QQI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Independent Evaluation Report on an Application for Validation of a Microcredential Programme

Part 1.   Provider details

Provider name	Dublin Business School
Date of report	02/08/2021

Section A.   Overall recommendations

Programme	Title	Certificate in Business and Digital Skills
	Award	Special Purpose Award
	Credit	30
	NFQ Level	6
	Recommendation *Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory*	**Satisfactory**

Section B.   Expert Panel

Name	Role	Affiliation
Cecilia Munro	Subject Matter Expert	Principal, CDETB Ballyfermot College of FE.
Dr. Austin Hanley	Subject Matter Expert / Secretary	Education consultant. Formerly Dean of Engineering, AIT

Brief synopsis of the programme *(supplied by the provider)*

The Certificate in Business and Digital Skills (Level 6, 30 ECTS) will equip students with practical skills and knowledge in core areas of business. Through the unique combination of modules, students will explore organisational behaviour (theory and skills applied to a variety of industry settings), acquire digital skills (necessary to a modern business environment) and develop an understanding of the importance of marketing communications in the promotion and future sustainability of a business. Through this programme, students will acquire work-aligned skills that will prepare them for the challenges posed by the dynamic nature of the modern business environment, enabling them to make an effective contribution to the resolution of business problems. On completion of this programme, students will possess knowledge in these core areas of business, and acquire key digital and business skills necessary to working successfully in a modern business environment. The Certificate in Business and Digital Skills (Level 6, 30 ECTS) programme is comprised of three modules (Organisational Behaviour, 10 ECTS; Applied Digital Skills for Business, 10 ECTS; Contemporary Marketing Communications, 10 ECTS) which are drawn from the parent programme of the Bachelor of Business (Level 7, 180 ECTS).

Target student groups

The Certificate in Business and Digital Skills (Level 6, 30 ECTS) micro-credential programme is targeted towards students who wish to gain essential knowledge and skills in business and digital skills. It has been designed for those who are self-employed with limited business and digital literacy knowledge and skills, unemployed from a related role, or in employment and who require cross skilling or up-skilling in this area. It is primarily aimed at those who wish to advance their careers by gaining skills and knowledge in business and digital skills in order to play an active role in their organisation. Upon successful completion of this programme, students will be able to apply their skills and knowledge effectively, and understand how to integrate business and digital skills into decision-making in a company or self-employed role. They will be well positioned to pursue roles within organisations that require business and digital skills- related tasks. Each module aims to stimulate curiosity and inquiry through delivery in a theoretical and experiential context through knowledge and skills to ensure students acquire a systematic understanding of these core concepts and practical application of business administration. Furthermore, the programme encourages self-awareness and academic independence by allowing the student to identify and build on their own individual attributes and competencies.

Rationale for Programme

Ireland is, increasingly, competing globally on the basis of talent and on its growing reputation for innovation (Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2017, 2025). Winning the war for talent will be achieved by ensuring that all of Ireland's citizens have access to the skills required to succeed in life; and by guaranteeing that Irish business has the skilled workforce to continue to grow. This National Skills Strategy (Dept. of Education and Skills, 2016; National Skills Strategy 2017, 2025) will see Ireland advance towards its ambitious vision as a country renowned for its skills talent through:

> The quality and relevance of our education and training base, which is responsive to the changing and diverse needs of our people, society and the economy.
> The strength of relationships and transfer of knowledge between employers, education and training providers, and all sections of society, and the resulting impact on how people are prepared for life and work.

> The quality of our workforce – a nation of people armed with relevant knowledge, entrepreneurial agility and analytical skills.
> The effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity, and to enhance the wellbeing of our country.
> The effective use of technology to support talent and skills provision, to grow enterprise, and to enhance the lives of all within society.

Future Jobs Ireland 2019 emphasises the current shift in Ireland's future workforce and notes that they will, in the coming decades, predominantly require cognitive, social and emotional skills. Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 echoes this statement, highlighting the "increasingly interdisciplinary nature of the world of work… [which] overlaps in the skills required across different sectors and occupations". Thus, acquiring the core competencies of numeracy, literacy and digital technologies are becoming ever more crucial across all sectors of industry in Ireland. Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 further stresses technology as "one of the key drivers of change", whereby a workforce with business skills will be vital, not only in higher-end professional jobs but, more widely, as a basic core competence. Insofar as we are equipped with these competencies, our workforce will underpin Ireland as a "global differentiator".

