A Guide for Development of Programmes and Modules

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance for staff who are setting up programmes or modules, and to document the University standards for Credits, Module size and Programme titles.

ECTS Credits

Maynooth University, in common with the other Irish universities uses the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). This is part of the Bologna process, and seeks to ensure that credits have the same meaning in all institutions, to allow for mutual recognition and student mobility.

Credits are a measure of hours of student effort. This does not directly equate to class time, as the proportion of class time and student study time can vary between disciplines. The credit value of a programme is intended to reflect the total student effort, including classes, reading, assignments, private study and even exams. One credit in the ECTS is calculated as 25 hours of student effort. Note that this is based on what an average student is expected to do to complete the course properly, and there can be considerable variation between students.

Modules

A module is unit of study that can be assessed separately. Maynooth University teaches modules in multiples of 2.5 credits only. In joint courses we can recognise modules from other institutions which have other credit values.

Having standard module sizes facilitates students as it offers greater options to cross-list modules from other disciplines and programmes. It is therefore recommended that as far as possible only the following modules sizes are used: 2.5 credits, 5, credits, 7.5 credits, 10 credits, and multiples of ten credits.

In undergraduate degrees, most first year modules are 7.5 credits in size, and after that, most modules are in multiples of 5 credits. Very small modules (2.5 credits) tend to result in fragmented assessment for the student and should be avoided where possible.

Module credits and student workload.

In principle one credit represents 25 hours of student effort. This includes both contact time and study time. The balance between these two varies by discipline, and by level of study.

In undergraduate subjects it is quite common to have a 5 credit module comprised of 2 lecture hours per week for one semester (24 lectures) plus tutorials, and where relevant practical classes. While this is a common pattern, it is recognised that some disciplines may require a greater proportion of contact hours, and in some cases lecture hours are supplemented by laboratory practical classes, language classes, or other teaching activities.

At postgraduate level it is expected that students spend more time in self-directed reading. It is common to have a ten credit module with 24 lecture hours.

When designing a module it is important to ensure that the contact time and study time are realistic. It is of course very difficult to quantify the amount of time students will spend in self-directed reading and study, it is clearly impossible to have a 5 credit module (125 hours) completed in one week.

The design of a module should ensure that expected study time plus contact time add to the expected hours of student effort. The table below shows some simple examples of modules with typical lecture contact hours, and no tutorials or other supporting activities.

Credits	Hours of student effort	Example of contact hours	Student study hours
2.5	62.5	12	50
5	125	24	100
7.5	187.5	36	150
10	250	48	200

Module code

The module code is the unique identifier of the module, and is typically in the form of letters followed by three numbers (e.g. AN151). The first letters of a module identify the discipline, and the number identifies the module. Normally the first number indicates the year of study typically associated with the module, as follows:

First number in module code	Typical year of study
1, 2, 3, 4	First, second third or fourth year undergraduate
6	PG Dip or Master's level
8 or 9	Doctoral modules.

A module may also have a letter at the end (e.g. AN151x). This is normally used to indicate a version of the module with the same content but taught separately (at a different location, at a different time, to a special group).

Where a significant change is made to a module, a new code must be created. If the same code is used, the new module content will be ascribed to students who took the old content. Therefore new module codes are needed if:

a) There is a change in the credit weight (one code cannot have 2 credit weights).
b) There is a significant change to the title. It is possible to edit the module title, but if the new title would not be a fair reflection of what was done in previous years in the module, then a new code is needed.

c) There is a substantial change to the content, such that it would not be correct to apply that descriptor to the previous students.

Module title

The module title is one of the most important fields. It will appear on the registration screen when students are selecting their modules, and will appear on the transcript when students have graduated. It is therefore important that it is a clear and accurate indication of the content of the module.

Once the module title is entered, the system will generate a short name, limited to 43 characters. Please consider the short name carefully as this is what will display on a student's transcript. It is also what the student sees when they register online and is what will display on the student's online 'proof of registration'.

If the module title is more than 43 characters a short name will not auto-generate. In such cases, a short name will be manually inserted by the ADB office and some words will be abbreviated or deleted. Where possible, please refrain from using sub-titles as often these have to be removed from the short name to keep it within the 43 character limit. Modules with diacritics (accents etc.) in the title will find that each diacritic is considered an additional character and so truncates the name further.

Assessment

A module can be graded or ungraded. A graded module has an outcome that is expressed as a mark (in the range 0-100). An ungraded module is recorded as Passed (P) or Incomplete/Not Passed (NP). Ungraded modules are commonly used for placement, and may also be used where a competency is being assessed and a numerical mark would be inconsistent with marking norms.

