



A Guide for Development of Programmes and Modules

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Version History

Version 1	Noted at Academic Programmes Committee 16 May 2018: New document. Published on APC webpage.
Version 2	Approved by Academic Programmes Committee 12 May 2021: Interim arrangements for new micro-credential courses.
Version 3	Approved by Academic Programmes Committee 01 March 2023: Updated to reflect approved framework for micro-credentials at MU; and some minor editorial changes.
Version 4	Updated 19 April 2024: Correction of a typographical error.

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.

QQI ([Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#)) is the state agency responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland, and it maintains the National Framework of Qualifications ([NFQ](#)).

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

Note that the Teaching and Learning hours of a module display on CourseFinder. These guide the Timetabling Office when allocating teaching space. They also give students an indication of the workload breakdown of each individual module on their programme.

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 department to which FTE and budget allocations for the module will be made), 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	Doctoral modules

A module may also have a letter at the end. An 'X' at the end of a module code (e.g. LW618X) is normally used by Registry to signify a second semester iteration of an existing semester 1 module. Other letters at the end of a module code can be 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 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 change to the title;
- c) There is a substantial change to the content, such that it would not be correct to apply that descriptor to the previous students;
- d) There is a substantial change to the module learning outcomes, such that it would not be correct to apply those learning outcomes to previous students who have completed that module.

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.

Registry IT systems require both a long title (for display on the web and on CourseFinder) and a short title (used in ITS – the Student Records system – with a limit of 43 characters). Please consider the short name carefully (including the use of diacritics and how they may display) as it is the only title that will display on items such as online registration, academic transcripts and judgement sheets. *The Curriculum Office can provide guidance in this regard to any department developing a new programme/module.*

Module learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are a statement of what a student is expected to be able to do when they successfully complete that module. All modules should have published learning outcomes. Learning outcomes guide

current students but are also used by employers and other third level institutions when reviewing the qualifications of our graduates.

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.

Module assessment can be by centrally scheduled examination, continuous assessment and most usually by a combination of both. Resit opportunities are normally provided. *The Curriculum Office can provide more nuanced information to any department developing a new programme/module.*

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 National Framework of Qualifications ([NEQ](#)) requires that every award have an award type, which should be one of the following:

- Major
- Minor
- Special Purpose
- Supplemental
- Professional Awards

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	This is used for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awards which are in part completion of a major award. For example, when we have a

learning outcomes required for a major award. This recognition will have relevance in its own right.	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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 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.

Blended and online programmes

Online courses refer to fully online programmes where no in-person attendance is required. Blended courses are a mix of remote and in-person delivery, but have substantial amounts of remote teaching which is in excess of normal on-campus courses. All blended and online courses are considered part-time offerings unless there are compelling reasons for them to involve full-time engagement that is parallel to an on-campus full time course.

Micro-credentials

Maynooth University micro-credentials are not formal awards. Micro-credentials are credit-bearing small volumes of learning, within the range of 5-15 ECTS, and normally completed at NFQ levels 8 and 9, while recognising that micro-credentials at level 7 may be considered. Micro-credentials use the title convention of "Micro-credential: short title." The Maynooth University framework for micro-credentials was approved by Academic Council on 23rd May 2022 ([Academic Programmes Committee webpage](#)).

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	Notes
		(Programmes may be approved where there are more credits than the standard, but not less)	
NFQ Level 9			
A level 9 degree should normally be composed 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 Master's programme must be at level 9.			
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	
Certificate	Minor	≥15	
NFQ Level 8			
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 <u>four-year degree</u> (or equivalent in part-time or modular mode) with progressive modules, a student must earn at least 240 credits, including:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 			
In a <u>three-year degree</u> (or equivalent in part-time or modular mode) with progressive modules, a student must earn 180 credits, including:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 			
Degree (4 years)	Major	240	60 credits in each year of study
Degree (3 years)	Major	180	60 credits in each year of study
Higher Diploma	Major	≥60	
Certificate	Minor	≥20	
NFQ Level 7			
Diploma	Major	≥60	
Certificate	Minor	≥20	
NFQ Level 6			
Higher Certificate	Major	120	
Certificate	Minor	≥20	
NFQ Level 5			
Foundation Certificate	Special purpose	≥20	Foundation level modules

Process for programme approval or modification

Academic Programmes Committee

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.

As micro-credentials are not full awards and they may need to be delivered within a short timeframe, proposals for new micro-credentials are normally considered in one stage and may be approved by the Academic Programmes Committee, and noted to Academic Council.

In order to meet the publication requirements of the CAO, postgraduate and micro-credential offerings, deadlines are set each year for the submission of proposals. The relevant forms, deadlines and updates to the process are available on the APC webpage [APC Forms, Process, Deadlines](#).

Curriculum Office

The Curriculum Office can provide advice and information in relation to the technical registry aspects of new programme/module development (email curriculum@mu.ie).