Fundamental to this shift will be the widespread availability of high-quality education and training, according to Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025. Future Jobs 2019 echoes this statement reporting the importance of individuals at all levels of education across all sectors receiving the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills for development, both during their initial formal education and throughout their whole lives. It is undoubtedly the case that a skills shortage in Ireland already exists.

We conducted research to examine current market vacancies and concluded that there is a demand for business graduates to fill roles identified below. This current demand not only reflects the vibrancy of the Irish market, but also echoes the Higher Education Authority's Graduate Outcomes Survey 2018, which states that eighty per cent of recent graduates of colleges in Ireland are currently employed or about to begin employment. To quote Gerard Brady, a senior economist at the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC): "Firms are competing for the best graduates … They are crying out for skilled … graduates…soft skills are rising in importance: they want people who can show communication and leadership skills."

Encouragingly, research among other industry stakeholders has indicated the importance of a range of both hard and soft skills. Letters of support were provided from key industry stakeholders which include Tim Bicknell, Deep Cove; Joe Keating, Glantus; Ciaran Connolly, Profile Tree; and Maura Ashe, UM.

Finally, we carried out research to identify employment opportunities for fresh business graduates using the websites: **Irish jobs, Indeed**, and **LinkedIn** - search words: *Business Graduate.* Our findings concluded that the feedback we received from industry professionals was paralleled to that of the requirements posted in the job vacancies. Nevertheless, we further noted that the majority of companies heavily emphasised *ability and willingness to learn* as a core requirement, reflected in the following quotes: 'talent for learning', 'open to and excited about further training', 'keen to learn', 'open to new technologies', 'quest for learning', 'enthusiasm for learning'. We also observed that 'excellent writing skills' appeared as a frequent core requirement.

On the basis of stakeholder feedback, and our research on the Irish job market, the programme has been developed in order to provide learners with the most relevant skills and attributes employers in industry have identified as most desirable in the area of business and digital skills.

Employment opportunities

A range of employment opportunities is possible in areas such as business, marketing, sales, operations, and people development. Due to the broad spectrum of career opportunities for business and digital skills we identified employment opportunities which require a mix of knowledge and practical skills that learners will acquire throughout the programme. Additionally, we mapped the required skill sets against the modules. In this way, the microcredential programme offers consolidated and emphasised focus on digital business skills fully integrated with personal plus an in-depth knowledge of marketing, communications and the key aspect of people management and professional skills development which were identified as more important than qualifications per se (Making Sense of Qualifications Report, QQI 2019).

According to Indeed (February, 2021), there are over 1600 jobs in digital business in Dublin and over 2000 jobs in Ireland. Some of the roles may include: Digital Business Assistant, Digital Marketing Officer, Marketing Generalist, Marketing Assistant, Marketing Communications Coordinator, Account Manager, Business Development Officer, Business Intelligence Officer, People Development Lead, Communications Assistant, Support Manager, Digital Development Representative, Account Specialist and many more.

The specific jobs from this programme might include the following:

1. Organisational Behaviour
2. Applied Digital Skills for Business
3. Contemporary Marketing Communications

13 actual job adverts / profiles relevant to the role were supplied by the provider.

Furthermore, the recent July Stimulus package and Springboard Plus call suggest that certain fundamental business areas, such as digital skills, leadership, management and transversal skills, were underserved in higher education skills provision. The July Stimulus call also noted the need for 'shorter, more focused courses/modules that can be offered in a flexible manner and allow people to gain important skills without taking a considerable period away from the labour market' (hea.ie/assets/uploads/2020/08/July-Stimulus-HE-Initiatives-Call). DBS has included *Certificate in Business and Digital Skills* in the Springboard Plus tender.

Finally, the micro-credential draws from the experience of DBS in a number of areas relating to industry support and market interest for this stand-alone, micro-programme. Namely, under the guidance of the Course Director and the independent Chairperson, Tim Bicknell, the DBS Business & Marketing Industry Advisory Board (IAB) board feeds into programme development, review and revalidations to ensure that there is an "industry-aligned" focus. The Board is composed of nearly thirty members from eBay, Deloitte, Salesforce and Marketing Network, to name a few. At the December meeting of the Board, the micro-credential proposal was discussed. Membership of the Board and further information on the profiles of Board are provided in the supporting appendix.

