



Respecting People. Impacting Business.™



# The **BIG** REWARDS OF MICROCREDENTIALS

How New Education Options Help Employees Advance Their Careers Quickly and Flexibly —And What Employers Think About It



“Every aspect of our lives is becoming customizable on demand. Why shouldn’t education follow suit? Microcredentials—or microdegrees—are proliferating as a cost-effective and time-saving way for job seekers and employees to develop their skills and prove their talents on their own schedules.”

– Bill Stoller, Chairman and CEO, Express Employment International

## The BIG REWARDS of MICROCREDENTIALS

An Express Employment Professionals White Paper  
**October 2023**

# Contents

**4** Microcredentials Defined

**5** Types of Microcredentials

**9** Skills Mismatch

**10** Time is of the Essence

**11** What Employers and Employees Think

**12** Value of Microcredentials vs. Traditional Degrees

**13** Benefits of Microcredentials

**14** What to Look For and Questions to Ask

**15** The Future of Microcredentials

**16** Learn More About Microcredentials

**17** Endnotes

## Highlights

- Microcredentials or microdegrees, also known as MicroCreds, come in many forms and provide people opportunities to develop or demonstrate skills in a way that is recognizable to employers.
- Microcredentials help job seekers and existing employees secure in-demand jobs and upskill without committing to a much longer traditional degree program.
- These credentials can be earned from a variety of institutions—from universities to colleges and even private companies.
- Prospective microcredential students should ask key questions before enrolling in a program. Not all programs are created equally.
- As the education system evolves, microcredentials are expected to increase in popularity.
- Surveys show that both employers and job seekers value microcredentials.

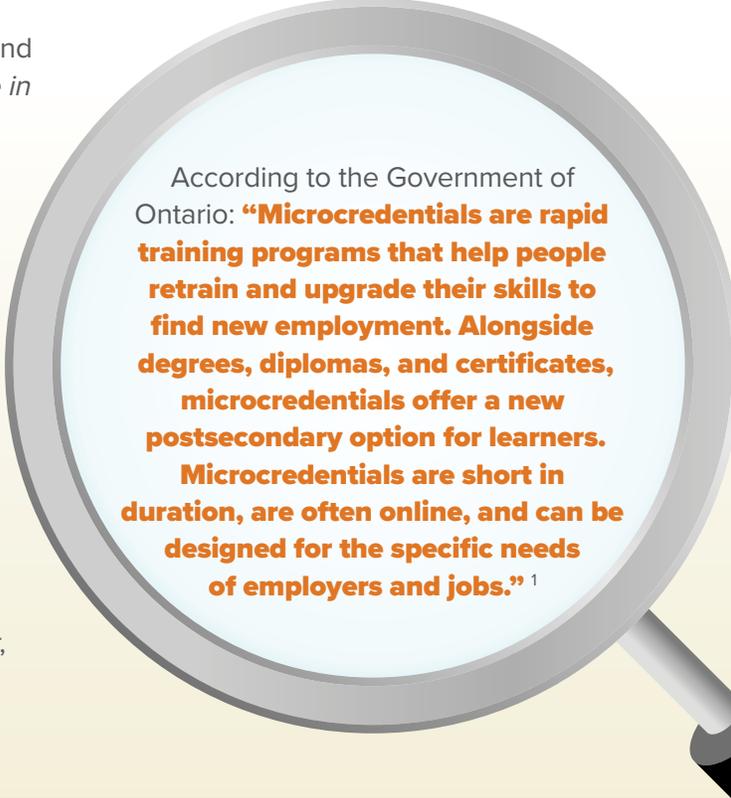
# Microcredentials Defined

For job seekers looking to realign their skill sets with in-demand jobs, there's some truth to the old proverb: *good things come in small packages*.

Microcredentials or microdegrees, otherwise known as MicroCreds, might just be the answer for those looking to advance in their jobs or go into a different field.

While these credentials have been around for several years, offerings have ballooned more recently as interest from employers and prospective employees has increased dramatically.

Microcredentials aren't specific to job seekers alone. Employees interested in upskilling and meeting their own professional goals benefit from these types of credentials. By demonstrating their learning outcomes in a formal manner, employees can share their competencies to reach their professional goals, and employers can easily verify them, leading to a win-win for both parties.



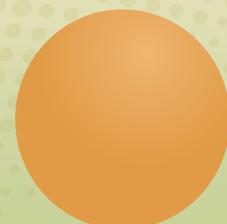
According to the Government of Ontario: **“Microcredentials are rapid training programs that help people retrain and upgrade their skills to find new employment. Alongside degrees, diplomas, and certificates, microcredentials offer a new postsecondary option for learners. Microcredentials are short in duration, are often online, and can be designed for the specific needs of employers and jobs.”**<sup>1</sup>

“Microcredentials are expected to play a major role in the future of skills training and education. Their short duration makes them essential tools for workers who wish to enter a new professional field or advance in their existing career path, but who lack the time to pursue a multi-year degree program. Microcredentials can be a powerful solution that responds to the needs of employers, encourages professional flexibility for mid-career workers, and meets the challenges related to workforce training in a rapidly changing economy.”

