

## Guidelines for Design of Part Time Programmes

September 2016

### 1. Context

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) endeavours to ensure broad access to education for learners. In doing so DkIT provides a suite of part-time programmes to enable learners continue their life long education while engaged in employment. Such programmes also enhance the Institute's links with Industry, Business, Professional Bodies and the Community. Part-time programmes include both major awards delivered in part-time mode and continuing professional development programmes which are more usually non-major award types.

As the academic community at DkIT responds to the need to develop part time programmes a number of issues have arisen which require clarification in the design and validation of such programmes. The Guidelines serve to address some of the queries and to ensure consistency of quality across the Institute.

### 2. General Principles

While it is unlikely to be identical, the quality of a part-time learner's experience should be equivalent to that of a full-time learner. Effective support of part-time learners should be considered when designing and developing such programmes as their needs may differ significantly from those of a campus-based learner. Programme teams should consult with the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching during the development phase to ensure that the learning, teaching and assessment strategies are appropriate for the programme.

<https://www.dkit.ie/centre-learning-teaching/information-staff/best-practice-guides>

All part-time programmes should be placed at an appropriate level on the National Framework of Qualifications and have credit ratings compatible with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

### 3. Programme Structure

The design and validation of part-time programmes must be carried out in accordance with the DkIT Policy on the Design and Approval of Programmes (<https://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/academic-policies/policy-design-approval-programmes>).

Part-time programmes may be major or non-major awards. Major awards are those on the NQF framework with 60 ECTS credits or more, which in the case of taught programmes at DkIT include the Higher Certificate (NQF level 6, 120 credits), Ordinary Bachelor Degree (NQF level 7, 180 credits), Honours Bachelor Degree (NQF level 8, 180 or 240 credits), Higher Diploma (NQF level 8, 60 credits), Postgraduate Diploma (NQF level 9, 60 credits) and Taught Masters Degree (NQF level 9, 6-120 credits). Major awards of 60 credits are also possible where these 'add-on' to an existing major award, for example a 60 credit level 8 programme can exist where this 'adds' to a level 7 award and a 60 credit level 7 award can 'add' to a level 6 award.

In addition to these major awards, there are a range of other awards (often gained through part-time study) made at each of the NQF levels (6 to 9), known as minor, supplemental or special purpose awards. These awards normally have at least 10 ECTS credits and less than 90 credits. All non-major awards at level 6 are termed 'Certificate'. Non-major awards at levels 7 or above with less than 60 credits are also termed 'Certificate', those with in excess of 60 credits are termed 'Diploma'.



DkIT have adopted QQI conventions in relation to the definitions of non-major awards as follows:

<http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Descriptors%20-%20minor,%20special%20purpose,%20supplemental.pdf>

1. Minor Awards are always linked to major awards. They provide recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes, but not the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award. This recognition will have relevance in its own right. Minor awards may facilitate credit or exemptions towards other awards of DkIT and/or external academic professional bodies.
2. Special Purpose Awards are made for specific, relatively narrow purposes (e.g. legislative, regulatory, economic, social or personal learning requirements). They may or may not contain learning outcomes from a major award.
3. Supplemental Awards are for learning which is additional to or builds on that in a previous award. They often related to updating and refreshing knowledge or skills or to continuing professional development. They may comprise learning outcomes that also form part of major awards and are usually at the same NQF level as the major award they are linked to.

#### **4. National Quality Framework**

It is essential that the programme validation process agrees the level at which the award is placed on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

If a part time programme is being created using previously validated modules from other programmes, then the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level of the existing programmes and complexity of the modules must be considered. Programme designers should consider the following factors when deciding how to locate a programme on the NFQ:

1. The particular context or circumstances relating to the development of the programme may predetermine the level of the learning outcomes and/or the programme NQF level, for example, the learning outcomes for a special purpose award may be matched to a particular NFQ level for legislative reasons.
2. The purpose of the award and the overall objectives of the programme. Factors considered will include the expected or stated capacity of all learners entering the programme, any prerequisite or other specific entry requirements.
3. Links to another award where relevant. For example, if a minor award comprises learning outcomes at the introductory stage of a 180 credit level 7 Ordinary Bachelor Degree then by implication the level of the minor award is more likely to be level 6. If a minor award is linked to an add-on 60 credit Level 8 bachelor degree then the level of the minor award is level 8 by implication.

