialise in a specific skill area To prepare for a transition to employment To meet internship requirements I don't know exactly
9	Employed workers	In your professional context, micro-credentials would most likely function as: (Multiple choice, select up to 2)	Evidence of specific competencies Part of a structured career pathway A requirement for internal progression External certification only I don't know exactly
9	Unemployed workers	In your situation, micro-credentials would most likely help by: (Multiple choice, select up to 2)	Demonstrating updated skills to employers Supporting a career change Meeting the requirements of job programmes Structuring personal upskilling I don't know exactly
9	Employers	In your organisation, micro-credentials would be most relevant for: (Ranking)	Validating specific technical skills Structuring internal development pathways Supporting reskilling initiatives Standardising onboarding Signalling specialised competence
9.1	Employers only	How would your organisation most likely verify a micro-credential? (Single choice, shown randomised)	Through digital credential platforms Through recognised qualification frameworks Through internal validation Through external accreditation Verification would not be required I don't know exactly

Table 9.1d — Block 3: Operational Conditions (Q10–Q12)

Q	Respondent group	Question	Response options
10	Full-time Students	Short-term learning leading to a micro-credential could be integrated into my current study structure without major disruption. (Likert)	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree
10	Employed workers	Short-term learning leading to a micro-credential could be integrated into my current work structure without major disruption. (Likert)	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree
10	Unemployed workers	Short-term learning leading to a micro-credential could be integrated into my current situation without major disruption. (Likert)	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree

Q	Respondent group	Question	Response options
			Strongly agree
10	Employers	Short-term learning leading to a micro-credential could be integrated into my current organisational structure without major disruption. (Likert)	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree
11	All targets	What would be the main operational barrier to integration in your context? (Single choice)	Time constraints Administrative or procedural complexity Cost or budget limitations Misalignment with existing structures Lack of institutional or organisational support Regulatory or accreditation constraints No significant barrier I do not have enough information to assess
12	All targets	For integration to be feasible in your context, it would require: (Single choice)	No significant changes Minor adjustments to existing structures Moderate procedural modifications Major structural redesign Complete restructuring

Table 9.1e — Block 4: Ownership Mapping (Q13–Q15)

Q	Respondent group	Question	Response options
13	All targets	Who should primarily initiate the integration of micro-credentials within existing systems? (Single choice)	Education providers Employers Public authorities Sector bodies Individuals Shared responsibility
13.1	Respondents who selected "Shared responsibility" in Q13	Please be more specific, a shared responsibility among which of the actors below? (Multiple choice, select up to 2)	Education providers Employers Public authorities Sector bodies Individuals
14	Employers only	Integration of micro-credentials in my organisation would require formal HR policy adjustments. (Likert)	Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree
15	All targets	For integration to be sustainable, micro-credentials would need to: (Single choice)	Be formally embedded in existing structures Be recognised but remain optional Replace existing components Remain independent from formal systems

9.2 Segmentation Branching Logic (Q6/Q7)

The four stakeholder segments used throughout Section 4 (Students, Employed, Unemployed, Employers) are not a single survey question. They are derived from Q6 (current status, asked of all respondents) and Q7 (involvement in hiring decisions, asked of working respondents only), following the routing set in the survey instrument. The instrument states that employer classification is determined exclusively through direct involvement in hiring or training decisions.

Table 9.2a — Routing rules for Q6 and Q7 (survey instrument)

Q6 response	Next step in the instrument	Segment assigned
Unemployed	Unemployed questions	Unemployed
Not yet entered the labour market	Unemployed questions	Unemployed
Employed (any type of contract)	Q7: involved in hiring decisions?	Employers (Q7 = Yes) or Employed (Q7 = No)
Employed and studying	Q7: involved in hiring decisions?	Employers (Q7 = Yes) or Employed (Q7 = No)
Studying full-time (Vocational educational training, Undergrad, Master, PhD, etc.)	Student questions	Students

Table 9.2b — Derivation of stakeholder segments from Q6 and Q7 (overall, n = 1,044)

Q6 response	Q7 response	Segment	n
Employed (any type of contract)	No	Employed	291
Employed and studying	No	Employed	60
Unemployed	Not asked	Unemployed	304
Not yet entered the labour market	Not asked	Unemployed	21
Employed (any type of contract)	Yes	Employers	251
Employed and studying	Yes	Employers	51
Studying full-time (Vocational educational training, Undergrad, Master, PhD, etc.)	Not asked	Students	66
Total			**1,044**

Resulting segment sizes: Employed 351 (33.6%), Unemployed 325 (31.1%), Employers 302 (28.9%), Students 66 (6.3%), as reported in Table A07. Every respondent is assigned to exactly one segment.

