

# Evaluation of eCampusOntario's Micro Credentials:

## Getting People into Programs and into Jobs Project

### Evaluation Report

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FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Future Skills Centre or the Government of Canada.



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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Goss Gilroy Inc (GGI) is proud to present this report for the evaluation of the Micro Credentials: Getting People into Programs and into Jobs Project (the project). This project is led by eCampusOntario and funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC), in partnership with the Conference Board of Canada. This report starts by presenting some background information about the project, explaining the broader context in which it took place, and the objectives it was meant to address. It also presents a logic model and theory of change highlighting the intended outcomes of the project. Next, the report identifies the purpose, scope and objectives of this evaluation and summarizes the methods used. Finally, the results of the evaluation are presented according to key evaluation questions and indicators. A brief summary concludes this evaluation report.

## 1.2 Background and Context

eCampusOntario is a non-profit organization that is provincially-funded and that “develop[s] and test[s] online learning tools to advance the use of education technology and digital learning environments” for a consortium of 24 publicly-funded colleges, 6 publicly-funded Indigenous Institutes, and 23 publicly-funded universities in Ontario.<sup>1</sup> Inclusion, creativity, curiosity and experimentation are the core values of the organization whose mission it is to “imagine and co-create Ontario’s postsecondary digital learning ecosystem by supporting academic institutions, educators, and learners to navigate change and deliver excellent and innovative digital learner-centric experiences”.<sup>2</sup>

As part of their mandate, eCampusOntario launched a micro-credential portal in late 2021.<sup>3</sup> Micro-credentials are short and condensed training programs offered by postsecondary institutions that allow people to retrain or upgrade their skills.<sup>4</sup> They typically last less than 12 weeks and allow for flexibility in terms of where, when, and how to learn content.

The eCampusOntario micro-credential portal provides users with information about “short, affordable, industry-relevant learning programs” available to them in Ontario, and has attracted more than 40,000 unique users.<sup>5</sup> The portal is part of Ontario’s micro-credential strategy. This strategy has also provided funding to “accelerate the development of micro-credentials and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/about/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/about/>

<sup>3</sup> Summary report of priorities from MCPAC.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/micro-credentials-ontarios-postsecondary-schools>

<sup>5</sup> Summary report of priorities from MCPAC (p. 1).

expand program offerings”.<sup>6</sup> Currently, 65 projects that bring together Ontario post-secondary institutions and local industry and employers are funded to create up to 250 new micro-credential programs that focus on teaching skills to directly address labour needs employers are facing.<sup>7</sup>

In Ontario, many of the micro-credential programs offered throughout the province have been approved for financial assistance through the Ontario Student Assistance Programs (OSAP). This means that individuals enrolled in micro-credential programs can access loans and grants to help them cover the costs associated with enrolling in approved programs.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, both in Canada and internationally, there has been a rise in the availability of micro-credential programs, recognized as a valuable means to enhance skills and meet specific employer requirements.<sup>9</sup> While Ontario is the first province that has created a micro-credential portal, similar projects are under development in British Columbia and Atlantic Canada. Hence, it is crucial to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact that the eCampusOntario micro-credential portal has had and identify potential areas for improvement. This, in turn, steers the ongoing development of similar portals across Canada.

### 1.3 Project Description and Objectives

Currently, eCampusOntario’s micro-credential portal enables users to obtain information on different micro-credential programs available to them across the province. Users can either search by topic, industry or institutions, or they can browse among all 1,805 micro-credential programs available in Ontario.

The pilot project aims to “enable the implementation of metadata enhancements”.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, information currently available on the portal is slated to be supplemented by a) “standardized occupation & skills data” and b) “related labour market data”.<sup>11</sup> Upon recommendation of the Micro-credential Program Advisory Committee (MCPAC), this enhancement of metadata is planned for micro-credential programs in three specific industry sectors:

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/micro-credentials-ontarios-postsecondary-schools>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/micro-credentials-ontarios-postsecondary-schools>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/micro-credentials-ontarios-postsecondary-schools>

<sup>9</sup> <https://fsc-ccf.ca/microcredentials-data/#:~:text=The%20use%20of%20microcredentials%20is,by%20better%20training%20their%20employees.;> [https://one.oecd.org/document/EDU/WKP\(2020\)4/En/pdf;](https://one.oecd.org/document/EDU/WKP(2020)4/En/pdf) [https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/micro-credentials-training-education/.](https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/micro-credentials-training-education/)

<sup>10</sup> Summary report of priorities from MCPAC (p. 1).

<sup>11</sup> Summary report of priorities from MCPAC (p. 1).

- Manufacturing;
- Health care and social assistance; and,
- Information and communication industries.<sup>12</sup>

To attain this result, eCampusOntario intends to utilize datasets provided by OpportuNext, incorporating details on job outlooks (indicated as "hot" or "not") and enabling the tagging of micro-credential programs to specific skills areas. The organization also plans to involve industry partners as well as post-secondary institutions in this data enhancement process to further enhance the data available, as well as the user experience. To date, eCampusOntario has succeeded in securing the support of eleven industry partners.

Overall, the project identifies three objectives, as follows:<sup>13</sup>

- The release of the updated micro-credential portal with user interface and workflows to support personalized program recommendations (i.e., upon entering their current or past job title users will receive information on recommended micro-credential programs);
- Increasing the number of institutional referrals as a result of the more personalized learning and employment recommendations; and
- Creating data connections with OpportuNext that can be leveraged for additional jurisdictions in the future.

## 1.4 Theory of Change

A theory of change serves as a comprehensive roadmap that outlines how a program's actions are expected to bring about its desired results. It visually represents the program's assumptions, interventions, and the expected sequence of events leading to the intended impact. By outlining the logical connections between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, it offers a strategic framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating the program.

### The Problem

Micro-credential programs promise to take an important role in allowing individuals to upskill or reskill to adjust to changing labour market needs at the same time as they offer a convenient tool for employers to address skill shortages in their fields. While the number of micro-credential programs has increased significantly over the past few years, and the province of Ontario has made a significant investment in micro-credential programs, the knowledge about micro-credential programs in the general population remains relatively low. While eCampusOntario has established a micro-credential portal in Ontario that enables users to explore various programs

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<sup>12</sup> Summary report of priorities from MCPAC.

<sup>13</sup> Summary report of priorities from MCPAC.

available in the province, analytics data from the portal suggests that users frequently lack a specific direction or starting point for their search. This leads to extensive browsing behavior and relatively low click-through rates to the web pages of post-secondary institutions, where additional information about the programs and registration details can be accessed.

## Target Groups

This project primarily targets the users of the micro-credential portal to better equip them with relevant information to make informed choices about their up- or re-skilling journey. Users typically visit the site to upskill for an existing career, to explore a new career path, or broaden their learning,

## Mechanisms of Change

This project was designed to assess whether enhanced and personalized recommendations, coupled with relevant labour market information, could increase web traffic to post-secondary institutions.

In planning this evaluation, a logic model was developed to outline the project's activities and the results expected from them.

The logic model (see page 6) shows the **inputs**, i.e., the various resources available to support the program including program funding, eCampusOntario staff and resources, the MCPAC, employer and industry associations, postsecondary institutions as well as OpportuNext data.

It also displays the **activities** that the project planned and undertook: consultations with employer and industry associations, occupational outlook data added to micro-credential program listing pages, postsecondary institutions tagging micro-credential programs to new metadata added in the portal, as well as a new workflow added to the portal.

The **outputs** are the direct result of those activities and have resulted in portal users receiving personalized micro-credential program recommendations as well as portal users being able to access labour market outlook information for careers that are associated with various micro-credential programs.

The **immediate outcomes** are the changes that are expected to come from these activities and outputs in a short period, and largely attributable to the project. The expected immediate outcomes include that portal users are better informed about programs that suit their employment background and also better understand the labour market outlook for careers associated with micro-credential programs.

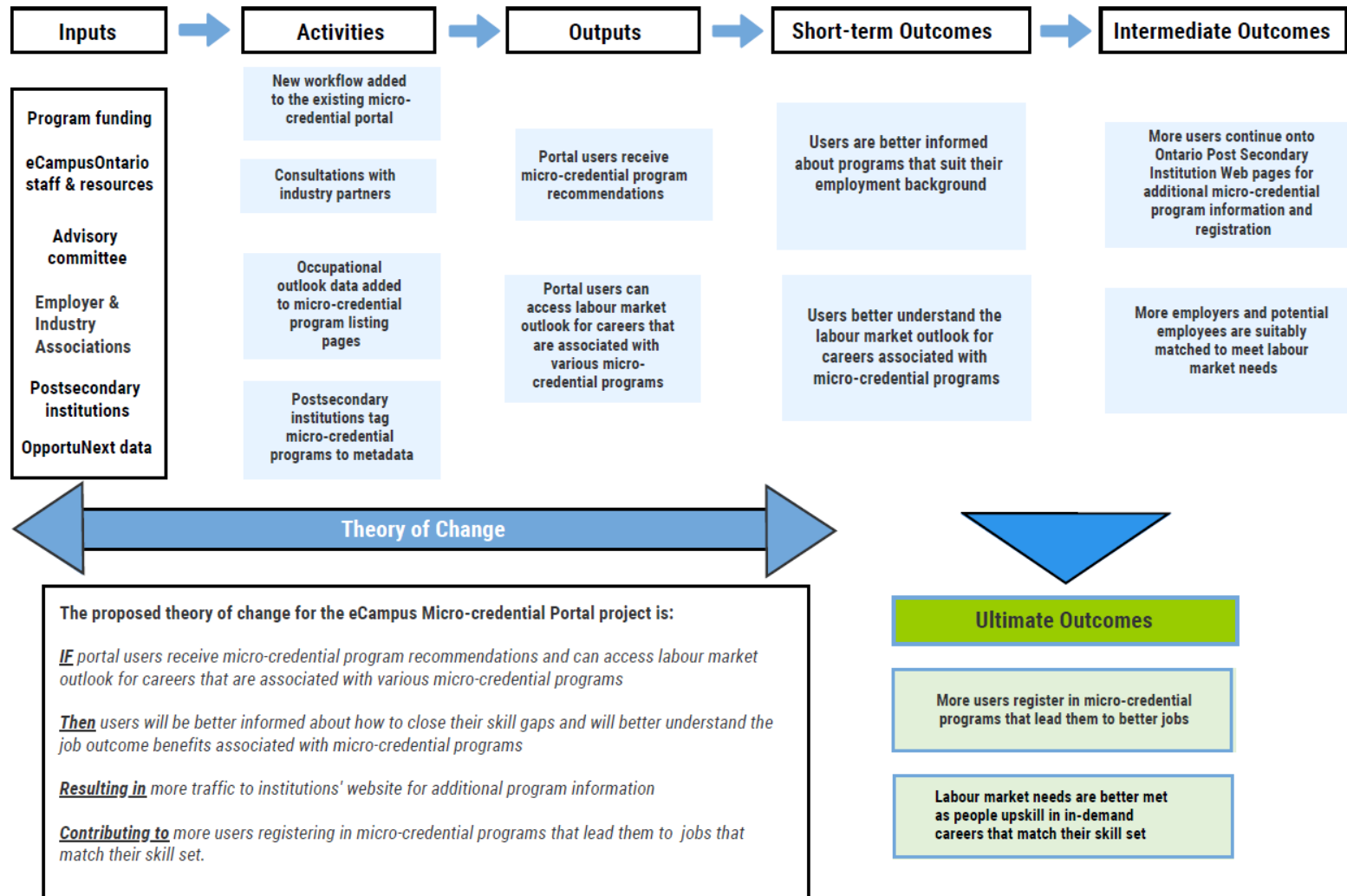
The **intermediate outcomes** are the changes expected in the medium-term to which the project is expected to contribute to, at least in part. It is assumed that the enhancement of the micro-credential portal will contribute to more users continuing onto Ontario Post Secondary Institution

web pages to access additional micro-credential program information and registration. Moreover, the enhancement is assumed to contribute to more employers and potential employees being suitably matched to meet labour market needs.

