



MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

GUIDELINES ON DEVELOPING
ACADEMIC PROGRAM
THROUGH
STACKABLE DEGREE
PATHWAY



Guidelines on Developing Academic Program through Stackable Degree Pathway

©Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi Malaysia

Hakcipta Terpelihara

Tiada bahagian daripada terbitan ini boleh diterbitkan semula, disimpan untuk pengeluaran atau ditukarkan dalam sebarang bentuk atau dengan sebarang alat juga pun, sama ada dengan cara elektronik, gambar serta rakaman dan sebagainya tanpa kebenaran bertulis daripada Jabatan Pendidikan Tinggi, Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi terlebih dahulu.

Cetakan Pertama/First Printing 2026

eISBN 978-983-3225-73-6



Diterbitkan di Malaysia oleh:

Jabatan Pendidikan Tinggi,
Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi,
No. 2, Tower 2,
Street P5/6, Presint 5,
62200 Putrajaya, Malaysia

Preface

The Malaysian higher education landscape is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by the evolving needs of learners, the demands of the workforce, and the rapid advancement of digital technologies. In response to these developments, the Ministry of Higher Education is committed to fostering flexible and inclusive pathways that enable individuals from diverse academic, professional, and personal backgrounds to pursue and attain formal qualifications. It aligns with Rancangan Pendidikan Tinggi Malaysia 2026-2035 particularly Shift 8 in promoting flexible and lifelong learning.

This document, *Guidelines on Developing Academic Program through Stackable Degree Pathway*, represents a forward-looking framework designed to guide Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia in the design, implementation, and governance of stackable degree pathways. It provides a structured approach to unbundling accredited academic programs into smaller, credit-bearing components, and establishes the principles by which learners may progressively stack credentials earned from formal, non-formal, and informal learning towards the conferment of an academic qualification.

The development of this guideline was informed by extensive consultation with key stakeholders in the Malaysian higher education ecosystem, including representatives from public and private universities, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), and subject matter experts in curriculum design, quality assurance, and credit transfer policy. Their invaluable contributions have ensured that this document is both academically rigorous and practically relevant to the diverse institutional contexts across the country.

This guideline should be read in conjunction with existing quality assurance documents issued by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency, including the Guidelines to Good Practices on Micro-credentials, the APEL guidelines, the Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation for Open and Distance Learning, and the Guidelines on Credit Transfer for MOOCs, among others. Together, these documents form a comprehensive policy ecosystem that supports the integrity and recognition of stackable credentials within the Malaysian Qualifications Framework.

It is our aspiration that this guideline will empower HEIs to design innovative academic pathways that are responsive to the needs of lifelong learners, while upholding the quality and standards that define Malaysian higher education. We encourage all stakeholders to embrace the opportunities that stackable degree pathways present in widening access to education and building a more agile, skilled, and future-ready nation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	4
1 Introduction	9
2 Definition of Stackable Degree.....	12
3 Unbundling an Academic Program.....	13
3.1 Principles of Unbundling an Academic Program.....	15
3.2 Unbundling an Accredited Academic Program into Micro- credential Courses	16
4 Stacking Credentials for a Stackable Degree	19
4.1 Principles of Stacking Credentials	19
4.2 Models for Unbundling an Academic Program and Stacking Credentials.....	20
5 Evaluating a Credential for Stackable Degree Pathway	25
5.1 Principles for Evaluating a Credential	26
5.2 Mechanisms to Evaluate a Credential	26
6 Awarding A Qualification through Stackable Degree Pathway .	30
7 Conclusion	33
References	35
Appendices.....	40



1.0

Introduction

1 Introduction

Academic program in Malaysia can be divided into two broad categories: conventional academic program and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) program. An ODL program means that more than 60% of the courses are conducted in an open and distance learning mode, while students enrolling in a conventional program enjoy learning mostly in-campus. Although learning in a conventional program, delivery mode of the courses is not limited to face-to-face setting. In fact, there are courses in this program that blends online, hybrid and face-to-face settings, as well as courses conducted entirely online.

The various delivery modes offer flexibility to Malaysia Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in bundling the courses or unbundling the academic program while assuring quality and ensuring recognition from the regulating body. For students, this flexibility allows them to earn credentials from courses offered outside of the HEIs block-based and semester system as typically offered in an academic program structure. For the credentials to be recognised, students can leverage on the various pathways to earn a degree by stacking their credentials through the credit transfer mechanism at the respective HEIs. Stacking of these credentials will form a stackable degree.

The purpose of this guideline is to assist HEIs to design unbundling of an academic program, explain the various ways for stacking credentials, and principles in awarding a degree in a stackable degree pathway. This document must be read together with the following documents:

- i. Guidelines to Good Practices: Micro-credentials (MQA, 2020)
- ii. Guidelines to Good Practices: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Access (APEL.A) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Micro-credentials (APEL.M) (MQA, 2023)
- iii. Guidelines on Credit Transfer for Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) (MQA, 2016)
- iv. Guidelines to Good Practices: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Credit Award [APEL (C)] (MQA, 2020)
- v. Code of Practice for Program Accreditation: Open and Distance Learning (Second Edition) (MQA, 2019)



2.0

Definition of Stackable Degree

2 Definition of Stackable Degree

A stackable degree is a pathway for an academic program formed by stacking credit-bearing credentials to obtain a qualification. The following further explain the related principles for a stackable degree pathway:

i. Degree

A degree is a formal academic qualification awarded to individuals upon completion of learning from credit-bearing courses at a recognized institution within the levels in the Malaysia Qualification Framework (MQF).

ii. Stackable credential

A stackable credential is a statement of completion of a credit-bearing course obtained through formal or non-formal learning that can be accumulated and collected to apply for an award of a qualification.

iii. Credit-bearing credentials

Credit-bearing credentials are educational recognitions that carry transferable academic credit and can be applied toward formal academic qualifications within the Malaysian Qualification Framework.

