

FRAMEWORK FOR MICRO-CREDENTIALS

This framework document is intended to provide the responsible academic managers (see section 5) with guidance in the process and identification of micro-credentials (see definitions in section 3 and variations of micro-credentials in section 4). The applicable principles are set out in section 2.

1 The purpose of the framework for micro-credentials

The purpose of this framework is to indicate the conditions under which the credit-values for a micro-credential are determined to ensure:

- a) compliance with relevant external and internal regulatory requirements,
 - b) that the University's requirements to increase its business reach are met, and
 - c) international best practice.
- 1.1 The framework describes how oversight of and guidance in the creation, use and management of the NWU's micro-credential offering, occurs.
 - 1.1.1.1 The framework provides oversight of the management of all micro-credentials of the University as a key component of the curriculum offering
 - 1.1.1.2 The framework aligns with the Teaching and Learning Assessment Policy and the University Strategy for Teaching and Learning.
 - 1.2 In pursuit of realising the aspirations of the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy, the framework
 - 1.2.1 protects information generated by the University as a vital asset,
 - 1.2.2 guides the implementation of micro-credential in a fully integrated way with the existing curriculum, with the understanding that the business value is aligned with the NWU Strategy to commercialise teaching-learning innovation to bring the curriculum closer to employers as well as employees in the marketplace,
 - 1.2.3 assists the relevant business-process or line-management environment; also indicating that the relevant line manager takes responsibility for the management of risks and related matters within the relevant line function.
 - 1.3 The framework also ensures accountability for the curriculum offering and assures the quality thereof as part of the existing curriculum offering of the NWU.
 - 1.3.1 The framework assures compliance with existing curriculum formation, recommendation, and approvals processes; and
 - 1.3.2 Provides the pathway for the integration and alignment of processes associated with the identification, description, recommendation, and approval of micro-credentials with regards to existing processes within and outside the institution.

2 Principles for the framework on micro-credentials

- 2.1 The NWU recognises the need for an appropriate balance between flexibility that allows for micro-credentials that bring the curriculum closer to the world of work.

- 2.2 Therefore, the University subscribes to the following principles to guide the University's Framework for Micro-credentials:
- 2.2.1 Accountability for the evidential links between micro-credentials and the credentials (i.e. the credits and the programme of which these form part) of which they are part in terms of the programmes and qualifications of the University.
 - 2.2.2 Transparency in respect to the fact that the processes associate with the identification, recommendation, and approval of micro-credentials as well as the monitoring thereof.
 - 2.2.3 The integrity of a micro-credential as a discretely defined component of a module which is linked to credit value and to which the corresponding study hours apply so that the University has a reasonable and suitable correlation between time and the associated credits of the micro-credential.
 - 2.2.4 Regarding the value proposition of the micro-credential, the University believes that accurate, timeous and relevant information is essential to deliver the highest quality of service to registered students as well as non-registered participants enrolled for a micro-credential.

3 Defining the micro-credential

Terms **used** to describe micro-credentials need to capture characteristics such as accessibility, flexibility, portability and stackability. It should express its contribution to curricula aligned with the needs of the world of work and lifelong learning.

"Portability" refers to the components of a curriculum which can be transferred for recognition towards the attainment either of a qualification other than the one for which a student was originally registered, or which can be transferred and recognised by another institution.¹

"Stackability" refers to those learning sub-components of a curriculum which allow for:

- *horizontal articulation* to other components of the same or other modules recognised for the purposes of the accumulation of credits towards a module, or
- *vertical articulation* to other modules in into which the discrete area of focus, of the micro-credential, fits; or
- *diagonal articulation* from one NQF sub-framework to another (e.g., CHE to the QCTO); or
- *sectoral articulation*, which occurs where learning is recognised from e.g. a business to a university (SAQA).
- The four conditions of stackability need not be simultaneously in place for it to occur.

