

# MICROCREDS

Revolutionising Lifelong Learning  
in Ireland

*Mags Arnold – Project Lead MicroCreds  
University College Cork Ireland*



# Overview

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- 1) Overview of MicroCreds Project
- 2) Progress of Micro-credentials in Ireland
- 3) Future for Micro-credentials in Ireland





## What is MicroCreds?

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MicroCreds is a 5-Year €12.3 million national project, led by Irish Universities Association (IUA) and delivered in partnership with each of the seven founding IUA universities.

Its vision is to **empower lifelong learning in Ireland by re-imagining the learner's relationship with education** through agile, accessible and bite-sized qualifications: micro-credentials

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## What is a Micro-credential?

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Small, focused, enterprise informed courses

Range from Undergraduate to Masters Level

Credit Size 1-30 ECTS  
(1 ECT = 25 Learning Hours)

University Quality Assured

Stand-alone credentials, some may stack towards a larger award through predefined pathways

Developed in response to identified need

# Our Partner Universities

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**DCU**

Ollscoil Chathair  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



**Maynooth University**

National University  
of Ireland Maynooth



**Trinity College Dublin**

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin



**UCC**

University College Cork, Ireland  
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh



University College Dublin  
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE  
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



UNIVERSITY OF  
**LIMERICK**  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH



## Benefits for our Partners

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HCI funding allows our **universities to be more agile and innovative** with education

Working as a group allows for **meaningful collaboration on best practice** for micro-credential development and delivery

**Broken down barriers to university-enterprise** engagement beyond just micro-credentials

Partners have embedded micro-credentials into their wider course offers and **use them as a tool to recruit students on to related larger degrees**

# Impact of MicroCreds

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- Development of a **clear, coherent and consistent understanding** of micro-credentials.
- Pro-actively engaging with **national skills architecture**.
- Ability to **collectively engage** with and across external partners.
- Development of evidence-based model of **university-enterprise collaboration**.
- Sharing of best practice approaches in the **development of micro-credentials**.
- Positively **influencing quality** of content delivery for learners.



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## Engaging with Enterprise

[www.microcreds.ie](http://www.microcreds.ie) #MicroCredsIE



# Enterprise Advisory Group

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**DR AISLING SODEN**  
Talent Transformation  
& Innovation Manager,  
IDA Ireland



**TONY DONOHUE**  
Chair of the Expert  
Group on Future Skills  
Needs



**ALAN FAHEY**  
Vocational Trainer, SAP  
Software Solutions



**NATASHA KINSELLA**  
Regional Skills  
Manager, Regional  
Skills Forum Dublin



**HELEN MCMAHON**  
Senior Executive for  
Client Skills, Enterprise  
Ireland



**ADAM WEATHERLEY**  
Learning &  
Development  
Manager, ISME



**JAMES SULLIVAN**  
Client Services  
Manager, Cpl



**BRIDIE CORRIGAN  
MATTHEWS**  
Network Director,  
Taste 4 Success  
Skillnet



A woman with short, curly hair, wearing a dark blazer, is smiling and clapping her hands. She is in the center of a group of people, with a woman on her left and a man on her right, both also clapping. The background is a blurred office setting with a whiteboard. The entire image has a semi-transparent pink overlay.

**Employers estimate that 44% of workers' skills will be disrupted in the next 5 years with 6 in 10 workers requiring training before 2027.**

The World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Insight Report (May 2023)

# Insights from Enterprise

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**Engagement Channels:** SMEs eager to engage with academics / universities, however, are broadly uncertain how to engage or identify correct channels into the institutions on skills needs.

**Practicalities:**

1. Delivery mode: Strong preference for fully online or blended
2. Duration: What time, what day/evening, for how long?
3. Pricing: Cohort / group discounts, are supports available, comparative pricing?

**Rationale for Investment:** ROI frequently cited, MicroCreds need to address clear enterprise needs.

**Stacking:** Clear coherent stacking pathways, ideally linked to competency frameworks would be favourable viewed.

**MicroCreds.ie:** Welcomed as a *one-stop shop* for micro-credentials – in a crowded market - with employer and learner-friendly terminology, clear pricing, delivery, *etc.*

**Language:** Need for language used to be what's deemed 'accessible' and 'non-academic'

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- 2) **Progress of Micro-credentials**
- 3) Understanding the MicroCreds Learner Journey

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[www.microcreds.ie](http://www.microcreds.ie) #MicroCredsIE



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## National Support

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Beta version of the MicroCreds.ie platform went live on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Formally launched on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023 by:

- Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science, Simon Harris
- Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Simon Coveney

HCI Pillar 3 Learner fee Subsidy

- 14,000 places across 650 courses.
- 80% or 50% subsidy

Further Funding

HEA has proposed further funding for MicroCreds project until June 2026



## Cohesive Communications

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Clear cohesive communications is paramount to building trust and awareness of micro-credentials in Ireland

MicroCreds Comms Strategy has 3 pillars:

- 1) Comprehension & Awareness
- 2) Credibility
- 3) Value

Communications Working Group implements the strategy at two levels: National Level and Local Level

Our brand identity is bold, professional and stands out from traditional HEI branding



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## Systems and Non-Negotiables

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University Systems are built for Programmes:  
UCC has invested in:

