



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY

# Microcredential

Product design framework **overview**

Lifelong Learning, Portfolio Projects,  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)



2024

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For a copy of the full Microcredential Product Design Framework, including templates and detailed instructions for each step, contact:

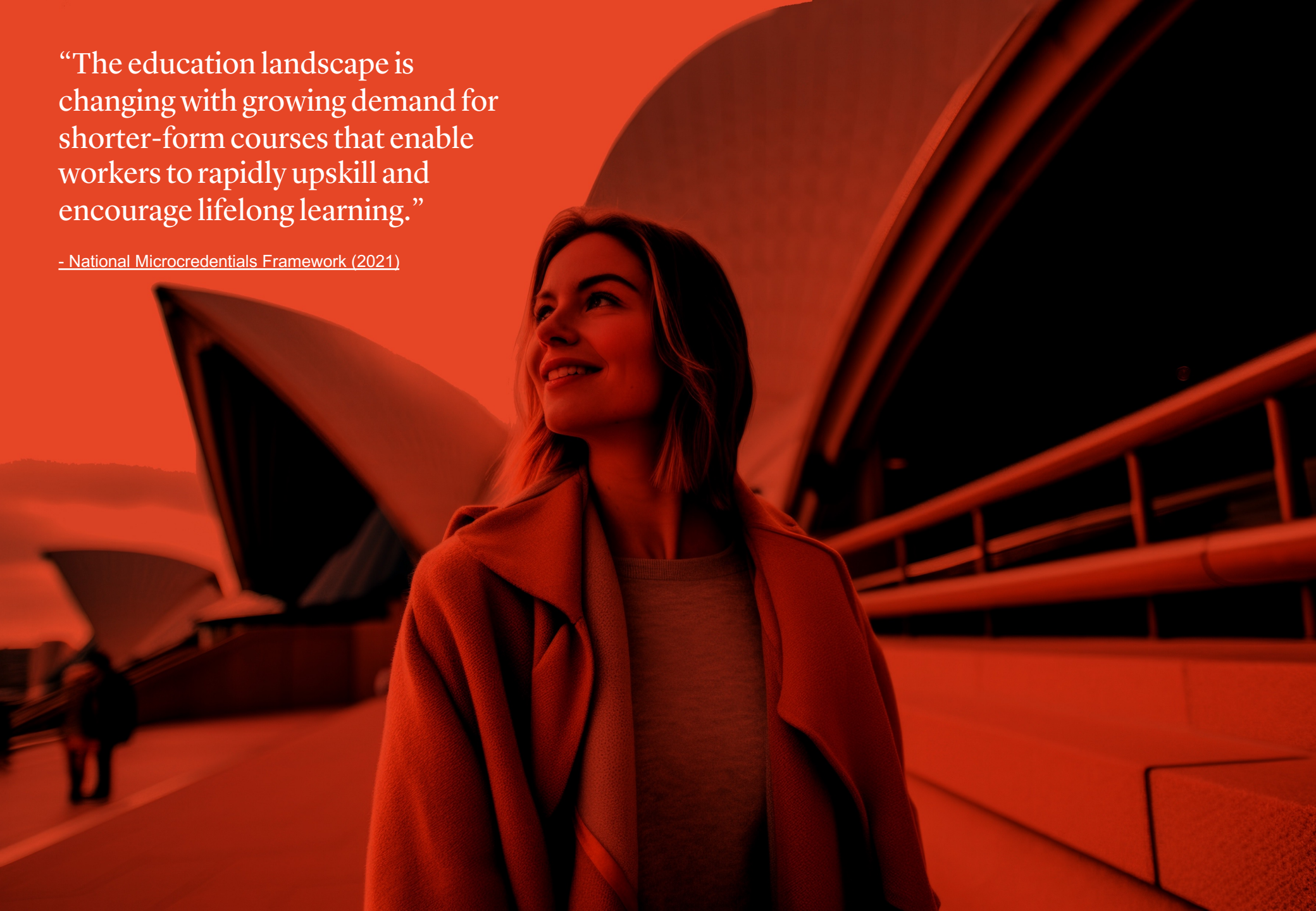
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*Background*

“The education landscape is changing with growing demand for shorter-form courses that enable workers to rapidly upskill and encourage lifelong learning.”

