

Guidelines for Elective Credits and Minors Leiden University

Preamble

This document comprises guidelines drawn up by the Executive Board, within the meaning of Article 9.5 in conjunction with Article 9.15 of the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), which must be implemented by the Faculty Boards.

The Guidelines for Elective Credits and Minors describe the procedure by which students choose and apply for a minor, as referred to in Article 3.2.2 of the (model) Leiden University Bachelor's Course and Examination Regulations (OER) 2023-2024.

Introduction

Interdisciplinarity and the T-shaped education model

There is an increasing need for interdisciplinary skills and knowledge in the world of academia, society and the labour market. It is therefore important for undergraduates to be able to delve into subjects but also to learn about and explore a wide range of academic disciplines, through a T-shaped education model. Free elective credits play an important role in broadening the bachelor's phase, because they ensure that all students have an opportunity to look beyond the boundaries of their own discipline. Leiden University achieves this by reserving 30 EC as elective credits in every bachelor's programme, within the same period¹. Students have considerable freedom to decide how to use these free elective credits.

Broadening through minors

Students can use their free elective credits for a minor, which enables them to broaden their knowledge by following a structured curriculum in a different discipline. This could be a monodisciplinary minor from another discipline or an interdisciplinary minor that has no overlap with a bachelor's programme. Minors can also serve as a pre-master's programme, to facilitate progression to a master's programme that does not follow directly from the bachelor's programme. This creates new routes to the more specialised education in the master's phase and brings students into contact with lecturers and students from other disciplines early on in their university careers. Students can also take a minor offered by Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) and Erasmus University Rotterdam, enabling them to learn about disciplines that are not offered by Leiden University.

All broadening minors offered by Leiden University, TU Delft and Erasmus University Rotterdam (LDE) can be found in a central location: <https://eduxchange.nl/>

Deepening through elective packages

The academic world, society and the labour market will continue to need specialists. Students who want to develop specialist knowledge and skills can therefore use their free elective credits to complete an advanced elective package. These elective packages are offered within a department or a faculty to

¹ A few bachelor's programmes reserve only 15 EC as elective credits. This is the case when professional requirements (for example, Medicine or Notarial Law) leave less space in the curriculum.

its own students, and entry requirements² may apply with regard to the prior knowledge that students must possess before starting. Where possible, elective packages should be in line with the policy for minors, so that, for example, the period in which elective courses are timetabled is not an obstacle to participation.

Students can consult their study programme's page in the Prospectus to see which elective courses are available for their programme.

Freedom to choose courses, do an internship or study abroad

Students can also use their free elective credits to do something other than a minor; the Course and Examination Regulations (OER) of the individual study programmes specify the choices available to students. Options include internships or research internships, elective courses or a minor at an institution abroad, following a pre-master's programme for another degree programme or putting together their own package of individual electives. For these elective options to count towards graduation, or for ECs obtained at another institution to be included on the degree certificate, students first need permission from the Board of Examiners of their own programme.

Insufficient elective credits

For those students who want to follow their own learning path, but which does not fit within the elective credits of their own programme, can compile their own tailor-made programme. In the Higher Education and Research Act, this is referred to as an open degree programme (*vrij onderwijsprogramma*). However, this programme does not give students complete free rein; the content of their self-designed programme must be approved by a Board of Examiners of an existing study programme (see Article 3.2.6 of the OER). This freedom is also accompanied by greater responsibility for the student in terms of the study feasibility of the programme; for example, they are responsible for distributing the number of ECs throughout the academic year and adjusting their timetable if teaching activities (lectures, tutorials, practicals, exams) are scheduled at the same time. In practice, therefore, this option is more frequently used to replace a few compulsory courses, rather than for a student to design an entire curriculum on their own.

Educational innovation

A university continues to be relevant by continuously updating its range of study programmes and courses. Minors and elective packages play a pivotal role in this process; they are of a sufficient scope to familiarise students with a new subject, and a new minor can be set up and discontinued more quickly than a new study programme or specialisation. As such, minors and elective packages present an excellent opportunity to innovate our curricula, which we do by updating them every year. We also collaborate with our LDE partners on interdisciplinary minors taught by lecturers from the three universities, which, in turn, gives rise to unique curricula for our students.

