Division of Sciences Guidelines on Micro-credentials

Background

Micro-credentials are:

> "*stand-alone education products intended to enable learners to access specific knowledge and skills in a cost-effective and time-effective way. They are smaller than qualifications and focus on skill development opportunities not currently catered for in the tertiary system, and for which there is strong evidence of need by industry, employers, iwi and community" (NZQA).* They may be between 5 and 40 points.

In February 2019 TEC set out funding approval guidelines for micro-credentials. In response the University of Otago developed a Micro-credentials Framework ('Framework') which was approved by Senate in May 2019.

Each Division is required to develop further detailed guidelines based on this Framework, including whether to take a liberal or more conservative approach based on the unique opportunities and risks within the respective Division.

In September 2019 the Division set up a working group to draft the Division's guidelines. Convened by Associate Professor Janice Murray, the members of the working group were Associate Professor Steven Mills, Professor Phil Seddon, Associate Professor Sally Shaw and Dr Dave Warren. To provide consistency in language and format across the University, the guidelines template developed by Health Sciences has been used by all four Divisions to capture Division-specific guidelines.

Division of Sciences Guidelines

The University's approved Framework is in black font; The Division's guidelines within the parameters of this framework are stated in blue font.

1. There is the expectation that micro-credentials will be entrepreneurial and agile in nature.
2. The Division will require very strong evidence of demonstrated need for a micro-credential, including from industry, employers, professional associations, iwi and/or other communities.
3. A micro-credential is a standalone course of study which a student must be enrolled in and successfully complete in order to be granted the award. In Sciences, micro-credentials will be discrete "parcels" of learning in a particular discipline or area. Some examples might include: outreach, demonstration of competency, field instrumentation, Treaty familiarity professional development.
4. A high proliferation of micro-credentials is not anticipated, nor in Sciences encouraged.
5. A micro-credential must be financially sustainable and revenue-generating.
6. Micro-credentials must:

a.   contribute to the University's graduate profile, particularly in regard to life-long learning;

b.   Be consistent with the Division's Strategic Plan and Teaching & Learning Plan.

c.   Teach discrete skills/components of learning, with a preference that the emphasis is on skills rather than knowledge;

d.   Include a robust graded assessment component in line with the University's Assessment policy.

7.   It is anticipated that most micro-credentials will be at a postgraduate level.

8.   A micro-credential may be between 5 and 40 points. In Sciences, micro-credentials will normally be 5 points. This point value is deemed optimal for the "small parcels of learning" concept and manageable for stakeholders wishing to upskill or sample new areas of learning.

9.   Micro-credentials may be particularly suited to distance learning.

10.   Micro-credentials are not meant to duplicate existing papers. In Sciences micro-credentials must include **new** content and not duplicate existing papers or any part of a paper. Extraction of material from current papers runs the risk of significantly diluting the value of qualification-based offerings, with a potential to reduce qualification enrolment and completions. This does not preclude content from previously deleted papers being developed as a micro-credential.

11.   Converting existing papers to micro-credentials will be strongly discouraged due to the risks associated with managing cross-crediting and restrictions, as well as posing a disincentive to complete conventional qualifications.

12.   The University will not offer micro-credentials in recognition of prior learning (i.e., via transfer of credit for an existing paper or component of an existing qualifications).

13.   Credit from micro-credentials offered by the University may be used as cross-credit or transfer-credit for existing qualifications where appropriate and where permitted by the regulations and admission criteria. In Sciences, micro-credentials will not normally count towards any University of Otago qualifications. In instances in which a case can be made, the maximum number of points that can be credited to a qualification is 10. Any credit would be under consultation with the Associate Dean Postgraduate.

14.   Entry criteria for any micro-credential should be aligned with the level and learning outcomes of that micro-credential.

15.   A micro-credential that has not been offered for a period of three years will be automatically deleted; micro-credentials cannot be suspended.

16.   In approving a micro-credential, the Division will give consideration to the;

a.   Evidence of very strong demand from industry, employers, professional associations, iwi and/or other communities.

b.   Reputational effects on the University and specifically the Division;

c.   Anticipated future enrolment effects on existing papers and qualifications, including that micro-credentials consume fees-free entitlements for postgraduate

students and that TEC funding for micro-credentials is grouped with CoPs which collectively are capped at 5% of the University's total teaching delivery
d. Overall teaching delivery costs, including governance and management of micro-credentials.

Quality Assurance

A micro-credential must be approved by the Sciences Academic Board before being submitted to the Board of Undergraduate Studies or Board of Graduate Studies for final approval. Prior to this, consultation with other relevant University of Otago stakeholders should take place.

A micro-credential must be evaluated each time it is offered using a range of evidence that includes some form of student evaluation. Any micro-credential offered for less than three years should be subject to the quality assurance process.

A micro-credential will be approved for a period of three years before being subject to a Micro-credentials Review that will include: a brief description of the main highlights, successes, problems and challenges involved in teaching the micro-credential; an assessment of the quality of the micro-credential informed in part by student feedback; analysis of the number of enrolments; and a recommendation on continuance. A Micro-credentials Review report should be no more than three pages and should be supported by the relevant divisional board before the recommendation on continuance is considered by the Board of Undergraduate Studies or Board of Graduate Studies.

Certification

The certification of a micro-credential will follow the University's guidelines and include:
- The name and logo of the University
- The title of the micro-credential
- The credit points and level of the micro-credential.