- National Microcredentials Framework (2021)







# Aspiration

The University's 2032 Strategy sets out an intention to develop a portfolio of accessible, flexible and professionally-relevant educational opportunities that address local and regional labour market needs and tackle emerging global challenges.

Microcredential courses are underpinned by the Continuing and Extra-Curricular Education Policy 2022 and adhere to a well-governed approval process. This ensures consistency in quality of learning and student experience to support financial sustainability and overall University of Sydney education standards.

This document details a design framework of best practice for the development of microcredentials.

## Reading this document:



These sections denote university policy requirements and will include a link to the relevant policy.



These sections represent activities to complete. You can complete these separately, digitally or on paper.

What is a *microcredential*?

# A microcredential is:

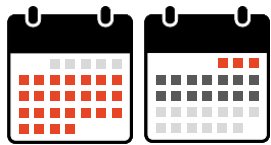
"...a continuing education course which results in certification of assessed learning that focuses on specific knowledge, skills and capabilities and verifies that the holder possesses a particular professional skill."

- Continuing and Extra-Curricular Education Policy 2022

## Approval

- 1 Dean OR Head of Institute/Centre  
**+ If credit eligible:**  
Program Director & Faculty Education Committee
- 2 Non-Award Sub-Committee endorsement
- 3 Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) approval

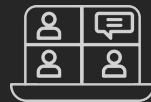
## Length



Total volume of learning: 15 – 150 hrs.  
It is often approx:  
50 hrs over 4-6 weeks

**+ If credit eligible**  
1 CP = 25 hours

## Delivery



Online lectures



Face to face sessions



Self-paced  
online modules

Online content is delivered via **Canvas 2** – a separate instance of the University's LMS, Canvas, for Non-Award courses.

*Microcredentials should include a synchronous learning component*

## Content complexity



Microcredentials are aligned to AQF 8-9

*Graduate Certificates / Graduate Diploma – Masters levels*

## Attainment



Students receive a digital badge which can be added to their CV or LinkedIn and verified in real time.

**+ If credit eligible**  
Student receive credit toward a postgraduate award course

## Assessment

Must have assessment which demonstrate learning outcomes and may not be multiple-choice quizzes.

**+ If credit eligible**  
Assessment may not be group assessment or participation

# Lifelong learning landscape

Education products are either Award courses or Non-Award courses. Award courses are approved by the Academic board, endorsed by Senate, lead to conferral of a degree or award of a diploma or certificate\*\* and are governed by [Coursework Policy 2021](#).

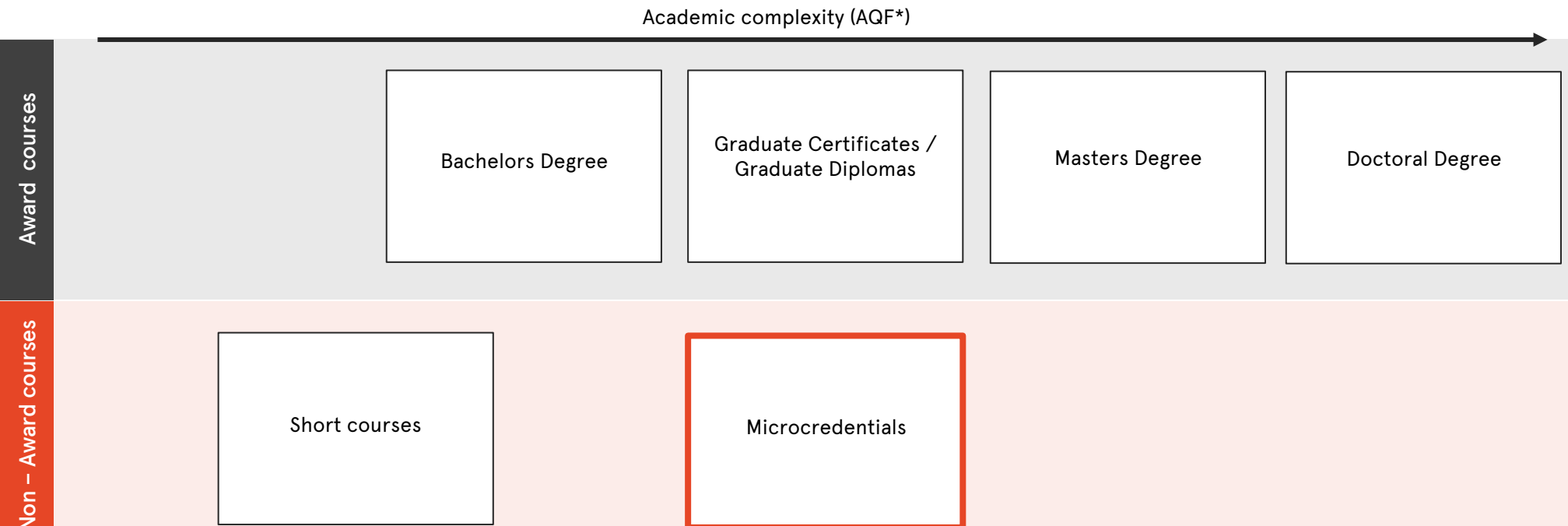
Microcredentials are Non-Award courses with development governed by [Continuing and Extra-Curricular Education Policy 2022](#). Non-Award courses are endorsed by the Non-Award Sub-Committee with final approval from DVC-Education.

