MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester

# Microcredentials Guidance

## Contents


Principles for the delivery of microcredentials ..... 2

1. Relevance and Industry Alignment ..... 2
2. Learner-Centred design ..... 2
3. Prepared for stackability ..... 2
4. Online, blended delivery modalities ..... 2

Principles for Learning Design and Development of microcredentials ..... 3

1. Competency-Based Learning ..... 3
2. Contextualised learning ..... 3
3. Assessment ..... 3
4. Evaluation ..... 3
5. Quality assurance and standards of microcredentials ..... 3

Microcredential Proposal Process ..... 4

1. Initial Scoping and Internal Stakeholder Engagement (School or Faculty) ..... 4
2. Proposal Documentation (Academic Lead/Proposal Owner) ..... 4
3. Approval Stage (School, Faculty with specialist input as required) ..... 4
4. Design and Development (Academic, Education Development Team) ..... 5

Related links ..... 5


Microcredentials offer The University of Manchester an opportunity to expand lifelong learning and meet evolving industry and learner needs. These flexible, non-credit bearing options support targeted upskilling of learners and are aligned with market demand. The framework outlined in this document emphasises the aim of microcredentials to be relevant to employers, focussed on learner-centred design and the need for rigorous quality assurance. With future potential for stackability into credit-bearing pathways and a delivery model focused on online, asynchronous learning, the university can provide accessible, high-quality learning experiences.

The table below identifies the design criteria for a microcredential delivered by The University of Manchester.

| Microcredentials | |
|---|---|
| **Key Purpose** | Structured courses intended for specific learners (offered either direct to consumers and or direct to employers) with validated output. |
| **Fees** | Agreed at the point of design and based on cost model and intended learners. |
| **Hours of Learning** | 50 hours (40 hours of learning and 10 hours for assessment tasks) |
| **Assessment** | Required |
| **Validation of Learning** | Yes (Microcredential Certificate, digital/physical) |
| **Academic Credit** | No (non-credit bearing only) |
| **Mode(s)** | Online Asynchronous or Online Synchronous |

This guidance distinguishes between mandatory requirements (approval process) and recommended design principles. Mandatory requirements include completion of the agreed proposal and approval documentation, appropriate academic approval through the relevant School, Faculty, completion of required costing and resource considerations, and compliance with relevant University quality, legal, data, branding and accessibility requirements. Recommended design principles include preferred learning hours, online or blended delivery models, assessment approaches, co-design with employers or learners, and preparation for future stackability where appropriate. Any exceptions should be justified within the proposal documentation.

# Principles for the delivery of microcredentials

The following principles have been agreed for the development and delivery of microcredentials at the University of Manchester:

## 1. Relevance and Industry Alignment

Microcredentials must be driven by and respond to employer needs and identified skills gaps. Co-design with employers is recommended, or the formation of an industry advisory group to inform and steer development and design. Due to the non-credit bearing nature of microcredentials, they may be studied in addition to or complementary to other formal qualifications. Due to their strong focus on employer needs they may have a significant component of learning that reflects on the application in practice and the individual's workplace.

## 2. Learner-Centred design

Accessibility and inclusivity should be considered in the design and delivery, in line with best practice of online course design. Learner requirements must be the focus of design, enabling them to study flexibly around their existing commitments. Learners will not be fully registered students and will not have access to all student services (e.g. DASS and counselling for example). Some library access may be facilitated to allow access to relevant journals or articles as needed.

## 3. Prepared for stackability

Currently, microcredentials are non-credit bearing, however in preparing for stackability they might be themed in specific subject areas to develop a suite of products. This allows future design to potentially include a relevant capstone assessment which may be undertaken to receive recognition for prior learning and allow porting of that prior learning towards other credit-bearing programmes.

## 4. Online, blended delivery modalities

Microcredentials are recommended to follow an online, blended approach with a large focus on asynchronous learning. Opportunities for online synchronous sessions can be made available. These can be recorded to support flexibility in learning. Exceptions can be made for an in-person approach for specific examples or as per the needs of learners or employers. Learners are required to participate in a defined timeframe. This period will be identified and agreed as part of the design process, however it should not routinely exceed 4 months of study time.

# Principles for Learning Design and Development of microcredentials

## 1. Competency-Based Learning

Learning outcomes are to be aligned with competencies from relevant professional bodies where appropriate, and co-design (with learners and or employers) is recommended where possible.

## 2. Contextualised learning

The curriculum should support learners to apply and reflect on their learning in their own context or work-based practice. In cases where this is not possible – either when the learner is not in work or is studying in an area unrelated to their current practice – the provision of relevant case studies or group projects is recommended.

## 3. Assessment

The following principles are recommended regarding assessment:

- Designed for authenticity and applied to relevant contexts.
- Emphasis on assessing ILOs (we recommend two learning outcomes for a 50h microcredential).
- Support social issues in local, regional, or international locations.
- Have learner choice embedded (recognising whilst we need some flexibility, academic teams are unlikely to be able to support free choice, also noting professional bodies may require a particular assessment type).
- Limited to one assessment per microcredential.
- Quality assured to a high standard.
- Approved by relevant accreditors.
- Account for approximately 20% of the total learning hours.

