

HEA

An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas
The Higher Education Authority

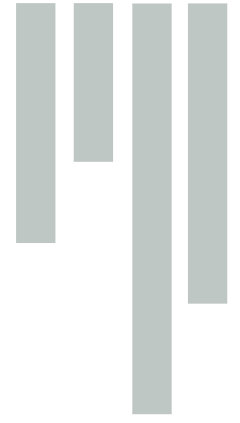
Micro-credential Learner Fee Subsidy

Call for Proposals 2026

Frequently Asked Questions

Version 2

26 March 2026



Funding & Modes

Q1. Are micro-credential fees only subsidised at 50% like Springboard+?

No, funding for micro-credentials under the Learner Fee Subsidy 2026 will be **80% for all eligible learners**.

Q2. Are existing micro-credentials (i.e. already running) eligible for funding?

Yes, provided there is **no double funding of cohorts**.

If a Springboard+ 2026 funded micro-credential is successful in achieving LFS 2026 funding, it **must relinquish all Springboard+ funding**.

Micro-credentials funded under Springboard+2026 which have commenced accepting applications under the Springboard+ 2026 programme, i.e. micro-credentials which were approved to continue in 2026 and have commenced accepting applications, are **not eligible** to apply to for LFS 2026 funding.

The HEA Executive will be reviewing proposals to ensure that they are not already supported via another funding stream.

Q3. Are the important skills areas ranked?

The LFS 2026 programme will address key skills needs for enterprise and the economy. Micro-credentials should fall under one of the eligible discipline areas (i.e. ISCED Codes), as outlined in **Appendix I of the Call document**. Micro-credentials outside of these discipline areas may apply for the learner fee subsidy, however **priority** will be given to the Appendix I ISCED areas.

The Call will prioritise **digital skills and objectives of the twin digital and decarbonising strategy**, addressing objectives of the government as detailed in the National Skills Strategy, Climate Action Plan, Digital Ireland strategy, and EU Objectives under the European Commission Union of Skills.



Q4. Can HEIs not listed in Appendix VI and Appendix VII submit proposals for Micro-credential Learner Fee Subsidy 2026?

No, only HEA-designated HEIs and non-HEA designated higher education providers whose quality assurance procedures have been approved under the 2012 Act (re-engagement / QA approval processes) will be **eligible to submit proposals**.

Q5. Is there a maximum time limit within which micro-credentials should be completed?

Yes, the maximum duration for any approved micro-credential under LFS 2026 is **12 months**. **Micro-credentials must commence before 4th December 2026**.

Q6. Is it possible to have Micro-credential LFS funded learners attend classes alongside other funded learners, if each cohort will be funded separately but taught together?

It is possible for Micro-credential LFS funded learners to be taught alongside other funded learners, provided the **two cohorts are clearly identifiable** and there is **no double-funding of the same learner(s)**.

Micro-credential LFS funding is subject to audit so this criterion must be strictly adhered to.

In the development of micro-credentials, providers should be mindful of how they attribute these costs to proposals in circumstances where a mixed class of learners on the same micro-credential may be taught together.

Q7. Can the total budget allocation for the LFS 2026 be provided?

No, the funding allocation has not been finalised.

Q8. Why is total cost per learner submitted? Is the subsidy not based on the MC fee?

The **total cost per learner is the course fee**. This is the terminology used in both Springboard+ and the LFS 2024. The HEA will subsidise 80% of the cost per learner / course fee.



Q9. Does the provider receive RGAM per student also?

No, learners funded by the LFS will not be eligible for RGAM funding.

Application Process & Proposal Ranking

Q10. Has the proposal application submission process changed for Micro-credential Learner Fee Subsidy 2026?

Yes, we will be using the **WizeHive** platform for submitting proposal applications under the new Call and instructions will issue separately on how to complete a proposal application using the WizeHive portal. Any HEIs experiencing issues using the WizeHive portal should email hci@hea.ie

Q11. Will the platform for proposal applications be the same for learner applicants?

No, learner applications for the approved micro-credential LFS will use the **Application Management System (AMS)**. WizeHive is only being used for **Call proposal applications from HEIs**.

Q12. Will letters of support be required with the proposals?

Letters of support **do not have to be submitted** but evidence of industry support should be detailed in the proposal.

Q13. Are consortium proposals being accepted in this Call? If so, is the proposal counted within the total list of 20 or 35 micro-credential proposals that a HEI can submit?

Consortium proposals from two or more HEIs will be considered for funding. Consortium proposals should be submitted on WizeHive by the **lead provider only** and not by each individual institution. Each of the partners must include the proposal on their **ranked list** and indicate that they are a partner, not the lead, on the proposal.

The proposal counts towards the total number of proposals allowed for the lead and partner HEIs.

Q14. Are collaborative proposals only eligible from HEIs with multiple campuses?

No, collaborative proposals may be submitted by a group (consortium) of HEIs across their individual campuses, but the proposal must designate a **lead institution** and **partner institution(s)**.

