The Evolving Landscape of Non-Degree Credential (NDC) Quality

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Rising Interest in NDCs

- Individual preference
  - Over 2/3 of adults considering education prefer nondegree, up from 1/2 pre-pandemic (Strada, 2020).
  - Among "great resigners", 72% are enrolling in programs that are 6 months or shorter (Cengage, 2022).

- State funding investments
  - Examples: Get There FL, IN Next Level Jobs, NJ Pay It Forward, LA MJ Foster, VA Fast Forward, and others.

Proliferation of NDCs

- Estimated over 500,000 non-degree credentials offerings according to Credential Engine 2022 estimates

- Many types of NDCs
  - Certificates, for-credit and noncredit
  - Certifications
  - License
  - Apprenticeship
  - Badges/microcredentials

- WorkCred definitions provide helpful distinctions (https://workcred.org/Interactive-Graphics/How-Do-Credentials-Differ-Degree.aspx)

- Efforts to promote quality exist and new ones are emergent.

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Brief Overview of NDCs

For-credit Certificates

- Credential awarded by an educational institution for completion of a credit educational program, usually less than one year in length (short-term and long-term credit)

- Key providers are post-secondary educational institutions

- Vary a lot in duration and intensity, also educational level

- Over 50,000 certificates (Credential Engine, 2022)

- Influences on quality include accreditors, state departments of education and labor, and others

Noncredit Certificates

- Credential awarded for completion of an educational program that does not count towards academic credit

- Key providers include post-secondary educational institutions, training providers, employers, labor unions, industry associations

- Vary a lot in duration and intensity, also educational level

- Estimated over 58,000 noncredit certificates from postsecondary institutions (Credential Engine, 2022)

- Influences on quality include state departments of education and labor, ANSI National Accreditation Board, and others

Certifications

- Credential awarded by an industry body or governmental agency for demonstration of skills typically via examination based on industry or occupational standards.

- Key providers are industry certification bodies

- Can be earned in combination with a degree, and can be associated with programs/degrees

- Estimated over 7,000 certifications (Credential Engine, 2022)

- Key influencers include ANSI National Accreditation Board, Institute for Credentialing Excellence, National Commission for Certifying Agencies, state departments of education and labor, and others

Licenses

- Credential awarded by a governmental agency for demonstration of skills in a specific occupation and sometimes also completion of an educational program; often required to work in an occupation.

- Key providers include government agencies

- Can be earned in combination with a degree, and can be associated with programs/degrees

- Estimated over 12,000 licenses (Credential Engine, 2022)

- Key influences include government agencies, professional associations, and others

Apprenticeship

- Credential awarded after completion of structured educational and workplace program based on industry and occupational standards.

- Key providers include government agencies

- Can sometimes be earned at the same time as a degree

- Registered apprenticeship process sets standards

- Estimated over 27,000 apprenticeships (Credential Engine, 2022)

- Key influences include government agencies, unions, professional associations, and others

Badges/Microcredentials

- Credential awarded for completion of a short program of study or demonstration of a targeted set of skills; these are newly emerging and are still being developed.

- Key providers include post-secondary educational institutions, training providers, employers, labor unions, industry associations

- Include a digital component

- A great of variation in these awards

- Colleges/universities are developing policies, standards are under development, very similar to certificates

- Estimated over 430,000 digital badges (Credential Engine, 2022)

- Influences on quality include state departments of education and labor, badging platforms, and others

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Definitions of Quality

Many Definitions of NDC/Credential Quality

- **National Skills Coalition…** Documented Job opportunities, Competencies; Employment outcomes, stackabilty (optional)

- **Education Strategy Group…** In-demand occupation, Employer use in hiring, education articulation

- **New America…** strong labor market outcomes, advances equity in occupations, educational articulation, affordable, strong completion

- **Gates Postsecondary Value Commission…** Employment outcomes

- **Lumina Quality Credentials Task Force…** Multiple measures of credential design and outcomes