The **long-term outcomes** are the changes that may result at a later time in the future. As a concept, medium and long-term outcomes are less directly attributable to an intervention (i.e., the project) alone, since other intervening factors play a role over time. For example, the project may contribute to the long-term outcomes of more users registering in micro-credential programs that lead them to better jobs as well as labour market needs being better met as people upskills in in-demand careers that match their skill set, but of course, there are many other external factors that influence achievement of this outcome over time, such as willingness of employers to recruit graduates from micro-credential programs, the economy, personal life events etc. As a small intervention, this project can only be expected to contribute towards these long-term changes.



Figure 1: Logic Model for the eCampusOntario Micro-credential Portal Project



## 2.0 Objectives of the Evaluation

### 2.1 Evaluation Objectives and Scope

The evaluation of the pilot project is being conducted in order to evaluate its relevance, reach, design, effectiveness and impact as well as to inform next steps (e.g., whether eCampusOntario should invest in additional enhancements to connect users with personalised program recommendations and relevant labour market information in micro-credential programs and institutions). The scope of the evaluation focuses on the development and implementation of the enhancements for the pilot from May through September 2023. As well, the evaluation will examine whether personalized learning and employment recommendations resulted in an increase in institutional referrals and learner registrations. Web site traffic data from August – September 2022 will be compared to the same period in 2023 to contribute to understanding the initial outcomes of the enhancement’s launch. This will help capture and evaluate the different steps and processes involved in the project, as well as to compare data before and after the implementation of the changes in the portal.

### 2.2 Evaluation Questions

The following table presents an overview of the key evaluation questions, indicators, data collection methods as well as data source that will guide the data collection and analysis. Overall, the evaluation will address the issues of relevance, reach, design and delivery and effectiveness of the project.

Table 1: Evaluation Matrix

Questions	Indicators	Data Collection Method	Data Source
<b>Relevance</b>			
1. To what extent is the project relevant to the needs of various stakeholders? a) Portal users b) Employer and labour market industry associations c) Post-secondary institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of the needs of portal users;</li> <li>• Identification of the needs of employer and labour market industry associations</li> <li>• Identification of the needs of post-secondary institutions</li> <li>• Evidence that the format and activities of the project support these needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document and data review</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Focus group</li> <li>• Web survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project documentation and data (e.g., on project design, participant surveys etc.)</li> <li>• Interviews with eCampusOntario staff, MCPAC members and representatives from post-secondary institutions</li> <li>• Focus group with employer and labour market industry associations</li> <li>• Web survey with portal users</li> </ul>
<b>Reach</b>			
2. In what ways and to what extent is the project reaching intended target populations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies to reach portal users</li> <li>• Number of employer and labour market industry associations involved in the project</li> <li>• Number of post-secondary institutions involved in the project</li> <li>• Number of portal users who access the new information online</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytic data review</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Focus group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portal analytics</li> <li>• Interviews with eCampusOntario staff, MCPAC members and representatives from post-secondary institutions</li> <li>• Focus group with employer and labour market industry associations</li> </ul>
<b>Design – The Extent to Which the Project Has Been Implemented as Intended</b>			
3. To what extent was the project implemented as intended?  3.1 To what extent was a user interface implemented to support personalized program recommendations  3.2 To what extent were standardized occupation and skills data as well as related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of key stakeholders about the design of the project</li> <li>• Evidence that the project provided recommendations and metadata information for micro credential programs in the manufacturing, health care and social assistance as well as the information and communication industries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document and data review</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Focus group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project documentation</li> <li>• Interviews with eCampusOntario staff, MCPAC members and representatives from post-secondary institutions</li> <li>• Focus groups with employer and labour market industry associations</li> </ul>

Questions	Indicators	Data Collection Method	Data Source
<p>labour market data added to the portal for micro credential programs in the three identified industry sectors (i.e., manufacturing, health care and social assistance, and information and communication industries)?</p> <p>3.3 To what extent did the project involve industry partners as well as post-secondary institutions in the data enhancement process of the portal?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence that the project involved industry partners as well as post-secondary institutions in the data enhancement process of the portal</li> </ul>		
<p>4. Were modifications made to the design of the project?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence that the design of the project changed over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Interviews</li> <li>Focus group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project documentation (e.g., on project design)</li> <li>Interviews with eCampusOntario staff, MCPAC members and representatives from post-secondary institutions</li> <li>Focus group with employee and labour market industry associations</li> </ul>
<p>5. How was equity, diversity and inclusion considered in the project's design?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of/views on the inclusion of EDI in the project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Interviews</li> <li>Focus group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project documentation</li> <li>Interviews with eCampusOntario staff, MCPAC members and representatives from post-secondary institutions</li> <li>Focus group with employer and labour market industry associations</li> </ul>
<p>6. What are the key factors supporting or hindering the delivery of the project?</p> <p>6.1 What improvements can eCampusOntario make in its delivery of the project?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of/views on challenges of the project</li> <li>Evidence of/views on what is working well</li> <li>Suggestions from key stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews</li> <li>Focus group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews with eCampusOntario staff, MCPAC members and representatives from post-secondary institutions</li> <li>Focus group with employer and labour market industry associations</li> </ul>

Questions	Indicators	Data Collection Method	Data Source
<b>Effectiveness</b>			
<p>7. To what extent did/does the project meet its intended outcomes?</p> <p>7.1 To what extent did the project succeed in releasing the updated micro-credential portal with user interface and workflows to support personalized program recommendations (i.e., upon entering their current or past job title users will receive information on recommended micro-credential programs)?</p> <p>7.2 To what extent did the project increase the number of institutional inquiries/ referrals as a result of the more personalized learning and employment recommendations?</p> <p>7.3 To what extent did the project create data connections with OpportuNext that can be leveraged for additional industries and jurisdictions in the future?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of/views on the extent to which the project succeeds in providing personalized program recommendations to portal users</li> <li>Evidence of/views on the extent to which the project has increased the number of institutional inquiries and/or referrals</li> <li>Evidence of/views on the extent to which the project created data connections with OpportuNext that can be leveraged for additional jurisdictions in the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analytics data review</li> <li>Interviews</li> <li>Focus groups</li> <li>Web survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portal analytics</li> <li>Interviews with eCampusOntario staff, MCPAC members and representatives from post-secondary institutions</li> <li>Focus group with employer and labour market industry associations</li> <li>Web survey with portal users</li> </ul>
<p>8. Have there been unintended impacts (positive or negative) of the project? If so, what were they?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholders' perceptions of any unintended outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analytics data review</li> <li>Interviews</li> <li>Focus group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web survey with portal users</li> <li>Interviews with eCampusOntario staff, MCPAC members and representatives from post-secondary institutions</li> <li>Focus groups with employer and labour market industry associations</li> </ul>

## 3.0 Evaluation Methodology

GGI implemented the evaluation in three phases: design, data collection, and analysis and reporting. The methods included:

- Document and data review;
- Key informant interviews (KIIs);
- Focus group; and,
- Web Survey.

These methods are further described below.

### 3.1 Document and Data Review

The document and data review contributed to evidence for most evaluation questions related to relevance, reach, design and delivery as well as some questions related to effectiveness. Specifically, it provided background information on the origin and initial design of the project. The review of implementation documents was key in order to understand how the project was intended to operate, and how it was actually implemented. Moreover, analytics data was used to evaluate how user patterns have changed after the metadata enhancements were implemented. Key documents reviewed were eCampusOntario's project proposal, progress reports, workplan, as well as internal design documents and analytics data from the micro credential portal. The list below identifies all documents reviewed:

- Evaluation Plan eCampusOntario;
- MC Portal Metadata Documentation - OppNext Integration;
- Quarterly reports; and,
- Summary report of priorities from MCPAC.

### 3.2 Key Informant Interviews

GGI conducted 4 semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) with:

- Three (3) eCampusOntario staff members; and
- One (1) member of the Micro-credential Program Advisory Committee (MCPAC)

These Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) enabled the capture of opinions, explanations, examples, and factual information regarding various evaluation issues and questions. They also facilitated the provision of additional context about the project.

### 3.3 Focus Group

To capture feedback from employer and labour market industry associations, GGI conducted a focus group with a total of 4 representatives from post-secondary institutions (2), and employer and labour market associations (2) across the information technology and manufacturing sectors. The focus group was conducted virtually to ensure perspectives across Ontario were included. Findings from the focus group answered most evaluation questions.

### 3.4 End-User Web Survey

A short end-user web survey was integrated on the micro-credential portal to collect data on the needs of portal users, as well as the efficiency of the new metadata enhancements. The survey played a role in addressing the evaluation questions related to the need and effectiveness of the project. The survey questions focused on the purpose of the user's visit, extent to which their needs were met, and whether the portal enhancement contributes to their intention to inquire about, or register with, an institution for a micro-credential program (see appendix 3 for the survey).

### 3.5 Analysis and Reporting

GGI analyzed all data from the different lines of evidence. The analysis consisted of a vertical and a horizontal analysis of the findings. In the first step (the vertical analysis), the GGI team focused on the four individual lines of evidence individually, that is, a) the document and data review; b) the KIIs with different stakeholder groups; c) the focus group with employer and industry associations; as well as d) the web survey. For each of these lines of evidence, the GGI team identified key findings. In the second step (the horizontal analysis), the GGI team then compared the findings of the four lines of evidence and made linkages between them. This allowed us to identify essential insights for evaluating the project in its entirety.

### 3.6 Limitations

- There are few documents available for this evaluation, and while available documents include valuable information, they lack details in some cases. To mitigate this limitation, an online search was conducted to identify additional evidence and insights.
- Perspectives of the MCPAC are limited to one member, as other members of the MCPAC invited to participate in interviews declined due to limited knowledge of the most recent launch of the eCampusOntario portal.
- The insights and perspectives of end-users are constrained by the low number of responses (N=9) received from the end-user web survey conducted on the portal between September and December 2023.

## 4.0 Findings

### 4.1 Relevance

In this section, we systematically address the dimension of relevance, aligning our exploration with the key evaluation questions under this crucial aspect. Our analysis aims to assess how well the project's objectives align with current needs, examining the contextual significance of the program in relation to its intended outcomes. By scrutinizing its relevance, we gain valuable insights into the project's alignment with overarching goals and its ability to meet the evolving demands of its target audience.

***Evaluation Question 1*** – To What Extent Is the Project Relevant to the Needs of Various Stakeholders (i.e., portal users, employer and labour market industry associations, and post-secondary institutions)?

#### ***KEY FINDINGS***

There is an increasing need for the workforce in Ontario to enhance their skills to better adapt to the labour market and a corresponding desire to pursue additional education or training. Micro-credentials have gained prominence in Canada as a strategic solution offering targeted and flexible training opportunities that align with specific industry demands.

Micro-credential programs offered at post-secondary institutions in Ontario and the eCampusOntario micro-credential portal have great potential to address challenges in the labour market, particularly with respect to skills “mismatch” that result in hiring and retention challenges. The micro-credential portal provides the opportunity to address the needs of stakeholders by enabling the development of micro-credential programs among post-secondary institutions across Ontario, with the intention of rapidly upskilling and/or re-skilling job seekers in order for them to quickly enter or re-enter the workforce.

