

## MICRO-CREDENTIALS POLICY

<b>Date approved:</b>	20/06/2024	<b>Date policy will take effect:</b>	20/06/2024	<b>Date of Next Review:</b>	20/06/2025 (Pilot for 2024/2025)
<b>Approving Authority:</b>	Academic Council				
<b>Responsibility:</b>	Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Registrar				
<b>Consultation undertaken:</b>	Academic Quality Sub-committee				
<b>Supporting documents, procedures &amp; forms of this policy:</b>	Not applicable.				
<b>Reference(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy on the Design and Approval of Programmes;</li> <li>• Guidelines for Design of Part-Time Programmes;</li> <li>• Assessment and Standards;</li> <li>• Continuous Assessment Procedures;</li> <li>• Assessment and Learning Policy;</li> <li>• Examination and Assessment Policy and Procedure;</li> <li>• Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures;</li> <li>• External Examiner Duties and Procedures;</li> <li>• Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy and Practice;</li> <li>• Awarding Policy.</li> </ul>				
<b>Expiry Date of Policy (if applicable)</b>	Not applicable				
<b>Audience:</b>	Public – accessible to anyone				
<b>Category:</b>	Design and Approval of Programmes				

## Version Control and Change History

Version Control	Date Effective	Approved By	Description
1		Academic Council (meeting No. 194, 20/06/2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Policy approved for the first time.</li></ul>

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## Purpose and Scope of Policy

- The objective of this policy is to provide a quality assurance framework for the validation and certification of micro-credentials, units of learning that attract less than 10 ECTS credits.
- The quality assurance policies and procedures for units of learning greater than or equal to 10 ECTS credits are documented in the *Policy on the Design and Approval of Programmes and Guidelines for Design of Part-Time Programmes* (<https://www.dkit.ie/about-dkit/policies-and-guidelines/academic-policies.html>). This Policy should be read in conjunction with the *Policy on the Design and Approval of Programmes and Guidelines for Design of Part-Time Programmes* as appropriate
- This policy supports the piloting of Micro-credentials at DkIT for the academic year 2024/2025. The policy will be reviewed after one academic year of operation, in this case June 2025.
- This policy applies to all students and staff at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT).

## Background and Strategic Context

- Micro-credentials are a record '...of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning' (European Commission, 2022, p.13). They have the potential to offer increased flexibility and agility in responding to specific education and training needs (Carroll, et al., 2023). DkIT has seen increased demand for micro-credentials both from individual learners and from employers seeking to address skills needs for their organisations. In response, this policy will assist in the development of accredited existing and new learning pathways to form short, flexible learning experiences that are quality assured by the Institute, ensuring that learning is in line with skills needs.
- Micro-credentials can act as a mechanism for learners to update and diversify their skills portfolio flexibly and at their own pace, or for providers to expand their educational reach to disadvantaged or minority learner groups. For Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), micro-credentialling offers a novel and significant opportunity to augment educational offerings by drawing on existing programmes or developing entirely new ones. From a business perspective, it can also act as a new strategy for commercialising educational knowledge and expertise by diversifying educational packaging, delivery, and markets.
- The development and provision of micro-credentials is aligned with the DkIT Strategic Plan 2024-2028 (<https://www.dkit.ie/strategicplan>), specifically Strategic Pillar 3: Widening Access and Participation, Goal 3: To maintain a high-quality, inclusive and flexible student experience that supports all our students, holistically, and in their diversity, to achieve their potential.

## Micro-credentials-Definition and Granularity

- The European Council/Commission defines a micro-credential as follows (Council of the European Union, 2022, p.13; adopted by the European Commission in June 2023; adopted by DkIT at Academic Council Meeting No. 191, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2024).

- *‘Micro-credential’ means the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be stand-alone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.”*
- DkIT permits micro-credentials with an ECTS credit value of 10 or less, which are aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) (ENQA, 2015) through the National Framework of Qualifications (NQF) Level 6 to 9.

## Micro-credential Implementation Strategies

- Micro-credentials offer a new opportunity to innovate and grow a HEI’s programme portfolio while expanding their existing learner cohorts and reaching out to new and potentially under-served ones.
- The following micro-credentialing strategies have been identified at DkIT for implementation:
  - **Existing Accredited Modules Strategy:** Developing micro-credentials from existing validated programmes to offer “bite-sized” and flexible learning pathways and expand and widen access. Such micro-credentials could potentially be stackable toward the full award. Stackable micro-credentials can be combined towards a larger award.
  - **New Accredited Modules Strategy:** Designing novel micro-credentials in areas that address current or future skills needs. This strategy might include developing short programmes in trending subject areas or modules that appeal to particular industry sectors or new learner groups. Their primary intention is to upskill or cover urgent skills gaps. As such, these micro-credentials could be categorised as ‘just in time’ or ‘on demand’. They may or may not be stackable.