##### **4.1 Major Awards:**

The NFQ level descriptors of the framework are divided into three different types of learning outcomes, knowledge, skill and competence. These strands are further subdivided into sub-strands (e.g. knowledge-breath, competence-context, etc.). In a major award it is important to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes under each sub-strand although some may be more important than others, depending on the type of programme and its purpose. In the case of major awards consisting of more than one stage, progression of complexity in knowledge, skills and competencies should occur within each sub-strand over the duration of the programme. Therefore it is usual to have foundational or introductory modules in the first stage, progressing through intermediate modules to more advanced modules in the final stage. In accordance with academic council policy all credits on which the award are based must be at the level of the award (AC Motion 130.4, December 2012).

The NFQ level of a part-time major award which has a full-time equivalent will be at the same level as its full-time version.

## 4.2 Non-Major Awards:

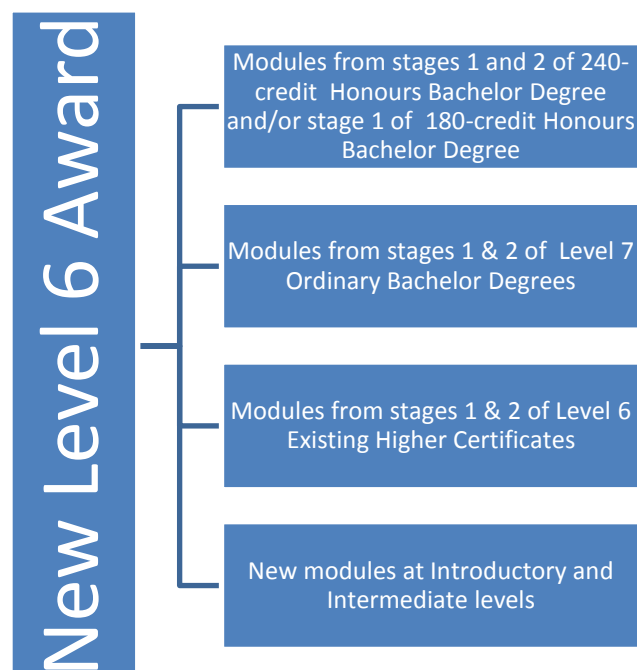
Major and minor awards can be differentiated from major awards by both the volume of the learning outcomes and comprehensiveness of the sub-strands. In the case of most minor, special purpose and supplementary awards, the focus is narrow and only a small number of learning outcome sub-strands over one or a number of NFQ levels will be met. Non-major awards do not require the full completion of all 8 strands of knowledge, skills and competencies defined for any level of the NQF levels. The learning outcomes for a non-major award should be mapped to outcomes achieved from the learning outcomes of the modules undertaken. If the sub-strands/learning outcomes defined for the award are from one level then that is the level of the award. If more than one sub-strand is defined across a number of NFQ levels then the following factors should be taken into account when deciding the level of the award:

1. Do the modules substantially span a stage of a programme (i.e. first year or final year) in which case the likely level of the programme NFQ is the year of the programme (i.e. Level 6 for introductory modules, level 8 for final undergraduate award year modules).
2. Do the modules build from foundational to advanced level within a narrowly defined knowledge, skill or competency within the NFQ descriptors? In such cases a vertical learning experience should be demonstrated, i.e. a logical progression from introductory to advanced. The development team should articulate clearly the sub-strands of knowledge, skills and competencies that the award is to satisfy. If the sub-strands of knowledge, skill and competence and / or learning outcomes defined for an award are from one level then the level to which the award is allocated is decided on the basis of that strand or those learning outcomes. If more than one sub-strand is defined across a number of levels or learning outcomes span a series of levels then a **best-fit principle** shall apply.

