



LIVERPOOL
HOPE
UNIVERSITY
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Micro-credentials and Digital Badges Policy

Quality Handbook QH15

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1. INTRODUCTION / PURPOSE

- 1.1 In response to the evolving landscape of education and workforce demands, both in the U.K. and internationally, Liverpool Hope University has introduced a portfolio Micro-credentials/Digitally Badged courses aimed to address the needs of the global jobs market and the shift towards skills-based employment and lifelong learning.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to establish a framework for the development, approval, and implementation of Micro-credentials / Digital Badges across various disciplines within the University. This policy will ensure that the Micro-credential / Digital Badge portfolio is of high quality, aligned to industry standards and capable of meeting the diverse needs of students and stakeholders alike.
- 1.3 This policy will outline the Scope, Definitions, Objectives and Procedures for the successful implementation of Micro-credentials / Digital Badges and is aimed to foster an inclusive and adaptive educational environment that responds to the needs of students, employers and stakeholders.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1 This policy applies to all University Staff and Students¹ in order to support the development and management of Micro-credentials and Digital Badges. This includes both credit and non-credit bearing courses, co-curricular activities, and any other educational initiatives that align with the University's goals of fostering lifelong learning and skills attainment.
- 2.2 The policy encompasses all forms of Micro-credentials and Digital Badges awarded by the University whether they are created internally or in collaboration with Partner organisations. The policy is intended to guide the design, assessment, and approval processes for these credentials to ensure quality, consistency, and alignment with the University's standards for educational outcomes.
- 2.3 Exclusions to this policy include the University's standard degree programmes and certificates that have not been designated as Micro-credentials/Digital Badges, as well as other course offerings that do not meet the criteria set out in this policy.

3. DEFINITIONS

3.1 Definition - Micro-credentials:

- 3.1.1 A micro-credential is a discrete achievement of study that results from having fulfilled a specific set of measured requirements as follows:

- It serves as evidence of a specific skill.

¹ Including but not limited to Student Recruitment & Admissions, Student Enrolment & Administration, Global Unit, Student Learning, Data team, Marketing & Communications, Student Futures and the Resource Management and Planning Office.

- It can represent a designation, a label, an achievement, or a qualification.
- In higher education, it involves some activity on the part of an individual that has been both assessed and validated as having equalled or surpassed an established benchmark² and can be credit or non-credit bearing.
- It is a granular level of discrete achievement represented by small units of study that can be built upon.
- It can be an unaccredited competency-based certificate which recognises demonstrated skills without the formal award of credits.
- It may focus on practical application rather than on traditional academic achievement.
- It offers a flexible and accessible ways to recognise a practice or skill based learning, and can therefore be accessed by a wide range of students whilst also complementing traditional academic qualifications.
- It is short-term and focussed – completed in a relatively short time frame, often focussing on a particular skill.

3.1.2 Credit bearing Micro-credentials earned at an approved FHEQ level³ can be combined into more complex Micro-credentials which may result in a qualification of Liverpool Hope as detailed in the University's [Framework of Qualifications](#). Any Micro-credential that can be combined with others to create at least a portion of an approved course within the University's portfolio is considered "stackable".

3.2 Definition - Digital Badges

- 3.2.1 A digital badge is a visual representation of a skill, achievement, or certification that is earned through online learning or participation in various activities.
- 3.2.2 Digital Badges are typically issued by educational institutions or platforms that recognise an individual's accomplishment in a specific area.
- 3.2.3 Digital badges contain such information as: the criteria met to earn the badge, the issuing organisation, and the date of issue.
- 3.2.4 Digital Badges can be shared online, via social media platforms or professional networks (e.g. LinkedIn), allowing individuals to showcase their credentials and skills to potential employers.

4. OBJECTIVES

- 4.2 The University has implemented a Digital Qualification Framework (DQF) which is a structured system designed to recognise skills and learning in a digital world. DQF's are a set of services and standards for creating, storing, verifying, and sharing digital credentials. A core goal of the DQF is to ensure

² Please refer to the [QAA's Micro-credentials Characteristic Statement](#).

³ [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#)

that qualifications obtained in one country can be easily understood and recognised in another.