– Future Skills Centre<sup>2</sup>

“We know that large institutions, like universities and colleges, are not always able to respond as quickly to trends as, say, industry groups, might be, so it's exciting to see so much microcredential activity within the sector. Microcredentials can help people adapt to changes in their jobs and sectors.”

– Jackie Pichette, director of policy, research, and partnerships at Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.<sup>3</sup>



# Types of Microcredentials

## Subjects

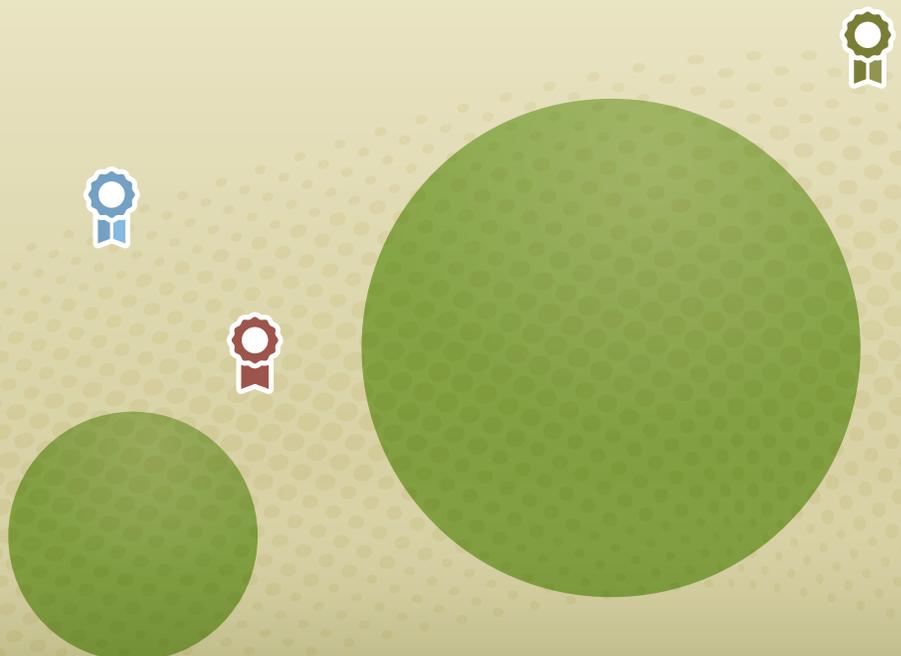
Most universities and colleges in Canada now offer microcredentials. There are currently thousands of microcredentials offered with subjects varying widely. Unlike a traditional degree, they are generally more focused on specific skill sets. In fact, many microcredential programs have been created by educational institutions in direct collaboration with employers. Examples include:

- Accounting
- Business Management
- Cybersecurity
- Data Management
- Drilling Basics
- Economics
- Film Set Construction
- Project Management
- Manufacturing and Production
- Secondary Classroom Management