Two definitional points follow from these rules. “Employed” refers to working respondents who are not involved in hiring decisions, and includes respondents who are employed and studying. “Unemployed” includes respondents who have not yet entered the labour market, because the

instrument routes them to the Unemployed questions.

Table 9.2c — Segment bases through the questionnaire

Segment	Segment n (Q6/Q7)	Routed to Q8.1–Q8.2	Exited at Q8.2 ("No")	Base for Q9–Q15
Students	66	2	0	66
Employed	351	11	4	347
Unemployed	325	12	4	321
Employers	302	18	7	295
Total	**1,044**	**43**	**15**	**1,029**

The 15 respondents who answered "No, integration would not be feasible" at Q8.2 were routed to the closing items (Q16) and did not answer Q9–Q15. This is why the bases for Blocks 2 to 4 (for example Tables A20, A21 and A22: n = 347, 321 and 295) are smaller than the segment sizes in Table A07. Q14 was asked of Employers only (n = 295). For Q15, five Student responses record the value "Individuals", which is not a Q15 response option; these are treated as invalid, which gives the Q15 base of n = 1,024 in Table A28. In line with the report's standing convention, every table whose valid n is smaller than the full segment n carries a denominator footnote.

9.3 Frequency Breakdown of Qualitative Coded Themes

Table 9.3 reports, for each code applied in the qualitative strand, the number of coded excerpts and the number of interviews in which the code appears. The number of excerpts reflects how often a theme was coded, not its importance; the interview count is the measure used in Section 5.1 to describe how widespread a pattern is.

Table 9.3 — Coded excerpts and interview coverage by code (12 interviews, 163 excerpts)

Parent theme	Sub-theme	Code	Excerpts (n)	Interviews (n of 12)	Interviews represented
Integration	Entry Points	INT_EP	7	6 / 12	INT-01, INT-05, INT-06, INT-09, INT-11, INT-12
Integration	Institutional Flexibility	INT_FLEX	8	8 / 12	INT-01, INT-02, INT-03, INT-04, INT-05, INT-08, INT-10, INT-12
Integration	Structural Constraints	INT_CONST	10	10 / 12	INT-01, INT-02, INT-04, INT-05, INT-06, INT-08, INT-09, INT-10, INT-11, INT-12
Integration	Modular Design	INT_MOD	11	11 / 12	INT-01, INT-02, INT-03, INT-04, INT-06, INT-07, INT-08, INT-09, INT-10, INT-11, INT-12
Usage Logic	Academic Value	USE_ACAD	4	3 / 12	INT-01, INT-06, INT-11
Usage Logic	Professional Value	USE_PRO	14	11 / 12	INT-01, INT-02, INT-03, INT-04, INT-05, INT-07, INT-08, INT-09, INT-10, INT-11,

Parent theme	Sub-theme	Code	Excerpts (n)	Interviews (n of 12)	Interviews represented
					INT-12
Usage Logic	Employer Value	USE_EMP	6	5 / 12	INT-01, INT-02, INT-04, INT-09, INT-10
Operational	Compatibility	OPS_COMP	23	12 / 12	INT-01, INT-02, INT-03, INT-04, INT-05, INT-06, INT-07, INT-08, INT-09, INT-10, INT-11, INT-12
Operational	Barriers	OPS_BAR	25	10 / 12	INT-01, INT-02, INT-03, INT-04, INT-06, INT-07, INT-08, INT-10, INT-11, INT-12
Operational	Readiness	OPS_READY	8	8 / 12	INT-01, INT-02, INT-03, INT-04, INT-05, INT-09, INT-10, INT-11
Governance	Ownership	GOV_OWNER	14	12 / 12	INT-01, INT-02, INT-03, INT-04, INT-05, INT-06, INT-07, INT-08, INT-09, INT-10, INT-11, INT-12
Governance	Shared Governance	GOV_SHARED	17	10 / 12	INT-01, INT-02, INT-03, INT-04, INT-05, INT-06, INT-07, INT-08, INT-09, INT-12
Sustainability	Long-term Adoption	SUS_LONG	16	11 / 12	INT-01, INT-02, INT-03, INT-04, INT-05, INT-06, INT-08, INT-09, INT-10, INT-11, INT-12
Total			**163**		