However, poor awareness of micro-credentials among employers and industry associations limits their engagement in the development and recognition of micro-credentials and subsequent validation of this skills-based training. While micro-credentials may be relevant in addressing the needs of employers, appropriate linkage between micro-credential programs and occupational skills must be established and validated by industry employers.

#### **Identification of the Needs of Portal Users**

Globally, in recent years, there has been a significant surge in interest in short-duration, employment focused, flexible and innovative learning opportunities, and this trend has only



accelerated following the pandemic.<sup>14</sup> According to a 2023 survey of over 2,000 Ontarians aged 20 to 84, 45% of respondents had taken short education or training in the past year, most often for professional development or career advancement. Additionally, 76% expressed a desire to pursue additional education or training in the next five years.<sup>15</sup>

There is a general need for employees to enhance their skills to better adapt to the labour market. Historically, careers were unchanging and usually involved a relatively static life-long utilization of existing skills. Today's labour market however, is characterized by rapidly evolving requirements, requiring individuals to engage in life-long learning, acquire new competencies, and regularly master hard skills, soft skills and new technologies.<sup>16</sup> Job seekers and employees that lack the appropriate skills not only face barriers to promotion and new opportunities, but may also experience redundancy in a current position that demands a new set of skills.<sup>17</sup>

According to a recent draft proposal for an Ontario Micro-Credential Quality Assurance Framework, the growing demand for short, labour market relevant programming (now called micro-credentials) has resulted in a proliferation of offerings. The problem, however, is that a “jungle of micro-credentials” puts the onus on the student to presume the value of investment in the educational experience in advance, and requires after-the-fact judgement by an employer, industry, or academic institution to determine the relevance of programming for labour market advancement or academic credit.<sup>18</sup>

Findings from the focus group and interviews highlighted the importance of linking micro-credentials to relevant occupational skills in order to provide better insight on how micro-credential programs could lead to prospective employment opportunities. Findings also highlighted the need to enable a more curated experience for portal users to assist them in refining their search for micro-credentials as much as possible based on their needs and interests. As stated by one eCampusOntario staff member, “*we are focused on the learners, on how to measure their skills, where the gaps are and where to get those skills [to fill these gaps].*”

## Identification of the Needs of Employer and Labour Market Industry Associations

According to a November 2022 survey on workers' skills conducted by Statistics Canada, 44.5% of companies expressed challenges in finding candidates with necessary skills, while 56.1% reported that employees often lack the adequate skills needed for their job roles.<sup>19</sup> For Canadian businesses grappling with recruitment difficulties and skills shortages, there is a potential risk of foregoing

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.peqab.ca/Publications/OMC%20final%20for%20posting%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.peqab.ca/Publications/OMC%20final%20for%20posting%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/enhanced-micro-credential-portal-helps-individuals-unlock-their-career-potential-helps-organizations-upskill-their-talent/>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.peqab.ca/Publications/OMC%20final%20for%20posting%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/enhanced-micro-credential-portal-helps-individuals-unlock-their-career-potential-helps-organizations-upskill-their-talent/>

growth opportunities and experiencing reduced productivity. The extent of the challenge should not be underestimated.<sup>20</sup>

Micro-credentials have gained prominence in Canada as a strategic solution offering targeted and flexible training opportunities that align with specific industry demands. The objective is to enable individuals to quickly acquire specialized skills and knowledge, thereby enhancing their employability and adaptability in a rapidly changing job market.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, micro-credentials can serve as a solution when a potential employee possesses overall qualifications for a position but lacks proficiency in a specific required skill. This targeted approach enables individuals to efficiently acquire the necessary competence, thereby bridging the gap and increasing their suitability for employment (OECD, 2021). Employers can also benefit from micro-credentials granted by other institutions/employers or industries as they provide a signal of an individual's specialized knowledge and skills, aiding in talent acquisition and workforce development.<sup>22</sup>

The evaluation findings highlight the need to address skills “mismatch” in the labour market by ensuring the appropriate alignment of specific skillsets to in-demand jobs. According to one focus group participant representing the manufacturing sector, *“the project is responding to the need of an industry that is facing a huge workforce shift – there is a need for anyone in the industry to remain relevant with the way the industry is moving.”*

### Identification of the Needs of Post-Secondary Institutions

Micro-credential programs are already being offered and issued by various providers such as higher education institutions, industry associations, sector boards, and employers.<sup>23</sup> According to a public report released by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, many post-secondary institutions emphasized the increased relevance of such programs due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this report also highlighted that there is a significant lack of awareness about Micro-credential programs among their main user groups: prospective students and employers.<sup>24</sup>

Focus group and interview findings also indicated that awareness of micro-credentials, among industry employers across sectors, is particularly low, likely resulting in their under-utilization of micro-credential programs to support their workforce and/or ensure that prospective job seekers are equipped with the necessary skills to match their needs. For example, an industry representative in the focus group discussion indicated a general lack of awareness of micro-credentials among employers in the information technology sector, in particular. According to this representative, greater awareness of micro-credentials among industry sectors and better linkage

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.peqab.ca/Publications/OMC%20final%20for%20posting%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.peqab.ca/Publications/OMC%20final%20for%20posting%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> [https://openlibrary-repo.ecampusontario.ca/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1439/1/eCampusOntario039s-Micro-credential-Toolkit-1655731685\\_print.pdf](https://openlibrary-repo.ecampusontario.ca/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1439/1/eCampusOntario039s-Micro-credential-Toolkit-1655731685_print.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> [https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Formatted\\_Microcredentials\\_FINAL1.pdf](https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Formatted_Microcredentials_FINAL1.pdf)

of post-secondary institutions' micro-credential programs to the necessary skillsets for in-demand jobs could help address challenges in the labour market.

### Evidence that the Format and Activities of the Project Support these Needs

Program documents revealed that this project is intended to help more people, especially those who are unsure where to begin their upskilling journey, and thereby find micro-credential programs that will lead them into jobs and career advancement opportunities.<sup>25</sup> It was also noted that micro-credential programs provide, short, accessible, skills-based development opportunities linked to career pathways. Employer demand, skills mapping, accessible programming, and solutions that help individuals make career choices all serve to enable individuals to maximize their employment potential and drive economic growth for Canadian business.<sup>26</sup>

eCampusOntario has upgraded its Micro-credential Portal, enabling job seekers and workers to improve their career prospects through personalized, skills-based pathways to new capabilities and in-demand jobs.<sup>27</sup> In order to enable a more curated search for micro-credentials among portal users, the eCampusOntario website includes functionalities that provide users with information such as the types of micro-credentials available, where they are offered, job forecasting, and career outlooks within specific sectors. After entering past or current job titles, the system identifies an individual's skills set and matches them with an inventory of micro-credentials offered by publicly-assisted colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes across Ontario. The system also indicates which micro-credentials fit with high-demand careers and sectors. Through automation, the portal presents the individual with a personalized portfolio of near-match, skills-based micro-credentials and, by extension, career possibilities.<sup>28</sup> According to one eCampusOntario staff member, *"the project with the Future Skills Center helped [eCampusOntario] update and adapt the user-centered design and focus of portal to help make it more relevant to job seekers."* The ability for portal users to refine their search for micro-credentials and obtain more precise results empowers users to more readily identify micro-credential programs that meet their needs and interests and eliminate "general browsing" that may not yield results that are of interest to the user.

By supporting the curated selection of fast, affordable and flexible training opportunities from nearly 2,000 short-duration micro-credentials, eCampusOntario not only helps develop the most relevant and in-demand skills and competencies through fast, accessible and affordable education, but also help organizations seeking critical skillsets train current and future employees.<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>25</sup> Evaluation Plan eCampusOntario.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/enhanced-micro-credential-portal-helps-individuals-unlock-their-career-potential-helps-organizations-upskill-their-talent/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/enhanced-micro-credential-portal-helps-individuals-unlock-their-career-potential-helps-organizations-upskill-their-talent/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/enhanced-micro-credential-portal-helps-individuals-unlock-their-career-potential-helps-organizations-upskill-their-talent/>

accessibility of micro-credentials in Ontario is enabled by their eligibility for student loans, namely the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). According to one interviewee, *“There is nowhere else in Canada where you can get a student loan for a part-time program. Usually, student loans are offered only if you are in school full-time, which is not ideal if you need to work.”*

Additionally, compared to traditional ways of learning that focus on structure and specific due dates for assessments, micro-credentials value self-directed learning and enable learners to complete smaller units of learning experiences at a pace that meets their learning needs and styles.<sup>30</sup> A key objective of the project as described by one eCampusOntario staff member is *“to bridge the gap between what [post-secondary] institutions are offering and what businesses need.”*

Focus group and interview findings suggest that the purpose of the micro-credential portal is to address the needs of stakeholders by enabling the development of micro-credential programs among post-secondary institutions across Ontario with the intention of rapidly upskilling and/or re-skilling job seekers in order for them to quickly enter or re-enter the workforce. The portal itself acts as a central repository of available micro-credentials and provides an avenue where individuals can access this skills-based training and directly engage in the learning process, which is meant to be supported and recognized by employers. However, findings also indicate that limited awareness of micro-credentials among industry employers thwarts their necessary engagement in the development, recognition and validation of micro-credential programs, and in turn, the utilization of micro-credential programs among job seekers and employees. During the focus group discussion, one employer noted financial barriers explaining that *“As an employer, it is nice to have eCampusOntario as a reference, but we haven’t been able to utilize it yet as it is difficult to budget anything when the prices [of micro-credential programs] aren’t there and having to reach out to each individual college to inquire is a barrier from an employer’s standpoint.”*

## 4.2 Reach

This section delves into the dimension of reach, strategically aligning our investigation with the pertinent evaluation questions that underscore how effectively the program connected with its designated audiences. We scrutinize the outreach strategies employed, assessing the degree to which the program reached its intended communities, as well as strategies to improve reach among portal users.

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<sup>30</sup> [https://openlibrary-repo.ecampusontario.ca/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1439/1/eCampusOntario039s-Micro-credential-Toolkit-1655731685\\_.print.pdf](https://openlibrary-repo.ecampusontario.ca/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1439/1/eCampusOntario039s-Micro-credential-Toolkit-1655731685_.print.pdf)

## Evaluation Question 2 – In What Ways and to What Extent Is the Project Reaching Intended Target Populations?

### KEY FINDINGS

No specific outreach strategies targeting end-users were identified in the evaluation. eCampusOntario identified key stakeholders to engage in the project from its existing networks and partnerships including members of the MCPAC and a micro-credential Community of Practice comprised of post-secondary institutions and employer and labour market associations across Ontario.

After identifying the industry segments of focus for the project, eCampusOntario engaged a total of ten post-secondary institutions and ten industry representatives across three relevant industry segments to provide insight and information to help solve labour market shortages as part of the project.

The extent to which the micro-credential portal is advertised to end-users among post-secondary institutions and industry employers is unclear; however, Google Analytics data indicates that nearly 17,000 users have accessed the portal since its launch in September 2023. Suggestions on how to reach learners and prospective portal users in the future include formal outreach and marketing campaigns, pop-ups at post-secondary institutions to allow students to test the portal, organized events such as a “lunch and learns”, interactive webinars, and connecting with relevant associations such as training certification groups and Employment Ontario.