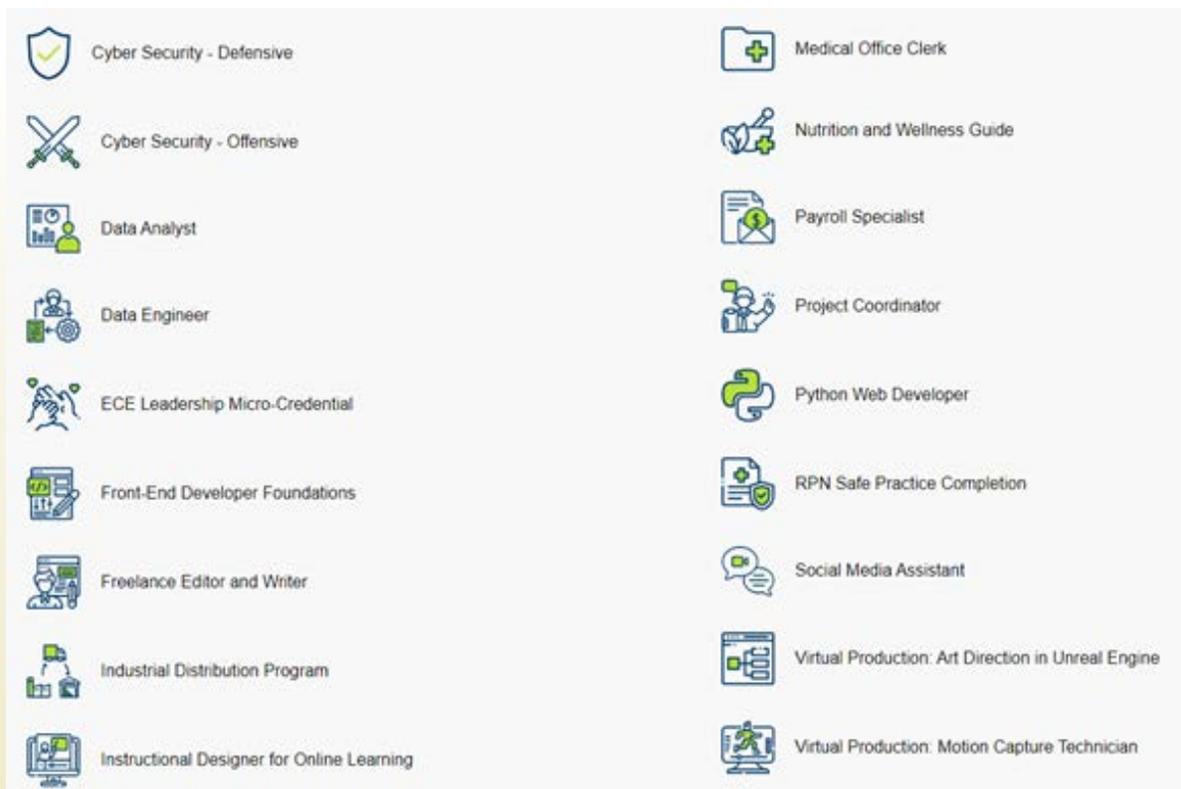


***“One of the big reasons for the proliferation of microcredentials is that they are much more cost effective; the other is the shorter time frame. The software diploma program at the nearest university that used to be two years in duration has evolved into a 16-week program. Students gain relevant and practical skills, resulting in them getting employed faster, and companies don’t have to wait as long to find the skilled workers they need. It’s a win-win scenario for both employers and employees.”***

*– Sid Gupta, Express Employment Professionals franchise owner, Burnaby, British Columbia*



**An example of microcredentials offered by the University of Ottawa (top) and Sheridan College (bottom).<sup>4</sup>**



## Institutions and Stackability

Students can find credentials and degrees from expected and unexpected places. Major universities offer microcredentials, lending their credibility and reputation to the programs. Colleges also offer these programs, which may be more responsive to the demands of employers in the local area.

Companies also design certificates and microcredentials for the general public. Google, for example, offers certificates in cybersecurity, IT support, data analytics, and more—areas generally associated with the tech giant—through the Coursera platform.<sup>5</sup>

The platform EdX brings together a range of institutions—including Harvard and the London School of Economics—to offer “micro-bachelors.” EdX bills this program as “the only path to a bachelor’s degree that makes you job-ready today and credentialed along the way.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, students do not have to wait for a graduation ceremony to receive only one degree; they earn specialized credentials in the meantime.

Many educational institutions allow some microcredentials to be used toward a diploma or certificate. For example, many microcredentials are “stackable,” allowing the pursuit of whole credentials such as diplomas or certificates.

## Badges and Validation

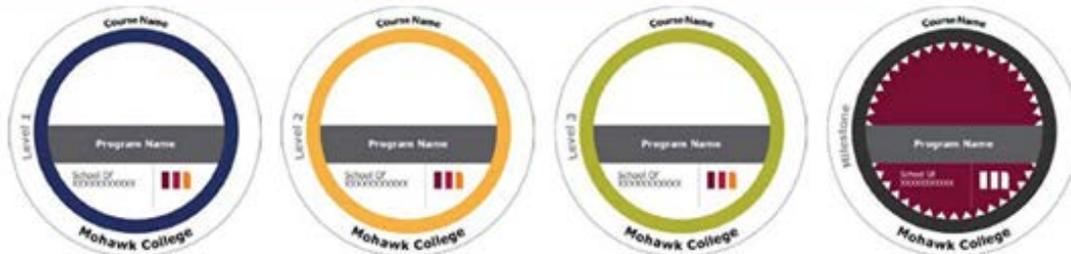
One concern for both employees and employers is validating the microcredentials they earn. Before embarking on any coursework, students should understand exactly how they will be able to demonstrate proof of completion. Many platforms send students a competency-based transcript or unique digital badge from third parties, such as eCampusOntario, BC Diploma, and Canvas Credentials, that employers can use to authenticate their credentials.

The University of Toronto explains that “microcredentials are digital representations of the competencies or skills that you have achieved by completing a micro course. They are tamper proof, verifiable, blockchain-based, and 100% digital. They can be shared on social media, including LinkedIn and Facebook, embedded in websites, or downloaded as PDFs. Micro-credentials provide an innovative new way to showcase your competencies and skills to colleagues, managers, and potential employers.”<sup>7</sup>



## Examples of digital badges from Mohawk College and a certification of completion of a microcredential from McMaster University.<sup>8</sup>

### Mohawk Badge



### Co-Branded Badge (Mohawk & Partner)



### TEAM ESSENTIALS PROGRAM - CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION



Issuing Institution:  
McMaster University Continuing Education

Micro-certification issued to

**FirstName LastName**

on: April 19, 2023

#### Description/Learning Outcomes

Earners of this Certificate of Completion have demonstrated proficiency in core team competencies including highly effective teamwork for achieving optimum productivity and harmony in the workplace by effectively managing, motivating, and working as part of a successful team, resolving conflicts, and discovering how to take full advantage of team members' personal strengths to bring out the best in the team.

Upon completion of this program, participants are able to:

- Apply strategies for leading and navigating change for improved team efficiency, productivity, and continuous improvement.
- Recognize and build on existing strengths of individuals to enhance team success.
- Demonstrate improved analytical skills and emotional intelligence for understanding and predicting the diverse behaviours of others and groups while aspiring to inclusive communication.
- Display consideration of other stakeholders' points of view through self-management techniques including framing issues/topics before responding in group settings.
- Demonstrate skill in prioritizing tasks, allocating resources, and delegating duties.
- Demonstrate use of creative and critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making skills in team situations.
- Demonstrate practical skills for team collaboration and communication including active listening, application of team management tools, and techniques for motivating.

