



TUS

**Technological University of the Shannon:
Midlands Midwest**

Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Sionainne:
Lár Tíre Iarthar Láir

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TUS: Midlands Midwest Policy on Micro-credentials 2022-2024



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1.0 Introduction and Context

Continuing professional development (CPD) is long-established in industry; individuals keep track of their education and training as evidence of upskilling and personal development on an on-going basis. Most professional bodies have a requirement where members must maintain a CPD log in order to maintain their certifications. Traditionally, students would attend short courses and receive a Certificate of Attendance. Other CPD activities would include self-directed learning and other pursuits. Online courses offer certification that can be used as proof of course participation. The use of micro-credentials is one means of recognising participation in short courses and other CPD activity. In their electronic form, Digital Badges can be used to represent micro-credentials as a form of verifiable evidence of an achievement or activity.

This policy is informed by the recommendations made in the final European Commission Report (2020) *A European Approach to Micro-Credentials: Output of the Micro-credentials Higher Education Consultation Group*.

1.1 Shifting From the Traditional Higher Education Paradigm

The Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS) offers a range of programmes from Level-6 to Level-10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2021). The courses of study offered meet the needs of students and industry in the traditional way. In recent years there has been an increasing demand for flexible learning (Valtonen *et al* 2020). This approach allows the student to study specific modules and accumulate them for a higher award. In the TUS context, these modules have a minimum of 5 ECTS credits, with the minimum of 10 ECTS credits being used for a special purpose award (SPA).

There is an opportunity to further develop this approach for shorter programmes of study, where a student is awarded certification for learning undertaken attracting less than 10 ECTS credits.

1.2 The Right to Quality and Inclusive Education

According to the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission, 2017), “Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market”.

1.3 Strategic Context

The use of micro-credentials is in line with TUS's strategic vision as being "a leading provider of higher education that is student centred, research informed, industry relevant and accessible for all". The traditional higher education model dictates the development of programmes by means of the accumulation of (ECTS) credits. TUS follows the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) model. A typical full-time year of study requires the accumulation of 60 credits; a Level 6 course requires 120 credits, typically two years of study. A further 60 credits are required for an ordinary degree and a further 60 credits for an honour's degree. This equates to four years of full-time study.

There are, however, many (CPD-oriented) short courses and other activities that do not come under the NFQ umbrella, as typically, programme modules are not developed below 5 ECTS credits.

1.4 Meeting Industry Needs

In the Irish education context, major awards are well-established and aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2021). Internationally, it is recognised by the major universities (European Commission, 2018) that there is a need to certify other forms of shorter academic and other achievement through the adoption of micro-credentials. Such certifications may be issued in the form of Digital Badges, which are an electronic, formal recognition of achievement not covered under normal academic processes. These credentials are evidence of work undertaken and certified in a more formal setting than previous manual settings.

2.0 Scope

This policy covers the development, validation, issuing and management of micro-credentials having a credit value of less than 10 ECTS credits.

This policy describes the background and processes by which short courses and activities may be certified through the development, maintenance and issuing of micro-credential certifications. The policy is not intended for courses that attract 10 ECTS credits or more.

Micro-credentials may also be used to certify short courses developed by other institutions but should be presented in collaboration with TUS.

3.0 Definitions

The following definitions are used in the context of this policy.

3.1 Micro-credential

A micro-credential (European Commission, 2020) “is a proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards. The proof is contained in a certified document that lists the name of the holder, the achieved learning outcomes, the assessment method, the awarding body and, where applicable, the qualifications framework level and the credits gained.

Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared, are portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards”.

Micro-credentials that are issued by formal education institutions can be aligned with the ESG (ENQA, *et al.*, 2015), through the NQF.

In the context of this policy, a micro-credential is a qualification that attracts less than 10 ECTS credits.

3.2 Certification of Learning Outcomes

The process of issuing a certificate, diploma or title formally attesting that a set of learning outcomes (knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual have been assessed by a competent body against a predefined standard (European Commission, 2018).

3.3 Digital Badge

Digitally-signed credential electronic document which is issued by an awarding body to an individual to confirm and provide proof of their learning outcomes. Digital Badges are “online representations of learning experiences and activities that tell a story about the learner’s education and skills” (Gamrat *et al.*, 2014, p. 1136).

4.0 Micro-credential Structure and Content

4.1 Micro-credential Structure

The following list outlines the proposed EU standard of constitutive elements of micro-credentials (European Commission, 2020):

- **Identification** of the learner
- **Title** of the micro-credential
- **Country/region** of the issuer
- **Awarding body**
- **Date** of issuing
- **Notional workload** needed to be achieved the learning outcomes (in **ECTS**, wherever possible)
- **Level** (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (EQF and/or national qualifications framework; Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Education Area)
- **Learning outcomes**
- **Form of participation** in the learning activity (online, onsite or blended, volunteering, work experience)
- **Prerequisites:** needed to enrol in the learning activity
- **Type of assessment** (testing, application of a skill, portfolio, recognition of prior learning, etc)
- **Supervision and identity verification** during assessment (unsupervised with no identity verification, supervised online or onsite with identity verification)
- **Quality assurance** of the credential and, where relevant, of the learning content
- **Grade achieved**
- **Integration/stackability options** (standalone / independent micro-credential integrated, stackable towards another credential)
- Further information

The purpose of this metadata is to give the enquirer as much information as possible relating to the Micro-credential award.

