

eCampusOntario Microcredentials: Getting People into Programs and into Jobs



PARTNERS

eCampusOntario



LOCATIONS

Ontario



INVESTMENT

\$267,660



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CONTRIBUTORS

Laura McDonough,
Associate Director of
Knowledge Mobilization
& Insights, Future Skills
Centre

☰ Executive Summary

Launched in 2021, eCampusOntario's Micro-credentials Portal addresses skills mismatches in the labour market by offering short, industry-relevant learning programs. It has attracted over 40,000 unique users.

The portal targets skills gaps in key sectors such as manufacturing, health care and information technology, providing flexible and accessible education options supported by financial assistance through the Ontario Student Assistance Program. This initiative, which reflects a shift toward micro-credentials in education, aims to develop the workforce by aligning educational offerings with market demand.

With funding from the Future Skills Centre and data from the Conference Board of Canada, eCampusOntario was able to tag many of its courses with the skills they were intended to develop, then map those courses to occupations to which they were best suited. The eCampusOntario portal was subsequently improved to allow users to enter a job title and receive customized program recommendations, as well as labour market information about the role provided. Further phases focused on knowledge mobilization, expansion and improved functionality for users.

The portal improvements led to better program recommendations, increased user engagement and enhanced inclusivity and accessibility. After implementation, the portal also experienced an increase in program referrals to postsecondary institutions and an increase in click-through rates.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1** In the first four months that the new portal was active, eCampusOntario experienced a 32% increase in the number of inquiries it provided to postsecondary institutions, and a 4% increase in click-throughs to postsecondary institutions.
- 2** To date, a total of 2,181 programs were tagged with labour market information data, representing 85% of portal listings.
- 3** The portal has generated 14,843 personalized recommendations, exceeding its target of 10,000.

The Issue

Specialized, in-demand areas need upskilling to respond to the ever-evolving needs of the labour market and the skills requirements for sustained economic productivity. Micro-credentials are an innovative way for workers to demonstrate proficiency in skills and competencies. They offer a strategy to address both skills gaps in Canada's labour market and future skills needs for sustained economic productivity. Linking labour market information to micro-credential programs can help employers and workers make informed learning and training decisions to respond to industry needs and demands for a skilled workforce.

In 2020, Ontario implemented a micro-credentials strategy to assist Ontarians with retraining and upgrading their skills, contributing to individuals' career advancement in current jobs or improving re-entry into the labour market. The strategy encouraged postsecondary institutions to develop rapid training programs designed to teach skills that match employers' needs. Additional funding was provided through the Ontario Micro-credentials Challenge Fund to speed the development of micro-credentials and increase the number of programs offered in the province. Round 1 was announced in April 2021 and Round 2 in November 2023.

The Ontario Online Learning Consortium (eCampusOntario) was commissioned by the Government of Ontario to develop the Micro-credentials Portal, which was launched in December 2021. Working with Ontario's 53 public post-secondary institutions, the portal improved access to information and registration through a searchable online database of program offerings and has undergone several iterations.



What We Investigated

From February 2023 to December 2023, eCampusOntario, supported by the Future Skills Centre, launched a pilot project for the portal to link labour market information with the micro-credential programs. The pilot focused on three sectors—manufacturing, health care and information technology—and worked with institutions offering programs in these areas. The pilot intended to create a new workflow in the Micro-credentials Portal to make personalized micro-credential program recommendations based on an individual's current or past job title. A new interface was to be developed for postsecondary institutions to tag their micro-credential offerings with labour market information data.

The pilot project sought to address the knowledge gap identified in user behavior—extensive browsing with little follow-through to postsecondary institutions.

Through consultations with industry partners and collaboration with postsecondary institutions for program tagging, and using occupational data from [OpportunitiesNext](#), the pilot was designed to improve the portal's usability, encouraging more informed decision-making by users and better aligning educational offerings with labour market needs. This strategic expansion was designed not only to increase traffic to postsecondary websites, but also to contribute to the long-term goal of meeting employers' needs for a skilled workforce.

Following the pilot phase in 2023, the Future Skills Centre provided a further phase of funding

- to expand the number of programs tagged with labour market information and the number of recommendations to learners;
- to build a way for employers to search for programs linked to specific skills and connect them with postsecondary institutions; and
- for eCampusOntario to host a series of knowledge mobilization events to generate awareness of the Micro-credentials Portal and outcomes of the 2023 pilot.