#### Competencies / Skills



#### Assessment/Evaluation Criteria

Successful completion of 5 days of training from the Team Essentials course list.  
Course completion status of "Pass" based on attendance and completion of all course requirements including activities, participation, and quizzes as assigned by course facilitators.

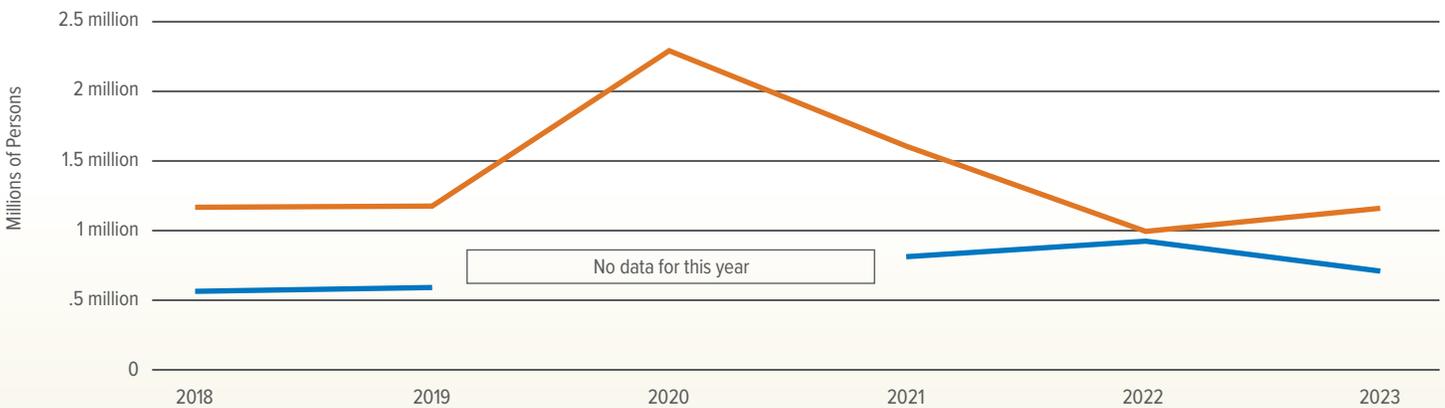
# Skills Mismatch

For years, the Canadian economy has suffered from a skills mismatch—unemployed Canadians do not have the requisite skills for the positions that are currently open. That is a major part of the reason there were 701,300 job vacancies in July 2023, despite there being 1.3 million unemployed Canadians. That means there were 1.7 unemployed persons for every job vacancy.<sup>9</sup>

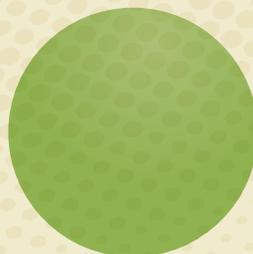
In other words, there isn't a shortage of labour in Canada, there is a shortage of skills. Microcredentials can be part of the solution to fix this skills mismatch.

## Canadian Job Vacancies vs. Unemployed Canadians

- Number of Job Vacancies in Canada
- Number of Unemployed Canadians



Source: Statistics Canada<sup>10</sup>

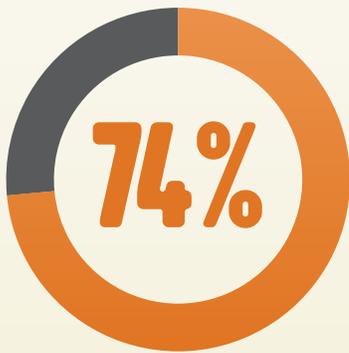


# Time is of the Essence

Companies want and need candidates with the requisite skills now, with three-quarters (74%) saying they are desperately seeking more skilled workers but don't have the time to wait for them to receive a traditional degree. Even more companies (80%) wish there was a way to expedite the time it takes for workers to obtain the necessary skills for a job.<sup>11</sup>

Job seekers agree, with an even higher proportion (79%) saying they want to further their skills but don't have time to complete a traditional degree, and most (87%) saying they wish there was a way to expedite the time it takes to obtain the necessary skills for a job.<sup>12</sup>

Canada's economy is constantly changing, and with evolving technology, the skills required for the jobs of the future will change quickly, as well. As a result, even employees with traditional 2- or 4-year degrees may have to upgrade their skills throughout their careers.