- And others

Commonalities in NDC Quality Definitions
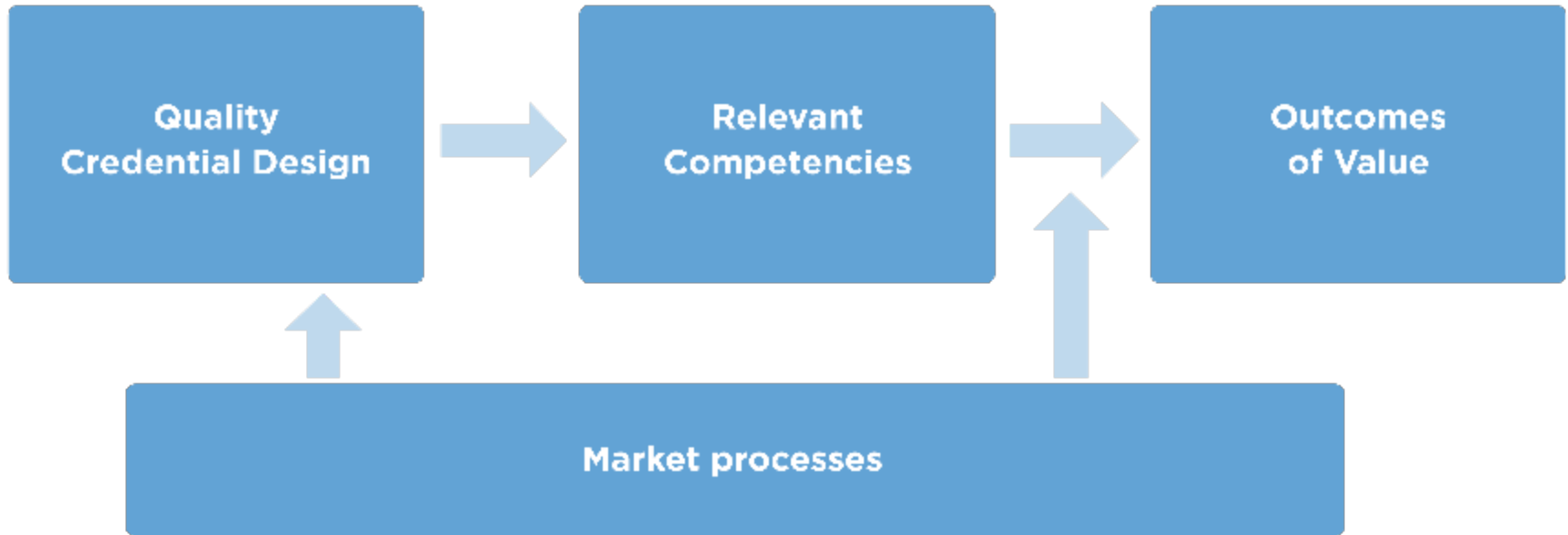
Quality Definitions Relate to Stakeholder Goals

Stakeholder	Goal	Key Questions to Consider
Individuals	Informed decision making	How do we know as an individual whether it is a good investment of time and money to pursue an NDC?
Employer	Informed decision making	How do we know whether NDCs are a useful indicator of skill and competency to be used in hiring and advancement?
Policy Makers	Accountability	How do we know whether public funds should be used to support the attainment of NDCs?
Credential Providers	Program Improvement	How can NDCs be improved?