## Approval of Micro-credentials

- Best practice recommends that micro-credentials be subject to internal and external quality assurance by the system producing them and that the quality assurance processes must be fit-for-purpose, be explicitly documented and accessible and satisfy the needs and expectations of learners and stakeholders (European Commission, 2021). In addition, the European Commission (2021) recommends that micro-credentials be measurable, comparable and understandable containing clear information on learning outcomes, workload, content, level, and the learning offer, as relevant.
- This is in line with the QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines for providers of higher, further and English language education and training which DkIT under the 2012 Act are required to give due regard to.

- For the purpose of validation, a micro-credential has the following attributes:
  - ECTS credit value of 10 or less, which are aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) through the National Framework of Qualifications (NQF), Level 6 to 9 inclusive.
  - Designed to meet a current market need for which there is demonstrable learner demand and value.
  - Targeted to a clearly expressed learner profile and delivery and assessment methods appropriate to that learner profile.
  - Have a delivery mode of face-to-face, or preferably blended or fully online. It will not be awarded transnationally.
  - Comprising one or more modules which may either originate from previously validated programmes (i.e., Existing Modules) or which may be novel (i.e., New Modules).
  - With quality assurance procedures relevant to the delivery and assessment methodologies proposed.
- As a Designated Awarding Body (DAB) with authority to award qualifications at NFQ levels 6 through 9, DkIT already has in place comprehensive quality assurance processes, including robust policies and procedures for the design and approval of programmes. The validation process for micro-credentials will take account of these established processes but will streamline them as appropriate.

## Validation Procedure

- A micro-credential proposal will be submitted by a School/Department, a relevant individual or group within a School/Department or an interdisciplinary Schools group to the Registrar's Office using the *Micro-credentials Proposal* template (see Appendix 1).
- The Registrar's Office confirms that the *Micro-credentials Proposal* and associated documentation from the Institute Curriculum Management System (Akari Curriculum-<https://courses.dkit.ie/curriculum>) is completed fully in accordance with requirements. The Registrar's Office may revert to the proposer(s) should documentation be incomplete or clarification of an aspect of the proposal be required.
- **Micro-credentials (Existing Modules):** If the proposed micro-credential is comprised of a module (5 ECTS credits, 10 ECTS credits, 7.5 credits in exceptional circumstances, in accordance with Institute policy) that originates from a previously validated programme, whose validation has not expired, the micro-credential is deemed to be approved. The micro-credential will be ratified by the Academic Council and will be recorded on the relevant register(s) by the Registrar's Office.
- **Micro-credentials (New):** If the proposed micro-credential is comprised of a new module (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10 ECTS credits) the *Micro-credentials Proposal* and associated documentation will be sent to an External Discipline Expert by the Registrar's Office for desk

review. The Registrar's Office may seek External Discipline Expert nominations from the proposer(s). The External Discipline Expert will provide a written report on the proposed micro-credential to indicate approval or rejection of the micro-credential. Where a micro-credential is not approved by the External Discipline Expert, reasons should be provided with advice offered as to the amendments necessary to attain approval. Once approved, the micro-credential will be ratified by the Academic Council and will be recorded on the relevant register(s) by the Registrar's Office.

- **Stackable Micro-credentials:** In a case where stackability of micro-credentials is required a validation process shall be initiated in accordance with DkIT's Policy on the Design and Approval of Programmes. This ensures that the micro-credential is compatible with the proposed higher award.

## **Certification**

- Certification is a formal confirmation by an awarding body that the student has demonstrated the knowledge, skill and competence required, against a predefined standard, to achieve a named award.
- Micro-credentials will be considered by Examination Boards. On completion of the micro-credential a student will receive certification in the form of a transcript of results from the Examinations Office. The micro-credential will form part of the student's academic record.

## **Monitoring and Periodic Review**

- Micro-credentials will be monitored in accordance with DkIT's Monitoring of Programmes Policy, which includes providing opportunities for students to provide feedback on their learning.
- Proposed changes to micro-credentials must be submitted to the Programme Evaluation Sub-Committee (PEC) for consideration no later than at the March/April sub-committee meeting in order to be forwarded to Academic Council for approval.
- Micro-credentials will be reviewed on a periodic basis (i.e., Programmatic Review) in accordance with DkIT policy.

## **Digital Badges and Micro-credentials**

- Digital badges are a subcategory of micro-credentials. They provide digital evidence of outcomes following a short learning experience, but they are not credit bearing (i.e., not accredited) (see Figure 1).
- This policy is concerned with accredited (i.e., credit-bearing) micro-credentials only.