Unlike non-credit bearing credentials, these credentials provide academic validation and long-term educational flexibility, serving as building blocks for stackable degree.

iv. Credit-bearing course

A credit-bearing course is a structured learning unit offered by a recognized institution that carries academic credit. Credit-bearing of a course that issues the credential is calculated in terms of student learning time and educational level, based on evaluation with reliable identification verification. Credit-bearing courses can be in the form of unbundled micro-credential courses from existing accredited academic program, or a verified course by the Quality Verification Centre for Standalone Micro-credentials or other courses that have been evaluated by subject matter experts at HEIs to carry a credit.

v. Credit transfer

Credit transfer is the mechanism that makes forming the stackable degree pathway possible. Stacking of credit-bearing credentials requires the use of credit transfer mechanism that is reliable to evaluate acquired learning outcomes and identity verification. The mechanism involves a process of transferring credits for courses which the learners have undertaken in prior learning to their current program of study. This process allows credits that have been acquired to be counted as part of the graduation credit requirement of the current program learners are pursuing.



3.0

Unbundling an Academic Program

3 Unbundling an Academic Program

Unbundling an academic program means Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) unpackage an academic program into independent credit-bearing courses that learners can learn at their own pace, time and space, making it accessible for learners who do not enroll in formal learning. Later, learners can stack the earned credentials (referred to as micro-credentials) from the courses of the unbundled academic program with other credentials to be awarded an academic qualification from HEIs through credential evaluation methods.

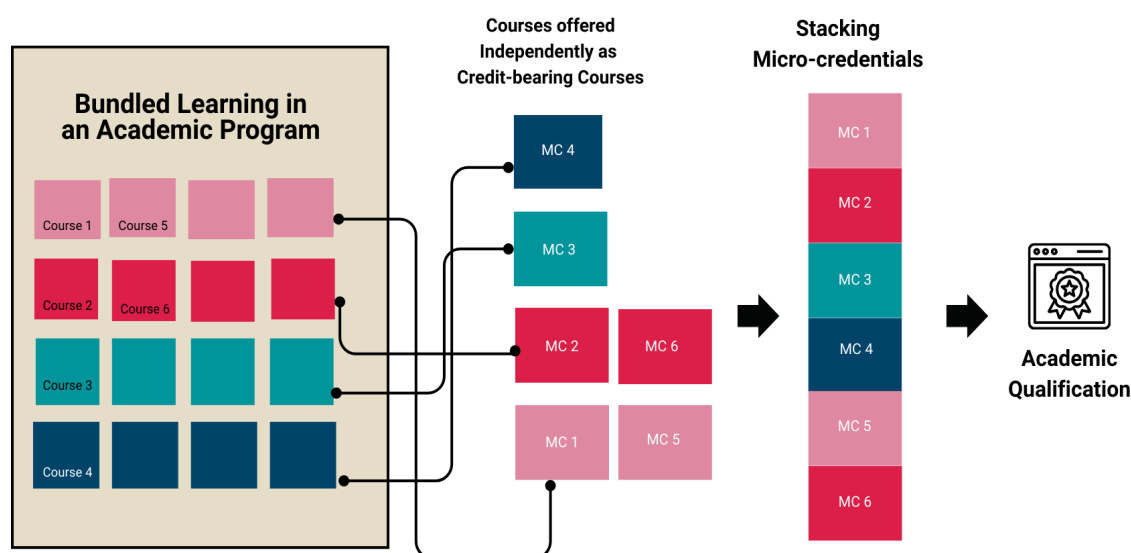


Figure 1: The concept of unbundling an academic program into courses that is offered independently

Figure 1 illustrates the transformation of a bundled academic program into stackable micro-credential pathway. In the bundled learning ecosystem, learners complete all courses as part of a fixed curriculum structure. Through unbundling, learners can take any independent credit-bearing courses at any time and complete them to earn a micro-credential. These micro-credentials can be stacked to apply for an academic qualification. Application to be awarded an academic qualification often involves credit transfer mechanisms.

3.1 Principles of Unbundling an Academic Program

An academic program can be unbundled into independent credit-bearing courses to earn a micro-credential. In designing micro-credential stackable pathways, HEIs must ensure that the unbundled courses are not merely fragmented portions of existing content. Rather, it should constitute well-structured academic units/courses that uphold the integrity, credibility, and intended learning outcomes of the parent program. The following guiding principles serve as a guideline to achieve this objective:

i. Unbundling an Accredited Academic Program

Academic programs that have successfully obtained full accreditation, as stipulated under the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), are eligible to be disaggregated into smaller, credential-bearing components to form stackable degree pathway. This prerequisite ensures that the academic integrity, quality assurance standards, and learning outcomes of the parent program remain intact throughout the unbundling process.

ii. Outcome Alignment

Each course that is unbundled from a program must align directly with the program's intended learning outcomes and comply with the requirements of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF). This means that each unbundled course should contribute towards achieving one or more of the overall program learning outcomes (PLOs), with clearly stated course learning outcomes (CLOs) that are specific, measurable, and achievable.

This alignment ensures that as learners accumulate micro-credentials, they are not merely collecting different skills but developing coherent knowledge that contributes meaningfully to a larger qualification.

iii. Quality Assurance

The academic rigour, assessment standards, and review processes applied to an academic program must also be maintained for courses that have been unbundled from a program. This ensures that the micro-credentials earned through these courses are of equal quality. Quality assurance should include:

- Curriculum approval processes are equivalent to those used for conventional courses, implying the same academic process.
- The assessment design evaluates the attainment of CLOs.
- Periodic reviews to keep content current,
- The use of credentialing standards such as digital badges and micro-credentials, records learning outcomes, credit value, and issuing authority, ensuring that each credential is both transparent and traceable.

iv. Credit Transferability

For micro-credentials to be meaningful in a stackable degree pathway, they must be recognised within the institution's credit transfer policies. For this purpose, HEI has to determine the following:

- Credit value is based on Student Learning Time (SLT) mapping in accordance with MQF.

