Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University

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 Diploma 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. Modules with diacritics (accents etc.) in the title will find that each diacritic is considered an additional character and so truncates the name further. Please consider the short name carefully as it will be the only thing displayed in some places.

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.

Qualifications and Programmes

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 for: • Award of 5-20 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 in 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.

Maynooth University Awards

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 set out in the table below. Currently offered programmes may continue to exist in their present format, but may be aligned to this structure as part of the periodic programme review process or if a programme is re-activated after a period of time. It is noted that Doctoral qualifications will be documented separately.

Qualification type	Award type	Credit range[1]	Notes
NFQ Level 9 [2]			
Master's, Research	Major	90-120	
Master's, Taught	Major	60-120	A 60-credit Master's programme may be approved in limited cases, usually as a follow-on from another programme.
Postgraduate Diploma	Major	60	
Postgraduate Certificate	Minor	30-40	
Professional Certificate	Special purpose	5-20	May be approved for professional micro-credential programmes
Certificate of Continuing Education	Special purpose	5-20	May be approved for micro-credential programmes
NFQ Level 8			
Degree (4 years)	Major	240	60 credits in each year of study [3]
Degree (3 years)	Major	180	60 credits in each year of study [4]
Higher Diploma	Major	60	
University Certificate	Minor	20-40	
Professional Certificate	Special purpose	5-20	May be approved for professional micro-credential programmes
Certificate of Continuing Education	Special purpose	5-20	May be approved for micro-credential programmes
NFQ Level 7			
Diploma	Major	60-80	
University Certificate	Minor	20-40	
NFQ Level 6			
Higher Certificate	Major	120	
University Certificate	Minor	20-40	
NFQ Level 5			
Foundation Certificate	Special purpose	20	Foundation level modules

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[1] Programmes may be approved where there are more credits than the standard, but not less.

[2] A level 9 degree should normally be made of level 9 modules. It can include a minority of level 8 modules, where there is justification, subject to the overall limit that the majority (at least half) must be level 9, and at least 60 credits of an MA must be at level 9.

[3] Most multi annual degrees have modules of a higher standard in the later years. A student is generally expected to have taken 60 credits in each year of study (or equivalent in part-time or modular mode). There may be some variation in the number of modules taken in each year of study, but the general principle is that a student can replace modules with modules of a higher standard, but not a lower standard. Therefore, in a four-year degree (or equivalent in part-time or modular mode) with progressive modules, a student must earn at least 240 credits, including:
- At least 180 credits available on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th year curricula, of which
- At least 120 credits must be on the 3rd and 4th year curricula, of which
- At least 60 credits must be on the 4th year curriculum.

[4] In a three-year degree (or equivalent in part-time or modular mode) with progressive modules, a student must earn 180 credits, including:
- At least 120 credits of modules available on the 2nd and 3rd year curricula, of which at least 60 credits must be on the 3rd year curriculum.

Process for programme approval or modification

All proposals for new programmes or modifications to existing programmes are considered by the Academic Programmes Committee, which then makes a recommendation to Academic Council.

New programme proposals are normally considered in two stages. Stage 1 involves an initial consideration by Academic Programmes Committee (APC) which may approve an external review of the proposed programme. Stage 2 involves a consideration by APC of the full programme details, along with the input of the external reviewers.

In order to meet the publication requirements of the CAO and postgraduate offerings, deadlines are set each year for submission of Stage 1 proposals. The relevant forms, deadlines and updates to the process are available on the APC webpage https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/academic-council/academic-council-standing-committees-membership/academic-programmes-committee.