The proposal must be listed on the **Ranked List of Proposals** for the lead and partner institution(s), and the proposal must include the **total number of places sought for the micro-credential, not per institution**.

Q15. If a Technological University is part of a consortium proposal that will run on multiple of its campuses, should this be one single entry on the ranked list with the total number of places, or must it be listed more than once with the breakdown of places per campus?

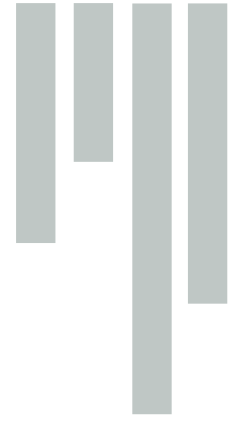
The consortium proposal must be listed **only once** on each consortia institution's ranked list. It must clearly identify the **lead provider** on that institution's ranked list. It must also clearly identify a partner provider on that institution's ranked list. **The proposal is on a per institution basis, not a per campus basis**. HEIs should note on the ranked list if the micro-credential will be offered across multiple campuses, if applicable.

***For example:** Institution A, Institution B, and Institution C are all Technological Universities with multiple campuses and have a collaborative (consortium) proposal, where Institution A is the lead and Institutions B and C are partners. The proposal **must be listed once** on Institution A's ranked list (with the total places sought) and identify **Institution A as the lead provider**. The **same proposal must also be listed once** on Institution B and Institution C's ranked list (with the total places sought) and identifying **Institution B and Institution C as partner HEIs** on their respective ranked lists.*

The collaborative (consortium) proposal counts towards the total number of proposals allowed for the lead and partner HEIs in the consortium.

Q16. Do staff have sight of the list of proposals that are eventually submitted and their rankings?

This is an internal organisation matter for HEIs submitting proposals.



Start Dates & Course Validation

Q17. Are there any restrictions on start dates for Micro-Credential LFS 2026 intakes?

Yes, all intakes must commence by **4th December 2026**. No intakes can commence after this date.

Q18. Is there an estimated timeframe for course commencement?

As per the indicative timetable, it is anticipated that courses will **commence from May**.

Q19. Is it permissible to submit an application for a course awaiting QQI validation?

Yes, this is permitted. You are required to complete and upload the template form in **Appendix II (QQI Course Validation Submission)** of the Call document.

Q20. If there is no evidence of QQI validation, what else can be submitted?

One of the following documents must be uploaded with the WiseHive proposal application. The **only alternative relates to Appendix III**, where a copy of the official **QQI Certificate of Validation** may be uploaded.

Category	Upload Required
HEIs awaiting validation of a micro-credential by QQI	APPENDIX II Form
HEIs with a QQI micro-credential validation covering 2026/27	APPENDIX III Form
HEIs with a non-QQI micro-credential validation covering 2026/27	APPENDIX IV Form
Universities, Technological Universities, Institutes of Technology self-validating micro-credentials	APPENDIX V Template Letter



ECTS (Credits) & Awards

Q21. Are micro-credentials limited to 20 ECTS (credits) or more?

No, micro-credentials **must have between 5 and 20 ECTS** (credits) to be eligible for consideration for funding under Micro-credential Learner Fee Subsidy 2026.

Q22. Could you clarify what is meant by “stackability”?

This will give learners the opportunity to build towards a qualification over time by taking micro-credentials with fewer credits. It provides a flexible and accessible way of building a qualification for learners who are time poor, but who have a desire to upskill or reskill.

This policy may not yet be in place in an institution; however, should it become available in the future, it is important that micro-credential graduates will be able to use their qualification to stack.

Q23. Do micro-credentials need to be “higher education awards” recognised on the NFQ, or can they be standalone modules of a validated course, carrying ECTS credits, but which are not validated separately?

Micro-credentials must award ECTS credits that can lead to a **higher education qualification** that is aligned to the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) at Levels 6 to 9. Micro-credentials can be modules of validated courses or stand-alone validated / QA approved micro-credentials.

Q24. Will the Value for Money assessment be aligned to cost per 10 ECTS credits?

Yes, VFM will be aligned to cost per 10 ECTS credits for NFQ levels and skills disciplines.

Q25. Can uptake data by NFQ level and ECTS be provided?

Yes, we will draft data which will be circulated shortly, and this will provide a reference guide on demand for courses across NFQ levels and ECTS ranges.



Q26. Can the ECTS be extended to cover 3 to 21 credits?

No, as per the Call document, micro-credentials submitted for funding in this round of the LFS must award between **5 and 20 ECTS** which can lead to a higher education qualification that is aligned to the NFQ at Levels 6 to 9.

Learner Applications & Eligibility

Q27. Will the application process for learners stay the same?

No, applications for Micro-Credential Learner Fee Subsidy 2026 will be submitted through the **Application Management System (AMS)**.

Q28. Will HEIs need to verify applicant eligibility?

Yes, HEIs will be required to verify applicants' eligibility for the subsidy. The eligibility verification will follow the principles of the Springboard+ programme. HEIs will be **required to confirm an applicant's eligibility** in line with the published eligibility criteria before moving them to **"Enrolled"** status on the AMS.