- Equivalency mapping that shows how a set of micro-credentials corresponds to a conventional course in terms of content, outcomes, and assessment.
- Recognition of prior experiential and learning (e.g. APEL) pathways so that learners who complete micro-credentials, either internally or from external accredited providers, can seamlessly integrate them into their formal academic transcript.
- Educational level mapping that shows how micro-credential stacking is positioned within the existing Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF).
- The system provides a reliable identity verification process of a micro-credential holder.

v. Accessibility & Flexibility

One of the main strengths of unbundling is the ability to offer learning in formats that suit diverse learner needs, including working adults, part-time students, or those in remote areas. This also includes unbundled courses offered through multiple delivery modes, such as online, hybrid, blended, or in-person and allows self-paced learning and flexible entry requirements, such as through APEL.A and APEL.M.

vi. Stackability

HEI has to make sure that all the unbundled courses can lead to a stackable degree of an accredited academic program. A stackable degree must have clearly mapped pathways that show learners exactly how many credit-bearing credentials are required to achieve each qualification milestone. It is also essential to provide information on “exit and re-entry” options in a course or an academic program, allowing students to pause their studies after earning an academic qualification and later return to continue stacking credentials.

vii. Mode of program for awarding a degree

HEI can unbundle conventional academic programs or ODL programs into micro-credential courses. A learner can earn these micro-credentials and stack them to be awarded a degree in either program mode (conventional or ODL mode) based on the preference of the learner.

3.2 Unbundling an Accredited Academic Program into Micro-credential Courses

The unbundling of an accredited academic program process is the deliberate deconstruction of a traditional, comprehensive degree program into smaller, discrete, and often standalone units of learning called micro-credential courses. HEIs can choose any fully accredited academic program to be unbundled for a stackable pathway. However, for academic program governed by professional bodies or subject to international accreditation, unbundling is subject to the respective professional bodies. Then, HEIs can offer the selected micro-credential courses based on the following guidelines:

i. Courses that can be offered as micro-credential courses from unbundled program

The type of courses that can be offered as micro-credential courses from unbundled programs can be theory-based or practical-based courses. The HEIs are encouraged to prioritize theory-based courses over practice-based courses, given the greater complexity involved in delivering the latter. Theory-based courses generally rely on knowledge that can be accessed through text-based materials, whereas practice-based courses often require specialized tools, software, and hands-on activities, making them more resource-intensive.

Courses such as industrial training, internships, research projects, fieldwork with substantial hands-on teaching and learning are not suitable for online delivery of micro-credentials and may have to be delivered by conventional and/or blended means. Nonetheless, HEIs retain full autonomy in determining the design and delivery of micro-credential courses, based on their institutional resources and areas of expertise.

ii. Course sequence (pre-requisite)

HEI should provide a guideline for the learners to follow the order of courses or complexity level based on pre-requisites to be taken prior to the next course in the sequence (if applicable). For courses that do not have any pre-requisites, learners are free to take any courses in the unbundled academic program.

iii. Determine Credit Value

Credit values must be determined for the micro-credential course using Student Learning Time (SLT) in accordance with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework. Micro-credential courses may either carry the same credit value as the equivalent accredited course or be subdivided into smaller credit values. For the smaller unit from the accredited course, it can be offered as a module. The learners need to complete all the modules to earn one micro-credential.

iv. Design Assessment Strategy

The design of the assessment in the micro-credential course aligns with the CLO from the accredited courses. If the HEI breaks the existing courses into smaller modules, the assessment should also be aligned and mapped with the CLOs within the smaller modules. Although the type of assessment in the micro-credential course is different, the HEI has to make sure that the learning outcome of the micro-credential course is achieved.

v. Design Learning Delivery

The delivery mode can be online, blended, or face-to-face. It is based on learner needs, the nature of the content, and institutional capabilities.



4.0

Stacking Credentials for a Stackable Degree

4 Stacking Credentials for a Stackable Degree

Stacking in academic programs refers to the process of combining smaller units of learning that comprise formal learning, non-formal learning, and informal learning such as micro-credentials or short courses, into a conventional academic qualification. This approach allows learners to progressively build their knowledge and skills over time, while earning formal recognition at each stage.

In practice, stacking provides a flexible and inclusive pathway for learners, particularly working professionals, to build towards formal qualifications while meeting immediate skill needs., these pathways are supported by credit transfer policies, APEL.C, and institutional quality assurance processes.

4.1 Principles of Stacking Credentials

The principle of stacking is the underlying concept that enables smaller, credit-bearing credentials to be accumulated and recognised as part of a larger qualification. For a credential to be accepted for stacking, the following principles should apply:

i. Source of Credential

Credentials that can be stacked can be obtained from formal learning (unbundled of academic program in the form of Micro-credentials), non-formal learning (learning through structured training or workshops) and informal learning (working experience). However, all the credentials must go through evaluation process to determine the credit equivalency.

ii. Credit-bearing Credential

Credentials earned through various sources (formal and non-formal) must have clearly defined learning outcomes, student learning time, and assessment standards that are equivalent to a credit-bearing credential. Only credit-bearing credentials can be stacked to form a stackable degree including credits earned from credit transfer processes such as APEL.C, MOOC, vertical or horizontal credit transfer. The credit-bearing credentials may be graded or non-graded credentials based on the requirements of the HEI.

iii. Credential Validity

Credential validity refers to the extent to which a credential is recognized as a credit-bearing credential by HEIs and other training/learning providers in order to stack into an academic program. The valid credential can be stacked to form an existing bundled program at the offering HEI.

A valid credential can also be credit transferred to other courses at other HEIs and stacked to form a similar bundled program. HEI can choose to set the validity period of a credential depending on the frequency of HEIs reviewing the curriculum of the program.

iv. Curriculum Alignment

Curriculum alignment in a stackable degree refers to the process of ensuring that the learning outcomes, content, assessments, and credit values of smaller units of learning are systematically mapped to the requirements of an academic qualification. This ensures the curriculum mapping meets the same academic rigour and contributes directly towards fulfilling the program's requirements.