### Strategies to Reach Portal Users

Findings from the evaluation did not identify specific strategies used by eCampusOntario to reach learners and/or job seekers. Moreover, the extent to which the micro-credential portal is advertised to end-users among post-secondary institutions and industry employers is unclear. Rather, eCampusOntario staff indicated that existing networks and partnerships were utilized to connect with relevant stakeholders (i.e., industry and labour market associations) that could provide insight on the project. As stated by one eCampusOntario staff member: *“We are working with the micro-credential advisory committee, our community of practices, and people that we know across the sector.”*

In addition to the MCPAC, eCampusOntario has also established a micro-credential Community of Practice comprised of over 350 members across post-secondary institutions and employer and labour market associations. eCampusOntario hosted two special meetings to engage members of its Community of Practice: one meeting held for employers and labour market associations, and another for post-secondary institutions. eCampusOntario also hosts two major events that bring together their members and relevant stakeholders including an annual conference and an annual micro-credential forum. The micro-credential forum specifically aims to highlight successful

partnerships between industry, community organizations, and postsecondary institutions; and spotlight how the growing micro-credential ecosystem is working to meet the needs of learners, employers, and educators in a rapidly changing global economy.<sup>31</sup>

### **Number of Post-Secondary Institutions and Employer and Labour Market Industry Associations Involved in the Project**

Evidence from the document review indicates that eCampusOntario recognizes the importance of engaging relevant stakeholders in the project to provide insights and experience on skills- and competency-based education and training initiatives. eCampusOntario initially planned to engage sector groups related to industry segments with the greatest current or future need for skills development, with a focus on 2-3 segments of programming around labour market priorities.<sup>32</sup>

To initiate this project, eCampusOntario consulted with MCPAC, which includes representatives from post-secondary institutions and employer and labour market industry associations, to determine which sectors require focus. eCampusOntario staff members that were interviewed confirmed that members of the MCPAC supported eCampusOntario in identifying which industry segments to prioritize out of the top ten industries experiencing workforce shortages as reported by Statistics Canada. The three industry segments identified as the priority focus for this project include: Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Information Communication Technology.<sup>33</sup>

After identifying the industry segments of focus, eCampusOntario engaged a total of ten industry representatives across the three relevant industry segments to provide insight and information to help solve labour market shortages as part of the project. These included, for example: the Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network (OVIN), Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association (APMA), the Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), and TechNation. The pilot project also engaged ten post-secondary institutions that offer micro-credential programs for manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology to provide feedback on the portal prior to its launch.

### **Number of Portal Users Who Access the New Information Online**

Google Analytics data indicates that 16,839 unique users have accessed the portal since its launch in September 2023. One caveat noted by an internal eCampusOntario stakeholder is that issues with updates to Google Analytics resulted in data loss for a duration of ten days since the launch of the portal, limiting the accuracy of the data measurement tool.

Focus group participants provided a number of suggestions on how to reach learners/prospective portal users in the future. These include: formal outreach and marketing campaigns, 'pop-ups' at post-secondary institutions to allow students to test the portal, organized events such as a "lunch and learns", interactive webinars, and connecting with relevant associations such as training

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/micro-credential-forum-2024/developing-tomorrows-workforce/>

<sup>32</sup> Evaluation & Learning Plan for Targeted Call Partners.

<sup>33</sup> Summary report of priorities from MCPAC.



certification groups and Employment Ontario. One focus group participant emphasized that outreach strategies should be targeted to the various audiences the portal is trying to reach (e.g., job seekers versus employees requiring upskilling), as opposed to deploying a generalized outreach campaign across Ontario.

## 4.3 Design

This section delves into the intricate aspects of the program's design, shedding light on the extent to which it was implemented according to its intended blueprint. We explore whether any modifications were introduced during the course of the project, considering the factors that influenced these adjustments. Additionally, a focal point of our analysis is the incorporation of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles in the program's design, assessing how these principles were integrated and their impact on the project's delivery. Our examination aims to identify elements that contribute to the successful implementation of the project, as well as any challenges that may impede its effective delivery.

### *Evaluation Question 3 – To What Extent Was the Project Implemented as Intended?*

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

The evaluation noted overall positive perceptions of the micro-credential portal and its intended use among stakeholders. As part of their involvement in the project, ten post-secondary institutions worked in collaboration with ten employers and labour market associations to corroborate information that would help develop the metadata schema of the portal and participate in user testing to identify any issues prior to the launch of the metadata enhancement. Evaluation findings revealed positive experiences reported by stakeholders when providing feedback to eCampusOntario during scheduled consultative sessions on the project.

eCampusOntario subsequently engaged all post-secondary institutions in Ontario that offer micro-credential programs for manufacturing, healthcare and information technology sectors to orient them on how to tag their micro-credential programs to the new metadata from the OpportuNext dataset. eCampusOntario continues to support post-secondary institutions as they tag their program, resulting in 1,283 micro-credentials on the portal being tagged to the new metadata.

One caveat with the portal's design is the notion that of the hundreds of micro-credentials already on the portal, a number of them may not in fact correspond with the definition a micro-credential established by the Ministry.

## Perception of Key Stakeholders about the Design of the Project

Although feedback from interviewees and focus group participants was limited, findings from the evaluation noted overall positive perceptions of the micro-credential portal and its intended use among stakeholders. As noted by one interviewee, *“the idea of a portal is a good one. It’s a one-stop shop that provides access for very specific, short bursts of learning opportunities.”*

An important aspect identified by one stakeholder is the evolution of the term ‘micro-credential’ and the fact that it has been interpreted differently across colleges, universities and private sector/industry until a formal definition was eventually established. However, since there are already hundreds of micro-credentials available on the portal that may not necessarily correspond with the established definition, there have been concerns about misrepresenting what micro-credentials are to Ontarians. A draft proposal for an Ontario Micro-Credential Quality Assurance Framework suggests that “formal recognition that some short programming meets agreed upon expectations will provide transparency of that educational experience, establish in advance the value of a given micro-credential for employers, industry, and academic institutions, and thereby provide students with a clarity of options, confidence of recognition, and the validation of their educational investment.”<sup>34</sup> The need to undertake a formal exercise to validate whether the micro-credential programs listed on the eCampusOntario portal correspond with the established definition and meet the standards established by the Ontario Micro-Credential Quality Assurance Framework was identified.

## Evidence that the Project Involved Industry Partners as well as Post-Secondary Institutions in the Data Enhancement Process of the Portal

Findings from the document review found that post-secondary institutions have been enthusiastic about this project and its potential to help recommend programs to relevant potential learners in the workforce.<sup>35</sup>

eCampusOntario engaged with many new and existing collaborators, including sector boards and employers, and recruited new individuals with unique insights aligned with employer and job needs. Ten post-secondary institutions and employer and labour market association representatives were engaged in the pilot project via three scheduled project meetings, one for each of the three industry segments identified. Specifically, post-secondary institutions worked in collaboration with employers and labour market associations to corroborate information that would help develop the metadata schema of the portal and participate in user testing to identify any issues prior to the launch of the metadata enhancement. For example, a representative of the healthcare sector identified an error in the recommendation of nursing micro-credentials to individuals that did not meet the pre-requisite requirements. This enabled a necessary

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.peqab.ca/Publications/OMC%20final%20for%20posting%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Microcredentials: Getting people into programs and into jobs. Q1 (April 1, 2023 to June 30, 2023) report.



modification to the algorithm used to map micro-credential skillsets with occupations to ensure proper alignment.

Post-secondary institutions and employer and labour market association representatives that participated in the focus group reported positive experiences when providing feedback to eCampusOntario during scheduled consultative sessions on the project. Focus group participants noted that the consultative process was “engaging” and that it was *“helpful to have people from similar sectors in the sessions”*, which demonstrated alignment in the identification of sector-specific skills gaps. Others indicated that it was beneficial for them to be able to test the functionality of the portal and provide insight on areas for improvement.

### **Evidence that the Project Provided Recommendations and Metadata Information for Micro-Credential Programs in the Manufacturing, Health-Care and Social Assistance as well as the Information and Communication Technology Industries**

An examination of documents revealed that eCampusOntario collaborated with all post-secondary institutions in Ontario providing micro-credential programs in the manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology sectors. The purpose of this collaboration was to familiarize them with the updated metadata features resulting from the partnership with OpportuNext and the Conference Board of Canada.<sup>36</sup> Interview findings confirmed that eCampusOntario reached out to post-secondary institutions directly and hosted training sessions with administrative staff to inform them about ways to tag their micro-credential programs to the new metadata that is aligned with the OpportuNext datasets and algorithms. In order to accomplish this, post-secondary institutions were granted access to the backend end of the portal to be able to manually tag their respective micro-credential programs to the metadata. By the end of June 2023, more than 300 micro-credential programs had already been tagged with metadata from the OpportuNext dataset.<sup>37</sup> It was also noted that eCampusOntario continues to support post-secondary institutions as they tag their program with new data. Interview results indicated that through active promotion among all post-secondary institutions offering programs in the three industry segments relevant to the project, the count of micro-credential programs tagged with metadata had reached 500 by September 2023. In addition, since the portal’s launch in September 2023, eCampusOntario staff reported that of the 1,943 total micro-credential programs currently available on the portal, approximately 1,283 have been tagged with the new metadata.

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<sup>36</sup> Microcredentials: Getting people into programs and into jobs. Q1 (April 1, 2023 to June 30, 2023) report.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

## Evaluation Question 4 – Were Modifications Made to the Design of the Project?

### KEY FINDINGS

Few adaptations were made to the project in the short duration since its launch. The only adaptation identified was the addition of metadata for occupation related ‘tools and technologies’ that could be tagged to relevant micro-credentials programs. The adaptation resulted in all metadata for the portal being correlated to key words associated with occupational tools and technology, in addition to skills.

### Evidence that the Design of the Project Changed Over Time

Interview and focus group findings indicate that few adaptations were made to the project in the short duration since its launch. A representative of MCPAC, however, reported that the metadata enhancements, specifically mapping micro-credential skills to occupations, were not initially included in the original design. The original intent was for the portal to serve as a repository of micro-credentials accessible to anyone, directing them to post-secondary institutions offering these programs.

The only adaptation noted by one eCampusOntario staff member was the addition of ‘tools and technology’ metadata. Specifically, the backend of the portal was updated to include metadata for occupational tools and technologies that could be tagged to relevant micro-credentials programs. The adaptation was made following a consultative meeting with industry representatives where one representative noted that key words associated with occupational *skills* can sometimes be too general, whereas the inclusion of key words associated with *tools and technologies* would be more meaningful to employers. The adaptation led to the correlation of all portal metadata with keywords related to occupational tools, technology, and skills.

## Evaluation Question 5 – How Was Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Considered in the Project’s Design?

### KEY FINDINGS

Evaluation findings regarding the integration of EDI considerations in the project are constrained to the representation of Indigenous institutions on the MCPAC and the availability of micro-credential programs offered by Indigenous institutions on the portal.

Insights offered on factors to contemplate when applying an equity perspective to the project include: 1) ensuring that marginalized groups can access the content on the portal and; 2) enabling data capture to ensure that eCampusOntario can acquire information on the different types of end-users, and apply this information to make future improvements.