- Curriculum management
- Application System
- Student Records

Knowing where to draw the line

- University Standards
- Quality Assurance
- Mapping against NFAQ
- ECTS based on student hours
- Transparent admissions with verification
- Curriculum approval at three levels
- External Examiner input
- Student Supports & Feedback
- Student Feedback
- Authentic assessment

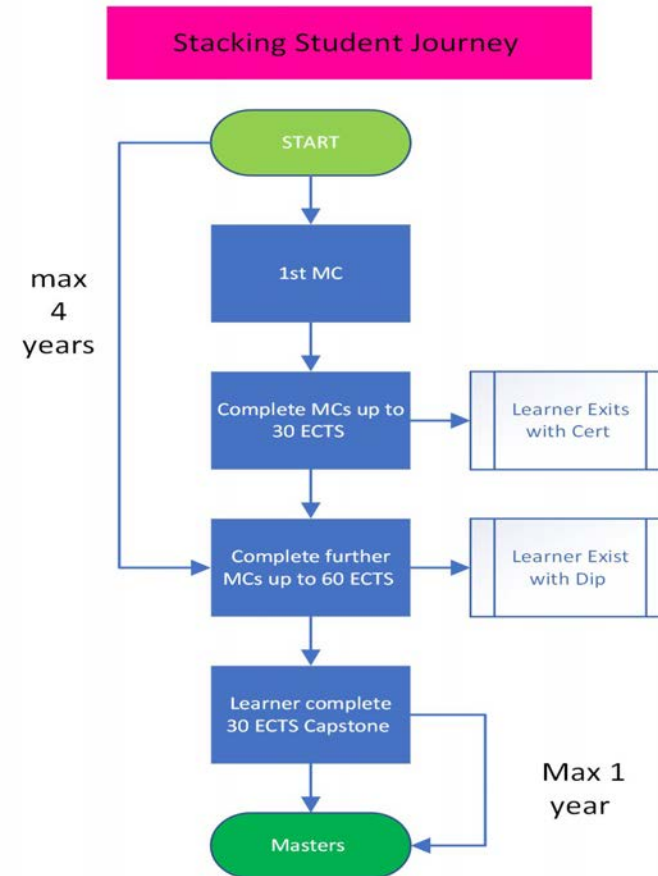




# Stacking in UCC

## Principles

- Predefined Pathway Learning Outcomes
- Predefined suite of component MicroCreds
- Same entry requirements for individual MicroCreds and Pathway
- Pass & progression limits dependent on knowledge validity
- Not all MicroCreds have to be part of a pathway



# Two Distinct Stakeholders

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## Learners

Individuals (25-60+) interested in lifelong learning opportunities to upskill, reskill, change careers, explore new areas or follow their personal interests in a short, flexible and quality assured way. Return on investment is key to them.

## Enterprise

CEOs, Managing Directors and HR/Skills Development Managers looking for quality assured courses that meet the needs of their organisations. They are looking to close skills gaps, address industry changes, retain current staff and attract new staff. The courses need to be flexible for the company and learner.



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## examples of Micro-Credentials

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### Creating Value with ESG

(Trinity College Dublin)

### Introduction to Supply Chain Management

(University of Limerick)

### Concepts of Nutrition and Healthy Eating

(University College Dublin)

### Finance For Non-Financial Managers

(University of Galway)

### Driving Digital Innovation

(University College Cork)

### FinTech – Financial Innovation

(Dublin City University)

### Mentoring for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

(Maynooth University)

*More information: [www.microcreds.ie](http://www.microcreds.ie)*

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# Insights from Early Research

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**Engagement Channels:** Enterprise eager to engage with academics / universities, however, are broadly uncertain how to engage or identify correct channels into the institutions on skills needs.

**Practicalities:**

- 1.Delivery mode:** Strong preference for fully online or blended
- 2.Duration:** What time, what day/evening, for how long?
- 3.Pricing:** Cohort / group discounts, are supports available, comparative pricing?
- 4.Title / Topic:** Want to easily find the topic they are interested in

**Rationale for Investment:** ROI frequently cited. Micro-credentials need to address clear skills needs.

**Stacking:** Clear coherent stacking pathways, ideally linked to competency frameworks would be favourable viewed.

**MicroCreds.ie:** Welcomed as a *one-stop shop* for micro-credentials – in a crowded market - with employer and learner-friendly terminology, clear pricing, delivery, *etc.*

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## Understanding Influencing Factors For MicroCreds

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Key objective now is to better understand the motivating factors and barriers that face micro-credential learners.

Implementing a biannual learner survey across partner universities.

### Top Influencing Factors In Decision Making:

1. Course Content
2. Delivery Mode
3. Course Structure
4. Outcomes
5. University Accreditation & Qualification

# Investment in the Future

## Bespoke Courses



## Consistent Learner Numbers

## Public Awareness



## National Support



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## Key Insights from our Journey

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- 1) Don't lose sight of the **end user** during projects like this
- 2) Speak the same **language** as your users / learners
- 3) The value of a **university** award to the learner and enterprise
- 4) Micro-credentials are an opportunity to **innovate**
- 5) Review & adapt as you develop from project to **mainstream**



# Thank You!

Stay Connected with the Project



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[www.microcreds.ie](http://www.microcreds.ie)



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