A clear mechanism to ensure that stackable credentials are properly mapped to the target academic qualification. This alignment guarantees that the curriculum mapping upholds the same academic rigour and contributes directly toward fulfilling the requirements of the overall program.

v. Accumulation Pathway

There must be a clear progression route showing how individual credentials combine to meet the total credit requirement to redeem an academic qualification level based on MQF. This progression route will allow students to pause their studies after earning an academic qualification and later return to continue stacking credit-bearing credentials to earn another level of academic qualification.

By accumulating credit-bearing credentials, the learners can begin obtaining an academic qualification with a single program entry point and later earn more credits towards multiple levels of academic qualification.

4.2 Models for Unbundling an Academic Program and Stacking Credentials

Regardless of the unbundling pathway designed by HEIs, the final awarding of a qualification must be from an accredited academic program. HEIs can choose to recognise credentials earned by the learners/students from any of the following pathways to finally award the student with a qualification.

i. Unbundling from the existing accredited academic program within a single HEI

Figure 2 illustrates the systematic process by which HEIs can disaggregate their existing accredited academic programs to create modular micro-credential pathways. University A employs program unbundling to transform a conventional degree program into discrete, competency-based learning modules that can be offered as independent micro-credential courses.

This disaggregation allows the university to offer granular skill verification through individual micro-credential courses while maintaining the academic rigour and learning outcomes of the original degree program.

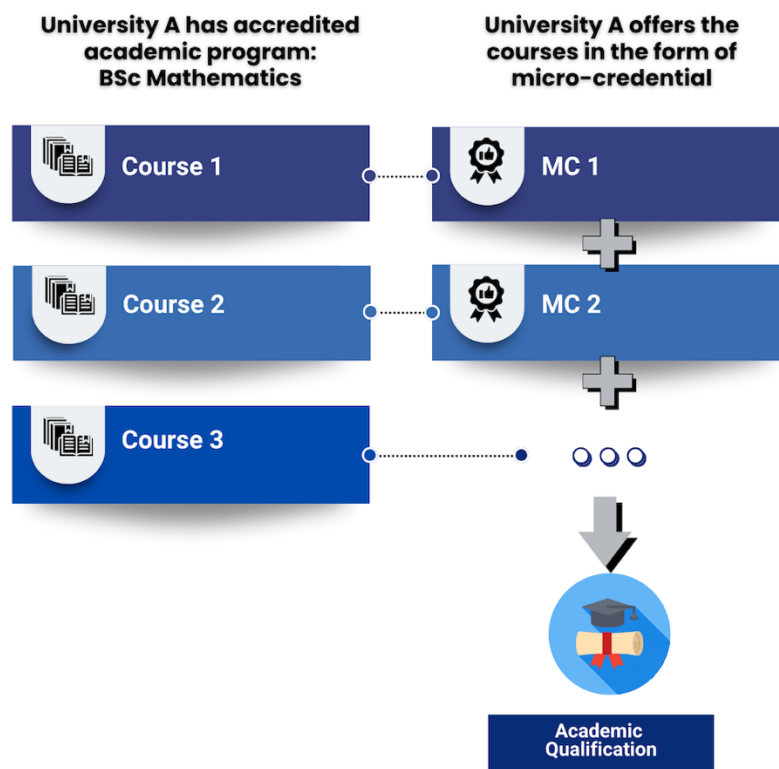


Figure 2: HEIs unpack their existing academic program and offer them as micro-credentials.

ii. Unbundling from the existing accredited academic program within multiple HEIs

HEIs can also use a collaborative approach in facilitating stackable degree pathways through inter-institutional credit recognition. Figure 3 demonstrates how both universities, despite maintaining their distinct accredited academic programs leading to similar degree outcomes, can systematically unbundle their respective curricula into discrete micro-credential components. This unbundling process enables students to strategically combine courses from both institutions' offerings, creating a flexible pathway toward degree completion.

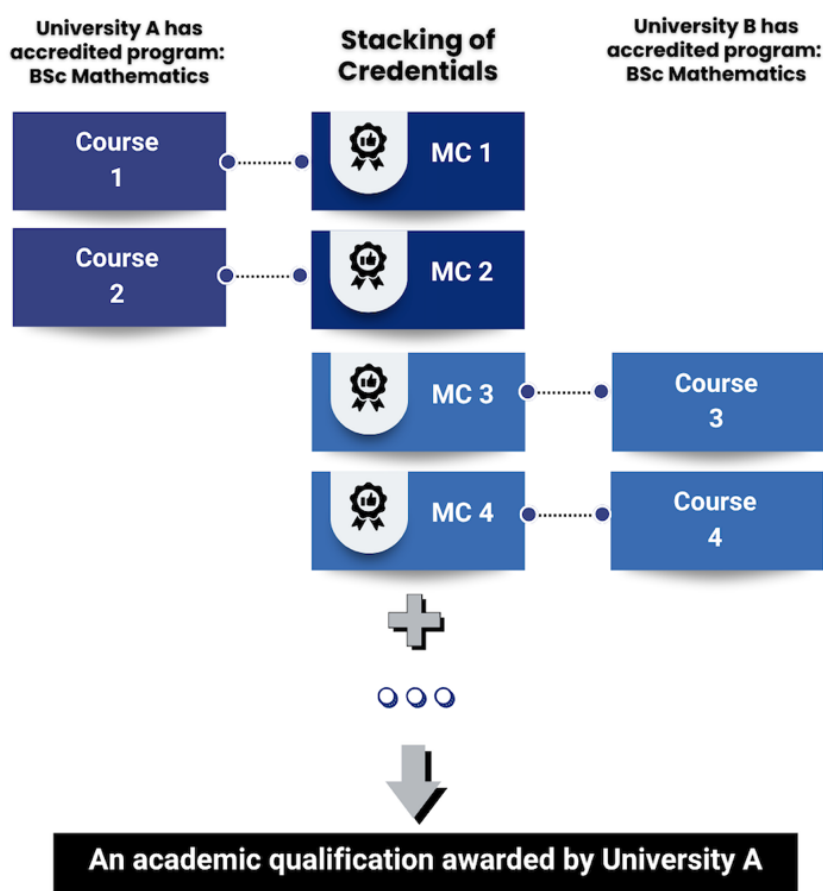


Figure 3: Two universities offer similar degree and unpack their respective accredited academic programs

iii. Multi-source credential aggregation model

HEIs can also design the stackable degree pathway based on a comprehensive model for multi-source credential aggregation. By demonstrating the diverse pathways, students can accumulate micro-credentials (MCs) from various educational/training providers to fulfil the requirements for a qualification to be awarded at University C.