About these Guidelines

Sections 1, 2 and 3 of these Guidelines specify how faculties should structure and organise elective credits and minors and how decisions are made. These Guidelines contain rules about the procedure

² An entry requirement stipulates that a student must have passed a certain course in order to be allowed to participate in a subsequent course, e.g. they must first complete Statistics 1 before participating in Statistics 2. No further entry requirements are permitted (e.g., requirements for admission to a curriculum, such as a study programme, or selection, such as, for example, the submission of letters of motivation or the selection of students with the best average grades).

for students in relation to application, admission and enrolment for minors; see section 4. They also contain rules about how a minor can partly count towards graduation and about when there is overlap between a minor and the compulsory curriculum; see section 5.

This document does not set out any rules on the more in-depth elective packages, thereby giving faculties more freedom to deviate in terms of entry requirements and timetabling.

1. Elective credits

All study programmes have free elective credits. The number of credits and the timetabling are coordinated within Leiden University and with the LDE (Leiden-Delft-Erasmus) partners, which makes it easy for students to choose from the range of minors offered by all three universities.

- a. Every bachelor's programme has a minimum of 30 ECs of free elective credits. Students can use these credits for inter alia a minor, an internship or a period of study abroad.
- b. They can use these free elective credits in accordance with the rules set out in the study programme's OER.
- c. The elective credits are timetabled in the first semester of the third year of the study programme, or the fifth semester of the study programme.
- d. At the request of a Faculty Board, the Executive Board can grant the following exceptions (or combinations thereof):
 - i. A transitional arrangement for faculties, enabling them to comply with the elements referred to in 1a, 1b and 1c by 2027-2028 at the latest;
 - ii. The number of EC that are reserved as elective credits, with a minimum of 15 EC of elective credits;
 - iii. The point in time when the elective credits (or some of these credits) are timetabled, with elective timetabling of the first half of the first semester as a minimum;
 - iv. Possible restrictions for students, entailing that the Board of Examiners must give permission to take a minor, in derogation from section 3.

2. Basic principles of Leiden University minors

A minor is a set of courses whose subject matter forms a coherent and complete whole, which allows students to broaden their knowledge. The range of minors to be offered is discussed each year with the University Council, and the Executive Board takes a decision on this. The established range of minors is published in the [Prospectus](#). The minors of Leiden University are subject to the following basic principles:

- a. Minors are worth 30 or 15 EC;
- b. Minors are structured in such a way that the final attainment level is a minimum of 300, in accordance with the Leiden University education structure, for at least one third of the size of the minor, so that the minor is appropriate for third-year students;



- c. Minors can be monodisciplinary or interdisciplinary and consist of courses included in a bachelor's programme or separate courses;
- d. In principle, minors do not have entry, selection or admission requirements;
- e. Minors can also serve as a pre-master's programme to increase accessibility to a master's programme for students from related disciplines, but they can never serve as a prerequisite for admission to a master's programme that follows directly from the bachelor's programme in which the student is enrolled;
- f. It is possible to set a maximum number of participants; the number of students on the waiting list may not exceed 25% of the number of places available on the minor;
- g. The education relating to the minor will take place in the first semester and the entire minor, including retakes, can always be completed within one academic year; minors worth 15 EC take place in the first half (first block) of the same semester;
- h. During the first eight weeks of the application period, 33% of the places in each minor will be reserved for students from TU Delft and Erasmus University Rotterdam (LDE) (jointly), and our partners will likewise reserve 33% of their places for students from the other two partner institutions in the first eight weeks of the application period;
- i. A minor can also be offered (fully or partly) in a language other than Dutch;
- j. An elective package will only be recognised as a 'minor' if it has been approved by the Executive Board³. The decision-making process is described in more detail in section 3.