9.4 Qualitative Interview Topic Guide

The topic guide is reproduced from the Year 3 qualitative interview protocol. Each interview opened with a consent statement and the working definition of micro-credentials, followed by a trigger question. The answer to the trigger question determined which version of the questions was asked in each of the six blocks.

Core research question: How can micro-credential short-term learning experiences be integrated into existing education, training, and employment systems in ways that are usable, credible, and sustainable?

Target populations: Programme directors, curriculum designers, and training leaders from universities, VET providers, and lifelong learning institutions in the hospitality industry.

Baseline definition (offered before starting any interview): 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.

Trigger question: Have you previously integrated short-term learning experiences that lead to a micro-credential within your programmes?

Table 9.4 — Interview questions by block and trigger-question answer

Block	If YES (already integrated)	If NO (not integrated)
Block 1 – Institutional Flexibility Current modular structures and micro-credential integration capacity	How were these learning experiences structurally positioned within your programme architecture? What concrete adjustments (modular design, credit allocation, sequencing) were required to accommodate them? Looking back, what aspect of your institutional structure made integration feasible?	How is your current programme architecture structured (modular, semester-based, credit-based)? If integration were proposed tomorrow, what would be the first structural obstacle you would encounter? What structural change would be most necessary to enable integration?
Block 2 – Integration Pathways Practical entry points within programmes	At which specific entry point were micro-credential–oriented learning experiences introduced (core curriculum, electives, internships, lifelong learning)? Why was this entry point selected? In hindsight, would another entry point have improved integration effectiveness?	Where within your programme could a short-term learning experience leading to a micro-credential most realistically fit? Would integration be more feasible within formal degree structures or continuing education streams? Would implementation require redesign of existing modules or could it align with current ones?
Block 3 – Decision and Governance Decision authority and approval processes	Who initiated the integration process? Which formal bodies approved the inclusion? What stage of the approval process required the most negotiation or adjustment?	Who would need to initiate integration in your institution? What formal approval pathway would be required? Where in your governance structure would resistance most likely emerge?
Block 4 – Operational Conditions Workload, assessment, procedural compatibility	What operational adjustments were necessary (teaching load, assessment, documentation, staff allocation)? How were learning outcomes aligned with existing assessment and credit systems? Which operational system required the most adaptation?	Which operational systems (workload allocation, assessment frameworks, administrative processes) would require significant adjustment? Would alignment with existing learning outcome frameworks be straightforward or complex? What practical condition would most determine successful implementation?
Block 5 – Constraints and Enablers Regulatory, institutional, and resource barriers	What were the main structural constraints encountered during integration? Which constraints proved non-negotiable versus adjustable? What factor most enabled successful integration?	At what level do the most binding constraints operate (institutional, accreditation, national regulation, resource-based)? Which of these constraints could realistically be adjusted internally? What single change would most increase the likelihood of integration?
Block 6 – Practical Continuity	What ensures that micro-credential–oriented learning experiences remain embedded beyond	What would need to change structurally for integration to move from possibility to

Block	If YES (already integrated)	If NO (not integrated)
Conditions under which integration could persist over time	the pilot phase? Are they now structurally institutionalised or dependent on specific individuals or funding streams? How do you evaluate whether integration is functioning sustainably?	institutional commitment? Would long-term sustainability depend more on leadership alignment, regulatory clarity, or resource allocation? What risk could most realistically prevent long-term continuity?