## Evidence of the Inclusion of EDI in the Project

Evidence and views regarding the inclusion of EDI considerations in the project is limited. No information to this effect was identified in the review of documents. Interviews with eCampusOntario staff uncovered that Indigenous institutions are represented on the MCPAC and that micro-credential programs from these institutions are accessible on the micro-credential portal. One internal eCampusOntario stakeholder reported that *“everything we do is informed by institutions committed to EDI; we take a fairly broad and holistic approach.”*

A focus group participant shared their insights on two key aspects to consider when applying an equity lens to the project. These include: 1) ensuring that marginalized groups can access the content on the portal and; 2) enabling data capture to ensure that eCampusOntario can acquire information on the different types of end-users, and apply this information to make future improvements. Relevant details about various user types encompass preferred learning styles, such as a preference for in-person learning (versus online). As noted by this representative, *“[the COVID-19 pandemic] showed us that we have to be adaptable to different types of learning.”*

## Evaluation Question 6 – What Are the Key Factors Supporting or Hindering the Delivery of the Project?

### KEY FINDINGS

Findings from the evaluation identified a number of areas of the project that are **working well**. Firstly, level of stakeholder engagement in the project exceeded expectations and demonstrated strong commitment among post-secondary institutions and industry representatives, resulting in a micro-credential portal that met the needs of end-users and other key stakeholders. Mechanisms for engaging stakeholders, such as the MCPAC and partnerships with the Future Skills Centre and the Conference Board of Canada were shown to be important factors in enabling the identification and engagement of stakeholders.

Secondly, the project has enabled the promotion of micro-credentials among relevant stakeholders, who previously were largely unaware of the availability and applicability of micro-credential programs in Ontario. The new metadata enhancements allow project members to promote micro-credentials in a way that is directly relevant to industry stakeholders.

Finally, the visual layout of the portal and the new metadata enhancements have greatly improved the user experience on the portal by providing a more curated experience in searching for micro-credential programs that meet the needs and interests of learners.

Elements of the project that were considered more **challenging** include employers’ lack of awareness of micro-credentials, resulting in barriers towards furthering development and investment in micro-credential programs. Competing stakeholder interests also posed barriers towards ensuring a comprehensive micro-credential online portal, namely with respect to

limiting the micro-credential programs available on the portal to only those that are eligible for student loans. This made it easier for eCampusOntario to obtain necessary information from the Ministry, but not conducive towards post-secondary institutions being able to promote all their available programs. Other challenges with the portal involve the manual procedure required to tag micro-credential programs to the metadata; as well as the lack of clarity around certain functionalities of the website available to end-users (e.g., search filters). Finally, limited evidence on the use of the portal and its efficacy makes it challenging for key stakeholders to see the value in engaging and investing in the portal as a solution for labour market shortages.

**Suggestions for improving the portal** include optimizing search features for a more user-friendly and personalized experience, validating micro-credential programs to meet Ministry standards, assessing outcomes among end-users and employers, and leveraging MCPAC members' expertise to enhance the portal's relevance for key industry stakeholders.

## Evidence of/Views on What Is Working Well

Findings from the evaluation identified a number of key aspects of the project that are working well.

**Stakeholder engagement.** The evaluation findings indicated that representatives from industry post-secondary institutions surpassed the expectations set by eCampusOntario in terms of their engagement and efforts to support the project objectives. According to one internal eCampusOntario stakeholder, *“stakeholder engagement was very positive. We didn’t need to worry about it, people were engaged. We had enough people to be able to stick to all three industry segments [identified] for the pilot.”* Interview findings also indicated that the MCPAC has been a key mechanism for engaging relevant stakeholders in the pilot project. Members of the MCPAC provided guidance and advice to eCampusOntario on the development of the portal for micro-credentials, and also enabled the identification of relevant stakeholders to join the initiative and provide further insight on sector-specific needs. As noted by one eCampusOntario staff member, *“stakeholders are eager to make a better searchable tool for learners who are looking for a better opportunity”.* According to one eCampusOntario staff member, *the project has “been effective at leveraging the collective expertise of everyone involved and producing an actual highly functional platform.”* Finally, the partnership between eCampusOntario, Future Skills Centre and the Conference Board of Canada was also hailed as a success by one eCampusOntario staff member who stated that *“the three-way partnership was really effective because everyone was keen to explore and experiment and try to make things better for people; there was a shared commitment.”*

**Broadening the understanding of micro-credentials.** One aspect of the project that was deemed a success was its ability to broaden the reach and understanding of micro-credentials among key stakeholders, namely employers and labour market associations. The new metadata enhancements, facilitating the alignment of micro-credential programs on the portal with relevant occupational skills, empower project members to promote micro-credentials in a manner directly relevant and engaging to labour market associations and industry stakeholders. As stated by one

post-secondary institution representative, “once they understand its about skill development, they are on board”.

**Improving user experience with metadata enhancements.** Interview and focus group findings uncovered positive views on the new metadata enhancements to the portal, which have improved the user experience. One focus group participant asserted that “the update has vastly improved the portal [...] it is easier to search [for micro-credentials] now.” According to one eCampusOntario staff member, “the [initial version of the] portal was flat and didn’t have the enhancements; through this opportunity, the usability and functionality of the portal has been enhanced [to improve] the learner experience. [...] The portal is now considered “a comprehensive user interface.”

**Visual layout and information provided of the portal.** Overall, interview and focus group findings uncovered positive views on the aesthetics and functionality of the portal. For example, one focus group participant noted that they like the layout of the portal and the information provided when accessing one of the micro-credential programs (i.e., program description, duration, and eligibility for OSAP). The suggested career paths associated with the program, offered to users, were also recognized as advantageous.

## Evidence of Challenges with the Project

Both eCampusOntario staff and stakeholder representatives identified a number of challenges related to the current state of micro-credentials and how they are identified and utilized.

**Limited awareness among employers.** As previously noted, one challenge is a lack of awareness among employers and labour market associations about micro-credentials and their application. According to one eCampusOntario staff member, the challenge with employers extends beyond simple awareness; rather, it may be challenging for employers to see the benefit in investing in micro-credentials, and education in general, in light of barriers to understanding its value. For example, one employer representative explained that employers may not want to invest in skills training for entry-level positions as this would not address the need for upskilling current employees to help with retention. Instead, this industry representative noted that employers would be more likely to invest in mid- and high-level micro-credentials to improve workforce retention.

**Competing stakeholder interests.** Interview and focus group findings uncovered challenges with managing the interests of various stakeholders related to investing in the development and promotion of micro-credentials. During the focus group discussion, concerns were raised regarding the limitation that only OSAP-eligible micro-credentials are available on the portal. One participant questioned the reasoning for not including all micro-credentials as OSAP-eligible, noting that they had voiced these concerns to eCampusOntario directly indicating to them that “this is not inclusive.” In a separate key informant interview, an eCampusOntario staff member reported that they are in fact “moving towards listing all micro-credentials” on the portal and that their rationale for listing OSAP-eligible micro-credentials was because it was “most convenient” in advancing rapid iterations of the portal. Moreover, this enabled eCampusOntario to acquire the

necessary data/information from the Ministry. Consequently, it is recognized that this limits the information that can be edited by post-secondary institutions. Moreover, it was reiterated that the process for listing all Ontario micro-credentials on the portal is currently “*in development*”. The challenge remains “*to develop a metadata application that will account for multiple and overlapping interests of the Ministry, post-secondary institutes, industry, and more – how do we work with the Ministry and make sure we get the data we want from them and allow post-secondary institutes to update their own data? [...] Working with a lot of people can be challenging.*”

**Usability of the portal.** Focus group participants identified challenges associated with the usability of the portal. Certain challenges were associated with the ‘backend’ functionalities of the portal. For example, it was noted that the manual process by which post-secondary institutions are required to input program information (e.g., program start date) and tag their relevant programs to the metadata is “*incredibly onerous*”. One participant suggested removing the program start dates from the portal completely as “*they are always out of date and there’s no way for institutions to keep up*”. Concerns regarding the ‘frontend’ functionality of the portal, including challenges like the inability to filter a search by post-secondary institutions (i.e., to be able to search for micro-credentials offered at one specific institution) limiting the visibility of institutions seeking to bolster their presence. Additionally, issues were noted with the clarity of certain functions, such as the meaning of the ‘hot’ button. Participants suggested providing a brief definition of the ‘hot’ in the form of a ‘float over’ feature (i.e., a definition appears on the screen when the cursor is placed over the icon). Finally, two end-users that completed the feedback survey available on the portal indicated that the micro-credential programs and associated weblinks for one post-secondary institution are not available on the portal.

**Limited evidence on efficacy.** Findings from the focus group and interviews uncovered concerns about the availability of information on the efficacy of the portal. Findings indicate gaps in information shared with stakeholders about the extent to which end-users access the portal and its efficacy. One focus group participant reported that “*eCampusOntario need to be more forthcoming with stakeholders regarding: 1) who is using the portal, 2) how we can make it better, 3) the value for institutions to put in the work, and 4) sharing more data.*” Questions raised by another stakeholder regarding the portal’s efficacy include concerns about utilization of the portal, for instance: “*How well has the portal been utilized? How many micro-credentials have been accessed? How many micro-credentials have been completed system-wide and are these actually recognized by industry? What is the follow-through?*” In a separate interview, an eCampusOntario staff member also referred to this concern indicating that “*the challenge is [that] we don’t see what happens after people register.*” In addition, one eCampusOntario staff member identified data monitoring challenges linked to technological issues with the Google Analytics tool used to measure web traffic on the portal website. This staff member explained that Google Analytics upgrades can result in data loss, which was experienced one time since the portal’s launch in September 2023.



## Suggestions from Key Stakeholders

Findings from the evaluation identified a number of recommendations to improve the micro-credential portal.

**Refining search features.** Focus group and interview findings, as well as end-user survey results, highlighted the need to refine the portal's online searching capabilities to minimize burden and ensure a more personalized experience that meets the needs of end-users.

Data analytics obtained by eCampusOntario staff indicated that portal users are more likely to “browse” the long list of micro-credentials listed on the portal, than enter key words to refine their search. Both eCampusOntario staff and focus group participants emphasized the need to find a way to better refine the search capabilities given the volume of micro-credentials that exists. As stated by one focus group participants: *“If you select ‘Filter’ and ‘Areas of Focus’ [on the portal], the list is long. It’s a good thing that there’s so much available, but there needs to be a way to refine the search capabilities given the volume that exists.”* This participant also noted that *“this issue relates back to the different types of learners and the fact that individuals may not know that the “search bar” can pick up key words.”*

Of the end-users that completed the feedback survey available on the portal, nearly half (4/9) recommended the addition of new functionalities to better support users in identifying micro-credentials of interest. These suggestions included the ability to save or ‘like’ micro-credential programs of interest in a personalized list that could be accessed by the user at any time, as well as additional filters that would help users “narrow down” the list of available micro-credentials that could be searched. Examples of additional filters include the ability to remove past programs or programs that are already in progress, and the ability to input one’s current skills, training and level of experience.

One eCampusOntario staff member indicated that with additional time and budget, the portal would allow users to create a user profile where they could save personalized information including their search results and their preferred micro-credential programs. According to the eCampusOntario staff member, this feature would enable a more personalized approach to the process of identifying the micro-credential programs best suited to meet the user’s needs and interest.

**Validating micro-credentials listed on the portal.** In light of the new Ontario Micro-Credential Quality Assurance Framework, it was suggested that all micro-credentials on the portal be validated according to the Ontario Ministry standards outlined in the Quality Assurance Framework. As noted by one stakeholder, the process of validating micro-credentials on the portal will in turn enable a more *“uniform approach to managing, describing and engaging with micro-credentials”* across all relevant stakeholders.

**Measuring outcomes.** Interview and focus group findings revealed that while the micro-credential portal shows promise, a lack of measurable efficacy outcomes makes it difficult for

stakeholders to see the added value in investing in the platform and in micro-credential programs. Stakeholders that were interviewed recommended that eCampusOntario continue to have ongoing discussions with key industry and post-secondary institution stakeholders to capture feedback on the portal and make necessary changes to improve its efficacy. In addition, stakeholders also suggested the need to capture key outcome measures such as the number of students registering for micro-credential programs, their satisfaction with these programs, as well as employers' level of satisfaction with employees hired from micro-credential programs. Likewise, two end-users who participated in the feedback survey on the portal recommended incorporating measures of satisfaction with micro-credential programs. This could include information such as the number of individuals who have successfully completed the program in the past, as well as program ratings and/or reviews from previous students.