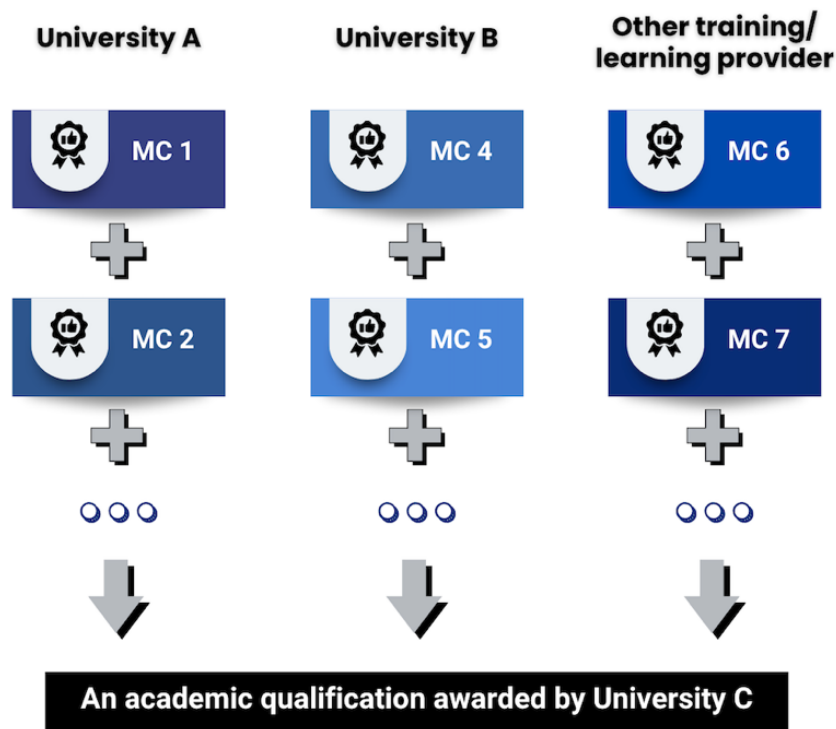


Figure 4: Various entities contribute to stacking of credentials for qualification

Figure 4 illustrates the heterogeneous nature of credential sources, encompassing not only traditional higher education institutions but also alternative learning providers, professional development organizations, and/or industry-specific training bodies. Other training providers can also include stacking of credentials from non-formal and informal prior learning experience. More importantly, Figure 4 emphasizes the centralized role of University C as the degree-awarding institution, which serves as the home HEI for credential validation and integration.

To form a degree from accumulated credit-bearing credentials, only 70% of credits is allowed to be credit transferred from other institutions and learning provider (MQA, 2020) to obtain a qualification at University C. The balance of the 30% of the total graduating credits must be obtained from University C.

iv. Multi-institutions collaboration stacking model

HEIs may choose to collaborate with other institutions to offer an academic program using stackable degree pathway. The following models are suggested:

- Collaborative HEI Curriculum Structure (Fixed Choice)

In this model, students enroll in an institution (eg. University A as a Home Institution) that allows courses in the program to be taken from other HEIs to complete the total credit for graduation. For this purpose, University A has built a curriculum structure that the students must follow (which is taking courses from various HEIs) as shown in Appendix A.

- Collaborative HEI Curriculum Structure (Flexible Choice)

In this model, students are given the flexibility to choose to accumulate their credentials for a specific course from any HEIs of their choice (See Appendix B). Students then stack their credentials and obtain qualification from a Home Institution through credit transfer mechanism.

- Collaborative HEI Curriculum Structure (Structured Choice)

In this model, students enrolling in a program at an institution (Home Institution) must follow the curriculum structure that requires the student to accumulate their credentials for a specific course from other HEIs (See Appendix C). In this model, students lack the flexibility to choose to learn from any other HEIs of their choice but follow the specified learning provider determined by the Host Institution.



5.0

Evaluating a Credential for Stackable Degree Pathway

5 Evaluating a Credential for Stackable Degree Pathway

In forming a stackable degree, learners can earn credentials from formal, non-formal, and/or informal learning. This includes credentials in the form of micro-credentials, certificates from Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and other prior experiential learning.

5.1 Principles for Evaluating a Credential

Despite the various sources of credentials that learners can earn to form a stackable degree, all these credentials have to be evaluated to determine their credit-bearing. The following are the principles for assessing a credential to form a stackable degree:

- i. Each credential, whether credit-bearing or non-credit-bearing, must be clearly mapped to the corresponding course in a stackable degree program. This ensures alignment of learning outcomes with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) level descriptors.
- ii. Non-credit-bearing credentials, such as professional short courses or training programs, must undergo a recognised process before they can be awarded as credits. These include APEL.C (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Credit Award) or CTM (Credit Transfer for MOOCs).
- iii. Credits awarded must demonstrate equivalence in both course learning outcomes and credit value when compared to conventional MQF-Level Qualification courses.
- iv. All credit transfer decisions must comply with institutional regulations and the policy set by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) including maximum transfer limits and quality assurance requirements.

