Microcredentials and Short Courses Procedure

Version 1.0  Effective 3 November 2021

Are Local Documents on this subject permitted? ☑ Yes, however Local Documents must be consistent with this University-wide Document ☐ No

1. Background
UNSW has long offered a range of short courses for continuing professional development (CPD) and executive education.

UNSW offers microcredentials and short courses to provide study opportunities for learners seeking relevant knowledge and skills in smaller, more flexible, and more accessible components. The key intent of these offerings is to provide options for rapid reskilling, upskilling, and complementary or lifelong learning in line with industry and societal needs.

Other objectives associated with these offerings are to:
- increase potential pathways for entry into award programs, in part to support diversification goals and to embrace new types of learners.
- open up access to UNSW to learners who may otherwise not consider studying with the University, particularly from socially under-represented and marginalised groups.
- leverage new education opportunities that emerge through partnerships with industry, employers, professional associations, and other higher education providers.
- open new avenues for research informed learning and promote areas of research strength.
- use them as a way of testing new markets, models, and disciplines
- generate new revenue opportunities, to act as lead generators where appropriate, and increase UNSW’s market presence.

2. Objective

The Higher Education sector (globally and domestically) is working towards common and unified standards to address issues of portability, currency, consistency, accessibility, and coherence. A consistent and formalised approach at UNSW will help us to fit more seamlessly into this broader ‘shorter forms of learning’ landscape as it develops and matures.

Microcredentials share many of the characteristics of award study, with their key distinguishing feature being that they are in smaller units of measure than the typical UNSW award course. Because of the smaller volume of learning and the type of student these offerings attract – who typically value flexibility and convenience – there is a need to put in place fit-for-purpose processes that balance the need for agility and flexibility, including the need to develop quick-to-market offerings in response to demand or opportunity, alongside appropriately rigorous governance.

This framework is especially important for microcredentials as these have the potential to be recognised as formal learning under recognition of prior learning provisions, with the potential for stackability and pre-defined credit arrangements. Therefore, strong rigor around approval and quality assurance is critical.

The remainder of this framework sets out the high-level principles and processes for the development, approval, delivery, and certification of microcredentials and short courses at UNSW.

3. Definitional Explanations

3.1. Microcredentials

Microcredentials are discrete certificated units of assessed learning that are additional, alternative, complementary to, separate from or a component part of a formal qualification. Microcredentials focus on small, discrete components of learning leading to specific coherent and documented sets of skills, competencies, and knowledge. Nanocredentials are a form of microcredential that are smaller in volume of learning (see 4.1 below).

Microcredentials may be credit-bearing or non-credit-bearing. Non-credit-bearing microcredentials are assessed and warrant a set of learning outcomes, but they do not promote pre-defined credit towards a formal qualification.

3.2. Short Courses

Short courses are UNSW courses other than those that are part of accredited UNSW awards or microcredentials. They are undertaken by learners to support work, career, lifelong learning and/or personal goals. While short courses should have clearly articulated learning outcomes and may sometimes be assessed, what distinguishes them from microcredentials is that they are not warranted according to the same rigorous assessment required for microcredentials, nor are they subject to the same quality assurance requirements.

Short courses involve curated content that is packaged, promoted, and delivered as branded “UNSW Short Course offerings” with a defined set of learning goals. Thus, short courses typically involve more structure than many other more ad hoc professional development and peer networking activities (such as lecture series, conferences, workshops, and symposiums) which tend to be more spontaneous and flexible in their content and learning outcomes.
4. General Principles

Microcredentials and short courses should incorporate best practice in curriculum design and development. They should deliver a high-quality educational experience that is equivalent to the University’s award offerings, and they are required to be consistent with our TEQSA obligations. Delivery may be in various modes and formats and should ideally be designed for convenience and flexibility with clear advice about delivery arrangements provided to learners.

Convening, teaching and assessment must be overseen by qualified UNSW academic staff. This does not preclude delivery by contracted staff and practitioners, as long as there is appropriate UNSW staff oversight to manage any potential academic and reputational risk. Workload allocations should be a consideration for UNSW staff who are delivering these offerings alongside other teaching activities and responsibilities.