A micro-credential:

- is a record of focused learning achievement verifying what the learner knows, understands or can do;
- includes assessment based on clearly defined standards and is awarded by a provider which the NWU has an agreement in place;
- has stand-alone value and may also contribute to or complement other micro-credentials or credentials, including through recognition of prior learning; and
- meets the standards required by relevant quality assurance.

Considering the above, a **"micro-credential"** for the University may be further defined as follows:

- a) A micro-credential needs to be credit-bearing, in order to be linked to the existing system of credits (as linked to hours) for the purposes of recognising the credential as stackable: in other words, for the credential to be combined with another credential and the credit value to be realized, the credit value must be stated clearly.
- b) A micro-credential is a part of a module, or a specially designed combination of areas of focus which are recognised by the NWU as potentially part of another module's requirements. Modules can be comprised of micro-credentials where formally approved. Modules are learning components, micro-credentials being module sub-components.
- c) A micro-credential can be stacked with other parts (sub-components) of a module in a coherent manner for the purposes of awarding the full credit value of the module. In other words, a micro-credential is a discrete sub-component (for example, a defined period of laboratory, project or themed work that leads to another similarly defined or delimited area of work, project, or theme).

¹ Within existing regulatory legislation in higher education in South Africa, portability of modules and credits is associated with policies concerning recognition of prior learning (RPL), and more so, with credit accumulation and transfer (CAT).

A **learning sub-component** must be defined by the subject group;² be assigned a particular credit weighting with reference to the time required to complete the sub-component, and mindful of the credit load of the module or learning component.

It must be clear what a micro-credential is **not**:

- A micro-credential is not a continuing education course, a short learning programme or short course, though it may share features of such in terms of limited time-duration or credit equivalence.
- Micro-credentials are also not part-qualifications.

4 Teaching learning modalities, and requirements for the designation and approval of micro-credentials

4.1 Micro-credentials can take the form of –

4.1.1 asynchronous learning (on-, or offline): in other words, the offering of the credential may take the form of independent, self-directed and self-paced learning using pre-recorded, pre-uploaded module contents, and could be considered an easily segmented sub-component of part of a larger module, in which the knowledge transfer is delimited to a particular topic and even skill; (for example, the skill of knowledge synthesis); or

4.1.2 a designated part of synchronous real-time learning (either in person or online): in other words, the credential is able to take the form of an active learning experience in the form of the laboratory, project or workshop-based work which may be allocated credits as part of the module and is thus also an easily segmented component or part of a larger module, in which the knowledge transfer is delimited to a particular topic and even skill; or

4.1.3 a hybrid: for example, a theory component offered through an asynchronous online mode with a 'real-time' learning experience (which could be university-based or workplace learning, or service learning).

4.2 Whilst the University attaches significance to time (i.e. in the form of credits, but also in the form of minimum completion time) the micro-credential might be worth several credits, but the pace of learning may be more flexible depending on the nature of the curriculum design (especially if this were to be asynchronous). Quality assurance and assessment related to the micro-credential remain the responsibility of the Faculty Boards and Deans. Recognition of micro-credentials may, only on application by the student, be granted in accordance with 5 below. Their value lies within their being recognised as a discrete component of a module or modules and when completed successfully can be used to count (if so desired by an employer or by a student) towards the attainment of the full module, and by implication, of the full qualification.

4.3 Requirements and process for the designation and approval of a micro-credential at the University.

4.4 A micro-credential may not have a value more than half of the defined credit value of an existing module offered by the University.

4.4.1 Micro-credentials must be captured on the curriculum management system against a module.

4.4.2 The Senate Committee for Academic Standards must consider approval of a module comprised of micro-credentials as recommended by a faculty for submission to Senate.

5 Roles and responsibilities concerning micro-credentials

5.1 *The Subject Leader* of an academic group (known as the Subject Group) of the University discusses with the group the identification of the micro-credential and its value to the University and the world of work.

