

# MICROCREDITS

## COLLABORATION TO CREATE A MICRO - CREDENTIAL ECOSYSTEM

*Jools O'Connor, MicroCreds Project Lead*

*Irish Universities Association*

**IUA** IRISH  
UNIVERSITIES  
ASSOCIATION



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

**HCI** Human  
Capital  
Initiative

This project is funded under Human  
Capital Initiative Pillar 3, Innovation  
and Agility



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# The voice of i r i s h uni v e r s i t i e s

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The Irish Universities Association is the representative voice of Ireland's research intensive, enterprise engaged, public universities.

## **The IUA is committed to:**

- Clearly and publicly articulating the importance and value of university education
- Acting as an advocate for the university system
- Providing effective liaison and dialogue with the State and its agencies
- Ensuring the system is resourced and prepared for the challenges of the future
- Developing sectoral policies and strategies
- Maximizing the contribution of higher education in all its dimensions to society and the economy.

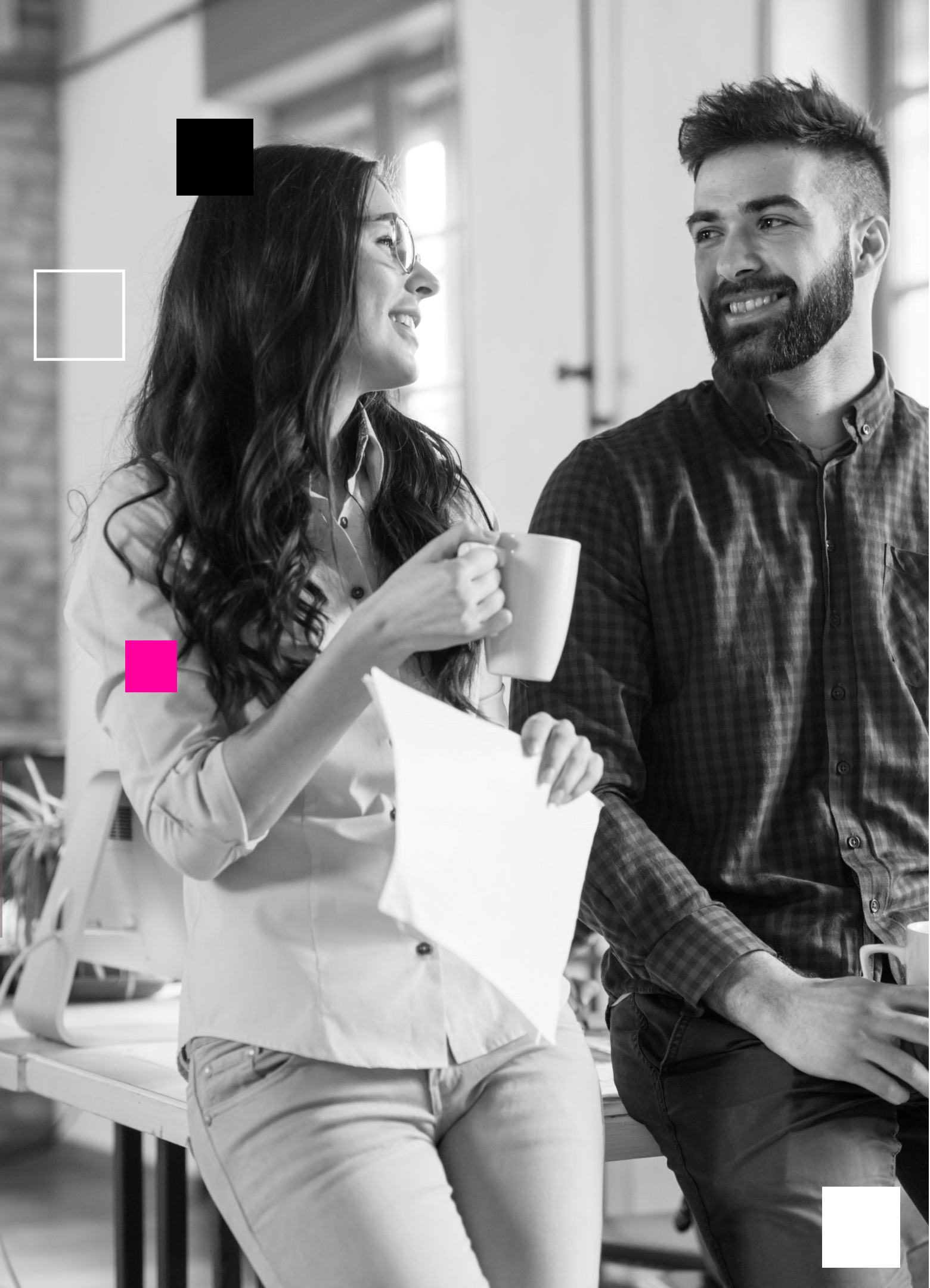
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# Our Research