5.2 Mechanisms to Evaluate a Credential

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that offer stackable degrees must provide a clear map showing how individual credit-bearing credentials align with courses in a full degree program. This mapping ensures content equivalency and that the learning outcomes of the credentials match the intended learning outcomes of the corresponding degree-level courses.

A credit-bearing credential can be stacked in two main ways:

- i. Horizontal - credit transfer from the same level of qualification,
- ii. Vertical - credit transfer from a lower qualification to a higher qualification.

A non-credit bearing credential can be recognised through the following mechanisms:

- i. APEL.C - Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Credit Award is the award of credits for prior informal learning or experiential learning towards a course in an accredited program of HEI.

- ii. MOOC Credit Transfer - Credit Transfer for MOOC is the award of credits given on the basis of recognising the learning acquired and not for the experience gained from the MOOC itself. The learning acquired by the learner through MOOC and the credits awarded must be equivalent to the corresponding learning and credit value of the course applied for credit transfer.
- iii. Quality Verification for Standalone Micro-credential (QV SAMC)- This mechanism recognises structured non-formal learning (e.g., stand-alone micro-credentials (SAMC) from external training providers or industry certifications). The SAMC designed and delivered by a provider is assessed by an approved Quality Verification Centre (QVC) as meeting and capable of meeting the good practice criteria as stipulated in GGP: Quality Verification of SAMCs (2023).

The evaluation methods described in this section serve as the foundation for awarding credits from formal, non-formal, and informal learning pathways towards a stackable degree. Each mode is designed to ensure that the learning outcomes are equivalent to those of conventional MQF-Level Qualification courses and that the credits awarded meet the requirements of the MQF.

Table 3.1 summarises the mechanism in evaluating credentials to be recognised as credit-bearing credentials through various credit transfer mechanisms. The credit transfer mechanisms are guided by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) through the *Guidelines to Good Practices: Micro-Credentials (2020)*, the *APEL.C Guidelines*, and *Guidelines on Credit Transfer for MOOC (MQA, 2016)*.

Table 3.1: Credit-Bearing Credential Evaluation Methods for Stackable Degree

Learning Pathways	Credit Transfer Mechanism	Description on Credit Recognition
MOOC	MOOC Credit Transfer (CTM)	Credits are awarded through the CTM process, based on recognition of learning attained from MOOCs with proper identity verification and secure assessment.
Stand-Alone Micro-Credential	APEL C	Credits granted for structured training or stand-alone micro-credentials offered by training providers. These credentials are earned through verification at Quality Verification Center (QVC) from learning in Standalone Micro credential Courses
Non-formal learning through: • Workshop • Self-learning • Professional Certificates • Short courses • Micro-credential	APEL.C	Recognition of prior experiential or non-structured learning for credit transfer into accredited programs.
Informal Learning through: Work and life experience		
Formal Learning through: Micro- Credential / MOOC (with credit)	Credit Transfer (by Faculty / Department in HEI)	Credits from HEI's own accredited programs, or from accredited academic institutions.

Figure 5 illustrates the accumulation of credits through credit-bearing credentials to form a stackable degree. Non-credit-bearing credentials can be converted into credit-bearing credentials upon evaluation using various mechanisms, such as CTM, quality verification by QVC, or APEL.C.

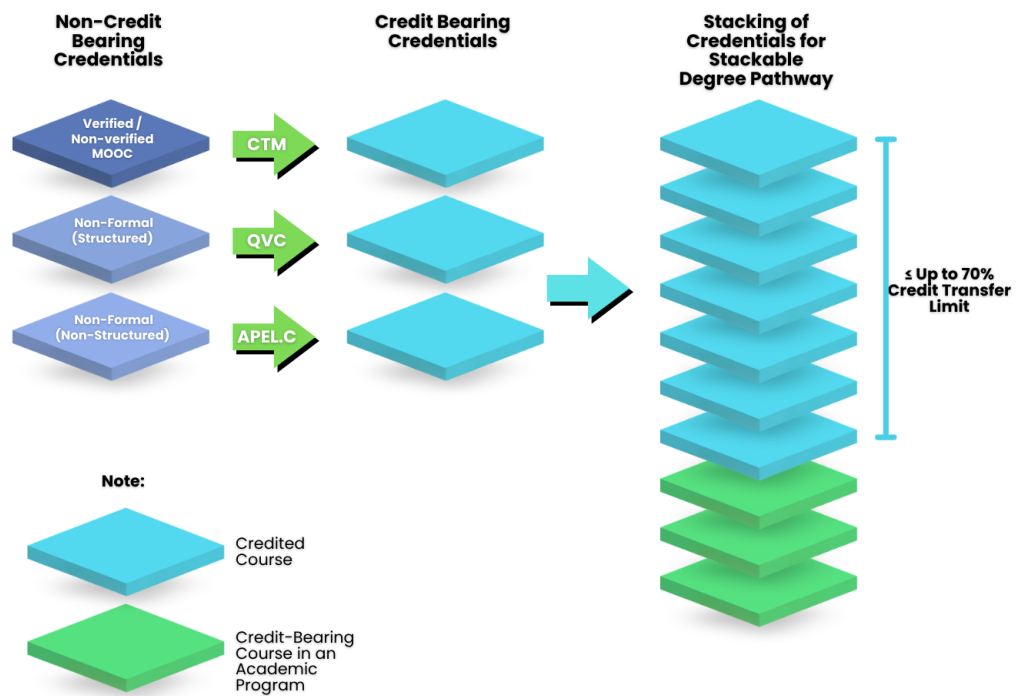


Figure 5: Formation of stackable degree from various pathways



6.0

Awarding a Qualification
through Stackable Degree
Pathway

6 Awarding A Qualification through Stackable Degree Pathway

This section outlines the requirement for HEIs to award a qualification through a stackable degree pathway. To award a learner with a qualification, HEIs must ensure of:

i. Valid Credit Accumulation

To be awarded with a qualification, learners must accumulate the total graduating credits for the respective Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) Level. For example, for Postgraduate Diploma, 30 credits must be earned by the learner before applying for graduation at a respective HEI. HEIs must also ensure that all the accumulated credentials are valid (accumulated credentials are credit-bearing credentials).

ii. Total Graduating Credits Accumulated at the Awarding HEIs

The awarding HEIs shall ensure that student has earned a minimum of thirty percent (30%) of the total graduating credits directly from the awarding HEI (home institution) itself. This applies to all qualifications conferred through the stackable degree pathway, regardless of the MQF level. Credits accumulated through prior credentials, credit transfers, or recognition of prior experiential learning from other institutions may constitute the remaining credit proportion, subject to the HEI's credit transfer and recognition policies.

iii. Body of Knowledge based on Credit Accumulation and Credential Stacking

To award a student a specific qualification, HEIs must make sure the obtained credits, and the received credentials maps with the Program Learning Outcomes of the applied qualification.