NDC Quality Ecosystem

Beginning Snapshot of the NDC Quality Ecosystem
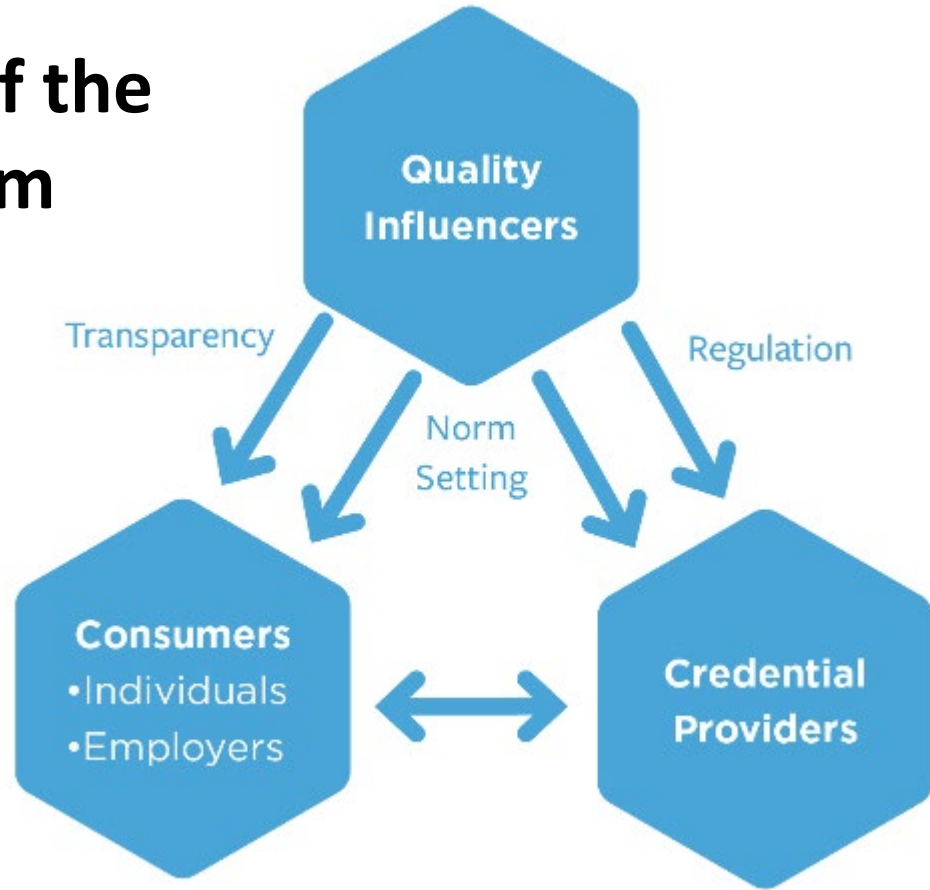
Credential Providers of NDCs

Educational Institutions - 4 year and 2 year, credit and noncredit

Private training providers, boot camps, online, and emerging providers
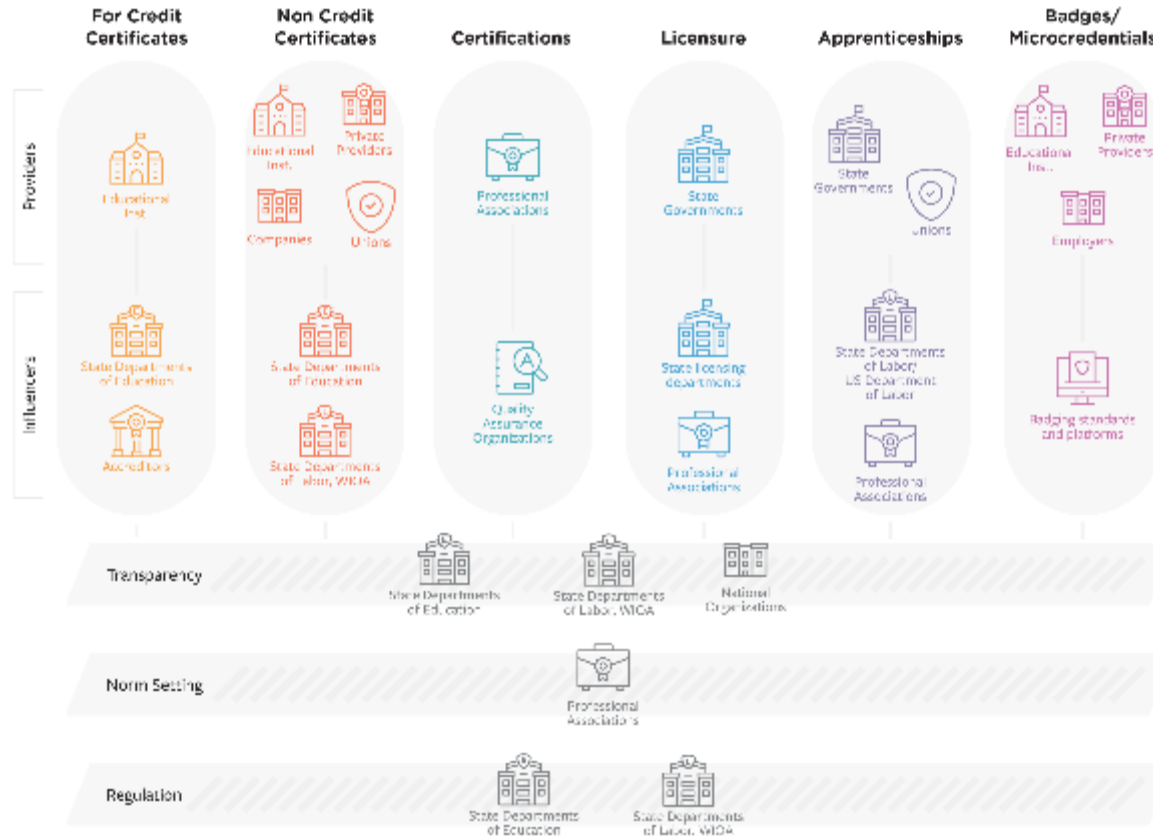
Private companies

