

WELCOME TO

Badges and buy-in

Motivating students to engage with
micro-credentials



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YOUR TIME.
YOUR PLACE.

Welcome!

- Before we begin...have a think about your students.
- Would they **voluntarily complete** an extra certification if it **wasn't worth credit**?

Turn to the person next to you:

- Yes / No / Depends... why?

- What you've just said matches what we're seeing in our data...
- Students don't just respond to opportunity.
- They respond to how it's framed, incentivised and supported.



Today's talk...micro-credentials

- **What** are they?
- Do they have any real **value**?
- Why do (or don't) students choose to **engage** with them?

Tensions exist between:

- Perceived value (credit-bearing? Employability boost?)
- Perceived cost (is it difficult? What's the workload?)
- Positioning within the curriculum.



What is a micro-credential?

- **e-learning**, “**chunked**” into segments covering **specific knowledge** (Taylor & Hung, 2022).
- However, it’s an umbrella term (Brown, 2022).
- Considerable variation in **size** and **scope** (Short activity? Full degree?) (Wang et al., 2020).
- Other words you might have seen:



(Gamage & Dehideniya, 2025; Cleme

- ...but these terms are often used **synonymously**.



What does this mean?



“The rise of micro-credentials signifies a shift from the conventional standards of education...[to] personalized and modular learning experiences” (Kayyali, 2025).

- Students see them as **learner-centred** and **flexible**...and employers value those with **recognisable awarding bodies** that require **hard work** (Varadarajan et al., 2023).
- Many are available...but “not all are equal” (Narayanaswamy et al., 2024).
- Flexible, responsive mechanisms for strengthening graduate employability in the face of **evolving labour market demands** (AACSB, 2024; Gamage & Dehideniya, 2025).

However – there are criticisms and questions...

- Motivation to simply “**complete**” (i.e. getting the badge) vs “**mastery**” of the subject (Ahsan et al., 2023; Alt, 2023) depending on learner’s performance and engagement.
- Students may see them as **distracting** or **redundant** (Olsson et al., 2015).
- **Less prestigious** than a traditional qualification? (Dyjur & Lindstrom, 2017).

Are they just “**gig credentials for the gig economy**”?
(Wheelahan & Moodie, 2022).



Our approach...

- **Placement returners** across all sectors tell us that they wished they had attained more knowledge about **Microsoft Excel/Office** before they went on placement.
- This messaging matches feedback from our placement **employers** too.



To be confident when using excel

To be more efficient on excel

using excel to manipulate large data sets.

We're definitely real students

Excel proficiency.

learning Excel functions and formulas such as Vlookup and Pivot Tables

Excel is a huge part of my role but is something that I had very little knowledge of when I started

Microsoft Office Specialist - what is involved?

- Dedicated **LinkedIn Learning courses**.
- We used these as the basis of either self-directed or class-based learning activities.
- Students then use a mock exam platform (**Gmetrix**) to prepare for the exam.
- The exam is **a 50-minute computer-based exam** (pass mark = 70%) which must take place in an IT lab on campus.
- A practical test of a student's ability to complete a range of challenges ("projects").

So he said "How good are you at PowerPoint?"
And I said: "I *Excel* at it."
And we all cracked up laughing!



You're fired, Steve.

Moodle site – open to all



Search for “MOS” ...

Getting started with Microsoft Office Specialist certificates

Book More ▾

This resource explains everything you need to know about studying for and taking a Microsoft Office Specialist exam.

The format of the exam

The exam lasts 50 minutes and consists of between 20 and 25 tasks that are based around projects very similar to those that you should have completed when watching the respective LinkedIn course. It is a pass/fail - you need to achieve at least 700 points out of a total of 1000 to obtain the certificate.

Before the exam, you should create an account with [Certiport at this link](#). Note, you need this account to take the exam and it will also be the place you go to in the future whenever you want to access your certificate. So choose an email, username and password that you will remember in future years.

On the second registration page where you are required to provide an email address, there is an option to document your student ID. Please put your UP number in here to enable us to keep track of who has passed the exam.

Be punctual for the exam. The platform from which the exam is run is not in our control and it offers a short window of about 10 minutes for the proctor to permit students to start the exam.

More information about the exam process can be found here:

Microsoft Office Specialist Resources 25/26

Course Grades Question bank Enrol me in this course More ▾

Welcome - start here! Collapse all

☰ Start here

Welcome! This site explains how to work towards a Microsoft Office Certification at the University of Portsmouth.