Microcredentials and short courses may be derived from the unbundling of component parts of award courses. This allows for the leveraging of existing content, intellectual property, and expertise to support quick lead times while also providing the capacity to extend market reach and attract new learners. Note that, due to licensing restrictions, it is not permissible to reuse copyrighted materials or Leganto reading lists in these unbundled offerings. Staff should refer to the library’s Open Online Course Resources guide for advice about unmediated support and resources.

Offerings should be aligned with university and faculty strategies. They should normally be financially and commercially viable, and generally driven by market demand. By exception, they may be approved with a strong strategic case rather than for commercial reasons.

Learners enrolled in microcredentials (or short courses) are not considered to be award students of the University. Any implications of this for insurance, licensing, copyright, and the provision of services should be checked with the relevant University offices including IT, Insurance, and Student Services. Due to licencing restrictions, the library is not able to offer services or scholarly information resources to teaching staff and learners in these offerings. These offerings will not be available for enrolment in myUNSW/SIMS as there is a need to distinguish clearly between the University’s award offerings and microcredentials and short courses, and because of differences in funding and government reporting requirements.

Microcredentials and short courses should not be publicly described using AQF nomenclature or implied to be an AQF qualification until or unless Commonwealth Government legislation determines otherwise. Learning outcomes should nonetheless be aligned to AQF learning outcomes for equivalency at the relevant level. Alignment to AQF specifications is a quality assurance measure only.

The language of instruction will be English unless explicitly approved as an exception, in which case the language of instruction should be clearly acknowledged on certification documentation or badges.

Appropriate advice about assumed knowledge or entry criteria should be published to ensure that learners are equipped with the necessary prior skills and knowledge. The assumed level of English Language competency is equivalent to the University’s minimum requirement. It is recommended that learners are referred to University resources on academic literacy and integrity as part of orientation materials and advice prior to commencement of learning.

4.1. Key Principles specific to Microcredentials

Microcredentials should have a stated audience and purpose. Learning outcomes should be clearly articulated and supported by constructively aligned learning and teaching, and assessment strategies. For the purposes of quality assurance only, the learning outcomes should be aligned for equivalency to AQF learning outcomes at the relevant level, however, care should be taken not to misrepresent the credential as a full AQF qualification. Misrepresentation may be avoided through the inclusion of clear disclaimer text on relevant promotional content and certification documents.

The University’s standard student workload expectation (25 hours per unit of credit including class contact hours, other learning activities, preparation and time spent on all assessable work) should be used on a pro-rata basis for award course equivalency measures. Assessment should also be proportionate.

A microcredential should typically be 75 hours workload (3 units of credit equivalent). Smaller workload credentials may be offered, referred to as nanocredentials. Nanocredentials are typically
37.5 hours (1.5 units of credit equivalent). Credentials that are smaller than 37.5 hours workload (1.5 unit of credit equivalent) may not be stacked towards, that is contribute to pre-defined credit towards, a UNSW program.

Microcredentials should not be co-taught with award courses and may not be included in the academic rules for award programs (they have a credit relationship only with award offerings). They are not currently eligible for commonwealth supported places.

5. Assessment

For microcredentials, recognised credentials are awarded and thus the integrity of assessment must be assured through the application of equivalent measures and standards to those used in award courses. Care should be taken to ensure that student expectations and rights around assessment are reasonably equivalent to those for standard UNSW award courses.

Microcredentials should include a summative assessment component with robust and appropriate validation to assure achievement of the stated learning outcomes. Microcredentials may only be awarded where the required assessments are passed and learning outcomes are achieved.

6. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Microcredentials may be stacked or aggregated for credit towards a UNSW award program in accordance with the requirements of the Recognition of Prior Learning (Coursework Programs) Procedure. They may also be used as part of a portfolio of evidence towards meeting admission criteria. Standard UNSW expectations for RPL will apply including the application of criteria such as equivalency of standard of learning, learning outcomes (conceptually mapped to the relevant AQF level from sub-degree foundational up to masters level), content, hours of learning, and assessments. For microcredentials to be eligible for specified credit, they must aggregate to the equivalent of at least 6 units of credit. This is because credit towards UNSW programs is only granted for whole courses, not part courses.