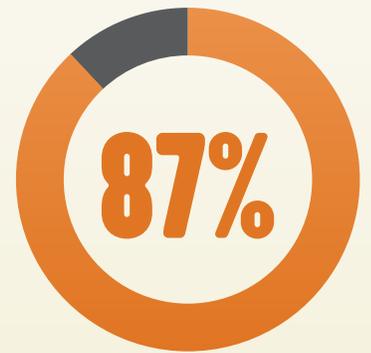
of companies seeking more skilled workers



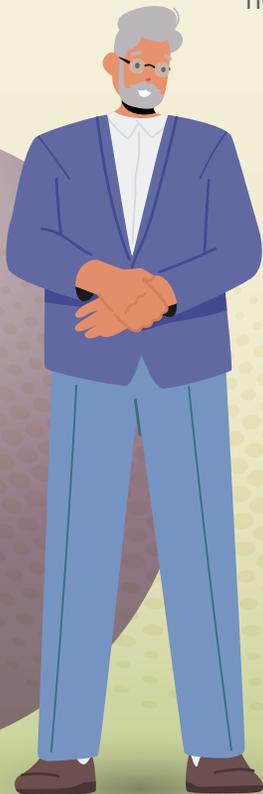
of companies wish to expedite the time for job seekers to attain necessary skills



of job seekers want to further their skills



of job seekers wish for a quicker way to attain necessary skills



# What Employers and Employees Think

Both employers and job seekers value microcredentials, according to a survey for Express Employment Professionals conducted by The Harris Poll.

## What employers say:<sup>13</sup>

- Half of Canadian employers say microcredentials are just as valuable as **(48%)** or more valuable than **(21%)** traditional degrees.
- **76%** of hiring decision-makers agree microcredentials provide the workforce with skilled workers in a timely manner.
- **81%** agree microcredentials are a valuable way for established employees to grow their skill sets and knowledge.
- **78%** say microcredentials will help close the workforce shortage.
- More than half **(56%)** of employers report they would be just as likely to hire a candidate with a microcredential, and **18%** would be more likely.

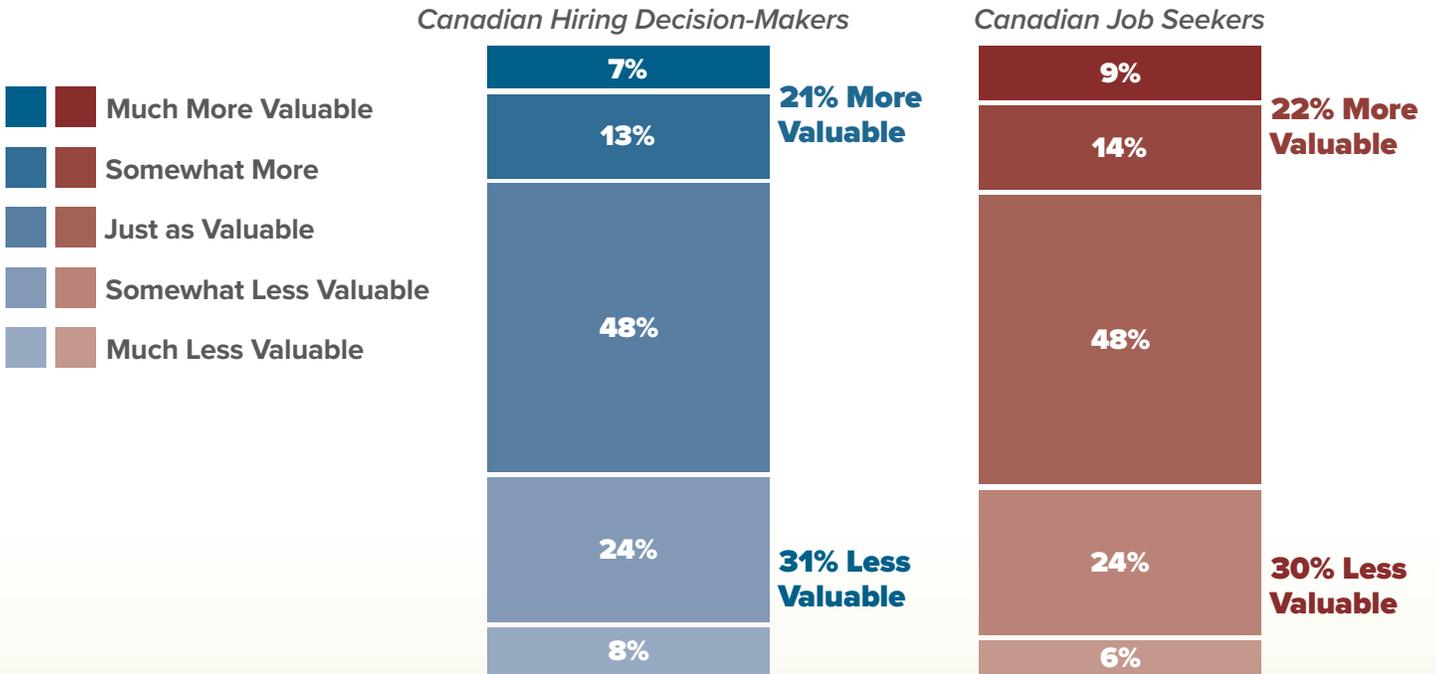
## What job seekers say:<sup>14</sup>

- Job seekers report microcredentials are just as valuable as **(48%)** or more valuable than **(22%)** traditional degrees.
- **84%** of job seekers agree that microcredentials provide the workforce with skilled workers in a timely manner.
- **85%** agree that microcredentials are a valuable way for established employees to grow their skill sets and knowledge.
- **82%** say microcredentials will help close the workforce shortage.
- **68%** would rather spend their time getting a microcredential than getting a degree through traditional means.