4.3 The DQF operates through several key features and processes, such as:

- 4.3.1 **Portfolio:** Is a digital backpack where learners can collect their Micro-credentials / Digital Badges in one place. This backpack can include formal qualifications, badges from online courses, certificates from workshops, and even skills learned on the job, creating a comprehensive skills record. The individual has complete control over what is in their portfolio and who they share it with. Through use of the backpack a student can build up a picture of what digital skills they need for career development going forward. They can also demonstrate that their learning aligns with the external professional arena.
- 4.3.2 **Issuing:** Is the process by which organisations, such as universities, colleges, training providers, or employers, create and award digital credentials. These credentials are designed to be secure and contain detailed information about the skills and achievements they represent. Issuers adhere to sector wide standards to ensure quality and credibility.
- 4.3.3 **Storage:** Is the system for keeping these credentials safe and secure. Issuing organisations can create their own secure digital repositories to manage, publish, and store credentials.
- 4.3.4 **Sharing:** Gives individual recipients control over how they share their credentials with others. They can access, view, and share their credentials directly with potential employers, educational institutions, or anyone else they choose.
- 4.3.5 **Verification:** Allows employers and others to check the authenticity and validity of a credential. This process is designed to be simple and reliable. Open badges, often used within such frameworks, contain metadata that links back to the Issuer, the criteria, and the supporting evidence, thus making the Micro-credential / Digital Badge a verifiable achievement.

4.4 General Principles: Credit Bearing Micro-credentials / Digital Badges

- 4.4.1 **Credit Size:** The prescribed credit size for Micro-credentials offered by Hope is **normally** between 5 and 15 Credits. It is likely for example that a short online module with discrete learning outcomes / learning time may carry a 5-credit Micro-credential as an outcome; whereas a face-to-face module, likely to be longer in duration if targeted at an executive audience, may carry a 15 credit tariff.
- 4.4.2 **Admission:** The application process to gain admission to standalone Micro-credentials/Digital Badges is straightforward and accessible. The University will offer flexible entry requirements compared to the requirements for entry to a full degree. Some Micro-credentials/Digital Badges may have specific pre-requisites for admission whilst others may be open entry without formal qualifications. This provides much

greater flexibility around credit transfer than is typically the case while ensuring coherence of award and addressing the risk of duplication or double-counting.

- 4.4.3 **English Language Proficiency:** the courses will be delivered in English and non-native speakers/international students will be required to demonstrate proficiency according to the defined University standards⁴.
- 4.4.4 **Learning Hours:** as per the [FHEQs](#) one academic credit is generally equivalent to 10 notional hours of learning effort. This includes time spent on scheduled teaching, directed learning, and private study. A 5-credit course unit therefore would require 50 hours of learning effort, either contact time or self-directed. Full information on contact hours/learning effort will be included in the Programme/module specification.
- 4.4.5 **Contact Hours:** The minimum number of contact hours will be subject to the programme of study and will be included in the Programme/Module specification and in the programme handbook/VLE.
- 4.4.6 **Academic credits:** are awarded on passing the final academic assessment as appropriate to the Micro-credential / Digital Badge and can be offered at FHEQ levels 4-7 of the FHEQ - funding for credit bearing programmes *may* be available via the Life Long Learning Entitlement⁵.
- 4.4.7 **Assessments:** are based on 1,000-word equivalent assessments for a 5-credit Micro-credential via various assessment methods such as: written assignments, reports, reflective journals, presentations etc. thus providing the student an opportunity to demonstrate learning. There will be a focus on authentic assessment which will enhance employability skills / professional development. All assessments will be subject to the relevant Universal Assessment Regulations and Conventions appropriate to students studying taught provision. In accordance with the University's [Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy](#) particular consideration will be given to alternative assessment methods and the risk of over-assessing when shorter modules are 'stacked' into more complex ones.
- 4.4.8 **Completion:** Reaching an aggregate mark of 50% for students undertaking FHEQ Level 7 Micro-credentials, and a mark of 40% for those studying at lower levels⁶.
- 4.4.9 **Award:** Upon successful completion, students will receive a Micro-credential and/or Digital Badge and/or a certificate of completion for the appropriate number of credits. For non-credit bearing courses, a Digital Badge will be conferred via the DQF.
- 4.4.10 **'Stackable' Academic Credit Transfer:** Students who successfully complete the academic assessments linked to a Micro-credential programme may Credit transfer or 'stack' their academic credits against a relevant module onto a Hope Programme subject to suitable

⁴ [English Language Requirements](#)

⁵ [Lifelong Learning Entitlement overview - GOV.UK](#)

⁶ As per the University's Universal Assessment Regulations and Conventions

mapping as per the University Recognition or Prior Learning policy⁷. This is wholly dependent upon meeting the admissions criteria for the relevant course.

4.4.11 **Standalone non-credit bearing Digital Badges:** The Digital Backpack is in effect an 'empty receptacle' which may be filled with any type of approved learning. The University has implemented a Digital Qualifications Framework which entails three types of non-credit bearing Badges appropriate to a different level of learning experience.

- **Tier 1 Badge:** awarded for attending a learning event only; essentially the equivalent of an attendance certificate.
- **Tier 2 Badge:** awarded following the completion of a competence assessment. This form of digital badge will be most attractive to an employer, as it certifies the obtaining of a particular level of skill.
- **Tier 3 Badge:** awarded following the successful completion of an academic assessment, and therefore is the equivalent of a credit bearing Micro-credential. This type of Badge can be used by a student to verify their academic achievement and it gives the Micro-credential/Digital Badge broad 'transferability'.

