UNIVERSITI MALAYA

MICROCREDENTIALS @UM
GUIDELINE
BY
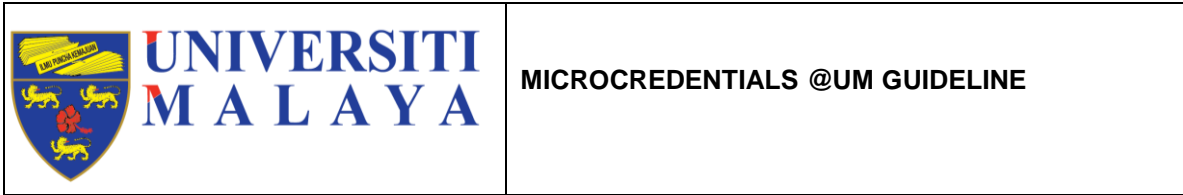# UNIVERSITI MALAYA

#UMTeachOnline

Microcredentials @UM Guideline

Prepared by:
Provost/ Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & International), Universiti Malaya
Academic Enhancement and Leadership Development Centre (ADeC), Universiti Malaya

First edition, September 2020.

Cover design by:
Ferlynda Jamaludin

Contents

UNIVERSITI MALAYA	**MICROCREDENTIALS @UM GUIDELINE**

1.0   PURPOSE
This guideline describes the implementation of Microcredentials@UM (MC@UM).

2.0   ABOUT THE GUIDELINE
This guideline consists of 4 sections:
1. Definition of terms
2. Overview of microcredentials
3. Microcredentials@UM (a.k.a MC@UM)
4. Implications.

3.0   DEFINITION OF TERMS

Microcredentials
Microcredentials (MC) is defined as "digital certification of assessed knowledge, skills and competencies in a specific area or field which can be a component of accredited programme or stand-alone courses supporting the professional, technical, academic and personal development of the learners" (MQA, May 2020).

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)
A MOOC is a course of study made available over the Internet without charge to a very large number of people. Anyone who decides to take a MOOC simply logs on to the website and signs up.

4.0   OVERVIEW OF MICROCREDENTIALS
Microcredentials (MC) is the new trend in higher education as a response to the needs to prepare skillful workforce for the future. MC is a form of alternative credential which functions like mini-certifications that acknowledge its learner's specific skills and competencies in specific areas of study or professional development. MC are labelled differently across platform providers, such as MicroMasters (edX), Nanodegree (Udacity), Specialization (Coursera) and MC Programs (FutureLearn). Many top universities in the world such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) etc. are already offering various MC programs.

A typical MC program consists of several grouped or 'stacked' online courses, also known as MOOC courses, which need to be completed by a MC learner. Upon successful completion – not just participation - of each course listed in the MC program, the MC learner will be awarded with a digital badge or certificate from the program providers. These badges can be displayed on the learner's social media page as testament of their specific achievement in mastering the skills and competencies, thus enhance their employment opportunities. MC is also well received by working adults or professionals who desire to stay competitive and relevant in their career and in the industry.

In the university setting, MC certificate comes with a guaranteed academic credits to use towards an award,

Unlike MOOC, which operates on the concept of 'free to learn, pay to certify', MC applies the concept of 'pay to learn'. In other words, learners of the MC programs will need to pay upfront for the programs they are interested in, undergo the courses listed, and get certification.

5.0 MICROCREDENTIALS @ UM (A.K.A MC@UM)

As the well-recognized Malaysian premier university and part of the top 60 universities in the world, UM has always been associated with high quality research as well as graduate development. UM can leverage on this branding to open its door to potential pre-professionals, professionals and working adults who are looking forward to getting a taste of UM's quality education via MC.

5.1 Types of MC courses

MQA currently identifies microcredentials (MCs) under three categories (MQA, May 2020).:

- Category 1: MCs which are component of Accredited Programmes of a Higher Education Provider (HEP)
- Category 2: MCs which are components of Accredited Programmes of Multiple HEPs
- Category 3: Free Standing MCs

It is recommended that MC@UM online courses be developed as either Category 1 or Category 3 MCs as detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Recommended microcredentials for MC@UM

MQA MC Category	MC@UM
Category 1: MCs which are component of Accredited Programmes from UM (see MQA 2020, p. 16)	A program owner may develop MCs from courses that are part of an existing academic program.
	Upon completion of one or several of these MCs, learners are eligible to apply for credit transfer and gain admission into that program.
Category 2: MCs which are components of Accredited Programmes from UM and other HEPs (see MQA, p.16)	*Not applicable currently.*