9.5 Anonymised Interviewee Roles and Institutional Types

Table 9.5a — Interviewee role category and institutional type (n = 12)

Interview	Role category	Institutional type
INT-01	Programme Director	University with autonomous degree-awarding status
INT-02	Programme Director	Training centre (non-formal short courses; completion certificates, no academic credit)
INT-03	Career Advisor	Vocational training (VET) school within a foundation-run school network
INT-04	Programme Director	Apprenticeship centre (workplace-based training)
INT-05	Programme Director	National funding and policy intermediary (not a training provider)
INT-06	Programme Director	University (degree programmes accredited by a national quality agency)
INT-07	Programme Director	Public vocational training (VET) school
INT-08	Curriculum Designer	Private training school (intensive short courses, some regionally accredited)
INT-09	Curriculum Designer	Post-secondary higher technical training institute (ministry-issued diploma)
INT-10	Career Advisor	Private hospitality school (term-based short programmes)
INT-11	Career Advisor	Foundation owned by a public university
INT-12	Programme Director	Higher education institution within an EU university alliance

Role categories: Programme Director (7), Career Advisor (3), Curriculum Designer (2).

Table 9.5b — Interviews by country and recruitment route (n = 12)

Recruitment route	Country	Interviews (n)
Consortium partner countries	Spain	3
	Iceland	3
	Denmark	1

Recruitment route	Country	Interviews (n)
Subtotal		**7**
Wider interview outreach	Italy	2
	Cyprus	1
	Ireland	1
	Switzerland	1
Subtotal		**5**
Total	**7 countries**	**12**

9.6 Limitations and Methodological Notes

No French institutions in the qualitative sample

Evidence. France is the largest country group in the survey, with 448 of 1,044 respondents (42.9%, Table A01). None of the 12 interviews was conducted with an institution based in France. A French contact was approached and followed up during recruitment, but no interview took place. Conversely, Iceland and Denmark account for four of the 12 interviews but for 3 (0.3%) and 4 (0.4%) survey respondents respectively.

Interpretation. The two strands draw on different national contexts. The institutional conditions described in Section 5 cannot be assumed to apply to the French education and training system, which shapes the answers of the largest group of survey respondents. Italy and Spain are the only countries well represented in both strands.

Recommendation. Read the convergence and divergence reported in Section 6 as thematic rather than as a like-for-like comparison of the same national systems (see Section 6.1). Future work on integration pathways should include French institutions.

Qualitative sample size and composition

Evidence. The interview protocol set a target of 15 interviews; 12 were completed between 27 April and 28 May 2026. Of the three remaining contacts, one scheduled interview did not take place because the interviewee did not attend, and two further contacts (Malta and France) were followed up without an interview being arranged. Two of the 12 interviews (INT-04 and INT-05) were with a workplace-based training provider and a national funding and policy intermediary, which sit outside the target population of universities, VET providers and lifelong learning institutions.

Interpretation. Twelve interviews are sufficient to identify recurring patterns but not to generalise by country, institution type or role. Counts in Section 5.1 describe how many of the 12 interviews raised a theme, not how common the view is in the sector.

Recommendation. Report qualitative patterns as counts of interviews (for example 10 of 12), as in

Section 5.1, and avoid percentages or sector-wide generalisations based on the interview sample.

Routing at Q8.2 and bases for Q9–Q15

Evidence. Fifteen respondents (4 Employed, 4 Unemployed, 7 Employers) answered at Q8.2 that integration would not be feasible in their context and were routed past Q9–Q15 (Table 9.2c). All Q9–Q15 percentages are therefore calculated on the respondents who were asked each item, not on the full segment sizes.

Interpretation. The excluded respondents are, by definition, the most sceptical about integration. Their absence is likely to raise the compatibility and readiness means slightly (Tables A19–A22 and A27). The effect on reported percentages is small: under one percentage point for every figure cited in the text.

Recommendation. Read compatibility and readiness results as describing respondents who consider integration at least possibly feasible.

Country concentration of the survey sample

Evidence. France, Italy and Spain together account for 851 of 1,044 respondents (81.5%, Table A01). The remaining 193 respondents are spread across 23 countries, none of which exceeds 3.6%.

Interpretation. Overall survey figures mainly reflect respondents in three countries and cannot be read as representative of all 26 countries present in the data.

Recommendation. Present overall percentages as describing the achieved sample. Country-level comparisons are not reported, given the small numbers outside the three main countries.





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