Digital Credentials Policy

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Effective from 15 October 2026

Read this if: you are a staff member, student, or learner who needs to understand how digital credentials, including digital badges and certificates of recognition, are created, approved, or issued at The University of Manchester. This policy outlines the standards all digital credentials must meet and the process for approving them. It is relevant if you design, approve, issue, or earn a digital credential.

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Definitions

Key terms

Digital Credential: An electronic artefact that recognises a learner's achievement of specific skills, knowledge, or learning activities. It includes required metadata and can be shared online to demonstrate the accomplishment. This may include digital badges, Micro-credentials, or certificates of recognition, whether credit or non-credit bearing.

Credential Earner: The person who receives a digital credential.

Credential Owner: The Department/School/Faculty/ Directorate that owns the activity the digital credential is for.

Credential Issuer: The person authorised to issue a digital credential.

Certificate of Recognition: A certificate of recognition is an electronic certificate that recognises a skill, achievement, or learning activity not associated with a Degree Award. It includes key details about what has been completed and can be shared online to show the accomplishments of the Credential Earner.

Digital Badge: A digital badge is an electronic award that recognises a skill, achievement, or learning activity. It includes key details about what has been completed and can be shared online to show the accomplishments of the Credential Earner.

Metadata: The attributes that must be included in all digital credentials issued by The University of Manchester. For example, the name of the activity, the learning hours, and the learning outcomes (see 2.3.1 for full list).

Lifetime Credential: A digital credential that represents skills or achievements that do not require regular renewal and therefore have no expiration date.

Micro-credential: A short, focused qualification that certifies specific knowledge, skills, or competencies gained through a defined learning activity. Micro-credentials are designed to be flexible, accessible, and stackable,

allowing learners to develop targeted expertise that may contribute to broader qualifications or professional development pathways.

Acronyms

TLSC: Teaching, Learning, and Students Committee

MDCSG: Manchester Doctoral College Strategy Group

RSSG: Research Staff Strategy Group

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

1.1.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure a consistent approach for the design, approval, issue and withdrawal of digital credentials by The University of Manchester.

1.1.2 This policy seeks to ensure digital credentials issued by The University of Manchester meet agreed principles, standards for quality, and design (set out in Section 2.3) so that learning recognised in this way is credible and upholds the global reputation of The University of Manchester.

1.2 Scope

1.2.1 This policy defines the circumstances under which a digital credential may be issued by The University of Manchester and sets out the principles for design (see Section 2.3) to which all digital credentials must conform. It also outlines the approval process that must be followed for the introduction and withdrawal of new digital credentials.

1.3 Applicability

1.3.1 This policy applies to all digital credentials issued in the name of The University of Manchester, whether associated with credit or non-credit bearing learning.

2.0 The Policy

2.0.1 Digital credentials allow the University of Manchester to recognise the achievements of students, postgraduate researchers, staff members and other

University learners for defined learning activities that enable them to acquire skills, attributes or behaviours in line with agreed learning outcomes.

2.0.2 Issuing credentials digitally allows them to be easily shared electronically via social media platforms, or to enhance a learner's CV. Digital credentials at The University of Manchester are designed to allow stakeholders to quickly understand which skills and competencies the credential represents.

2.0.3 Digital credentials can be issued by a designated member of staff once the learner has satisfied the criteria for earning the credential.

2.1 Approval Process for New Digital Credentials

2.1.1 The Digital Credentials Procedure provides full details of the approval process for all digital credentials.

2.1.2 All approved digital credentials must comply with The University of Manchester templates aligned to agreed branding conventions. The central Marketing Team must approve any exceptions to the standard template design before it can be authorised for use.

2.1.3 The Digital Credentials Group provide oversight of the approval of all new digital credentials to ensure they are aligned to the University's strategy and conform to the requirements of this policy. Before a digital credential is available to be issued to learners, it must have been approved by the Digital Credentials Group.

2.1.4 The designated member of staff authorised to issue the digital credential, the 'Credential Issuer', will be identified as part of the approval process. This will be the usually be the Head of School/Department, or their nominee.

2.1.5 Proposals for new digital credentials must first gain approval of the relevant governance structures before submission to the Digital Credentials Group for final approval. This includes the School and Faculty for programme components, or the appropriate Department and Directorate for areas outside of the School and Faculty structure (for example, the Library, the Students' Union, MDCSG). For digital credentials delivered as part of a micro-credential, proposers must follow the micro-credential approval process before submitting an application: Micro-credentials Guidance (The University of Manchester).

2.1.6 The Digital Credentials Procedure includes a standard application form that must be submitted to ensure the required metadata is captured.