## 4. Evaluation

It is recommended to have an end of course evaluation, running for 2 weeks prior to the microcredential ending.

## 5. Quality assurance and standards of microcredentials

Microcredentials are embedded with data that allows validation of the learning undertaken, ensuring that the microcredential is transparent, credible, and easily recognisable by employers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders. Relevant data will include, but not be limited to:

- Hours of learning
- Equivalent level of study (Microcredentials at levels 4-8 will be offered at UoM)
- Learning outcomes
- Date of validity (expiry date)
- Place of study
- Non-credit bearing
- Industry or professional body recognition (optional)

# Microcredential Proposal Process

The Education Development Team, Lifelong Learning and Continuing Professional Education colleagues will work together with the proposer to develop the microcredential proposal and the approved programme. Therefore, in addition to School and Faculty (where academic approval sits) they are an important stakeholder in the approval process. Specialist input should be sought early, where it is relevant to the nature of the proposal, including from Manchester Online where they should be engaged as a strategic, product and digital delivery consultee where relevant, particularly where there is a clear relationship to any potential future credit-bearing or recognition route.

The steps outlined below identify the process of development and approval of microcredentials.

## 1. Initial Scoping and Internal Stakeholder Engagement (School or Faculty)

- Identify the opportunity and ensure alignment with school/faculty/institutional principles and strategy including cost/resource considerations
- Contact Faculty Teaching and Learning team for advice on how to proceed with the proposal.
- Engage early with Manchester Online (MO), Lifelong Learning Business Engagement Manager and Education Development Marketing Team to assess market potential.
- Where external partners, employers or other providers are involved, proposers should also consider brand, reputational, legal and due-diligence risks, including any proposed use of the University name, certificate or digital badge.

An Expression of Interest form (EOI) including an initial costing model should be completed and discussed and agreed with Head of School, Head of School Operations and Education Development Team.

- If required, a stakeholder meeting should be set up to discuss the proposal, particularly if it aligns to existing on campus offerings, is across multiple faculties or requires input from specific stakeholders (timetabling/IS/library)[1]
- EOI form to be completed and submitted to School/Faculty for Approval to Proceed.

## 2. Proposal Documentation (Academic Lead/Proposal Owner)

- Once Approval to Proceed has been given, proposers should work with the Education Development Team to conduct collaborative workshops to refine the proposal, including defining roles for academic delivery, digital infrastructure, ILOs, assessment strategy and learner support.
- At this stage, co-design opportunities with industry partners can also be explored, as appropriate.

## 3. Approval Stage (School, Faculty with specialist input as required)

- The Microcredentials Approval Form and costing model should be submitted (along with the initial EOI) for approval to School and Faculty. All stakeholders involved in sign-off should:
    - Take into account strategic fit, academic quality, resource needs and market alignment
    - Ensure compliance with QAA microcredential characteristics statement, internal QA frameworks and UoM microcredentials principles.

[1] Whilst it is not envisaged that there will be an impact on other stakeholders as microcredentials are expected to be delivered online, there may be instances where access to library resources or space are required to support some on-campus delivery. These requirements should be discussed at the outset and factored into any costs and approval documentation

- Provide formal approval or feedback for revision.

## 4. Design and Development (Academic, Education Development Team)

- Finalise content and delivery plans.
- Finalise evaluation approach and embed in the design
- Pilot the microcredential if applicable.
- Prepare for launch via relevant Faculty pages/ University-wide pages and business engagement channels.

# Related links

The following resources have been used in developing this guidance:


- Australian National Framework for Microcredentials
- European Framework for Microcredentials
- Greal, R., Olcott, D. A strategic reset: microcredentials for higher education leaders. *Smart Learn. Environ.* **9**, 9 (2022).
- QAA Statement on Microcredentials
- University of Lincoln Microcredentials Quality Manual


| Version amendment history: Microcredentials Guidance | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Version** | **Date** | **Reason for change** |
| | | |

| Document control box | |
|---|---|
| Policy / Procedure title: | Microcredentials Guidance |
| Date approved: | November 2025 |
| Approving body: | Teaching and Learning Strategy Committee (TLSC) |
| Implementation date: | November 2025 |
| Version: | 1.0 |
| Supersedes: | |
| Previous review dates: | |
| Next review date: | November 2029 |
| Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations | Undergraduate Degree Regulations<br>Postgraduate Degree Regulations |
| Related Policies: | N/A |
| Related Procedures and Guidance: | Microcredentials Expression of Interest Form<br>Microcredentials Approval Form |
| Policy owner: | Head of Student and Academic Services (SAS) |
| Lead contact: | Sarah Williams, Teaching and Learning Manager (Programme Enhancement), Teaching and Learning Delivery |

MG/JH February 2022 v1.0