For example, for a student obtaining a bachelor's degree in computer science, HEIs have to make sure the collected and stacked credentials for graduating reflects the bachelor's degree of computer science.

iv. Residential Requirement for Students in Conventional Program

HEIs must ensure that the graduating student through stackable degree pathway in a conventional program fulfils a minimum residency requirement of one (1) semester at the awarding institution, regardless of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) level at which the qualification is conferred. This residency requirement may be satisfied through either physical attendance or online engagement, provided that the mode of delivery is consistent with the program's approved delivery framework.

v. Stackable Courses' Record

The awarding HEIs shall maintain comprehensive and up-to-date records of students who are progressively stacking credentials towards the completion of a qualification through the

stackable degree pathway. These records shall include, but are not limited to, the credentials obtained and its institution of origin, credit values accumulated, , exemptions or credit transfers granted, and the corresponding mapping of completed components against the requirements of the target qualification.

vi. Conferment and Graduation

Graduation through stackable credentials is subject to endorsement by the awarding HEIs. The procedure for endorsement may follow the standard process used in conventional education.



7.0

Conclusion

7 Conclusion

Stackable degree concept presents a flexible pathway for individuals with various academic and personal backgrounds. To be successful in implementation, HEIs have to provide the necessary mechanisms to enable the pathways that learners can take to embark on the stackable degree journey.

References

1. Malaysia Qualification Agency (2020). Guidelines to Good Practices: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Credit Award [APEL (C)]
2. Malaysia Qualification Agency (MQA) Circular No. 6/2025 (21 April 2025)
3. Malaysia Qualification Agency (2016). Guidelines on Credit Transfer for Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), Cyberjaya
4. Malaysia Qualification Agency (2020). Guidelines to Good Practices: Micro-credential, Cyberjaya
5. Malaysia Qualification Agency (2023). Guidelines to Good Practices: Quality Verification for Standalone Micro-credential, Cyberjaya
6. Malaysia Qualification Agency (2023). Guidelines to Good Practices: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Access (APEL.A) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Micro-credentials (APEL.M), Cyberjaya
7. Malaysia Qualification Agency (2019). Code of Practice for Program Accreditation: Open and Distance Learning (Second Edition), Cyberjaya
8. Malaysia Qualification Agency (2026). Advisory Note No. 3/2026 (6 April 2026).

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this guideline document.

Abbreviation	Full Term
APEL.A	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Access
APEL.C	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Credit Award
APEL.M	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for Micro-credentials
CLO	Course Learning Outcome
COPPA	Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation
COPPA:ODL	Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation: Open and Distance Learning
CTM	Credit Transfer for MOOCs
HEI	Higher Education Institution
MC	Micro-credential
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
MQF	Malaysian Qualifications Framework (Kerangka Kelayakan Malaysia)
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
PLO	Program Learning Outcome
QV SAMC	Quality Verification for Standalone Micro-credential
QVC	Quality Verification Centre
SAMC	Standalone Micro-credential
SLT	Student Learning Time

Glossary of Terms

The following terms are defined within the context of this guideline document and the stackable degree pathway framework.

Term	Definition
Accumulation Pathway	A clearly defined progression route showing how individual credentials combine to meet the total credit requirement to obtain an academic qualification at a specific MQF level.
Awarding Institution	The Higher Education Institution responsible for conferring a qualification upon a student who has fulfilled all graduation requirements through the stackable degree pathway. Also referred to as the Home Institution.
Body of Knowledge	The complete set of knowledge, skills, and competencies that a learner must demonstrate in order to be awarded a specific qualification, as reflected through the mapping of accumulated credentials against Program Learning Outcomes.
Bundled Academic Program	A conventional academic program in which all courses are offered as part of a fixed and integrated curriculum structure that learners must complete in sequence or within a prescribed timeframe.
Conferment	The formal act of awarding an academic qualification to a learner who has fulfilled all requirements, including credit accumulation, residency, and credential mapping, subject to endorsement by the awarding institution.
Credential Validity	The extent to which a credential is recognised as credit-bearing by HEIs and other training or learning providers, including any time-bound limitations set by the awarding institution.
Credit Transfer	The mechanism by which credits earned from prior learning (formal, non-formal, or informal) are recognised and counted toward the graduation credit requirement of a current program of study.
Credit Value	The numerical representation of the academic weight of a course or credential, determined by the amount of Student Learning Time (SLT) in accordance with MQF standards.
Credit-Bearing Course	A structured learning unit offered by a recognised institution that carries academic credit, calculated in terms of Student Learning Time (SLT) and educational level.
Credit-Bearing Credential	An educational recognition that carries transferable academic credit and can be applied toward formal academic qualifications within the Malaysian Qualifications Framework.
Digital Badge	A verifiable digital representation of a credential that records learning outcomes, credit value, and issuing authority, ensuring transparency and traceability.