Microcredentials enable students to master a discrete set of learning outcomes that directly relate to an industry need and/or professional development.

At the University of Sydney microcredentials must meet the minimum academic complexity of a Graduate Certificate/Diploma placing them as an equivalent to AQF8 level, or above.

\*AQF: Australian Qualifications Framework

\*\*[Coursework Policy 2021](#) (5) Definitions





# Student segments

Student segments are separated into five distinct categories, which can be akin to the course target audience for B2C courses. The student segment will inform the learning outcomes and student experience and are the basis for the business case that supports financial sustainability.

Career embarkers are not included as they are not a target audience for microcredentials. Although Extra-curricular has been identified as a potential student segment, the AQF8 level of content and assessment criteria does not typically attract those students.

	Career maintainer	Corporate refresher	Career accelerator	Career switcher	Extra-curricular
<b>Description:</b>	People seeking to bridge theory-to-practice or stay up to date with knowledge and skills, including to acquire and maintain accreditations	People prompted by their employer to refresh their skills or learn adjacent skills to support evolving business needs	People seeking to advance their career, typically within their current organisation.	People seeking to shift or evolve careers into different areas, either within their current organisation or different organisations.	People seeking further knowledge, skills, and understanding for non-work reasons
<b>Price sensitivity:</b>	<b>High:</b> Likely to be price sensitive if required for accreditation	<b>Moderate:</b> Less sensitive if filling critical skills gap	<b>Lower:</b> Often paid for by an employer investing in key staff	<b>Moderate:</b> Willing to pay more for clear career outcomes	<b>High:</b> No direct return on investment
<b>Opportunities:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access scale through professional development requirements</li> <li>- Increasing lifelong learning needs across most careers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access scale through corporate partners</li> <li>- Employers increasingly needing to upskill/reskill their workforces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Willingness to pay premium price for courses backed by a brand name</li> <li>- Often subsidised by employer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some willingness to pay premium price if in line with career prospects</li> <li>- Increasing frequency of career changes in workforce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can be attracted by brand prestige</li> <li>- High intrinsic motivation to undertake study</li> </ul>

Design *principles*

## 01 Value proposition and differentiation

Microcredentials should have a unique selling proposition (USP), be reputable and recognised by industry and have clear benefits to the student or their organisation.

The offerings should be distinctive, leverage the university's strengths and align with recognised postgraduate qualities.

