

1st Aristotle Innovation Forum - Aristotle Meets AI

Panel Agenda

Micro-credentials and Flexible Learning Pathways

Thursday, 21 May 2026 | 14:30-16:00 (90 minutes) | Ceremony Hall (Great Aula), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Panel chair / moderator	Professor Georgios Zarifis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Board Member of the Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (KEDIVIM), AUTH
Panel participants	Ms Elpida Vianni, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; Professor Thrasyvoulos Tsiatsos, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; Professor Laura Lopez de la Cruz, University Pablo de Olavide, Seville, Spain; Mr Ioannis Michiotis, Economic Chamber of Greece; Professor Larissa Jõgi, Tallinn University, Estonia; Mr Lazaros Pitkas, Thessaloniki Chamber of Tradesmen (E.E.TH.)
Organisational coordination	Ms Elpida Vianni, Head of the Administrative Support Department, Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (KEDIVIM), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

1. Purpose and framing

This panel is conceived as a focused policy-and-practice conversation on micro-credentials and flexible learning pathways as emerging instruments for lifelong learning, reskilling, upskilling, and European educational mobility.

Rather than treating micro-credentials in purely promotional terms, the discussion is designed to examine the conditions under which they can become credible, flexible, and socially meaningful learning arrangements across higher education, vocational education and training (VET), continuing professional development, adult learning, and labour-market-oriented learning.

The overall aim is to position micro-credentials within a wider architecture of lifelong learning, connecting universities, lifelong learning centres, VET providers, employers, professional bodies, standards and certification environments, and public policy, while retaining academic credibility, public trust, social purpose, meaningful recognition, and learner progression.

2. Core discussion axes

- Micro-credentials as complementary instruments within higher education, continuing education, and lifelong learning strategies
- The role of universities and lifelong learning centres as institutional enablers of flexible learning provision
- Quality assurance, certification, standards, recognition, transparency, and portability across institutional and national settings
- Flexible and stackable learning pathways: how short-form learning may connect to broader qualifications and progression routes
- Micro-credentials in VET, continuing education, and labour-market learning: responsiveness to sectoral change, employability, and re/upskilling needs
- Access and inclusion: the possible value of micro-credentials for adult learners, working learners, career changers, and other non-traditional participants
- Institutional and policy challenges: sustainability, trust, fragmentation, governance, and the relationship between flexibility and academic standards

3. Proposed 90-minute agenda

Time	Segment	Purpose / indicative content
14:30-14:34	Welcome and opening	Professor George K. Zarifis , Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, welcomes participants, introduces the panel, and situates the discussion within the wider Forum.
14:34-14:39	Introductory framing by moderator	Professor George K. Zarifis , Professor at the School of Philosophy and Education, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, offers a short framing on why micro-credentials matter for lifelong learning, higher education, VET, employability, inclusion, and European cooperation.
14:39-14:42	Institutional opening perspective: universities and lifelong learning centres	Ms Elpida Vianni , Head of the Administrative Support Department, Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (KEDIVIM), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, offers an institutional intervention on the strategic role of lifelong learning centres within Greek higher education, the enabling framework for non-formal provision, and the place of micro-credentials within a broader university lifelong learning mission.
14:42-14:50	Higher education / EPICUR perspective	Professor Thrasylvoulos Tsiatsos , Professor at the Department of Informatics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and Deputy Member of the Management Board and Digitalisation Leader, EPICUR Alliance, addresses the European higher education dimension of micro-credentials, with reference to flexible pathways, alliance-based cooperation, digitalisation, and emerging institutional models.
14:50-14:58	Institutional design and implementation perspective	Professor Laura Lopez de la Cruz , Professor and Vice-Rector for Institutional Relations, Lifelong Learning and Foundations, University Pablo de Olavide, Seville, Spain, addresses the design and implementation of micro-credentials at institutional level, including governance, strategic embedding, and the role of universities in building flexible learning pathways.
14:58-15:06	Standards, certification, and recognition perspective	Mr Ioannis Michiotis , Member of the Administrative Council, Consultative Committee Financial Affairs (CACC FIN), CEN-CENELEC; Member of the Board and Deputy CEO, NQIS ELOT; Head of Strategy and Business Planning, EUCAT SA; Member of the Economic Chamber of Greece, addresses standards, certification environments, recognition mechanisms, and the conditions under which micro-credentials may gain legitimacy, interoperability, and broader public trust.
15:06-15:14	Adult education and lifelong learning perspective	Professor Larissa Jõgi , Tallinn University, Estonia, addresses adult education, lifelong learning, recognition, inclusion, and the role of micro-credentials in widening meaningful participation and supporting progression for diverse adult learners.
15:14-15:22	Labour-market / chamber perspective	Mr Lazaros Pitkas , Member of the Administrative Committee and Head of Business Advisory Support at the Thessaloniki Chamber of Tradesmen (E.E.TH.), addresses skills relevance, employability, recognition, and the practical value of micro-credentials for trades, professions, and the wider labour market.
15:22-15:43	Moderated panel dialogue	Focused exchange among the speakers around trust, recognition, institutional uptake, certification logics, flexibility, labour-market value, inclusion, and academic standards.
15:43-15:57	Audience discussion	Questions from participants and short responses from the panelists.
15:57-16:00	Closing remarks	The moderator synthesises the main messages and closes the session.