***More in-depth involvement of MCPAC members.*** While the MCPAC provided valuable insights on stakeholder engagement within the scope of the project, it was recommended that MCPAC members be engaged in a way that could help transform the approach towards promoting micro-credentials more broadly, and engaging key industry stakeholders in Ontario. It was suggested that the MCPAC could move away from its advisory role and instead become a working group that *“utilizes the years of experience [of MCPAC members] across sectors to make [MCPAC] something that is meaningful to learners and industry”*. Most importantly, the MCPAC could serve as a platform to tactfully engage with industry stakeholders to discuss *“real problems”* and better educate them on micro-credentials and the value they bring to industry. According to one stakeholder, *“this education piece has not happened, and until it happens more broadly and there is a greater understanding among industry, [micro-credentials] will continue to not be understood and cared about by industry.”*

## 4.4 Effectiveness

This section assesses the effectiveness of the eCampusOntario program across various dimensions, including the degree to which it offers personalized program recommendations to users. Furthermore, it delves into the project's impact on increasing the number of inquiries and referrals, exploring its success in establishing valuable data connections with OpportuNext that could be leveraged for future initiatives in additional jurisdictions. The evaluation also gauges end-user satisfaction, shedding light on the overall user experience. Additionally, we evaluate whether unintended impacts, be they positive or negative, have emerged as a result of the project's implementation. Through this comprehensive examination, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the program's effectiveness in achieving its diverse objectives and uncover any unforeseen consequences that may have arisen.



## Evaluation Question 7 – To What Extent Did/Does the Project Meet Its Intended Outcomes?

### **KEY FINDINGS**

Overall, evaluation findings indicate that the project has met its intended outcomes. Specifically, the project succeeds in providing personalized program recommendations to portal users as a result of access to the OpportuNext dataset. Findings from the evaluation confirm that end-users are able to receive personalized micro-credential program recommendations through the portal's new metadata enhancements and resulting features. Google Analytics data also confirmed an increase in inquiries to institutions via the micro-credential portal. In addition, eCampusOntario confirmed that the data connections created with the OpportuNext dataset could be leveraged by any other Canadian jurisdiction.

End-user feedback obtained from an online survey revealed that most users visited the portal to learn about micro-credential programs or to upskill for their career. Most users also reported that the portal had recommended micro-credential programs that were right for them based on their current or past job. Interestingly, survey responses revealed that labour market information and factors associated with micro-credential programs (e.g., complexity, level of interest, related to previous experience) may not necessarily lead to users registering for a program. Finally, most survey respondents reported being satisfied with their experience on the portal.

### **Evidence of the Extent to Which the Project Succeeds in Providing Personalized Program Recommendations to Portal Users**

eCampusOntario acquired occupation-specific data and skills from the OpportuNext dataset, empowering the portal to furnish end-users with career examples aligned with the micro-credential programs they select. As one eCampusOntario staff member explained, *"You can now enter current or past job titles and figure out what you already know and what you need to know, you can browse all micro-credentials or look at industries in focus. This data was not available before this project."*

Findings from the evaluation confirm that end-users are able to attain personalized micro-credential program recommendations through the portal's new metadata enhancements and resulting features. More specifically, eCampusOntario staff confirmed that the portal has generated over 4,500 recommendations for portal users to date (i.e., personalized lists of recommended programs based on user's past or current job titles).

## Evidence of the Extent to Which the Project has Increased the Number of Institutional Inquiries and/or Referrals

By using Google Analytics data, eCampusOntario staff verified that there had been a 46% increase in inquiries to institutions via the micro-credential portal.<sup>38</sup> This uptick is observed when users express readiness to proceed with a chosen micro-credential program, providing their email address to facilitate connection with the relevant post-secondary institution. Unfortunately, no further information was available to offer additional insights into the quality of institutional inquiries and referrals stemming from potential access.

## Evidence of the Extent to Which the Project Created Data Connections with OpportuNext that Can Be Leveraged for Additional Jurisdictions in the Future

Interview findings confirmed the application of the new metadata, namely the mapping of OpportuNext datasets with occupational skills as well as tools and technologies associated with micro-credential programs across the healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology sectors. OpportuNext datasets include the National Occupation Codes (NOC) and North American Industry Classification (NAIC) databases; NOCs identify occupational skills that can be linked to one or more micro-credential programs, whereas NAIC codes are specifically used to tag relevant industry segments (i.e., healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology). In order to map micro-credential programs to the new metadata, institution administrators must select the relevant NOCs and NAIC codes based on how they want their micro-credential program(s) to be tagged to the associated skills, tools and technology (NOC), and industries (NAIC). This mapping of OpportuNext metadata to micro-credential programs results in the latter being directly linked to the labour market information (i.e., relevant occupational skills data). Prior to the metadata enhancements, there was no direct linkage of micro-credentials to the labour market.

Finally, eCampusOntario staff confirmed that the technology currently employed by the eCampusOntario micro-credential portal to map OpportuNext metadata to micro-credential programs can be used by any other Canadian jurisdiction, and possibly international jurisdictions as well. As stated by one eCampusOntario staff member, *“yes, the technology can be leveraged by other jurisdictions in future. We could license the platform to any jurisdiction for free or for a fee. You could connect other jurisdictions to the backend [of the portal], but each frontend would prioritize their micro-credential programs first”*.

## End-user Feedback Survey

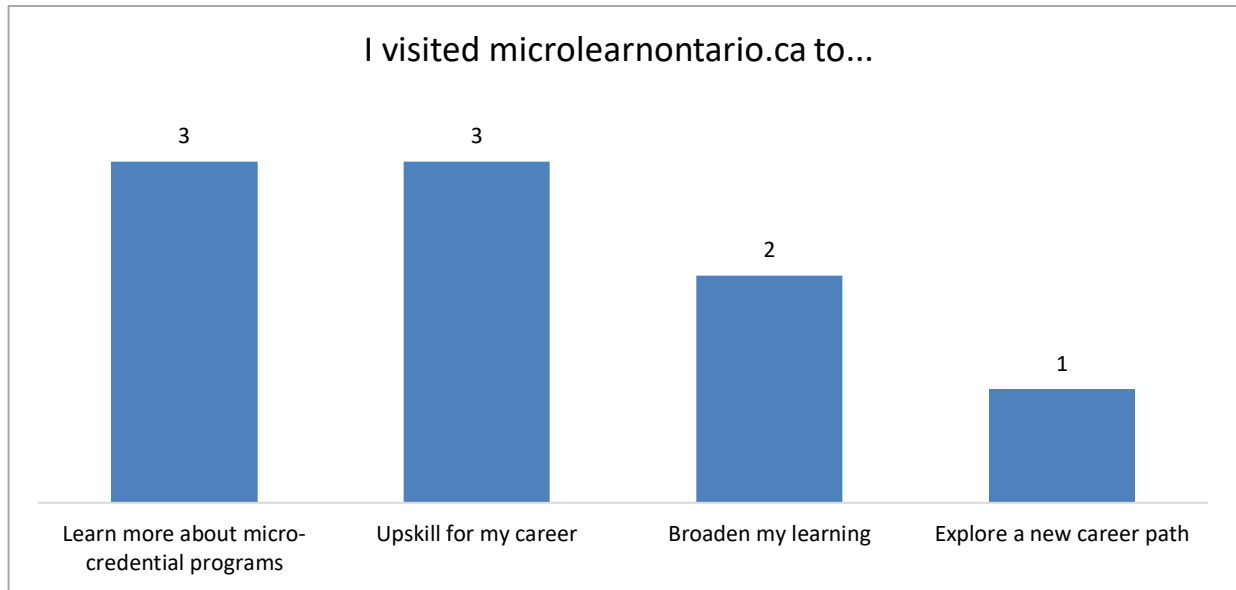
Evidence of the effectiveness of the micro-credential portal were also obtained directly from end-users via an online survey that was integrated on the micro-credential portal. A total of 9 end-users completed the survey between September 2023 and December 2023. Survey results are presented below.

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<sup>38</sup> Google Analytics data was unavailable for 10 days during the data collection period, which affected the accuracy of the numbers reported.

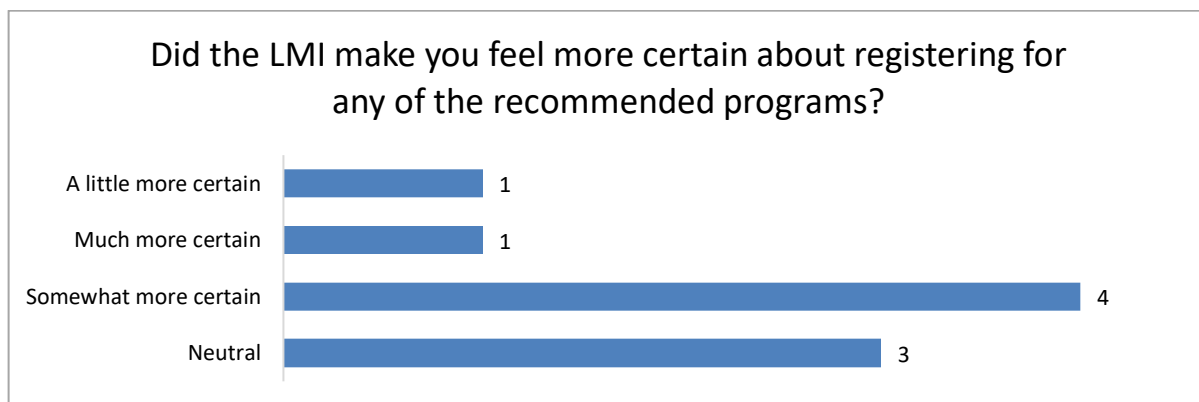
As summarized in **Figure 2** below, most survey respondents indicated that they visited the portal to learn more about micro-credential programs (3) or to upskill for their career (3).