Category 3:	Category 3 MC courses are developed to fulfill the demand for new knowledge and/or specific skills and competencies of the workforce.
Free Standing MCs (see MQA, p. 17)	In the context of UM, such courses can include:

- Selected courses from any undergraduate or postgraduate program that is suitable to be offered as a free standing course.
- Professional development courses such as ADeC's trainings and programs e.g. Emerald or LeadWell.
- SHE courses under CITrA
- Summer school program courses managed under the DVC (A&I) portfolio
- Short courses organized by PTj's under the DVC (R&I) portfolio (e.g. Kong Zi Institute, STEM Centre, UMCares, ICE)

5.2   Long-term, short-term and immediate plans

Phase 3: Long-term plan (5-year plan)

For UM branding and income generation purposes, academic PTj's (faculties/academies/centres/institutes) should plan for **Category 1** of MCs. Deans and Deputy Deans are responsible to pre-identify potential or future academic programs that will be offered under the MC@UM program. Courses with the following criteria should aim for the attainment of Category 1 MCs:

- Most popular; in-demand programs
- Receive many applications but only few student intakes due to lack of seats
- Almost have readily available audiences, for instance, working adults who seek for career improvement
- Professional certification programs or courses
- Have partnership or MOU/A with UM
- Professional preparation programs endorsed by professional bodies
- Etc.

Phase 2: Short-term plan (3-year plan)

Head of Departments and Program Coordinators are responsible to identify suitable courses within the pre-identified academic programs to be offered under the MC@UM program, **either** as **Category 1** or **Category 3** MCs. These may include:
- Courses that focus on developing specific competencies or skills in which students and learners can display digital badges on their social media or portfolio

- Courses that can be applicable in most postgraduate programs e.g. research methodology courses, statistics etc.
- Courses with unique appeal or Malaysian identity (e.g. Malay language, Islamic calligraphy).
- Summer program that is approved by UM.
- Courses on academic professional development

The Category 1 courses should be about 60% of the total MC courses offered, and the Category 3 courses should be about 40% of the total MC courses offered by UM.

5.3   Mode of delivery

MC@UM courses can be designed and delivered through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) or conventional including blended modes of delivery (MQA, May 2020, p. 10) (Table 2).

Table 2 MQA definition of conventional and ODL mode of delivery

Conventional mode	Conventional mode is the provision of teaching and learning mainly through face-to-face interaction in classroom. Within the conventional mode of delivery, blended learning implies significant use of online mechanisms for teaching and learning (between 30% to 60%) but the face-to-face interactions remains the primary strategy.
ODL mode	Open and Distance Learning is where at least 60% of the teaching and learning is provided through online learning systems with face-to-face interactions playing a supplementary role (Surat Makluman MQA Bil. 3 2018). Its implementation must be read together with Code of Practice for ODL which specifies other ODL requirements such as regional centers, self-instructional materials, learning management system that support synchronous and asynchronous learning.

5.4   Design and development of the courses

5.4.1 The Academic Enhancement and Leadership Development Centre (ADeC) will provide relevant trainings on the design and development of these courses. In a nutshell, an MC@UM course should consist of:
- Resources or learning materials in the forms of videos, texts, readings etc.
- Learning activities e.g. discussions, self or collaborative activities
- Assessment of learning.
…..all of these are in online mode

5.4.2 It is recommended that MC@UM courses applies the topic- or module-based design and development approach in which suitable topic(s) from a course is further divided into smaller modules.

These topics or modules will then be delivered, either as instructor-moderated or self-paced, online via FutureLearn, a leading global platform for online courses offered by selected top universities and recognized professional bodies.

5.4.3 Based on MQA's mode of delivery (see Table 2), there are 3 possible approaches to the design and development of MC@UM courses (Table 3):

Table 3 Possible approaches to the design and development of MC@UM courses

Options	Description
Option A (Blended learning course)	• Approximately 5 weeks online, (= about 35% blended learning component out of the standard 14 weeks semester) • Minimum of 1 MOOC course (e.g. 1 MOOC – 5 weeks duration) **OR** • 2 MOOCs of 2 weeks + 3 weeks each
Option B *(This can be converted into MC later)*	B1: A fully online single course Create 1 MOOC course for 14 weeks to cover the whole topic of the existing residential course. B2: A fully online multiple courses Create several MOOCs to cover the 14 weeks of the existing residential course.

5.5 MC Maintenance and Continuous Offerings

Lecturers and faculties offering the MC should take the responsibility to maintain and offer the MC courses at the agreed time.