# MICRO-CREDENTIALS VS DIGITAL BADGES

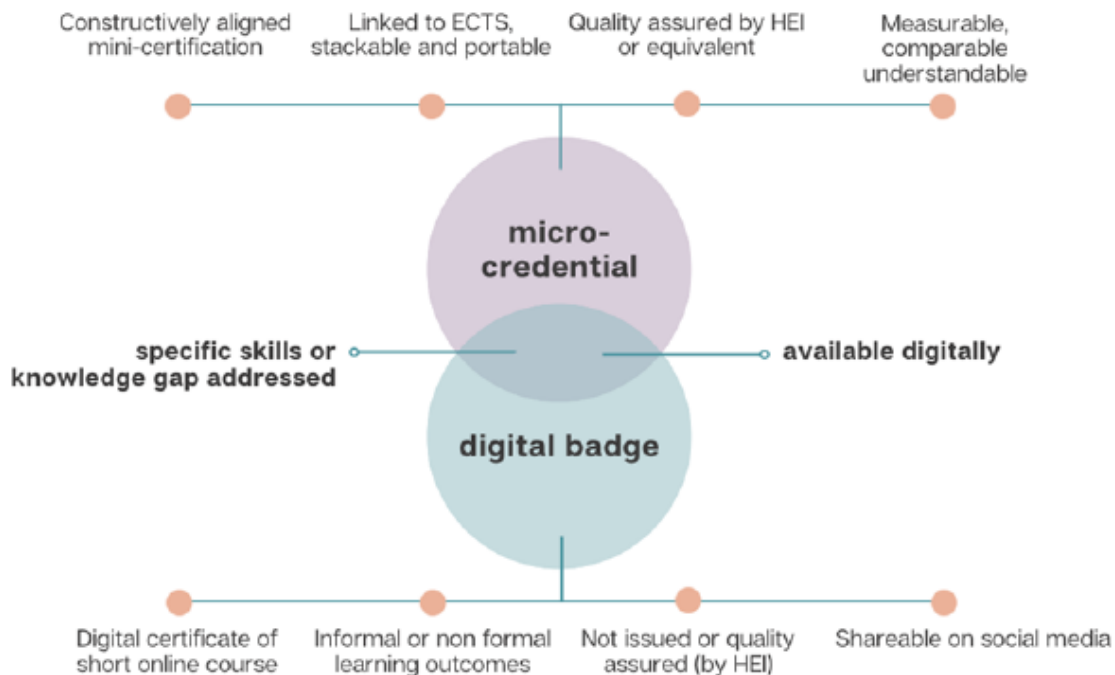


Figure 1: Micro-credentials vs Digital Badges (Source: Flynn et al. (2023) AISHE-J, Volume 15, No. 1 (Spring 2023), "Micro-credentials & Digital Badges: Definitions, Affordances and Design Considerations for Application in Higher Education Institutions").

## References

- European Commission. (2022). Proposal for a council recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/social-summiteuropean-pillar-social-rights-booklet\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/social-summiteuropean-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf).
- Carroll, S., Ginty, C. & Maguire, M. (2023). Unlocking Pathways: A Needs Analysis of Micro-credentials offered by the TU sector to address industry skill needs in Ireland (Report No. 231v1) N-TUTORR. Available Unlocking Pathways: N-TUTORR micro-credentials needs analysis report (<https://www.transforminglearning.ie/>)

## Appendix 1: Micro-credentials Proposal Template



### Section 1: Micro-credential Details

(Note: No response need exceed 500 words)

<b>School:</b>					
<b>Department:</b>					
<b>Head(s) of Department/Head(s) of Section:</b>					
<b>Micro-credential Title</b>	<b>NFQ Level</b>	<b>ECTS</b>	<b>ISCED</b>	<b>Delivery Mode</b> Face-to-Face/ Blended / Online	<b>First Intake Date</b> DD/MM/YYYY

<b>Brief Synopsis of Micro-credential</b>
<b>Rationale for Micro-credential</b> (Include evidence of learner demand and / or employment opportunities for graduates)
<b>Target Learner Profile</b> (Make as explicit as possible. Relate to suitability for delivery methodologies)
<b>Entry Requirements</b> (Including mathematical, ICT or English language proficiency as appropriate)
<b>Student Supports</b> (Detail the student supports available)
<b>Quality Assurance</b> (Detail how the micro-credential will the quality assured (Programme Board including student feedback, etc. Indicate who is responsible for the micro-credential and how its ongoing delivery will be monitored)

<b>Resources</b> <i>(Detail Facilities and staff necessary to deliver the Micro-credential)</i>
<b>Learner Information</b> <i>(Detail how the Micro-credential will be described to learners in any marketing / promotional material)</i>
<b>Other Information</b> <i>(Include any other information deemed to be relevant to the proposal)</i>

<b>1. Is this Micro-credential derived from an existing validated programme(s)?</b> <i>(Indicate with an "x")</i>	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>	
<b>2. Is the Micro-credential a new module?</b> <i>(Indicate with an "x")</i>	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>	
<b>3. Is it intended for the Micro-credential to be stackable?</b> <i>(Indicate with an "x")</i>	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>	

If the selection above was 1 please identify the relevant programme(s):

Programme Code	Programme Title	ECTS	Validation Date <i>(DD/MM/YYYY)</i>

## Section 2: Module Descriptor

*(Include module descriptor from the Institute Curriculum Management System (Akari Curriculum))*

See module descriptor from the Institute Curriculum Management System (Akari Curriculum).

**Submission approved by:**

**Signed:**

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<name>  
Head of School of <school-name>

**Date:** <date>

**Signed:**

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<name>  
Head of Department of  
<department-name>

**Date:** <date>