QUICK SUMMARY: To obtain a certificate, you need to pass a 50-minute exam in an IT lab on campus, which demonstrates your knowledge of skills in your chosen piece of software (Word, Excel or PowerPoint). We recommend studying for one certificate at a time. To give you an idea of the difference, here is a list of skills required within each of the MOS certificates. To pass each exam, you must achieve demonstrate knowledge of the skills shown:

- Microsoft Excel Associate (Office 365) – Skills Measured
- Microsoft Excel Expert (Office 365) – Skills Measured
- Microsoft Word Associate (Office 365) - Skills Measured
- Microsoft Word Expert (Office 365) - Skills Measured
- Microsoft PowerPoint Associate (Office 365) - Skills Measured
- Microsoft Outlook Associate (Office 365) - Skills Measured

We now offer Office 365 as standard, but certificates in Office 2019 are also available. Please contact andrew.wood@port.ac.uk / aron.truss@port.ac.uk for details.

Want more information, including how to study for the certificates and how to arrange an exam? Click on "Getting started" below for more details.

Want to jump straight ahead to studying for each certificate? This Moodle site contains links to the LinkedIn Learning preparation courses for each pathway (Word, Excel, PowerPoint). Feel free to explore these yourself.

Feel ready to take an exam? Please ensure you have used our [Gmetrix mock exam system](#) to verify your skill level, and then contact andrew.wood@port.ac.uk or aron.truss@port.ac.uk to book an exam.

Getting started with Microsoft Office Specialist certificates

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MOS – approaches so far

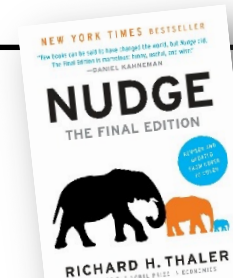
- “**Full**” credit-bearing (the Microsoft exam mark contributes to the module mark).
- “**Partial**” credit-bearing (obtain credit for attempting exam, regardless of outcome).
- “**Nudged**” credit-bearing (completion of a low-stakes LinkedIn Learning preparation course gives credit towards a module mark. The MOS exam itself is optional).
- “**Extra-curricular**” (entirely self-directed) completion of the MOS certificates.



Full

Credit-bearing

Just give them a
little nudge.
(Richard Thaler)



MOS so far...

Year 1 (2023-2024):

- Piloted through BaL and Biology (thanks to the involvement of Darren Gowers) as an extra-curricular activity.
- **184** certifications awarded.

Year 2 (2024-2025):

- **Embedded** on several BaL courses: **243** students attempted exam, with **53% pass rate**.
- Simultaneously, 1130 students were invited to take the **extra-curricular** option.
- They received at least three follow up to the initial invitation.
- 368 expressed interest but only 42 ended up taking the exam (**11%**).
- Of those who did, the **pass rate was much higher (83%)**.

Year 3 - 2025/2026

- **Extra-curricular takeaway:** quite a few students sign up for the certification, but relatively few see it through to completion (attempting the exam).
- Those who do, generally have **better grades** than their peers overall (regardless of whether they pass or fail the exam).
- **Commuter students** perform slightly better on MOS exams than non-commuter students.
- Those who book the exam but DNA *still* have better grades than peers (self-selecting sub-set?).
- Their self-reported motivations are **obtaining credit, improved employability**, gaining a **recognised qualification & improving skills**. This matches literature on employer perspectives.
- Very few claimed to have been influenced by lecturer encouragement or peers.

This suggests that a “nudge” needs to be credit-bearing to make a difference



A quick comparison across years...

- *Introduction to Business Analytics* module.
- Serves 5 x UG business courses (approx. 215 students).

	2024/25
Credit mechanism	10% for attempting exam
Did not attempt	5.1%
Pass rate	27.6%

- Perceived reward (guaranteed 10%) has been reduced, and engagement has dropped?
- But if they *did* attend, they were **more likely** to pass.

Key takeaways from our experience and literature

- **Recognition** matters (e.g. Microsoft).
- **Extra-curricular** (i.e. optional) has reasonably high uptake....low follow-through, but higher proportional success rates than embedded.
- However, it's **self-selecting** and **less equitable** than **embedded** delivery.
- The thing that makes micro-credentials **valuable** (hard work to achieve) is the feature that seems to **deter voluntary participation**.
- Based on feedback...we find the pathway benefits from scaffolding (e.g. LinkedIn Learning & practice exams).
- We don't yet understand the role of credit vs intrinsic drivers, so there's more to do.

But overall:

“**Built-in**” (embedded) seems to be better than “**bolt-on**” (extra-curricular) because **assessment drives behaviour** and embedded reaches more students, including those less likely to self-select.



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