Professional and industry associations

Joint training funds

State occupational licensing departments

Multiple NDC Quality Ecosystems Exist

Quality Influencers: Organizations Promoting Transparency and/or Norm Setting, Across NDCs

- Credential Engine

- State Departments of Labor, Eligible Training Provider Lists (ETPL)

- The Council on Integrity in Result Reporting

- Education Quality Outcomes Standards Board (EQOS)

- Badging Standards and Platforms

- And others…

Quality Influencers: Government Entities—Regulate and Set Norms, Across NDCs and Within NDC Types

- State Departments of Education, Noncredit Funding Oversight

- State Departments of Labor, WIOA Funding Oversight

- Various State Agencies, Proprietary School Oversight

- State Occupational Licensing Departments, Oversight of Licensure Processes and Standards

- US Department of Labor, Apprenticeship Oversight

Quality Influencers: Quality Assurance Bodies—Set Norms for Industry Certifications, Certificates

- ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB)

- Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE)

- National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA)

- ISO/IEC 17024

- Assessment-Based Certificate Accreditation Programs (ACAP)

Quality Influencers: Higher Education Accreditors—Set Norms for Certificates

- Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

- Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

- Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP)

- EFMD Quality Improvement System (EQUIS)

- Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges

- The Middle States Association Commission on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA-CESS)

- Former Regional Higher Education Accreditation Agencies.

How to Bring Together and Build on These Many Efforts?

- Many quality influencers, and many providers across NDC types

- Multiple definitions of quality… commonalities and distinct purposes

- Multiple ways to promote quality… different mechanisms and potential synergies

- Challenge and opportunity of creating something new

Summary of Current NDC Quality Efforts

- Certificates have most variation in providers and influencers

- Certifications, licensure, and apprenticeships have systems for quality—though not without challenges or limits

- Cross cutting efforts for quality are limited by lack of data and challenges of definitions; many are emergent and evolving

- States are a locus of activity, but national efforts and institutional level efforts may be complementary

Questions to Guide Action to Build the NDC Quality System

- How can we create the **data infrastructure** to track NDCs including new data systems and connecting fragmented existing systems?

- What are opportunities to **link quality efforts**, or to focus on specific quality efforts?

- What role does **information, norm setting,** and **regulation** have in promoting NDC quality?

- How can we address **labor market failures**, including credentials that are not well known or not trusted, and low wage occupations?

- What can different **stakeholders** each do, including providers, influencers, and consumers (e.g. employers, individuals, and public)?

What Is Missing?

- We would like to hear from you.

- Who else should be included in the NDC Quality Landscape?

- What other ways of promoting NDC quality should be considered?

- Other thoughts? Suggestions?

- Any and all feedback is welcome.

- Please take a moment to fill in the survey, and/or reach out to be part of the research. mvannoy@rutgers.edu

- Thank you!

Complete our survey:

For More Information…

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