Exceptions are possible in a number of cases, and the Executive Board makes a decision on these each year when establishing the range of minors to be offered. They relate to:

- k. An exception to subsection 2d, allowing entry or selection requirements to be used in the following cases:
 - i. The LDE minors for which the three partners jointly deliver the education; the rules of the university that coordinates the minor are applicable for these;
 - ii. The educational minor that results in a junior secondary school teaching qualification (*onderbouw havo/vwo and vmbo-t*) when combined with specific bachelor's programmes, because this is subject to admission requirements with respect to the bachelor's programme on which the student is enrolled, in view of the resulting teaching qualification;

³ An elective package is a related set of courses. It is only useful for such packages to be recognised as a 'minor' if they are widely accessible. Faculties are always free to offer their own elective packages. See also the introduction to these Guidelines.



- iii. A small number of science minors, because – while still aiming to maintain the greatest possible accessibility – the entry requirements are formulated at pre-university level (*VWO-diploma*) wherever possible.
- 1. An exception to subsection 2f, specifying that the minor programme (or part thereof):
 - i. will be offered twice; once in accordance with subsection 2f and once at a different time;
 - ii. will be timetabled from a different starting date, but no later than 2027-2028, in accordance with subsection 2f.

3. Decision making

- a. The Executive Board approves the range of minors offered every year before 1 March.
- b. Faculty Boards are responsible for the educational programmes offered and for the provision thereof.
- c. Every year in May, Faculty Boards discuss plans for the new range of minors to be offered and opportunities for interdisciplinary cooperation.
- d. Every year, Faculty Boards submit the proposed range of minors to be offered in the following academic year to the Executive Board. The number of minors and minor places corresponds to the number of students at the faculty. Faculties are responsible for ensuring sufficient capacity in terms of accommodation.
- e. The Minors Committee advises the Executive Board on the proposed range of minors. Regarding the Committee:
 - i. Each faculty is represented by one member; this member has extensive experience in teaching and developing curricula and is involved in the committee from the perspective of their teaching expertise, not in an administrative capacity.
 - ii. Appointments are for a period of three years; they are based on nominations by the Faculty Board and ratified by the Rector Magnificus.
 - iii. The Committee selects its own chairperson; in the event of disagreement, the Rector Magnificus decides on behalf of the Executive Board.
 - iv. The Committee issues either positive or negative advice on the launch of new minors.
 - v. The Committee discusses with Faculty Boards improvement plans and the discontinuation of minors with substandard intake or low performance, as indicated by teaching evaluations or student pass rates, and advises the Executive Board based on the outcome of its discussions with the Faculty Boards.
 - vi. The Committee advises the Executive Board on the number of minors and minor places per faculty and makes recommendations for the following academic year.
 - vii. The Committee advises the Executive Board on policy changes regarding the minor policy and related regulations.



- viii. Generally speaking, the Executive Board adopts these recommendations, but may deviate from them⁴.
- f. The range of minors offered is discussed each year with the University Council.
- g. Each minor is evaluated annually. Faculty Boards are responsible for conducting the evaluations and submitting the results to the Minors Committee.

4. Application and admission to minors

- a. Admission to a minor is possible without the permission or advice of the Board of Examiners. This is the case for the minors published in the [prospectus](#) and regardless of the faculty of origin.
- b. Permission or advice from the Board of Examiners is not required for the minors of the LDE partners.
- c. The procedure for application and enrolment and the date on which the application period begins will be published on the University website no later than four weeks before the start of the application period.
- d. A waiting list can be used in the application procedure. The number of students on the waiting list may not be more than 25% of the number of places available in the minor.
- e. Enrolment will take place on a 'first come, first served' basis or on the basis of preference⁵, and not by means of selection or drawing lots.
- f. If enrolment takes place on a 'first come, first served' basis, a student may only apply for one minor. If the number of applications for a minor is greater than the maximum number of places, a student can be placed on a waiting list. In that case, the student's position on the waiting list will be visible. Students who are placed on a waiting list are permitted to apply for a second minor.
- g. The application period, including dates, times and application locations (both physical and online), is published on the University's website no later than two months before the application period opens. The term 'application period' covers both the opening and closing of the period. Multiple application periods may take place, provided they are communicated in good time.
- h. In view of the LDE partnership in the area of minor programmes, 33% of the minor places available in Leiden are reserved for students of TU Delft and Erasmus University Rotterdam in the first eight weeks.