Short courses are not classified as formal learning for the purposes of recognition of prior learning (RPL) because the requirements for quality assurance and assessment are not equivalent to the requirements for microcredentials. They may sometimes be used for RPL under the provisions for non-formal learning in the Recognition of Prior Learning (Coursework Programs) Procedure. This may be the case where they contribute to a comprehensive portfolio of learning activities which evidence an appropriate aggregate set of learning outcomes across the suite of activities. Any RPL should be compliant with the requirements and expectations of the RPL Procedure. Other specific bespoke or tailored short programs of learning delivered on an ad hoc basis are not eligible for RPL.

7. Approval and Review

Microcredentials and short courses must be approved in accordance with the requirements for the establishment of a non-AQF course or credential in the Academic Offerings Approval Procedure. Microcredentials and short courses should have some level of review each time they are offered including some form of student evaluation. This should be used to inform and implement timely improvements. Faculties have responsibility for formally reviewing microcredentials and short courses at least every three years and for determining metrics to inform decisions about whether they should continue to be offered. Reviews should typically include an assessment of financial viability, delivery against market intelligence, and student completion and satisfaction rates. Offerings that do not meet identified measures of success should be retired as soon as is possible. A summary of outcomes should be included in annual reporting to Academic Board.

Microcredentials and short courses that have not been offered for a period of three years will be administratively disestablished; they cannot be suspended.

8. Certification and Recordkeeping

Certificates issued for short courses and microcredentials must comply with brand guidelines. Sample templates can be found on the UNSW Brand Website. While rigorous quality assurance, assessment, and
AQF *equivalency* is a feature of UNSW microcredentials, to comply with the Higher Education Standards Framework it is important that these offerings are not described publicly using the nomenclature of the AQF or implied to be a qualification recognised in the AQF. Alignment to AQF specifications is as a quality assurance measure only.

Short courses and microcredentials should issue a UNSW branded certificate stating the name of the student, title of the course, issuance date, volume of learning, and name of the person authorised to issue the certificate. For short courses, this should be entitled a *Certificate of Completion* and for microcredentials it should be entitled a *Certificate of Attainment*.

Recognition of short course completion and attainment of microcredentials may also be issued digitally using badging technology so that learners can share their credentials across social media as well as their own professional and industry networks. Digital badges should comply with UNSW branding, guidelines, and taxonomy and should be approved by the Deputy or Associate Dean Education (or equivalent) of the relevant Faculty or Board of Studies.

Participant records for short courses and microcredentials (including levels of attainment if applicable), must be kept in line with the UNSW *Recordkeeping Policy* and standards. Records about the attributes of microcredentials must include enough information to allow for future RPL assessment.

9. **Management of Risk**

Microcredentials and short courses carry risk. It is important that there is oversight and management of these risks including academic risk (especially where RPL is involved), reputational risk, and commercial risks including potential impacts on existing offerings and revenue streams.

Where a third party is involved in academic or student support activities, due diligence must be undertaken and UNSW oversight maintained, in line with UNSW’s Framework for Managing Educational TPAs.

Faculties (including the University Board of Studies) should provide a report to the University Academic Quality Committee and Academic Board annually about their short course and microcredential offerings including outcomes against high-level performance metrics.

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| Legislative Compliance    | This Procedure supports the University’s compliance with the following legislation:  
                            | Australian Qualifications Framework 2013  
                            | Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 (Cth)  
                            | Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (Cth) |
| Parent Document (Policy)  | Education Quality Policy |
| Supporting Documents      | Nil |
| Related Documents         | Academic Offerings Approval Procedure  
                            | Academic Offerings Governance Policy  
                            | Education Quality Procedure  
                            | Integrated Curriculum Framework  
<pre><code>                        | Recognition of Prior Learning (Coursework Programs) Procedure |
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<p>| Superseded Documents      | Nil |
| File Number               | 2021/039228 |</p>
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