# Value of Microcredentials vs. Traditional Degrees

## Canadian Hiring Decision-Makers and Canadian Job Seekers



**“From the employer’s perspective, the initiative that the job seeker is showing by completing a microcredential and the self-improvement focus is very valued.”**

– Hanif Hemani, Express Employment Professionals franchise owner, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan



**“The desire to learn, grow, and improve is still very much appreciated by employers. Taking microcredentials demonstrates engagement and initiative, which all employers want to see in their current and prospective employees.”**

– Jessica Culo, Express Employment Professionals and Specialized Recruiting Group franchise owner, Edmonton, Alberta



# Benefits of Microcredentials

- ***Students do not have to take on large sums of debt to pursue a credential.***

In Canada, the average student loan debt is close to \$30,000 for a bachelor's degree and \$15,000 for a college degree.<sup>15</sup> Between federal, provincial, and bank loans, Canadians hold billions of dollars of student debt. With so many struggling to pay it off, combined with the increased cost of living, people are understandably wary of signing up for pricey degrees.

Microcredentials programs often cost as little as a few hundred dollars. In most provinces, many microcredentials qualify for student loans, as well as the federal Canadian Training Credit, which helps with the cost of fees and can be used to refund up to half the costs of taking a course or enrolling in a training program through a refundable tax credit.

Some microcredentials are even free. For example, the Canadian Colleges for a Resilient Recovery (C2R2) is made up of 14 colleges and institutes with a focus to lead the world in the transition to a clean, sustainable future. C2R2 fully funds several microcredentials, including in the areas of carbon capture and climate-smart agriculture.<sup>16</sup>

- ***Students can receive new credentials within a matter of weeks, rather than having to invest two, four, or more years.***

Embarking on a full degree program can be daunting. With microcredentials, students can undertake smaller chunks at a time—some can be completed in hours or a few weeks—while still resulting in a credible addition to their résumés. For those who are already employed full-time or have caregiving responsibilities at home, microcredentials can be completed around their schedules and many can be completed online, offering further flexibility.

- ***Microcredentials help address the lost learning opportunities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.***

As Express reported previously,<sup>17</sup> the COVID-19 pandemic caused many people to delay schooling or put off opportunities for professional development. Microcredentials are one way to make up for lost time.

- ***Microcredentials are responsive to in-demand skills and can be targeted to specific needs in a certain sector.***

Employers can work directly with institutions to create tailor-made programs, meaning students can be certain that they are demonstrating skill sets hiring managers want.

For example, Seneca Polytechnic has designed programs with employers Microsoft Canada and Sobeys Inc. to help fill the shortage of cybersecurity analysts in Canada, that includes 11 stackable micro courses.<sup>18</sup> Red River College has partnered with IBM to offer microcredentials in Security Intelligence Tech and Predictive Analytics Modeler and delivers the curriculum through the Learn@IBM skills training platform.<sup>19</sup>

# What to Look For and Questions to Ask

Anyone looking to enroll in a microcredential program should understand whether the program will be valued by potential employers in their area. Ask a few key questions before enrolling:

- *Have the programs been designed with the job market in mind? Have employers or industry representatives provided input into the coursework?*
- *Does the coursework provide the timing and location flexibility that your specific situation demands?*
- *Are credentials stackable—meaning, can they eventually be combined to meet requirements of a traditional degree in the future, if desired? Do they transfer to other institutions?*
- *Is the institution credible? Do employers in your area or field of study understand that the institution is trustworthy? If necessary, is it accredited?*
- *How are credentials verified and validated? Does the institution provide a digital badge or a competency-based transcript? Do employers recognize and accept these?*



# The Future of Microcredentials



**“Our world is changing quickly. It is critical that training is fast, affordable, and flexible. Business moves so quickly now that the knowledge learned in many programs may be outdated by the time students graduate. With so much happening, such as the advent of generative AI and digital automation, demographic changes, supply chain reshuffling, climate change, and geopolitical changes, companies need people with specific knowledge and skills. It is important to have staff who can learn and use new knowledge and technology quickly. By providing continuing education such as microcredentials, it will not only benefit employers by having a relevant and skilled workforce, but it also increases retention and job satisfaction for the employees.”**

– Niven Lee, Express Employment Professionals franchise owner, Delta, British Columbia

The world of microcredentials is evolving rapidly, with universities, colleges, and various platforms announcing new developments and approaches on a regular basis. The landscape may look very different in just a few years, but the demand for microcredentials is unlikely to diminish as employees and employers continue prioritizing flexibility, portability, affordability, efficiency, and quality.