4.4.12 Digital Badges can easily be shared on a range of platforms and will include real time verification of key information (i.e. the Issuer, what the criteria for achievement were, expiry etc.).

5. PROCEDURES

5.1 Micro-credentials / Digital Badges: Governance, Compliance and Administration

5.1.1 The University's Academic Committee shall maintain oversight of the quality, design, approval, assessment standards and future development of Micro-credentials/Digital Badges. The arrangements for the operation of Micro-credentials / Digital Badging will follow standard administration responsibilities of both University Professional Services functions and Faculties, including but not limited to the following services:

- Oversight of the design, issuance and maintenance of Micro-credentials /Digital Badges via the University's course approval and External Examining process;
- Consideration of proposals from the Faculties for the issuance of Micro-credentials/Digital Badges;
- Guidance on the appropriate use of Micro-credentials/Digital Badges according to the University policies and regulations;

⁷ [Recognition of Prior Learning](#)

- Management of the approved platform (DQF) for the design, upload and issuance of Digital Badges and the uploading of metadata and graphics as applicable;
- Management of the integration of Micro-credentials / Digital Badges with the University's Strategic Learning Technology Services (SITS);
- University Professional Services functions to issue the award of Micro-credentials / Digital Badges following Confirmation Boards that a student has met all stated course requirements⁸;
- Monitor and audit the quality of Micro-credentials/Digital Badges, periodically reviewing the awards (as per the University's defined QA standards for course review) and reporting to both Faculty and University wide Academic Committee.

5.2 Student Experience and Communication

- 5.2.1 The purpose, value, and benefits of Micro-credentials/Digital Badges will be clearly communicated to students (via a course handbook/VLE), explaining why they are being used, and how they are to be interpreted.
- 5.2.2 If Digital Badges are used instead of, or alongside traditional marks/grades, a clear explanation on the differences between credit and non-credit bearing certificates will be given.
- 5.2.3 Students will have secure and ongoing access to their Digital Badges, via a central digital repository or backpack.
- 5.2.4 Clear instructions and support will be offered on how to claim, view, and share Digital Badges on various platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, social media, résumés, email signatures). The verifiable nature of Micro-credentials/Digital Badges will be highlighted to demonstrate how these awards benefit students when sharing with potential employers.
- 5.2.5 Credit bearing Micro-credentials / Digital Badges will be designed with stackability in mind and these pathways will be communicated to applicants to demonstrate progression opportunities in order to motivate persistence in learning.

6. PRIVACY, DATA MANAGEMENT, AND SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS.

- 6.1 In keeping with the University's [Data Protection Policy](#), compliance with data protection regulations ([UK-GDPR](#)) and privacy laws will be adhered to in the collection, storing and sharing personal data.
- 6.2 Digital Backpacks will be designed avoiding personally identifiable information as per the requirements of the Information Commissioners Office⁹. A core

⁸ For non- credit bearing Micro-credentials, resulting in a Digital Badge, the Confirmation Board will be held at Faculty Level and approved by the Faculty Academic Committee. Credit bearing Micro-credentials will follow the standard "exam board process".

⁹ [What are identifiers and related factors? | ICO](#)

record will be held by the University Professional Services function will include the recipient's name, achievement, and date the Badge was earned – this will allow recipients control over what is visible when sharing the Badge. Sensitive data will not be shared.

- 6.4 The DQF Platform offers privacy settings which allows the University to revoke student access to Digital Badges if necessary. In addition, the DQF Platform will offer built-in security features, such as unique IDs and encryption, to ensure authenticity and prevent counterfeiting. The University's DQF is managed "in-house" and as such, meets the security measures as per the following policies:

- [Data Protection Policy.pdf](#)
- [Information Security Policy.docx](#)
- [Information Asset Management Policy](#)
- [IT Acceptable Use Policy](#)

- 6.5 For Credit-bearing Micro-credentials, (for which a Certificate will be issued in addition to a Digital Badge), the Certificates will be issued by the University Professional Services function and will include all key security measures such as:

- Authenticated, branded certificate paper
- Hologram
- Embossed seal
- Watermark
- QR code
- Issuance of replacement certificates by University Professional Services function only

7. REVIEW AND MONITORING

- 7.1 Micro-credentials and Digital Badges will be reviewed / monitored in line with the standard University processes including but not limited to:

- Student Voice/feedback via surveys;
- Annual Review and Enhancement (ARE);
- Review / Modification of courses (QH4 /QH5)
- Monitoring via Faculty and University Academic Committee

- 7.2 This policy will be reviewed at least every 3 years or more frequently depending on changes required by stakeholders or in response to changes in the sector.