Evidence of student demand					
Student demand is evidenced largely by reference to job market opportunities, letters of support from employers and 'Springboard' approval.					

Duration and Enrolment					
	First Intake Date	**Duration (months)**	**Cohorts / Intakes per Annum**	**Enrolment i.e. students per Intake**	
			Maximum	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Full-Time	September 2021	3-6 months	300 between PT and FT	5	300 between PT and FT
Part-Time	September 2021	3-6 months		5	

Panel Commentary on Section C: Programme Profile Information

This should set out the panel's views on the adequacy of the case made by the provider for the approval of this programme as a viable, stand alone offering for the target student group. The panel should take into account the proposed rationale, evidence of market demand, student numbers, entry criteria, and marketing information. The information on objectives, MIPLO's and marketing information, rationale, should also be checked.

Where the proposed award is at a different NFQ level to that of its parent programme e.g. where the programme is taken from Stage 1 of a validated Level 8 programme, the panel should check the MIPLO to Level Indicator mapping for consistency.

The following Validation Criteria as they apply to this programme should be applied.

Criterion 3.The programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based (considering social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives)

Criterion 2: The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought

Criterion 11: Students enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for.

Criterion 12: The programme is well managed

The headings below are indicative only and can be removed

Rationale, Student Demand, Viability:

The programme sets out to provide students with practical skills and knowledge in Core Business areas such as Organisational Behaviour, Contemporary Marketing Communications and Applied Digital Skills for Business. The college claim that the combination of modules that makes up the award is 'unique'. The viability of the programme is supported by the fact that the modules are embedded in a Level 7 programme. The programme rationale is based on

1. Broad policy publications that speak to maintaining a relevant and skilled workforce, referencing the National Skills Strategy (Dept. of Education and Skills, 2016; National Skills Strategy 2017, 2025).
2. Research on current job vacancies that could attract certificate holders and more broadly, business graduates.
3. Letters of support from selected employers.
4. Graduate opportunities as identified from selected web sites (Irish jobs, Indeed, and LinkedIn)

The views of stakeholders have been taken into account in developing the concept and the rationale for the programme. Demand for this 'entry level' programme is articulated.

The provider offers that on successful completion of the course, students will have skills that equip them to apply for a range of employment opportunities as listed in the application. The opportunities include people management (to be addressed within the module Organisation Behaviour), Marketing (addressed in the Contemporary Marketing Communications module) and digital skills (addressed in the module Applied Digital Skills for Business). The jobs that graduates will be equipped to apply for appears to be aligned with the level of the programme.

The panel acknowledges that the selection of Level 6 programme modules aims to offer the learner a broad set of skills.

Proposed Award - consistency with NFQ: *(refer to the mapping of the programme MIPLOs to the relevant NFQ standards)*

The Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes (MIPLOs) are appropriately mapped to the programme award level (Level 6).

Student Interests: - (Information, QA, Supports, Benefits / Skills accruing from programme):

The panel acknowledges that the programme is primarily targeted at those in employment (including self-employed) who wish to enhance their business and digital skills. The supports provided through the college VLE (Moodle) include adequate student interactive communication tools. The educational supports avaiable to learners are adequate. The panel notes that the target group for this programme is likely to come from a low skill base and may be less prepared/able to use on-line tools than the wider student cohort enrolled on the Level 7 programme. The panel suggests that the college provides targeted and early additional support for students enrolled on the programme.

Entry requirements are clearly stated.

Section D.   Programme Content, Delivery and Assessment

Role	Profile	WTE
Summary of specifications for programme staff *e.g. Lecturer, instructional designer, learning technologist, and others involved in design / delivery / assessment of programme.*		
Lecturer	Lecturing staff will have a minimum of a Level 8 Honours Bachelor's degree in Business or equivalent qualification in the following areas: Organisational Behaviour, Human Resource Management, Information Technology, Marketing and related disciplines. Where industry experience is desirable, holders of Level 6 qualification in Business who are exceptionally qualified by virtue of significant business experience at senior level may also be considered.	0.3
Course Director	The Course Director for this programme will have a minimum of a NFQ Level 9 Postgraduate Diploma or Masters qualification in Business or related areas along with programme management/ academic leadership experience.	0.03
Administration and Support Staff	Such as Library, Admissions, Student Experience, Finance etc. Experience and qualifications relevant to the role.	0.64

Mode(s) of Delivery
Delivery is to both full time and part time students. Then the programme is offered through 4 different delivery modes • Face to face • Synchronous • On demand Asynchronous • Blended Learning

Assessment Strategy
The summative and formative assessment strategy includes a variety of assessment methods including peer assessments (with exemplar solutions), lab exercises, quizzes, MCQs, practical tests, projects and presentations. Assessment is 100% CA.