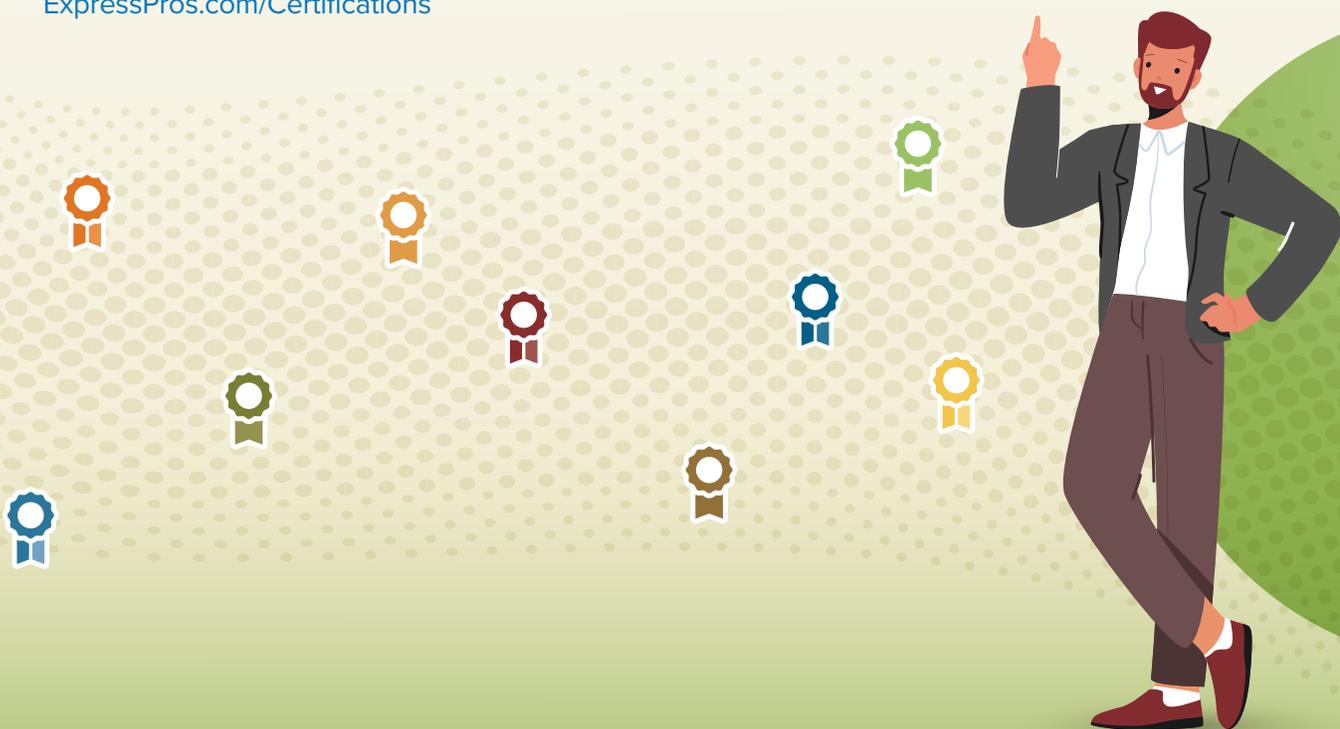
Furthermore, the significant skills gap in Canada and the desire of employers to have candidates who are job-ready means microcredential offerings will continue to increase and evolve. In other words, microcredentials are here to stay—and will continue to be a growing part of skills training and upgrading across the country.



# Learn More

To learn more about microcredentials and microdegrees, how to attain them, how to use them and whether they might be right for you or your employees, consider some of the following resources:

- **Micro-Credential Council of Canada** — The accreditation council of microcredentials in Canada: [MicroCreds.ca](https://MicroCreds.ca)
- **Colleges and Institutes Canada** — List of colleges and institutes offering microcredentials: [CollegesInstitutes.ca](https://CollegesInstitutes.ca)
- **QuickTrain Canada** — Fully funded microcredentials offered through select Canadian colleges: [QuickTrainCanada.ca](https://QuickTrainCanada.ca)
- **Micro-Credentials Portal** — Browse all 1,734 microcredentials from institutions across Ontario: [MicroLearnOntario.ca](https://MicroLearnOntario.ca)
- **Grow with Google** — Google career certificates: [Grow.Google.com/Certificates](https://Grow.Google.com/Certificates)
- **Coursera** — Company-designed microcredentials featured on the Coursera platform: [Coursera.org/Certificates/Advance-Your-Career](https://Coursera.org/Certificates/Advance-Your-Career)
- **MicroBachelors®** — EdX's microcredential program that also leads users to a bachelor's degree: [EDX.org/MicroBachelors](https://EDX.org/MicroBachelors)
- **Workplace Pro** — Express' Office Ready and Job Ready Certifications: [ExpressPros.com/WorkplacePro](https://ExpressPros.com/WorkplacePro)
- **ExpressLearn** — Flexible Courses in High-Demand Fields Facilitated by Express: [ExpressPros.com/ExpressLearn](https://ExpressPros.com/ExpressLearn)
- **Express Certifications** — Business Office Technology and the Career Preparedness Certifications: [ExpressPros.com/Certifications](https://ExpressPros.com/Certifications)