Examples:

A. A new award at NFQ Level 6 should consist of:

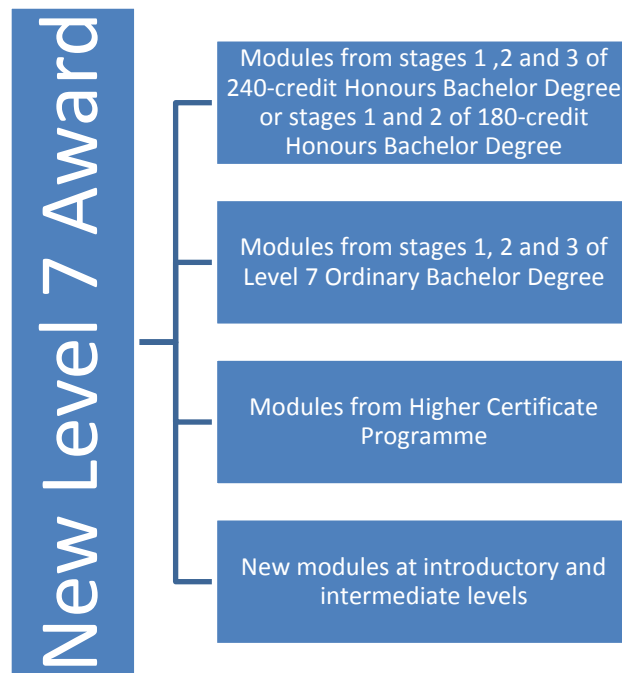
- Stage 1 / stage 2 modules from a 240-credit Honours Bachelor Degree and/or
- Stage 1 / stage 2 modules from an Ordinary Bachelor Degree and/or
- Stage 1 modules from a 180-credit Honours Bachelor Degree and/or
- Stage 1 / stage 2 modules from an existing Higher Certificate programme and/or
- New modules at introductory level



B. A new award at NFQ Level 7 should consist of:

- Stage 1, 2 and 3 modules from an Ordinary Bachelor Degree and/or
- Stage 1, 2 and 3 modules from a 240-credit Honours Bachelor Degree and/or
- Stage 1 and 2 modules from a 180-credit Honours Bachelor Degree and/or
- Modules from an add-on Ordinary Degree and/or
- Modules from a Higher Certificate programme.
- New modules at introductory and intermediate levels

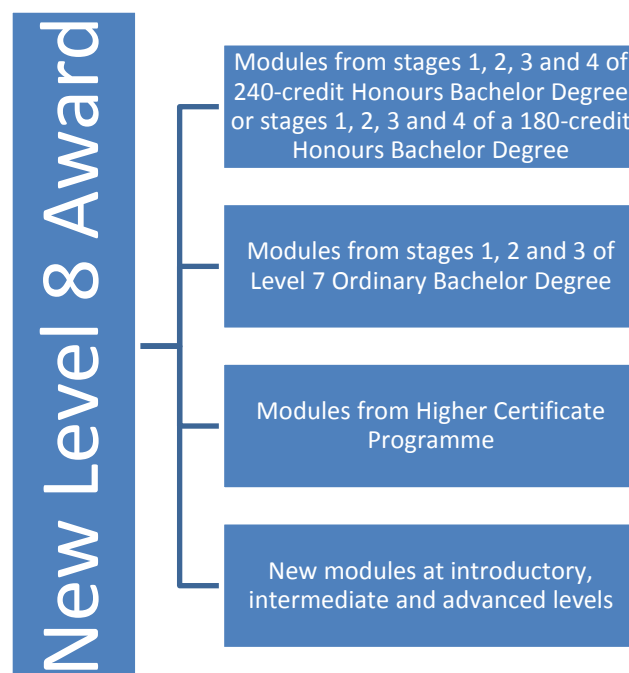
As a guide, at least one third of the credits should be from the award stage of existing Ordinary Degree programmes (or stage 2 of 180-credit Honours Degree programmes) and at least two thirds from stage 2 of Ordinary Degree programmes or higher. If new modules are being used, at least one third of the credits should be allocated to modules at an intermediate level of complexity.