4.2 Micro-credential Level

The NFQ level of the micro-credential award should be clearly stated when developing the micro-credential. The associated learning should be in line with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

4.3 Integration/Stackability Options

The default/stackability option should be set to “none” as default. In any other case, the normal course/module validation procedure must be undertaken.

5.0 The Micro-Credential Development Procedure and Governance

This Section outlines the process required to develop short courses or structured activity (valued at less than 10 ECTS credits).

5.1 The Micro-credential Validation and Development Process

The following outlines the process and oversight by which micro-credentials may be proposed, developed and issued:

- a) The relevant Department that wishes to develop a short course or structured activity submits the details of the micro-credential to the Programme Provision including Flexible Learning Sub-Committee of Academic Council (Appendix A).
- b) Following approval of the sub-committee, the Department may proceed with the development and running of the micro-credential activity. (Development guidelines are available in Appendix B)
- c) By default, a micro-credential is not associated with higher award. Academic Council approval must be sought if there is a requirement to this end.
- d) Should the relevant Department wish to collaborate with a third party in the development of and/or the running of a micro-credential, this is subject to Academic Council approval.

5.2 Stackable Micro-credentials

In the case where stackability or integration is required a validation process shall be required as per TUS Programme Validation process. This process is to ensure that the micro-credential is compatible with the proposed higher or integrated award.

6.0 Issuing of Micro-Credentials

On successful completion of the course or activity a student will receive a micro-credential certification. Details of the micro-credential achieved will be kept in the Examinations Office as part of the student's academic record.

6.1 The Issuing and Maintenance Procedure

The following outlines the process by which the Examinations Office will issue a micro-credential to the student:

- a) The course leader must be satisfied that the student has achieved the learning outcomes or goals as outlined in the micro-credential syllabus.
- b) A certificate is prepared for the student and signed off by the course leader.

- c) Micro-credential details shall be stored in a central repository, maintained by the Examinations Office.
- d) A micro-credential forms part of the student's academic record.
- e) Micro-credential statistics may be generated by the Examinations Office.
- f) Digital Badges, where applicable, may be issued to the student for the achievement of a micro-credential.

7.0 References

- 1) European Commission (2020). A European Approach to Micro-Credentials: Output of the Micro-credentials Higher Education Consultation Group. European Commission.
- 2) European Commission (2018). Europass Framework for Digitally-Signed Credentials
- 3) European Commission (2017). European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 Principles. Available at: [The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/euro-education-skills-training/en/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles)
- 4) ENQA *et al* (2015). Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), Brussels, Belgium.
- 5) Gamrat, C., Zimmerman, H.T., Dudek, J., & Peck, K. (2014). Personalized workplace learning: An exploratory study on Digital Badging within a teacher professional development program. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 45(6), 1136- 1148.
- 6) Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2021). "National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)" Available at: [https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-\(NFQ\).aspx](https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-(NFQ).aspx)
- 7) TUS: Midlands Midwest (2021) New Programme Validation Process Outline, Academic Years 2021-2023
- 8) Valtonen, T., Leppänen, U., Hyypiä, M. *et al*. Learning environments preferred by university students: a shift toward informal and flexible learning environments. *Learning Environ Res* **24**, 371–388 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-020-09339-6>

8.0 Appendices

Appendix A: Micro-Credential Application Details

Appendix B: Micro-Credential Design and Content Considerations

Appendix A: Micro-Credential Application Details

Application	Details
Micro-credential Code	
Faculty/Department (Issuer)	
Faculty/Department Contact Details	
Micro-credential Description	
Notional Workload	
ECTS Credits	
NFQ Level	
Associated integrated/higher awards	(Default: None)
Learning Outcomes	
Form of Participation	
Pre-requisites	
Type of assessment	
Supervision and identity verification	
Quality Assurance Measures	
Signature: Programme Coordinator	_____
Date	___/___/___

<p>Relevant supporting Documentation (including Syllabus (attached))</p> <p>(Please list and attach)</p>	
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Appendix B: Micro-Credential Design and Content Considerations

Inputs	Questions to Consider
Criteria	What is needed to earn the Micro-Credential?
Skills & Knowledge	What skills are represented?
Behaviours	What behaviours are encouraged?
Evidence	What artefact will show the criteria have been met?
Learning Pathways	What other Micro-credentials are associated with the Micro-Credential being developed?
Value	Is there a value in earning the Micro-Credential? Who is the issuer? Who is the earner? Who is the audience?
Endorsers	Who supports and recognises the Micro-Credential?
Channels	Where does a user find out about the Micro-Credential?
Awarded	Who awards the Micro-Credential and how?
Users	Who is the Micro-Credential for? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Earner - Issuer - Audience - Displayer
Resources & Sustainability	What resources are required?

The various inputs required to determine structure and potential viability of a Micro-Credential under consideration.