# References

1. Government of Ontario, "Ontario Providing New Rapid Training Programs", Dec. 15, 2021, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001346/ontario-providing-new-rapid-training-programs>.
2. Future Skills Centre, <https://fsc-ccf.ca/engage/focus-on-microcredentials/>.
3. Sharon, Aschaiek, "Microcredential programs on the rise in Canada", University Affairs, May 25, 2021, <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/news/news-article/microcredential-programs-on-the-rise-in-canada/>.
4. University of Ottawa, <https://www.uottawa.ca/study/graduate-studies/microprograms> and Sheridan College <https://caps.sheridancollege.ca/info/landing/type-micro-credentials/>.
5. "Grow with Google," Google, [grow.google](https://grow.google).
6. "MicroBachelors Programs for Undergraduate Education," <https://www.edx.org/microbachelors>.
7. University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies, "Micro Courses and Micro-Credentials," <https://learn.utoronto.ca/programs-courses/unique/micro-courses-and-micro-credentials>.
8. Mohawk College, "How do micro-credential badges work?" <https://www.mohawkcollege.ca/programs/explore-mohawk-micro-credentials>.
9. Statistics Canada, "Payroll employment, earnings and hours, and job vacancies, July 2023", September 28, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230928/dq230928a-eng.htm>.
10. Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0017-01, "Labour force characteristics by sex and detailed age group, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality (x 1,000)" <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410001701&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.6&cubeTimeFrame.startMonth=07&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2018&cubeTimeFrame.endMonth=07&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2023&referencePeriods=20180701%2C20230701> and Table 14-10-0371-01, "Job vacancies, payroll employees, and job vacancy rate by provinces and territories, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality", <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410037101&cubeTimeFrame.startMonth=07&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2018&cubeTimeFrame.endMonth=07&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2023&referencePeriods=20180701%2C20230701>.
11. "The Job Insights Survey" was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between June 8 and June 22, 2023, among 507 Canadian hiring decision-makers (defined as adults ages 18+ in Canada who are employed full-time or self-employed, work at companies with more than one employee, and have full/significant involvement in hiring decisions at their company). Data were weighted where necessary by company size to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within + 4.6 percentage points using a 95% confidence level.
12. "The Job Seeker Survey" was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from June 13 and June 26, 2023, among 507 adults ages 18 and older who are employed or not employed but looking for work and looking for a new job. Data are weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, household income and propensity to be online, to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within + 5.6 percentage points using a 95% confidence level.
13. The Job Insights Survey.
14. The Job Seeker Survey.
15. Erica Shaker, "What to know about student debt", Macleans, August 11, 2022, <https://macleans.ca/economy/canadian-economy-guide-2022-student-debt/>.
16. Quick Train Canada, <https://quicktraincanada.ca/>.
17. Express Employment Professionals, "Lost Generation: Pandemic School Closures Could Make Canada's Skills Gap Much Worse", October 13, 2021, <https://www.expresspros.com/CA/Newsroom/Canada-Employed/Lost-Generation-Pandemic-School-Closures-Could-Make-Canada-s-Skills-Gap-Much-Worse.aspx?&referrer=http://www.expresspros.com/CA/Newsroom/Canada-Employed-News-List.aspx?PageNumber=10>.
18. Seneca Polytechnic, "Seneca Polytechnic, Microsoft Canada and Sobeys Inc. are preparing the next generation of cybersecurity analysts", June 8, 2023, <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/seneca-polytechnic-microsoft-canada-and-sobeys-inc-are-preparing-the-next-generation-of-cybersecurity-analysts-850240608.html>.

# References

19. Red River College, “RRC and IBM Canada give tech industry a boost with new micro-credentials”, Sept. 8, 2021, <https://www.rrc.ca/news/2021/09/08/rrc-and-ibm-canada-give-tech-industry-a-boost-with-new-micro-credentials/>.
20. Dene Moore, “The mini-MBA lets busy professionals boost their business skills in less time,” The Globe and Mail, Nov. 21, 2022, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-the-mini-mba-lets-busy-professionals-boost-their-business-skills-in/>.
21. Madeline Smith, “University Of Texas, Coursera Launch Historic Micro-credential Partnership,” Edmonton Journal, Sept. 22, 2022, <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/alberta-rolls-out-8m-for-post-secondary-micro-credentials>.

# About Express Employment Professionals

At Express Employment Professionals, we're in the business of people. From job seekers to client companies, Express helps people thrive and businesses grow. Our international network of franchises offers localized staffing solutions to the communities they serve across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, employing 579,000 people globally in 2022 and 10 million since its inception. For more information, visit [ExpressPros.com](https://ExpressPros.com).

# About Express Employment International

Express Employment International supports the Express Employment Professionals franchise and related brands. The Express franchise brand is an industry-leading, international staffing company and boasts a team of more than 350 professionals in Oklahoma City and a network of sales and support teams internationally.

 [Facebook.com/ExpressEmploymentInternational](https://Facebook.com/ExpressEmploymentInternational)

 [LinkedIn.com/Company/ExpressEmploymentInternational](https://LinkedIn.com/Company/ExpressEmploymentInternational)

 [@ExpressEmploymentInternational](https://Instagram.com/ExpressEmploymentInternational)

 [YouTube.com/@ExpressEmploymentInternational](https://YouTube.com/@ExpressEmploymentInternational)

All Express offices are locally owned and operated.  
For information about franchise opportunities,  
visit [ExpressFranchising.com](https://ExpressFranchising.com).



*We're locally owned and operated with the support and stability of an international headquarters with four decades of staffing and HR expertise. It's the best of both worlds—small business flexibility, big company resources.*



[ExpressPros.com/CA](https://ExpressPros.com/CA)

©2023 Express Services, Inc. All rights reserved. 10/23