C. A new award at NFQ Level 8 should consist of:

- Stage 1, 2, 3 and 4 modules from a 240-credit Honours Bachelor Degree and/or
- Stage 1, 2, and 3 modules from an Ordinary Bachelor Degree and/or
- Stage 1, 2 and 3 modules from a 180-credit Honours Bachelor Degree and/or
- Modules from an add-on Honours Bachelor Degree or Ordinary Bachelor Degree and/or
- Modules from a Higher Certificate Programme
- New modules at introductory, intermediate and advanced levels

As a guide, at least one quarter of the credits should be from the award stages of existing Honours Degree programmes and at least half of the credits should be from stage 3 of existing level 7 or level 8 programmes (or add-on level 7 programmes) or higher. If new modules are being used, at least one quarter of the credits should be allocated to modules at an advanced level of complexity.



#### **4.2. Programme Duration and Workload:**

Part-time programmes are often undertaken by learners who are in full-time or part-time employment, therefore such programmes will often have reduced class contact hours relative to the equivalent full-time programmes. However they may be of the same duration as the full-time equivalent, particularly where there is provision for work-based learning. Allocation of credits at DkIT is aligned to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). In the design of the part-time programme, the total workload hours per credit must be in accordance with the DkIT Policy relating to full time programme workloads per credit, i.e. 20-25 hours per ECTS credit. Consequently, a reduction in contact hours for a module will result in an increase in other workloads, e.g. independent student learning, directed reading, completion of assignments, work-based learning and online learning activities or a combination of these. Programme documents must provide details of the proposed activities in each case.

The total student workload for a part-time programme must be equivalent to the full-time equivalent and/or appropriate for the ECTS credits awarded. Therefore it is usual for a part-time programme to be of longer duration to a full-time programme of the same credits. Learner workload should be manageable and achievable. In cases where a part-time programme is delivered over the same duration as its full-time equivalent, flexible arrangements must be in place that would allow the learner to attend the programme over a longer time period should the need arise, e.g. in the case of learners who are employed in a full-time capacity.

Examples:

1. Minor award of 30 credits delivered over 2 semesters. In each semester, 3 modules of 5 credits each will be delivered. On the related major award each of these modules has 4 hours/wk of class contact. The minimum total workload is  $30 \times 20 = 600$  over 30 weeks = 20 hours per week. Various combinations of workload type are possible and depend on the learning outcomes of the programme and assessment strategy. For example, it could consist of 6 hours per week of class contact (i.e. half the normal hours) and 14 hours of student effort per week OR 2 hours of class contact, 4 hours of online learning and 14 hours of independent study and directed assignments each week.
2. Honours Bachelor Degree (4-year) delivered on a part-time basis over 6 years. The total ECTS credits is 240, therefore a total of 4800 workload hours are required. Over 6 years this is 800 per year or 400 per semester, i.e. 27 hours per week. Various combinations of workload type are possible and depend on the learning outcomes of the programme and assessment strategy. For example, it could be made up of 9 hours per week of class contact (i.e. 3 evenings per week) and 18 hours of 'other' types of work, e.g. employment-based activities, directed reading, assignments, etc.

## **6. Quality Assurance**

All of DkIT's policies and procedures for the quality assurance of full-time programmes also apply to part-time programmes. Assessment of learners on part-time programmes must be in appropriate for the award standard and carried out in accordance with DkIT Marks and Standards (<https://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/academic-policies/marks-standards>). Where a part-time programme consists of more than one stage, criteria for progression from one stage to the next must be specified in the programme document if these deviate from existing DkIT policy. The content, delivery mechanisms, student assessment procedures, admission requirements and arrangements for accrediting prior learning and work-based learning must be specified in the Programme Document.



## Guidelines on the design of Part-time Programmes