4. Panel participants and roles

- **Professor Georgios Zarifis, Professor at the School of Philosophy and Education, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Board Member of the Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (KEDIVIM), AUTH:** panel chair, moderator, and opening framing of the discussion.
- **Ms Elpida Vianni, Head of the Administrative Support Department, Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning (KEDIVIM), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; member of the EPICUR AUTH team for the management of lifelong learning:** institutional perspective on lifelong learning centres, university-based non-formal education, and the enabling environment for micro-credentials.
- **Professor Thrasyvoulos Tsiatsos, Professor at the Department of Informatics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; Deputy Member of the Management Board and Digitalisation Leader, EPICUR Alliance:** European higher education and alliance-based perspective on micro-credentials and flexible pathways.
- **Professor Laura Lopez de la Cruz, Professor and Vice-Rector for Institutional Relations, Lifelong Learning and Foundations, University Pablo de Olavide, Seville, Spain:** institutional design and implementation perspective on micro-credentials.
- **Mr Ioannis Michiotis, Member of the Administrative Council, Consultative Committee Financial Affairs (CACC FIN), CEN-CENELEC; Member of the Board and Deputy CEO, NQIS ELOT; Head of Strategy and Business Planning, EUCAT SA; Member of the Economic Chamber of Greece:** standards, certification, recognition, and economic-governance perspective.
- **Professor Larissa Jõgi, Tallinn University, Estonia:** adult education and lifelong learning perspective, with emphasis on recognition, inclusion, and meaningful learner progression.
- **Mr Lazaros Pitkas, Member of the Administrative Committee and Head of Business Advisory Support at the Thessaloniki Chamber of Tradesmen (E.E.TH.):** labour-market and chamber perspective on relevance, employability, and practical value.

5. Indicative questions for the Moderated panel dialogue

1. What problem are micro-credentials actually solving, and for whom?
2. What institutional structures are necessary for micro-credentials to function credibly rather than remain fragmented initiatives?
3. How can universities balance flexibility with academic credibility, public trust, and meaningful learner progression?
4. What role do standards, certification environments, and recognition mechanisms play in whether micro-credentials become portable and trustworthy?
5. How can micro-credentials connect higher education, lifelong learning, VET, and labour-market needs without becoming merely fragmented skills tokens?
6. Which learners stand to benefit most, and what barriers remain for those currently excluded from flexible learning opportunities?
7. What would make micro-credentials meaningful not only educationally, but also professionally and economically?