Figure 2: Reasons for Visiting the Micro-credential Portal



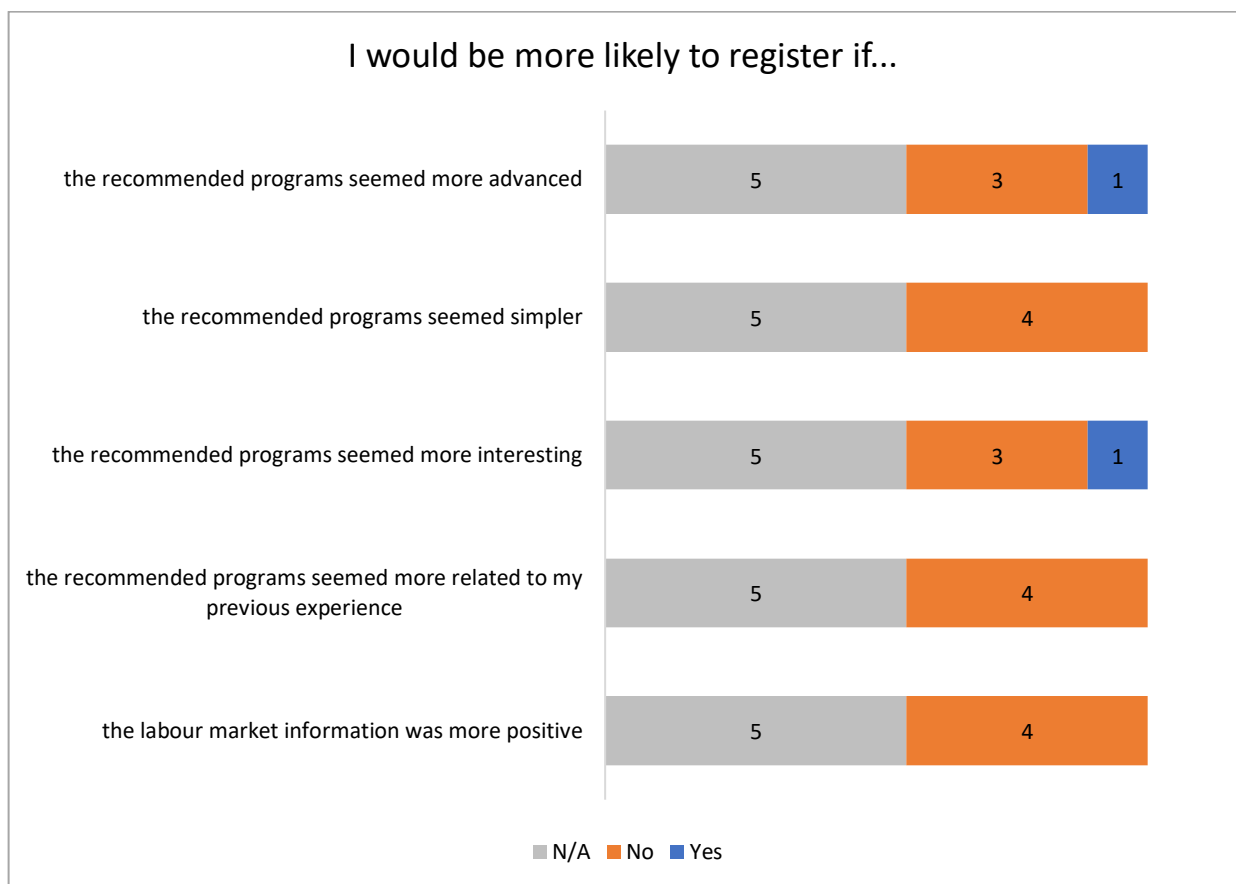
When asked if the portal recommended the micro-credential programs that are right for them based on their current or past job, four (4) users responded ‘yes’ and five (5) responded ‘maybe’. **Figure 3** below indicates that most (4) survey respondents indicated that the labour market information (LMI) presented to them made them feel ‘somewhat more certain’ about registering for any of the recommended programs. In addition, most (5) users responded ‘yes’ when asked if they would register for any of the recommended programs, and the remaining (4) responded ‘maybe’.

Figure 3: How Certain Users are about Registering for a Recommended Program after Viewing Relevant Labour Market Information



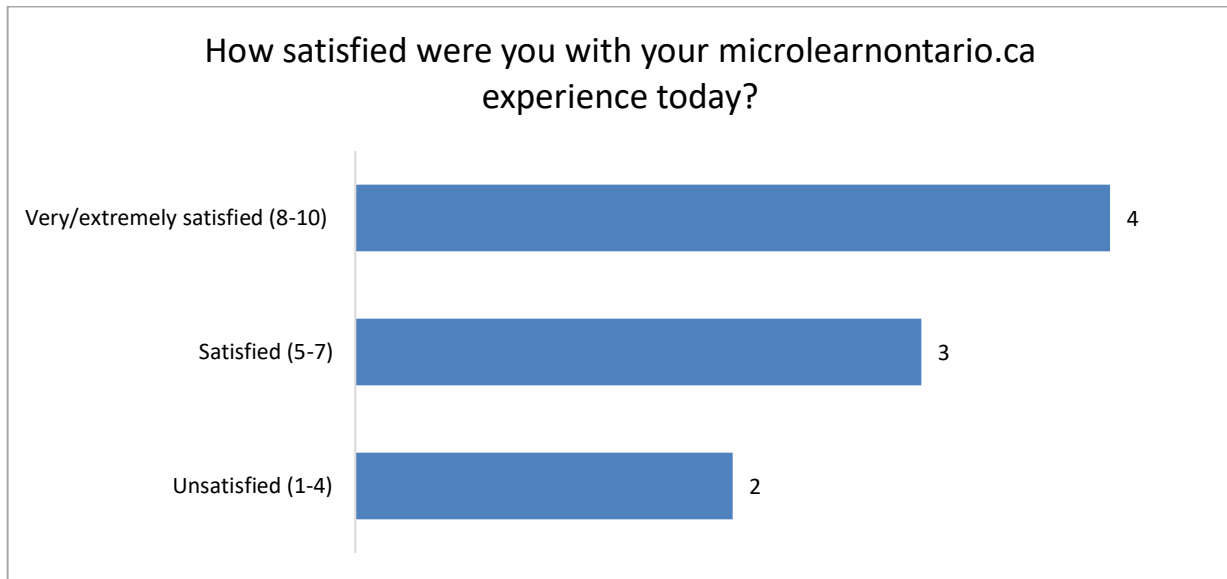
Survey respondents were also asked a number of questions to better understand what conditions could increase the likelihood of their registration for the recommended programs. Results presented in **Figure 4** below indicate that factors associated with recommended micro-credential programs including their degree of complexity (i.e., simple or advanced), users' level of interest in the programs, and the extent to which the program is related to users' previous experience may not necessarily influence whether learners choose to register for the micro-credential program(s) recommended to them. In fact, many respondents (3-4) indicated that they would not be more likely to register for the programs based on these factors. Of note, most (5) respondents selected 'not applicable'. In addition, one respondent commented that the short duration of a program (i.e., 2 hours) does not allow enough time to learn about the subject matter in question; whereas another respondent referenced potential constraints associated with being registered with the Ontario Disability Support Program (OSDP).

**Figure 4: Likelihood of Users Registering for Recommended Programs**



Finally, survey respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the micro-credential portal on a scale from 1 (extremely unsatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied). Results presented in **Figure 5** below indicate that most (7) respondents reported medium to high levels of satisfaction with their experience on the micro-credential portal.

Figure 5: User Satisfaction with the Micro-credential Portal



### Evaluation Question 8 – Have there Been Unintended Impacts (positive or negative) of the Project? If so, What Were They?

#### KEY FINDINGS

Few unintended impacts were identified by focus group participants and interviewees. The most relevant unexpected impact was the notion that the project had initiated a change in how the Ministry collects labour market data; specifically, moving from a content-based to a competency-based approach. This change was initiated by the new metadata enhancements that require micro-credential programs to be tagged to competency-based labour market data (i.e., occupational codes). Prior to this project, labour market data had not been linked to post-secondary courses or programs.

#### Stakeholders' Perceptions of any Unintended Impacts

Few unintended impacts were identified by focus group participants and interviewees. Staff from eCampusOntario noted that stakeholders' willingness to engage in the project, and the extent of their involvement, had surpassed their expectations and was, in this sense, an unexpected impact of the project.

The most relevant unexpected impact that was identified was the notion that the project had initiated a change in how the Ministry collects labour market data; specifically, moving from a content-based to a competency-based approach. As explained by one eCampusOntario staff member, by mapping their micro-credential programs to relevant NOC and NAIC codes, post-secondary institutions have linked their micro-credential programs with relevant labour market

data, which subsequently allows eCampusOntario the ability to provide learners with information on career outlooks and skillsets associated with micro-credential programs (i.e., competency-based information). Prior to this project, labour market data (i.e., NOC and NAIC codes) had not been linked to post-secondary courses/programs.

## 5.0 Learning Reflections and Recommendations

### 5.1 Learning Reflections

Collaboration with sector groups and associations has emerged as a key strategy for the success and efficiency of the initiative. These entities, often comprised of industry experts, professionals, and stakeholders, offer experience, knowledge, resources and insights. By engaging with partners early in the project, project teams can leverage their expertise to finalize the project's scope and develop a project plan.

### 5.2 Recommendations

#### Recommendations for eCampusOntario's Consideration

The forthcoming recommendations are put forth for the thoughtful consideration of eCampusOntario, aiming to provide constructive insights and suggestions for the enhancement and refinement of the current program. These recommendations stem from an in-depth evaluation that scrutinized various facets of the program, seeking to contribute to its ongoing development and effectiveness.

- Increase awareness of micro-credential programs among key stakeholders in the province (i.e., employers, labour market associations and other industry stakeholders, post-secondary institutions, and end-users)
  - Conduct formal outreach and marketing campaigns, 'pop-ups' at post-secondary institutions, organized events such as a "lunch and learns", and interactive webinars.
- Validate all micro-credential programs currently on the portal to ensure they meet the standards established by the Ministry of Ontario
  - Engage all post-secondary institutions in a formal exercise to identify which micro-credential programs do not meet the standards
- Include micro-credential programs that are not eligible for student loans (e.g., OSAP) on the portal (in progress)
- Perform ongoing user testing of the portal to address any technological issues/glitches and improve user experience
  - Revise and refine search filters
  - Enable end-users to save their searches (in progress)
- Continue to support post-secondary institutions with the process of tagging micro-credential programs to the metadata
- Engage experts to reflect on how Equity, Diversity and Inclusion considerations could be further integrated in the design and delivery of the micro-credential portal

- Capture data/information on the different types of end-users and apply this information to improve user experience
- Ensure that that marginalized groups can access the content on the portal
- Identify key performance indicators to measure outcomes and share this information with key stakeholders (e.g., number of students registering for micro-credential programs; student satisfaction with micro-credential program(s) completed; employer satisfaction with workforce that completed a micro-credentials program(s))
- Consider revising the MCPAC terms of references and engaging members through a working group that aims to address ‘real problems’ and provide insight that is ‘transformational’ (as opposed to surface level)

## Recommendations for FSC and Conference Board of Canada

The recommendations outlined below are directed towards Future Skills Centre (FSC) and the Conference Board of Canada. These suggestions are put forth with a keen focus on the significance of funding as a pivotal factor in supporting the growth and sustainability of the eCampusOntario program. As we delve into these recommendations, the aim is to provide valuable insights and strategic considerations for the continued success and broader impact of the eCampusOntario program.

- The evaluation highlighted the significance of enhancing awareness of the program, validating micro-credentials for quality assurance, ensuring that program offerings are inclusive, the need for continued support and collaboration, the importance of performance measurement, and the need for MCPAC enhancement. FSC and Conference Board of Canada are encouraged to continue supporting programs like eCampusOntario and explore its applicability as a best practice model for similar initiatives.
- The eCampusOntario program has showcased considerable potential for expansion within Ontario and with additional sectors. Consequently, it is advised that funders (FSC and Conference Board of Canada) maintain strong partnerships and ongoing collaboration with the eCampusOntario team to support sustainability efforts and facilitate the project's scaling up.
- Continued funding for programs like eCampusOntario is crucial to sustain and enhance their impact. Ongoing financial support ensures the program's ability to adapt to evolving labour market landscapes, expand outreach efforts, and implement improvements. This will ultimately contribute to the longevity and effectiveness of programs aimed at facilitating accessible and personalized employment opportunities for diverse populations.



# Appendix 1: Key Informant Interview Guides

## External Evaluation of eCampusOntario’s Micro-Credential Portal Project Interview Guide – eCampusOntario Staff

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) has contracted Goss Gilroy Inc (GGI), an independent consulting firm, to support their strategic evaluation and learning support initiatives by assisting eCampusOntario with its evaluation activities. GGI specializes in conducting program evaluations of skills training programs. The evaluation focuses on the relevance, reach, design, effectiveness and impact of the project.