⁴ In practice, this primarily concerns issues that are beyond the remit of the Minors Committee and that do not relate to the content of the courses/minors. For example, a minor may conflict with administrative agreements (as part of the LDE partnership), there might not be any room in the relevant teaching building to include the minor in the timetable or a minor may be too expensive.

⁵ Preference-based application is not yet possible, for technical reasons. If this becomes technically possible before the start of the application period in spring 2023, then preference-based application will be used; otherwise the basis will be 'first come, first served'.



- i. The admission rules for students of other research universities and universities of applied sciences are the same as those for Leiden University students, although the latter are given precedence when places for minor programmes are allocated. Therefore, external students will only be informed definitively about whether they have a place once the application period has closed.

5. Conditions for a minor to count towards graduation

Students can take a minor without the permission or advice of the Board of Examiners of their own study programme. A completed minor counts towards the student's graduation, with a few exceptions:

- a. **Overlap:** (1) The student is responsible for checking whether there is any overlap between the study programme on which they are enrolled at Leiden University and the minor. For permission to replace courses from a minor with non-overlapping courses, the student must personally submit a request to the *Board of Examiners of the study programme on which they are enrolled*. Additionally, the student must personally discuss with the study programme that offers the intended replacement courses whether they can be admitted.
(2) A study programme can include a minor in the OER⁶ as an exception to the elements referred to in 4a and 4b. The minors that are excepted in this way do not count towards the student's graduation unless the student submits a request to the Board of Examiners of the study programme on which they are enrolled at Leiden University, and the Board of Examiners decides that this is indeed permitted for a minor (or part thereof). This exception can only be included in the OER if there is an overlap with the study programme of more than 5 credits.
(3) In case of doubt, the student should consult the *Board of Examiners of the study programme on which they are enrolled*.
- b. **Partial completion:** It is not guaranteed that a minor will be offered again in a subsequent year, or that the student will be admitted again if the number of participants is restricted.
(1) If the student is unable to complete the minor due to unforeseen circumstances and the student would like the obtained credits to count towards graduation, the part that has actually been completed must be submitted for approval to the Board of Examiners of the study programme on which the student is enrolled.
(2) If a minor has only been partially completed, the courses will be designated as 'elective courses' on the diploma supplement, and not as part of a 'minor'. This also applies if the Board of Examiners of the study programme on which the student is enrolled has given permission for the student to take just part of a minor: in this case too, the partially taken minor will be designated as 'elective courses'.

6. Transitional arrangements for 2023-2024: Partial minor

Students who only have 15 EC of free elective credits in their study programme in the 2023-2024 academic year can take a part of a minor in that year. This option will only be available for one year, because as of the 2024-2025 academic year, we will be offering minors of 15 EC. Sections 6a to 6e therefore only apply to minors offered in the 2023-2024 academic year. These sections do not apply to

⁶ This relates to Article 3.2.7 of the OER.



minors offered in the 2024-2025 academic year and beyond, regardless of whether the student registered for these minors during the 2023-2024 academic year. The following applies to partial minors:

- a. Each minor also offers a course package worth 15 EC as a 'partial minor', which is offered in the first half of the first semester of the academic year.
- b. A 15 EC course package that is part of a minor will not be designated as a 'minor' on the diploma supplement.
- c. The study programme that offers the minor will determine the composition of the 15 EC course package: students do not have a free choice of the courses from a specific minor.
- d. The admission procedure for students who apply for 15 EC is the same as the admission procedure described in these Guidelines; there is no separate capacity restriction, quota or divergence from the application procedure specified (application on a 'first come, first served' basis or preference-based application) for students who apply for a 15 EC course package as a partial minor.
- e. A student with 30 EC of free elective credits may not take two 15 EC partial minors from two different minors without the permission of the Board of Examiners of their own study programme.

7. Entry into force and period of validity

These Guidelines were adopted by the Executive Board on 7 March 2023 and enter into force on 1 September 2023 for the duration of the 2023-2024 academic year.