Home Institution	The Higher Education Institution at which a learner is enrolled and from which the learner will ultimately receive the academic qualification upon fulfilling all graduation requirements.
Informal Learning	Learning acquired through work experience, life experience, or other unstructured activities that may be recognised for academic credit through mechanisms such as APEL.C.
Micro-credential	A credential earned upon completion of an independent credit-bearing course that has been unbundled from an accredited academic program, or verified through a recognised quality assurance mechanism.
Non-Credit-Bearing Credential	An educational recognition, such as a certificate of attendance or participation, that does not carry transferable academic credit but may be evaluated for credit equivalency through mechanisms such as APEL.C or CTM.
Non-Formal Learning	Learning acquired through structured training, workshops, professional development programs, or standalone micro-credential courses that are not part of a formal academic program.
Open and Distance Learning (ODL)	A mode of educational delivery in which more than 60% of courses are conducted through open and distance learning modalities, enabling learners to study remotely.
Qualification	A formal academic award conferred upon completion of a program of study at a recognised institution, aligned to a specific level within the Malaysian Qualifications Framework.
Stackable Credential	A statement of completion of a credit-bearing course, obtained through formal or non-formal learning, that can be accumulated and collected to apply for the award of a qualification.
Stackable Degree	A pathway for an academic program formed by stacking credit-bearing credentials to obtain a qualification at a specific MQF level.
Student Learning Time (SLT)	The total amount of time, including guided and independent learning hours, that a learner is expected to invest in order to achieve the learning outcomes of a course, used as the basis for determining credit value.
Unbundling	The deliberate process of disaggregating a fully accredited academic program into smaller, independent, credit-bearing courses (micro-credentials) that learners can complete at their own pace.
Vertical Credit Transfer	The transfer of credits from a lower qualification level to a higher qualification level within the MQF.

List of Contributors

Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia would like to thank MEIPTA, MAGNETIC and the following contributors in developing the Guideline:

Contributors	Institution
Junainah Binti Mohd Amin	Malaysian Qualifications Agency
Izwan Nizal Bin Mohd Shahrane	Universiti Utara Malaysia
Najwa Hayaati Binti Mohd Alwi	Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia
Nisfariza Binti Mohd Noor	Universiti Malaya
Noor Hazarina Hashim	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
Nurbiha A Shukor	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
Sharifah binti Mohamad	Universiti Malaya
Suriyani Ariffin	Universiti Teknologi MARA
Syariah Nor Binti Wan Shamsuddin	Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin
Syamsul Rizal Abd Shukor	Universiti Sains Malaysia
Wan Zuhainis Saad	Universiti Putra Malaysia
Wong Chee Onn	Universiti Multimedia
Zainal Bin Zakaria	Universiti Malaysia Sabah
Zanatul Shima Binti Aminuddin	Jabatan Pendidikan Politeknik & Kolej Komuniti
Zulkefli Bin Mansor	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Sekretariat	
Noraini Khalid	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
Nurul Nazihah Ismail	
Tamil Selvi A/P Virasinggam	Bahagian Kecemerlangan Akademik, Jabatan Pendidikan Tinggi
Wan Nalia Binti Wan Zaib	

Appendices

Appendix A: Collaborative HEI Curriculum Structure (Fixed Choice)

Collaborative HEI Curriculum Structure (Fixed Choice) Name of Home Institution: University C Program Name: MSc Computer Science Body of Knowledge for the Program: Level of Program: Certificate/Diploma/Bachelor/Master Total Graduating Credits:			
Course Title (Course Owner)	Course Sequence (Pre-requisites?)	Total Credit	Mode of Delivery (FTF/Online/Blended)
Eg. Introduction to Computer Science (University A)	No	3	Blended
Eg. Data Structure and Algorithms (University B)	Yes	3	Online
Minimum 30% of the Credits in the Program Compulsory to be taken at Home Institution			
Course Title	Total Credit	Mode of Delivery (FTF/Online/Blended)	
Final Year Project I/Dissertation/Project	4		
Final Year Project II/Dissertation/Project	6		

Appendix B: Collaborative HEI Curriculum Structure (Flexible Choice)

Collaborative HEIs Program Curriculum Structure (Flexible Choice) Name of Home Institution: University A Program Name: MSc Computer Science Body of Knowledge for the Program: Level of Program: Certificate/Diploma/Bachelor/Master Total Graduating Credits:						
Course Title	Total Credit	Course Owner 1 (Mode of Delivery)	Course Owner 2 (Mode of Delivery)	Course Owner 3 (Mode of Delivery)	Course Owner 4 (Mode of Delivery)	Course Owner 5 (Mode of Delivery)
Eg. Introduction to Computer Science	3	Univ B (Online)	Univ C (FTF)	Univ D (Online)	Univ E (FTF)	Univ F (Blended)

Minimum 30% of the Credits in the Program Compulsory to be taken at Home Institution

Course Title	Total Credit	Mode of Delivery (FTF/Online/Blended)
Final Year Project I/Dissertation/Project	4	
Final Year Project II/Dissertation/Project	6	

Appendix C: Collaborative HEI Curriculum Structure (Structured Choice)

Collaborative HEIs Program Curriculum Structure (Structured Choice) Name of Home Institution: Univ A Program Name: Body of Knowledge for the Program: Level of Program: Certificate/Diploma/Bachelor/Master Total Graduating Credits:						
Course Title	Total Credit	Course Owner 1 (Mode of Delivery)	Course Owner 2 (Mode of Delivery)	Course Owner 3 (Mode of Delivery)	Course Owner 4 (Mode of Delivery)	Course Owner 5 (Mode of Delivery)
Pengenalan kepada Sains Komputer	3	Univ B (Online)	Univ C (FTF)	Univ D (Online)	Univ E (FTF)	Univ F (Blended)

Student must choose courses minimum from 3 HEIs (eg. 2 courses from Univ A, 1 course from Univ B and 10 courses from Univ C)

Minimum 30% of the Courses in the Program Compulsory to be taken at Home Institution

Course Title	Total Credit	Mode of Delivery (FTF/Online/Blended)
Final Year Project I/Dissertation/Project	4	
Final Year Project II/Dissertation/Project	6	