Panel Commentary on Quality Assurance of the Programme

This should set out the panel's views on (1) how the provider has quality assured the programme development process and (ii) how it proposes to quality assure the programme when validated

The following Validation Criteria as they apply to this programme should be borne in mind:.

Criterion 12:   *The programme is well managed.*

Criterion 6:   *There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned.*

Criterion 7:   *There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned.*

Criterion 8:   *The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's students*

Criterion 10:   *There are sound assessment strategies*

The headings below are indicative only and can be removed

The programme is well managed

The panel acknowledges the innovative and varied delivery modes offered to learners, although in the first instance it will be delivered in a blended format (classroom & online). DBS's Principles for multimodal delivery guide decisions on programme delivery modes through the ABC Curriculum Design process. Attendance tracking is done through Zoom and discussions and comments are monitored to maintain appropriate behaviour, and as an information source for programme improvement.

QA of programme development process:

The programme development process takes account of the views of a variety of stakeholders and is based on the Level 7 programme within which these certificate modules reside. While the QA processes in place are appropriate, the panel suggests that the target group for this programme is represented on the Industrial Advisory Panel and/or its views captured formally through the course board structure when the programme is running.

The panel commends DBS for its two-step quality review process before material is published to students. Formal feedback is gathered from Students in addition to invited impromptu commentary.

QA of Programme Resourcing (Human and ICT) and Resilience:

The resourcing appears adequate (1:150 max for classroom on instances of cross-listing 1:35 for online synchronous).

QA of Assessment:

The assessment tools used are varied and appropriate for the programme and for prospective students. Sample assessment material is provided and the grade criteria rubrics are clear. There is an established peer-review assessment process in place. Assessment is designed in line with QQI Assessment and Standards Revised 2013.

General Comments on the modules:

Organisational Behaviour
- A Grade Criteria Rubric is not presented.

MCQ's:
- The marks per MCQ are not identified in the documentation.

Individual Assignment:
- The example of reassessment of a group assignment might be made clearer.
- The sample assignment given might better reflect a modern business environment.
- The marking scheme might be made clearer by detailing how marks can be achieved.

Applied Digital Skills for Business
- Grade Criteria Rubric is not presented.

Contemporary Marketing Communications
- Grade Criteria Rubric not presented
- Marking scheme needed – how are marks going to be awarded?

Part 2.   Overall recommendation to QQI

2.1   Programme:

Select one	
√	**Satisfactory** (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3) of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training;
	Satisfactory subject to proposed special conditions (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed (<u>**minor**</u>) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination);
	Not satisfactory.

Reasons for the overall recommendation

1. The programme offers a set of modules appropriate to validated market demand and to level 6 standards.

Any other observations:

1. The panel commends DBS for its two-step quality review process before material is published to students.
2. The panel commends DBS for the manner in which it responded to, and subsequently amended its original submission and for comprehensively addressing the panel's concerns.
3. Provider should discontinue using FETAC and use QQI instead in the documentation.

Special Conditions of Validation (directive and with timescale for compliance)
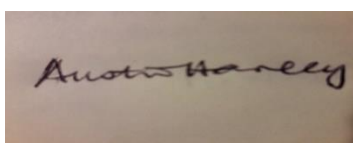
None

Recommendations

1. *The panel recommends that DBS list the specific modules on the Level 7 and 8 programmes that will attract exemptions on successful completion of the Certificate in Business and Digital Skills.*

Declarations of Evaluators' Interests

This report has been agreed by the evaluation panel and is signed on their behalf by the chairperson.

Panel chairperson: Dr Austin Hanley   Date: 16/08/2021

Signed:

2.2   Disclaimer

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