The knowledge mobilization events were also intended to improve understanding of employers' top labour market skills gaps and their previous experience connecting with postsecondary institutions for employee upskilling and graduate recruitment.

What We're Learning

The portal's labour market information may have limited usefulness if workers and employers cannot interpret it

The eCampusOntario platform leveraged labour market information from [Opportunext](#), including five-year job outlooks, salary information and job-title mapping, to identify critical connections between skills, occupations and micro-credential programs. This enabled the platform to provide personalized micro-credential recommendations to users, effectively targeting and addressing specific skills gaps while minimizing time and cost. To date, a total of 2,181 programs were tagged with labour market information, representing 85% of portal listings. However, findings suggest that the portal's users may lack experience with labour market information, which may limit the portal's utility to workers and employers. None of the learners contacted through the portal survey indicated that they were likely to register for a recommended program or said that they would do so because of the labour market information provided. There is a need to ensure employers and learners understand how to leverage the labour market information to make informed decisions.

Portal enhancements support engagement

After the organization deployed the updated portal in 2023 and integrated the metadata enhancements, the platform saw a significant increase in user engagement. Specifically, after the launch of the updated portal on September 5, 2023, there was a 32% increase in inquiries to postsecondary institutions and a 4% year-over-year increase in click-through rates to postsecondary institutions.

About half of the portal's personalized recommendations were aligned with learners' needs

To guide learners, the portal provides program recommendations based on current or past job titles. In total, the portal has generated 14,843 personalized recommendations, exceeding the 10,000 target set for the latest phase of the project. Generally, learners engaged with the portal to upskill their careers, explore new career paths, broaden their learning and learn more about micro-credential programs. Half of learners who responded to the portal survey agreed that the personalized micro-credential program recommendations were aligned with their needs, and 46% said they were likely to register for recommended programs.

Raising awareness remains a challenge

In addition to platform improvements, raising awareness of micro-credential programs is critical to their success and requires efforts to engage stakeholders, such as employers, industry associations, educational institutions and potential users. ECampusOntario held eight knowledge mobilization events, four online and four in person, through which it engaged 230 attendees. The knowledge mobilization event survey suggests that the event enhanced employer knowledge of how to connect with postsecondary institutions. However, low employer knowledge of micro-credentials and their value-add, the portal, the lack of transparency on how the contact interface works, and the reliance on employers to reach out limit the extent to which employers use the portal to connect with institutions to upskill existing or recruit new employees. While postsecondary institution interviewees agreed with staff that the portal provides employers with a tool to upskill employees, they stressed that employers are not sending their employees to sign up for micro-credentials. They suggested this may be occurring because employers do not fully understand the value and applicability of such credentials and that eCampusOntario may wish to conduct online sessions with employers to increase their awareness and understanding of micro-credentials.

★ Why It Matters

Labour shortages and skills shortages are not going away. Micro-credentials, with their potential to deliver training quickly and efficiently, will continue to be an important tool for ensuring employers have the workforces they need. By bridging the gap between industry demand and individual skill sets, micro-credential programs promise to facilitate career advancement and lifelong learning opportunities, with limited time and cost commitment.

Unfortunately, not enough employers are aware of micro-credentials and the need to include knowledge mobilization strategies to new and existing micro-credential efforts.

As the first of its kind in Ontario, the portal's success has inspired similar developments in British Columbia and Atlantic Canada, highlighting the national and global trend toward valuing micro-credentials for workforce development. However, creating a tool like the portal is a never-ending process, as evolving industry priorities require the portal to be redefined and refined to meet these changing priorities. Policymakers need to consider how tools like the portal will be supported to stay current and engage in an ongoing cycle of evaluation and improvement.

► What's Next



State of Skills: Microcredentials

Microcredentials are designed to offer flexible and innovative approaches to changing needs in the labour market and across industries.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

ECampusOntario continues to operate its [portal](#) and implement employer features on the portal. The organization is keen to continue to improve inclusivity and accessibility, with steps including expanding program offerings; refining the user experience through ongoing testing; and incorporating equity, diversity and inclusion considerations into the design and delivery processes of the portal.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report

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