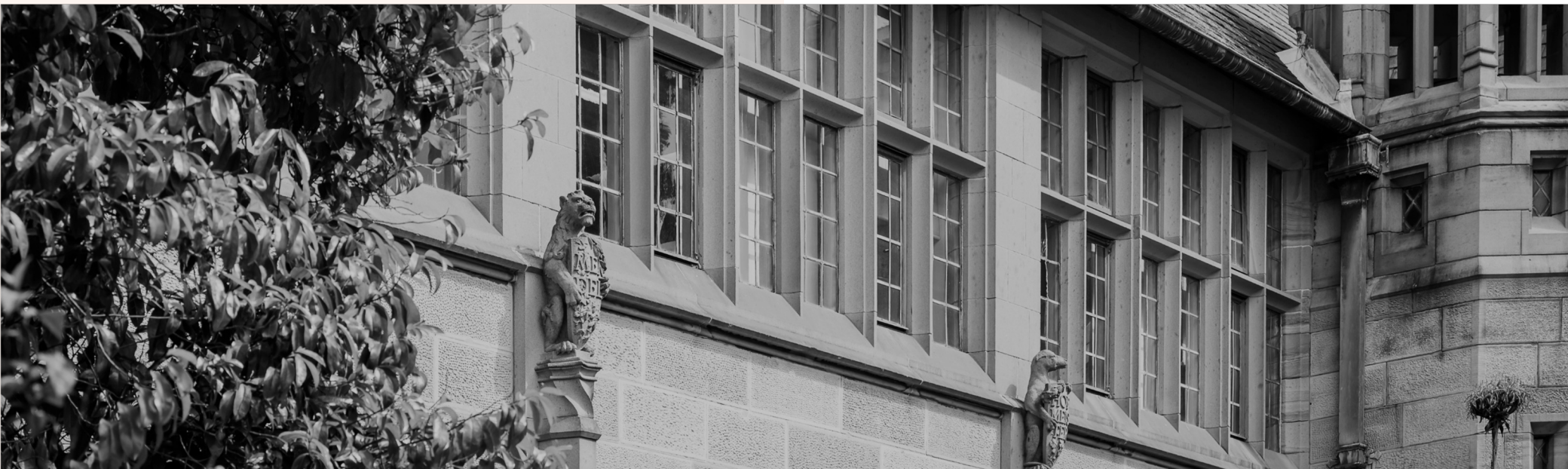
Microcredentials may also have potential to offer future learning pathways (stackability) towards a postgraduate Unit of Study

Courses should offer good value. The benefit of undertaking the course should outweigh the cost and individuals/organisations must be able to afford the cost, including cost in terms of time investment, course fee or other costs.

## 02 Inclusive, adaptable, tech-enabled learning

The learning experience should be interactive, adaptable, engaging with a blend of synchronous & asynchronous delivery, including multimedia and practical experiences.

Courses should be flexible, including self-paced elements, anytime/anywhere learning, learning-through-work, and non-traditional assessment, so students are able to fully engage, enjoy and benefit from course regardless of their needs, lifestyles, ability or other factors



## 03 Future-ready, needs-driven topics

Courses should equip students with innovative, future-ready skills to address workplace skill gaps or emerging societal demands. They should have a clear target market, which may include individuals or organisations, and deliver clear value to the target market through addressing their needs or goals.

Learning should be transformational; combining theoretical and practical skills, fostering personal growth, collaboration between academic disciplines and industry partners, and enabling life-changing opportunities.

## 04 Industry collaboration and co-creation

Where possible, courses should be developed through strategic partnerships with diverse industries and/or peak bodies to align with industry needs.

The focus is on integrating the best of academia and cutting-edge industry input, with opportunities for co-created course design and delivery.

## 05 Student support and experience

Course offerings should be intuitive and student-centric. Language, processes and the course offering should be clear and easy-to-understand.

Courses should be clearly named and described using familiar terms to improve discoverability. Throughout the student journey, from enrolment to course completion, process and systems should be easy and straightforward and student support should be available throughout.

Course content should be interesting and enjoyable for students to engage with and provides a sense of fulfillment.

## 06 Agile and sustainable delivery

Microcredentials should be able to be developed rapidly, using efficient and repeatable processes that enable the university to adapt to emerging and changing trends.

Courses should include ongoing review and continuous improvement as well as a demonstrable return on investment.

The *process*



# Process overview

The development of a microcredential involves three phases: planning, development, and delivery. Endorsement from University leadership during the planning phase ensures the course is financially sustainable and aligns with Faculty and University strategy. Early partner involvement may help identify industry skill gaps and boost enrolments.

Once approved, academics collaborate with an educational designer to create a best-practice learning experience while a marketing plan is established to communicate the course effectively. Finally, the course is promoted, delivered, and student feedback is collected after each offering to inform future improvements.

## 01 Plan

Allow 2-6 months

- Market scan
- Resourcing
- Concept development
- Details development
- Form industry partnerships\*
- Financial analysis
- Market testing \*
- Endorsement and approval

## 02 Develop

Allow 4-8 months

- Marketing
- Operationalisation
- Content development and education design

## 03 Deliver

Allow 3-6 months

- Promotion and enrolment
- Student support and admin
- Teaching
- Issuing attainment
- Collecting feedback
- Reporting and review

# 01 Plan

## 01 Market scan

1-2 days

Identify target audience and research skills needs and competitor courses to determine potential demand.