In case of academics leaving the university, the faculty shall run the MC course with the original academic member who developed the course or make necessary arrangements to offer the course with existing academic member of the faculty.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS / BENEFITS
MC@UM is a long-term effort with important implications on T&L and on various stakeholders. The main and most immediate implications include the following:

6.1 Implication on course and program design and delivery
As much as possible, it is highly recommended that existing Learning Outcomes be retained so that the integration of MC elements will complement the course and program structure particularly for courses under programs that have undergone the Curriculum Review process.

However, for mid-term planning, programme owners should be supportive of courses that may require some amendments to the Learning Outcomes. The integration of these MC elements should be treated as a testing ground and practice for programs aiming to offer Category 1 MCs in the mid-term and long-term.

6.2   Implication for residential students and MC learners

Participation in MC courses will provide UM students with immersive experience of learning in a real-world online course environment with other diverse learners. This experiential learning experience will scaffold the online course learning experience and provide exposure and experience with life-long learning. In addition, UM students may also gain from learning alongside other learners who may be of different ages, with different sets of educational backgrounds and life experiences.

External MOOC learners will have the opportunity not only to participate in MOOC for knowledge and/or skills but will also have the opportunity to experience an actual UM course alongside registered internal UM students.

Group discussions, peer teaching, as well as peer assessment are highly encouraged as these T&L activities are designed to increase student-to-student peer engagement.

6.3   Implication for MC lecturers/developers

As mentioned earlier, one major implication on lecturers involved in developing and delivering MCs is increased and more complex teaching workload.

While the implication on lecturer workload appears to be a challenge, there are also positive implications for MC lecturers' professional growth and academic reputation in a now changing higher education landscape, where Teaching & Learning (T&L) is re-emerging as a highly valued component of academic scholarship, alongside Research and Publication.

6.4   Implication for faculty/department/program

Faculties involved in this effort are helping UM achieving Ministry bound KPI on MOOCs as well as micro-credentialing. Similar to lecturers, the faculty/department/program may also benefit from income generated from high-demand MCs. Additionally, the faculty/department/program international and national presence will also be represented by MCs offered by their lecturers.

The department hosting the MC course contributes to expertise development for more lecturers be trained to offer more MOOC and MCs.

The department must discuss the possibilities to reduce the MC lecturer's teaching workload and/or provide extra KPI marks related to teaching & learning.

6.5   Implication for UM

The university's effort to offer micro-credential courses to the public is an important undertaking that will place UM alongside other global top universities expanding their audience to include external learners locally and internationally. MC@UM is an initiative that will bear positive implication for UM's achievement of several shifts outlined by the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education), namely:

- Shift 3 Nation of Lifelong Learners
- Shift 8 Global Prominence
- Shift 9 Globalised Online Learning
- Shift 10 Transformed Higher Education Delivery

Equally important, MC@UM can be one avenue for income generation for the university, as well as participating PTj's, and lecturers as mentioned above.

Designing, developing and implementing MC@UM requires strong commitment from UM academic community, especially lecturers teaching MC courses. Lecturers who are responsible of developing as well as running the MCs for both their own students and external learners need the full support of their colleagues and superiors.

The university will provide support in the form of training, guidelines, consultation, and liaising with FutureLearn. Program Coordinators, Heads of Department/Programme, Deputy Deans and Deans are responsible for ensuring that MC lecturers are not overburdened when assigning their teaching, supervision, and administrative loads.

In addition to considerations for MC lecturers' workload, Table 4 lists some additional issues to ensure success of MC@UM.

6.6   Copyrights

As the development of resources for MC might involve issues of copyright, the **existing UM's Intellectual Property and Commercialisation Policy** is referred to. In particular, section 7 of the policy which states:

> *"Rights in IP made or created by employees shall be owned by UM if the IP was either developed in the course of or pursuant to UM sponsored research or if the IP was developed using UM's resources".*

Further details on copyright related policies shall be consulted with UMCIC in person.

REFERENCES

MQA (4th May 2020). Draft guidelines to good practices: Micro-credential. Accessed on 25th June 2020 from https://www2.mqa.gov.my/qad/PS/2020/DRAFT%20GGP%20MICRO-CREDENTIAL%20Version%204%20May%202020.pdf

MOE (2015). Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education). Accessed on 26th June 2020 from http://www.mohe.gov.my/muat-turun/awam/penerbitan/pppm-2015-2025-pt/4-ringkasan-eksekutif-pppm-2015-2025-pt