Q29. Will successful applicants have to provide documentary evidence of eligibility?

We are examining the eligibility criteria verification and guidance will be issued to successful HEIs in advance of applications opening.

Q30. Why was it decided to use the Springboard portal for this round of the fee subsidy?

The AMS is the HEA Skills Section's system for **recording learner enrolments and outcomes** for funded programmes, and it is an important tool for reporting and payment processing.



Q31. Can you clarify if the number of ECTS credits influences the restriction on taking a maximum of three courses?

As per Section 5.2 of the Call document, a learner **may not enrol on more than three** micro-credentials funded in the LFS 2026 programme.

For clarity, a learner **may avail of the Subsidy on a maximum of three approved micro-credentials** in a single academic year, irrespective of the number of ECTS credits.

Q32. What will the reporting requirements be for LFS 2026?

Eligible learners will complete a **registration process on the AMS** to draw down funding for their place on the course. Reporting will be captured by the AMS.

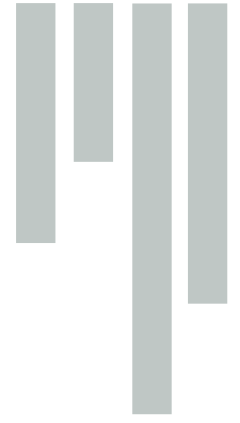
WizeHive Queries

Q33. What is the difference between “Online” and “e-Learning” on the WizeHive application?

Online refers to live lectures / classes which can be accessed remotely by learners, whereas **e-Learning** relates to self-directed learning with pre-recorded lectures / classes or other lesson tools.

Q34. Can website links be used in the “Course Description” fields on the WizeHive application?

We would **not recommend** using website links, as if these do not work, it will not be possible to review the critical information relating to the proposal.



Q35. What validation form should be uploaded with the WizeHive application?

As the upload of a document with a WizeHive application is **mandatory for all proposals**, HEIs must upload the relevant document from the list below.

	Category	Upload Required
1	HEIs awaiting validation of a micro-credential by QQI	APPENDIX II Form
2	HEIs with a QQI micro-credential validation covering 2026/27	APPENDIX III Form
3	HEIs with a non-QQI micro-credential validation covering 2026/27	APPENDIX IV Form
4	Universities, Technological Universities, Institutes of Technology self-validating micro-credentials	APPENDIX V Template Letter

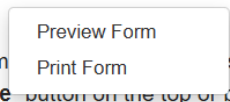
Q36. Is there an option to print draft proposals from WizeHive?

Yes, to print a draft proposal, HEIs can select the blue ▼ arrow next to the page title, this will then display the option to **Print Form**. A list of options to include the fields from all three sections of the form should be available to select, which will create one printed copy that also includes Course Costs and Mandatory Information.

Your device may also provide the option of printing to PDF (i.e. download / save a soft copy).

1. Proposals ▼

- You can save the information
- You can click the **“Close”** button on the top of each application form sections.



Q37. If a HEI will deliver micro-credentials across a variety of regions, how should this be reflected on the WizeHive application, as only one region can be selected?

HEIs should select the region where their institution is headquartered or the region where most micro-credential intakes may be delivered and may also **include a brief note in the Course Description** to note that micro-credentials will be delivered regionally.



Q38. Will there be a ‘SuperUser’ function on WizeHive?

No, due to the limited window to design the portal, the SuperUser function is not available for this Call. HEIs should coordinate internally on their applications.

General Queries

Q39. Is there a target percentage for the unemployed / returner cohorts?

No, there are no target percentages or ring-fencing of places for specific cohorts under the Micro-credential Learner Fee Subsidy 2026 Call.

Q40. Does the micro-credential already have to be in place, or can new micro-credentials be submitted for LFS 2026?

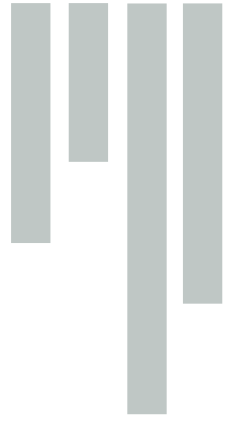
Proposals can be for both **new and existing** micro-credentials. Proposed micro-credentials should be **stand-alone courses that upskill learners** for the labour market upon completion.

Q41. Are transversal micro-credentials permitted?

Yes, transversal micro-credential proposals may be submitted. HEIs should **select the dominant ISCED** from the dropdown list on the WizeHive application and note that the **micro-credential is Transversal in the Course Description** section of the WizeHive application.

Q42. What information is sought in the question relating to relevant national policies?

HEIs should provide information as to how the micro-credential **addresses government priorities** in any relevant government strategies or policies.



Q43. Are there any SOPs or training for staff new to assessing eligibility and using the AMS?

A **Toolbox Guide** will be issued to assist HEIs in assessing eligibility in line with the published eligibility criteria. A separate **AMS User Guide** will also be circulated to any HEI that is a new user of the system.