## 02 Resourcing

1-2 hours

Determine team roles and resource requirements based on the course concept, existing material and partnership needs.

## 03 Concept development

2-3 hours

Brainstorm and refine ideas in a team workshop, aligning with industry needs, to create a unique course concept

## 04 Details Development

2-3 hours

Define course specifics in a team workshop, including name, target audience, delivery style, learning outcomes, and assessments.

## 05 Form industry partnerships \*

1-2 months

Engage industry partners to support enrolment, ensure course relevance, and meet specific skill gaps.

## 06 Financial analysis

1-2 hours

Review all development and delivery costs to set competitive pricing and ensure profitability and sustainability.

## 07 Market testing \*

2-3 months

Engage the target audience to measure interest and refine course content and details.

## 08 Endorsement and approval

2-3 weeks

Complete approval forms and obtain endorsement from the relevant Dean/Head of School, Non-Award Sub-Committee and approval from the DVC-E.

## 02 Develop

### 01 Marketing 3-4 months

Create a tailored marketing plan with key messages, budget, and chosen channels to reach the target audience.

### 02 Operationalisation 2-3 weeks

Set up course workflows and system configurations, covering key logistics and student support.

### 03 Content development & education design 2-8 months

Collaborate with educational designers to write content and create course materials, ensuring they align with learning outcomes and best practices.



# 03 Deliver



## 01 Promotion and enrolment

3-6 months

Promote the course, manage enrolments, and ensure a smooth enrolment process.

## 02 Student Support and admin

3-6 months

Provide technical and administrative support from course enrolment to completion.

## 03 Teaching

*varies*

Teach synchronous lessons, in person or online, monitor student progress, mark assessments and provide academic support if required

## 04 Issuing Attainment

N/A

Automated issuing of statement of completion and digital badge upon course completion.

## 05 Collecting Feedback

1-2 weeks

Gather feedback from students and partners to inform future improvements.

## 06 Reporting and Review

1-2 weeks

Report annually on course outcomes and improvements, focusing on enrolments, financials, and student satisfaction.



For more information or a copy of the full framework, contact:  
[dvce.non-award@sydney.edu.au](mailto:dvce.non-award@sydney.edu.au)



# Glossary of terms

<b>AQF</b>	<a href="#">Australian Qualifications Framework</a>
<b>Asynchronous delivery</b>	Pre-recorded lectures or online modular learning where student receives content at their own convenience via their internet-enabled device
<b>Course concept</b>	An idea for a microcredential course which has not yet been developed
<b>Credit eligible microcredential</b>	A microcredential which, if completed, grants the student credit for either a specific unit of study or number of credit points toward a postgraduate award course.
<b>Digital badge</b>	A verifiable, digital representation of an individual's competences and proof of course completion. The badge contains metadata about the course, organisation, learning outcomes and skill tags. The badge may be uploaded onto social media (eg LinkedIn) or emailed to a third party.
<b>Hybrid</b>	Some content is delivered in person, while other content is delivered online (either asynchronously or synchronously).
<b>Market testing</b>	Primary research engaging potential students to measure a course concept's appeal and/or inform the courses content or delivery.
<b>Market scan</b>	Secondary research using online sources to get an indication of a course concept market demand and competitor products.
<b>Non-Award Sub-Committee (NASC)</b>	A committee with representation across faculties which provides academic quality assurance and strategic oversight of non-award continuing and extra- curricular education courses. This includes endorsing and reviewing all microcredentials.
<b>Remote</b>	All content is delivered online, there is no in person requirement
<b>Self-paced online modules</b>	Asynchronous content , delivered online. Typical there would be a short quiz or reflection at the end of each module to test for understanding
<b>Sydney Future Students (SFS)</b>	An internal University of Sydney team who can conduct market research and testing
<b>Synchronous delivery</b>	Delivered in real time. e.g. Live online and/or in-person lectures, tutorials, workshops
<b>USP</b>	Unique selling point that places the knowledge, teacher or organisation offering a unique value for the learner
<b>Volume of Learning (VoL)</b>	Represents the total hours a student will need to dedicate over the duration of the course. It includes all delivered content, both synchronous & asynchronous, expected time to complete assessments and assignments and any additional study time.