Timetable groups

In the omnibus degrees (the multi-subject degrees where students have significant subject choices), we use timetable groups to avoid clashes. This works on the following principles:
  a) Each subject is allocated to a timetable group.
  b) Each timetable group is allocated certain timetable slots
  c) Each subject must schedule its core curriculum in those slots.
  d) Optional material can be scheduled outside of those core times, but it must be assumed that for some students this will clash with core modules in one of their other subjects. Therefore times outside core may be used for (i) optional modules, or (ii) teaching that is repeated multiple times such as tutorials, where the allocation to tutorials is done to avoid clashes.

A core principle of this approach is that a module cannot be compulsory in two timetable groups unless taught twice. A module may be compulsory in one group and optional in another.

The time slots allocated vary by year of study. That means that the core time for subject in first year is not in the same slots as the second year teaching in the same subject. This is done because it would place an unmanageable burden on some departments to have all their teaching at the same time. However as a consequence a module cannot be compulsory for two years of study, unless it is taught twice.

FTEs (Full Time Equivalents)

For the purposes of resource allocation to Departments, student numbers are expressed as Full Time Equivalents (FTEs). An undergraduate taking 60 credits is one FTE. Therefore an undergraduate taking 30 credits of a subject is considered half an FTE, and a student taking 15 credits is one quarter of an FTE.

FTE data is compiled at the level of the module. Each module is associated with one academic Department. That Department is responsible for teaching and managing the module, and earns any FTEs resulting from it.

Cross listing modules.

It is possible, and often desirable, to include modules offered by other Departments in a subject. Where this is done:

1. A student can take the module as part of their subject, and it will contribute to the subject mark and subject credits.
2. The module can normally only be optional, as it is normally scheduled in another timetable group.
3. The Department teaching the module is responsible for managing and uploading the results.
4. The Department teaching the module earns the FTEs associated with the module.

Example: The Sociology Department decides to include a social history module (HY3xy) in its third year programme. The module is listed as an option in the third year sociology subject. Because the module is in History times, it is listed as an option. A student of the double major sociology can take this module if it does not clash with the other subject taken. If a student takes this module, it will be part of the Sociology subject for that student, and will contribute to the subject mark and subject credits.

Qualifications and Programmes

All Maynooth University awards are aligned to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The titles of qualifications are determined both by their level (NFQ) and their size (credits). The University award standards are:

Qualification title	Level	Award type	Credits
PhD	10	Major	270 - 360
Doctorate	10	Major	270-360
Master's degree, research	9	Major	90-180
Master's degree, taught	9	Major	60 – 120
Postgraduate Diploma	9	Major or Minor	At least 60.
Honours Degree (4 year)	8	Major	240
Honours Degree (3 year)	8	Major	180
Higher Diploma	8	Major or Minor	At least 60
Diploma	Up to level 7	Non-major	At least 60
Certificate	Any level	Non-major	Normally less than 60

Award types

The NFQ requires that every award have an award type, which should be one of the following:
- Major
- Minor
- Special Purpose
- Supplemental

For Maynooth University, the major awards are diplomas and degrees of level 8 and above. Non major awards are classified as Minor, Special Purpose or Supplemental.

Non-major awards: QQI definition	Maynooth University implementation
Minor award-types 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	This is used for: • Awards which are in part completion of a major award. For example, when we have a PG Diploma as an exit award from a Master's degree, the PG Diploma may be a minor award.
Special-purpose award-types are made for specific, relatively narrow, purposes – for example, the Safe Pass certification of competence in health and safety in the construction industry	Normally used when: • Award is less than level 8. OR • Is less than 60 credits.
Supplemental award-types are for learning which is additional to a previous award. They could, for example, relate to updating and refreshing knowledge or skills, or to continuing professional development	Used for awards that are specifically linked to another award. These may be at any NFQ level.

Programme credits and workload

In the ECTS system 60 credits represents an academic year of full time study. This assumes an academic year of 33 weeks.   Where a student is working for the full year (50 weeks), up to 90 credits can be allowed. Students on part time courses should have proportionate credit weightings.

Examples of programme workloads.

Credits	Hours of student effort	Implied student workload over one year.
60	1,500	33 weeks of work, with an average of 45 hours per week. In the Maynooth academic year, this means working from orientation to the end of exams, including reading weeks and exam weeks.
90	2,250	50 weeks of work with an average of 45 hours per week.