5.2 *The Programme Leader*. The Programme Leader is consulted by the Subject Leader as regards the recommendation of the group. The Programme Leader also advises students/ participants seeking admission to a micro-credential, on the portability and stackability of the micro-credential in terms of the

² A subject group is the NWU equivalent of an academic department or discipline area. It is the basic academic unit of teaching entities (Schools and Faculties) at the NWU.

Programme for which the student or participant (if external to, and not a registered student, the NWU) seeks registration.

- 5.3 *The School Director*, or research entity Director proposes the micro-credential to the Faculty Teaching-Learning Committee which considers the application and makes a recommendation (or not) to the Faculty Board.
- 5.4 *The Dean or designated Deputy Dean*, has a responsibility in accordance with the Higher Education Act (101/1997) and the NWU Statute, the Council, to promote quality teaching and learning through the curriculum offering of the University. The Dean or designated Deputy Dean facilitates a discussion of the Faculty Board on the recommendation of the micro-credential in an optimal way which will result in a recommendation to SCAS, as submitted in the proper format, as regards the approval of the micro-credential and how it relates to the module.
- 5.5 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Teaching-Learning is the Chairperson of the Senate Sub-Committee on Academic Standards. The Chairperson of SCAS will facilitate a discussion of the Faculty Board on the recommendation of the micro-credential. This should result in a recommendation from SCAS to Senate, as submitted in the proper format, as regards the approval of the micro-credential is part of the report of SCAS to Senate.
- 5.6 NWU registered students and NWU participants in micro-credentials
 - 5.6.1 Any registered student (as registered by SALA) or participant (as registered through the UCE) may enrol for a micro-credential following the normal applications and admissions process of the University;
 - 5.6.2 A registered student or participant must seek permission of the relevant Programme Leader so that the portability and stackability of the micro-credential for the student's programme is discussed and advised upon.
 - 5.6.3 Any person, not a registered student of the NWU, may enrol as a participant, for a micro-credential provide s/he meets the requirements for the programme offered by the NWU.

Addendum

1 The scope of the framework

This framework encompasses the following:

- 1.1 Stakeholder (students and the world of work) needs as well as academic guidance on micro-credentials considered relevant to the marketplace or to students at the University;
- 1.2 The processes through which such prioritisation and decision-making occur;
- 1.3 Performance and monitoring in terms of capacity to delivery and quality assure micro-credentials as set against the Faculty Integrated Teaching-Learning Plans, University Teaching-Learning Strategy and Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and its rules;
- 1.4 Clear roles and responsibilities for the identification, recommendation, approval and related quality-assurance processes and the line managers which lead these;
- 1.5 Information risks are assessed appropriately;
- 1.6 Adequate and appropriate record-keeping through the relevant quality assurance processes.

2 Implementation procedures for micro-credentials

Procedures such as the following should be developed as needed:

- Legal and regulatory compliance procedures
- Creating and receiving information
- Storing and archiving information
- Disposing of information
- Acceptable content types
- Managing the volume of information
- Digitisation procedures
- Collaboration and sharing information
- Curriculum management system

3 Steering

Instances of statutory directives such as the following steer the process by means of which sound and effective information governance and management are established, maintained and monitored by the NWU:

- NWU Statute (8 May 2020)
- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996
- Higher Education Act, 101, 1997
- Consumer Protection Act, Act, 68 of 2008
- Protection of Personal Information, Act, 4 of 2013
- Electronic Communication and Transaction Act, 25 of 2002
- Copyright Act of 1978
- The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework

4 Strategies and plans

This framework should be read in conjunction with, but not limited to strategic documents such as the following:

- NWU Strategy 2015-2025
- NWU Teaching-Learning Strategy
- Policy on Continuing Education
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy (to be read with the Rules for Teaching, Learning and Assessment)
- Policy on Academic Integrity
- NWU Information Strategy and Framework for Information Governance

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