2.2 Approval Process for New Digital Credential Categories

2.2.1 Digital credentials awarded at The University of Manchester will fall into one of the following categories.

a) Achievement - credentials recognise the achievement of specific skills or knowledge through the completion of formal learning.

b) Professional development - credentials recognise the learning activities people engage in to develop or maintain their skills and knowledge.

c) Co-curricular experiences - credential recognise defined experiences completed by a learner during their learner journey at the University.

d) Curricular experiences – credentials recognise the successful completion of defined programme requirements

e) Milestone - credentials recognise the achievement of a significant milestone within a learner's qualification.

2.2.2 The Digital Credentials Group have the authority to approve new categories of digital credentials.

2.3 Digital Credential Features

2.3.1 All approved digital credentials will include the following metadata to ensure they are aligned with global digital badging frameworks, such as those used globally for example, in the EU, Australia and New Zealand:

- Name of the programme
- Duration/Learning hours
- Mode of delivery
- Location
- Description of the programme
- Learning Outcomes
- Achievement measure/assessment
- Audience

- Quality Assurance mechanism, including quality standards
- Partners/Client
- Date of issue
- Length of credential

2.3.2 Digital credentials that are earned in collaboration with other institutes, professional bodies, companies or organisations will be clearly stated and described. The level of engagement of any external organisation collaborating with or endorsing the badging process must be clearly reflected in the digital credential information. The logo of the external organisation may be included in the credential design (with permission) alongside The University of Manchester branding.

2.3.3 All digital credentials approved by The University of Manchester will comply with the Open Badges Standards, ensuring their portability for the Credential Earner and that they are easily verifiable by external parties.

2.3.4 Digital credentials issued by The University of Manchester must demonstrate they have value by representing meaningful, and verifiable achievement of specific learning outcomes which are captured in the credential metadata. As part of the approval process, the Digital Credentials Group will determine the level of attainment required to earn the credential, how this will be measured/assessed, and that the amount of effort it takes to earn the badge will ensure its value. Effort may not always be measured in hours, however, a standard digital credential may typically reflect approximately 20-30 hours of effort by the earner and may include the production of an artefact.

2.3.5 Digital credentials may be issued either on a permanent basis (known as a 'lifetime' credential) or will expire after a specified period, for example, this would be appropriate for health and safety courses that need to be completed every two years. The length of the credential will be agreed by the Digital Credentials Group as part of the approval process. The expiry date, if applicable, must be clearly stated in the credential information.

2.3.6 Once a digital credential has been issued to the Credential Earner, the metadata of that credential cannot be changed by a third person or the Credential Earner. It is at the Credential Earner's own discretion if they want to share the credential with third parties.

2.4 Annual Review of Digital Credentials

2.4.1 Digital credentials issued by the University of Manchester are subject to an annual review process to ensure they remain aligned to the University Strategy.

2.4.2 The Digital Credential Group is responsible for all digital credentials issued by the University. The group will conduct an annual review of the digital credentials portfolio to ensure all credentials are aligned to the University's 2035 strategy: From Manchester for the world.

2.5 Withdrawal of Digital Credentials

2.5.1 The Digital Credentials Group may withdraw an approved category or an approved individual digital credential from those in approval.

2.5.2 If the Digital Credentials Group withdraws a category of credentials or an approved individual digital credential, previously issued credentials will remain on record and valid until their expiration date, but no new credentials will be issued under that category or name.

2.5.3 The University reserves the right to revoke a digital credential in line with Ordinance XXXVIII if displayed inappropriately as part of an online profile. The University will take action against any individual wrongly displaying a plagiarised digital credential that has not been legitimately earned.

3.0 Monitoring Compliance

3.0.1 Adherence to this document is expected and should be monitored by Heads of Schools (or their delegates) as part of a wider quality assurance process which supports the Annual Academic Assurance Process including Schools, Faculties, Teaching Learning and Students Committee, Manchester Doctoral College Strategy Group, Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) for Teaching, Learning and Students, AQSC for Research, and Senate.

4.0 Supporting documents and sources of support

- Digital Credentials Procedure
- Open Badges Standard: Open Badges | 1EdTech

- Micro-credentials Guidance: Micro-credentials Guidance (The University of Manchester)

- Digital Credentials Proposal Request Form (The University of Manchester)

Version amendment history box and Document control box

Version amendment history: Digital Credentials Policy		
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1.0	October 2026	New policy approved at Senate.
1.1	Add date	

Document control box	
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Policy owner:	Head of Student and Academic Services (SAS)
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