

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Call for proposals to develop micro-credentials

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Reference: W21/23HE
To: Heads of universities in Wales
Response by: 30 August 2021
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This circular provides a call for submission of proposals from universities in Wales to carry out research into the areas where micro-credentials are most needed to support economic recovery in Wales, and the piloting of small amounts of this provision. The aim of this work is to ensure that HEFCW is in a position to integrate this provision into our funding method from 2022/23. Bids should be submitted by **30 August 2021** to quality@hefcw.ac.uk.

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Introduction

1. This circular provides a call for submission of proposals from universities in Wales to carry out research into the areas where micro-credentials are most needed to support economic recovery in Wales, and the piloting of small amounts of this provision. The aim of this work is to ensure that HEFCW is in a position to integrate this provision into our funding method from 2022/23.
2. Bids should be submitted to quality@hefcw.ac.uk by **30 August 2021**. We will make decisions regarding the allocation of funding by the end of September 2021.

Background

3. Micro-credentials are flexible, short, transparently-assessed learning experiences, which result in the award of credit, and are subject to standard quality assurance mechanisms. The term micro-credentials is sometimes used to refer to unaccredited provision. For clarity, we will refer to unaccredited provision as 'micro-provision'.
4. Micro-credentials have no upper or lower limit of credit, but they should not normally be of a size sufficient to constitute an award in their own right on qualifications frameworks. They are subject to the internal quality assurance procedures of institutions. They may be used as stand-alone qualifications, or aggregated as part of larger qualifications. They may be taken across a number of subject areas, and delivered online or in person. Further information on micro-credentials has been published by the [QAA](#).
5. The provision of micro-credentials and micro-provision can help universities deliver their civic mission: by offering accessible, flexible, short-term learning opportunities to a range of learners, universities are able to help make an important difference to the lives of people in their communities, while also helping to make a significant impact on the economic recovery of those communities through providing a skilled and prosperous workforce.
6. Micro-credentials can be helpful in enabling individuals to upskill or reskill, in order to address emerging labour market needs and/ or to obtain employment. By their nature they are inclusive, and could play a role in helping Wales to recover from economic challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. They also offer the opportunity for bilingual provision, and for provision to be tailored to a range of accessibility needs.
7. HEFCW's March 2021 [remit letter](#) included the following request: 'I would like the Council to continue its work in supporting the development of micro-credential and modular courses in Wales in support of our economic growth and recovery. I have allocated an indicative contribution of £1.1m to

support this activity.’ This funding was allocated from HEFCW’s baseline funding.

Proposal

8. HEFCW will fund proposals to carry out research into areas where micro-credentials are most needed to support economic recovery in Wales, together with piloting small amounts of this provision to test the findings. The work will run to 31 July 2022.
9. Our aim is to fund a bid, or bids, which cover all regions of Wales. Universities will need to take account of this in considering both the scope of their bids, and the amount of funding for which they wish to apply.
10. Through this funding we aim to drive synergy with the collaborative bids funded under the Investment and Recovery Fund.
11. We encourage collaborative approaches to micro-credentials, via regions, sectors, or other means. Universities can propose partnerships with other organisations, including FE colleges and other universities delivering higher education in Wales.

Bids

12. Bids should be no longer than 5 pages of A4. They will need to include the following:
 - Proposals to develop an enhanced regional and national understanding of market potential and needs in Wales (and beyond), including working with Regional Skills Partnerships. This could include:
 - A current and future skills gap analysis to determine sectors/ subject areas where micro-credentials are most needed to inform future development of this provision.
 - Consideration of FE Level 3/4 curriculum to promote learning pathways.
 - Clarity about how it is proposed to engage with relevant employers or employer organisations.
 - Proposals for the management and delivery of micro-credentials that could be achieved through a collaborative, regional and/or thematic approach. This could include delivery platforms, student engagement, admissions, assessment, etc.
 - How Welsh medium and/or bilingual provision would be supported.
 - Engagement with UK-wide work on micro-credentials, for example via engagement with QAA work and publications on this area.
 - The application of academic and quality infrastructure for micro-credentials.
 - Identification of the means by which micro-credentials can be aggregated into larger qualifications, with advanced standing, as well

as mechanisms for recognition and recording of credit, including transfer and accumulation across institutions, in order to promote learning pathways.

- Consideration of exit awards within larger qualifications that take account of aggregated micro-credentials.
 - Development and piloting of the delivery of a small number of micro-credential modules (and micro-provision, if desired) in order to test the findings and assess the demand for this provision.
 - Submission of an impact assessment of the proposed approach.
 - A breakdown of costs requested from HEFCW.
 - A statement of the institution's own investment in this area.
 - Identification of how the provision could be sustained into the future.
 - An assessment of the economic benefit to be delivered by the bid.
 - Confirmation that successful bids will submit a report by 1 September 2022 and interim reports as determined necessary by HEFCW.
13. A panel comprised of HEFCW staff and Council members will assess the bids and make decisions regarding funding. Criteria we will use to determine which bids we will fund will include:
- The extent to which each bid meets the requirements set out above.
 - Sustainability of provision and approaches developed through the bid.
 - Economic benefit delivered via the bid.
 - Extent to which the bid contributes to the needs of Wales as a whole
 - Value for money.
14. Micro-credentials developed through this project would not be fundable in 2021/22, other than via the funding provided through this bid. They will need to be subject to internal quality assurance mechanisms, be levelled, credit bearing, and assessed to determine achievement of learning outcomes.
15. We anticipate that, from 2022/23, micro-credential funding will be embedded within our teaching funding method. Micro-provision will not be fundable as it is not credit-based, and therefore institutions will have to consider how they would want to fund this provision, if they wish to deliver it.
16. Institutional bids should be no longer than 5 pages, with costs annexed.

Submission of bids

17. All bids should be submitted to quality@hefcw.ac.uk by 30 August.

Other considerations

18. Some of those undertaking micro-credentials may be eligible for HEFCW's part-time fee waiver. We are carrying out a review of our teaching funding,

which includes consideration of the part-time fee waiver scheme. We encourage institutions to respond to that consultation.

Further information / responses to

19. For further information, contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2085 9731; email cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk).

Assessing the impact of our policies

20. We have carried out an impact assessment screening to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We also considered the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales and potential impacts towards the goals set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 including our Well-Being Objectives. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about impact assessments.
21. A similar responsibility rests on higher education providers to assess the impact of their policies, to safeguard against discrimination and promote equality.