You have been identified as someone who can provide important feedback for this effort. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. The interview will take about 60 minutes and your participation is voluntary. Also, please be assured that any information you provide will remain confidential and will be managed and protected in accordance with the *Privacy Act* to prevent its loss or unauthorized disclosure. Findings will be used only for the evaluation of the project. The information we gather through this interview will be summarized in aggregate form and no responses will be attributed to you as an individual.

Since this interview covers a diverse range of activities, you will only be asked to speak to those areas where you are most involved or knowledgeable. Feel free to let us know if any questions do not apply to you, or if you do not feel comfortable answering them.

If you have any questions about this evaluation or the interviews, please feel free to contact Rich Louttet, Project Lead at eCampusOntario ([rlouttet@ecampusontario.ca](mailto:rlouttet@ecampusontario.ca)) or Hema Vyas, Project Lead at GGI ([hvyas@ggi.ca](mailto:hvyas@ggi.ca)).

Thank you in advance for your participation!

### Introduction

1) To start, please tell me briefly about your specific role at eCampusOntario, as well as your involvement with the project.

### Relevance

2) In your own words, what need was this project meant to respond to? [EQ1]

### Reach

3) What, if any, strategies did you use to involve the following stakeholders in the project? [EQ2]

- a) Employer and labour market industry associations
- b) Post-secondary institutions

- 4) How successful were these strategies (e.g., how many employer and labour market industry associations and post-secondary institutions participated)? [EQ2]
  - a) What role did these stakeholders play?
- 5) What, if any, strategies did you use to inform portal users about the metadata enhancements that were undertaken? [EQ2]

## Design

- 6) Please comment on the different aspect of the project and the extent to which they have been implemented: [EQ3]
  - a) The release of user interface and workflows to support personalized program recommendations (i.e., upon entering their current or past job title users will receive information on recommended micro-credential programs)
  - b) Adding standardized occupation and skills data as well as related labour market data to the micro-credential portal for programs in the three identified industry sectors (i.e., manufacturing, health care and social assistance, and information and communication industries)
  - c) Involvement of employer and labour market industry associations and post-secondary institutions in the data enhancement process of the portal
- 7) Have you made any adaptations to the original project design? If yes, what prompted you to make these adaptations? [EQ4]
- 8) What role did equity, diversity and inclusion considerations play when developing the project (e.g., in the development of the advisory group or in developing the web tool that generates personalised recommendations? [EQ5]
- 9) Tell me about your overall experience with the project/program: [EQ6]
  - a) What has been working well?
  - b) What challenges did you face?
  - c) Do you have any suggestions for how the project could be improved?

## Effectiveness

- 10) The project aims to achieve a number of outcomes related to the use of the micro-credential portal. For each of the outcome, please comment on how and the extent to which the project has made an impact: [EQ7]
  - a) Providing personalized program recommendations to portal users

- b) Increase in the number of institutional inquiries and/or referrals
- c) Creating data connections with OpportuNext that can be leveraged for additional jurisdictions in the future

11) Thinking about your answer to the last question, have there been any other unexpected impacts (positive or negative) that the project has resulted in for your organization and/or stakeholder involved? If so, what were they? [EQ8]

### Final Thoughts

12) This brings us to the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to share with us that will help to inform the external evaluation of the project?

*Thank you for your participation!*

## External Evaluation of eCampusOntario’s Micro-Credential Portal Project Interview Guide – Micro-credential Program Advisory Committee (MCPAC)

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) has contracted Goss Gilroy Inc (GGI), an independent consulting firm, to support their strategic evaluation and learning support initiatives by assisting eCampusOntario with its evaluation activities. GGI specializes in conducting program evaluations of skills training programs. The evaluation focuses on the relevance, reach, design, effectiveness and impact of the project.

You have been identified as someone who can provide important feedback for this effort. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. The interview will take about 60 minutes and your participation is voluntary. Also, please be assured that any information you provide will remain confidential and will be managed and protected in accordance with the *Privacy Act* to prevent its loss or unauthorized disclosure. Findings will be used only for the evaluation of the project. The information we gather through this interview will be summarized in aggregate form and no responses will be attributed to you as an individual.

Since this interview covers a diverse range of activities, you will only be asked to speak to those areas where you are most involved or knowledgeable. Feel free to let us know if any questions do not apply to you, or if you do not feel comfortable answering them.

If you have any questions about this evaluation or the interviews, please feel free to contact Rich Louttet, Project Lead at eCampusOntario ([rlouttet@ecampusontario.ca](mailto:rlouttet@ecampusontario.ca)) or Hema Vyas, Project Lead at GGI ([hvyas@ggi.ca](mailto:hvyas@ggi.ca)).

Thank you in advance for your participation!

### Introduction

- 1) To start, please tell me briefly about your role on the Micro-credential Program Advisory Committee (MCPAC), as well as your involvement with the project.

### Relevance

- 2) In your own words, what need was this project meant to respond to? [EQ1]

### Reach

- 3) Are you aware of any strategies that eCampusOntario uses to inform portal users about the metadata enhancements that were undertaken? [EQ2]

### Design

- 4) What was your role in the design and implementation of the project? [EQ3]
  - a) Were you involved in adding standardized occupation and skills data as well as related labour market data the micro-credential portal? If so, how?

- 5) Do you know if any adaptations to the original project design were made? If yes, what adaptations were made and why? [EQ4]
- 6) What role did equity, diversity and inclusion considerations play when developing the project (e.g., did you consider international job experience/titles in creating the enhancement)? [EQ5]
- 7) Tell me about your overall experience with the project/program: [EQ6]
  - a) What has been working well?
  - b) What challenges did you face?
  - c) Do you have any suggestions for how the project could be improved?
  - d) Would you like to see the metadata enhancements being adopted to micro-credential programs in other industry sectors? If so, which ones and why?

### Effectiveness

- 8) The project aims to achieve a number of outcomes related to the use of the micro-credential portal. For each of the outcomes, please comment on how and the extent to which the project has made an impact: [EQ7]
  - a) Providing personalized program recommendations to portal users
  - b) Creating data connections with OpportuNext that can be leveraged for additional jurisdictions in the future
- 9) Thinking about your answer to the last question, have there been any other unexpected impacts (positive or negative) that the project has resulted in for your organization and/or stakeholder involved? If so, what were they? [EQ8]

### Final Thoughts

- 10) This brings us to the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to share with us that will help to inform the external evaluation of the project?

***Thank you for your participation!***

## Appendix 2: Focus Group Guide

### External Evaluation of eCampusOntario's Micro-Credential Portal Project Focus Group Guide – Employer and Labour Market Industry Associations

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) has contracted Goss Gilroy Inc (GGI), an independent consulting firm, to support their strategic evaluation and learning support initiatives by assisting eCampusOntario with its evaluation activities. GGI specializes in conducting program evaluations of skills training programs. The evaluation focuses on the relevance, reach, design, effectiveness and impact of the project.

You have been identified as someone who can provide important feedback for this effort. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. The focus group will take about 1,5h and your participation is voluntary. Also, please be assured that any information you provide will remain confidential and will be managed and protected in accordance with the *Privacy Act* to prevent its loss or unauthorized disclosure. Findings will be used only for the evaluation of the project. The information we gather through this focus group will be summarized in aggregate form and no responses will be attributed to you as an individual.

Since this focus group covers a diverse range of activities, feel free to let us know if any questions do not apply to you, or if you do not feel comfortable answering them. With your permission, the focus group will be recorded to allow the facilitator to prepare summary notes. The recording will be destroyed once the final evaluation report has been accepted. Do we have your permission to record/transcribe our discussion?

You would have received in your invitation, focus group guidelines that outline our approach. Have you had an opportunity to review these guidelines?

Do you have any questions before we begin? Do we have your consent to participate in this focus group discussion?

If you have any questions about this evaluation or this focus group, please feel free to contact Rich Louttet, Project Lead at eCampusOntario ([rlouttet@ecampusontario.ca](mailto:rlouttet@ecampusontario.ca)) or Hema Vyas, Project Lead at GGI ([hvyas@ggi.ca](mailto:hvyas@ggi.ca)).

Thank you in advance for your participation!

#### Guidelines for Focus Groups

- There are no right or wrong answers, so please feel free to provide your honest opinions. Your responses will not affect your relationship with eCampusOntario.
- If you have a smart phone, other devices or alerts on your computer, please make sure all sounds are turned off; if you must be reachable, please use the *vibration* setting.

- It is very important that everyone in the room respect confidentiality. The comments made in this room must stay in this room. Please do not share what you hear today with anyone outside of this room. That is extremely important to ensure everyone feels safe sharing their perspectives today.
- In your responses, please do not include any personal information about anyone else; this includes names, contact information, or any other information by which they could be identified by your comments or views.
- Please try to speak up, and speak one at a time. For the first questions we will go around the room but thereafter anyone can respond to what someone else has said like in a conversation.

## Introduction

- 1) To start, please tell me briefly about which employer or labour market industry association you work for, your specific role, as well as your involvement with the project.

## Relevance

- 2) In your own words, what need was this project meant to respond to? [EQ1]

## Reach

- 3) How did eCampusOntario reach out to you to inform you about the project and get you involved? [EQ2]

## Design

- 4) Do you know if any adaptations to the original project design were made? If yes, what adaptations were made and why? [EQ4]
- 5) What role did equity, diversity and inclusion considerations play when developing the project (e.g., in considering international experience in the development of the personalised job recommendations)? [EQ5]
- 6) Tell me about your overall experience with the project/program: [EQ6]
  - a) What has been working well?
  - b) What challenges have you faced?
  - c) Do you have any suggestions for how the project could be improved?

## Effectiveness

- 7) How did the collaboration of your association and eCampusOntario contribute to: [EQ7]
  - a) Providing personalized program recommendations to portal users
  - b) Increasing the number of institutional inquiries and/or referrals



- c) Creating data connections with OpportuNext that can be leveraged for additional jurisdictions in the future
- 8) Thinking about your answer to the last question, have there been any other unexpected impacts (positive or negative) that the project has resulted in for your organization and/or stakeholders involved? If so, what were they? [EQ8]

### Final Thoughts

- 9) This brings us to the end of the focus group. Is there anything else you would like to share with us that will help to inform the external evaluation of the project?

*Thank you for your participation!*

## Appendix 3: Web Survey Tool

### MicroLearnOntario – Web Survey

We want to help you make an informed choice. We have a few questions so we can understand whether MicroLearnOntario.ca is working for you. This survey is voluntary, and it will take approximately less than one minute to complete.

1. I visited MicroLearnOntario to:
  - [1] Upskill for my career
  - [2] Explore a new career path
  - [3] Broaden my learning
  - [4] Learn more about micro-credential programs
  - [5] Refer someone else to micro-credential program information
  - [7] Other – please specify [Open response]
  
2. Do you think MicroLearnOntario suggested a program that is right for you, based on your last job?
  - [1] Yes
  - [2] Maybe
  - [3] No
  
3. Do you think you will register for the recommended program and institution?
  - [1] Yes [Go to Q5]
  - [2] Maybe [go to Q4]
  - [3] No [Go to Q4]
  
4. I would be more likely to register if the: [please check all that apply]
  - [1] Program seemed more related to my previous experience
  - [2] Labour market information was more positive
  - [3] Program seemed more interesting
  - [4] Program seemed simpler
  - [5] Program seemed more advanced
  - [6] Other – please specify [Open response]
  
5. How satisfied were you with your MicroLearnOntario experience today? Please rate your level of satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means you were extremely unsatisfied, and 10 means you were extremely satisfied.  
[insert slidebar of 1 to 10]
  
6. Do you have any recommendations on how we can better suggest programs to you, or share labour market information related to programs?  
[Open response]

*Thank you for your participation!*