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

#MicroCredsIE



# Background to MicroCreds: Landscape

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The labour market in Ireland is rapidly changing and the demand for upskilling and reskilling from both employers and employees is high. The **National Skills Strategy 2025** aimed to improve the relevance of skills provision to society and the economy and to secure more effective engagement with employers in skills development, improving the national rate of lifelong learning.

The MicroCreds project was created in response to multiple reports calling for the development of future skills needs, including:

- The 2018-2020 **HEA System Performance Framework** (2018) Key System Objectives;
- Providing a strong talent pipeline combining knowledge, skills & employability which responds effectively to the needs of our enterprise;
  - Creating rich opportunities which enhances the learning environment and delivers a strong bridge to enterprise;
- **Project Ireland 2040**: A Strong Economy, supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills, facilitating re-skilling and reinvention of the existing workforce in a world of rapid technological change.
- **Future Jobs Ireland 2019** deliverables including: Double the participation in lifelong learning to 18% by 2025; Promoting flexible training options; Matching training to the skills needs of workers and enterprises.

# Background to MicroCreds: our research

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We **commissioned research** on the provision of upskilling and reskilling opportunities in Ireland.

**Qualitative in-depth interviews** with senior contacts across a range of key businesses and enterprise stakeholders.

These included the HR or Learning and Development (L&D) leads in: SAP; IBM; Microsoft; Irish Life; Northern Trust; Kepak; Aрызta; BWG Foods; AXA Life Europe; Ibec; Small Firms Association; ISME; Dublin Chamber; and Enterprise Ireland.

Findings showed that there was an **opportunity to improve the capacity of Irish enterprise to better acquire the skills of the future**. The research also found that the most attractive elements of micro-credentials include:

- CPD pathways that can be tailored to organisations' and individuals' needs;
- The ability to react in an education context to changing skills needs within industry;
- Time to be spread rather than invested in large chunks;
- Not having to commit to a full programme up front in terms of cost.



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# Our Collaboration

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## OVERVIEW OF MicroCreds

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MicroCreds is a 5-Year €12.3 million national project, funded through HCI Pillar 3.

The project is 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

# Our Partner Universities

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University College Dublin  
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE  
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



Trinity College Dublin  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin



**Maynooth  
University**  
National University  
of Ireland Maynooth



# MicroCreds Project Leads

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**CAITRÍONA NIC GIOLLA  
MHICHÍL**  
Project Lead at Dublin  
City University



**DR ZSUZSANNA  
ZARKA**  
Project Lead at  
Maynooth University



**JANICE MULVANY  
GLENNON**  
Project Lead at  
University of Galway



**FIONA GAMBLE**  
Project Lead at Trinity  
College Dublin



**MAGS ARNOLD**  
Project Lead at  
University College Cork



**SOPHIE BONHEIM**  
Interim Project Lead at  
University College  
Dublin



**DR SARAH BRADY**  
Project Lead at the  
University of Limerick



# IUA MicroCreds Team

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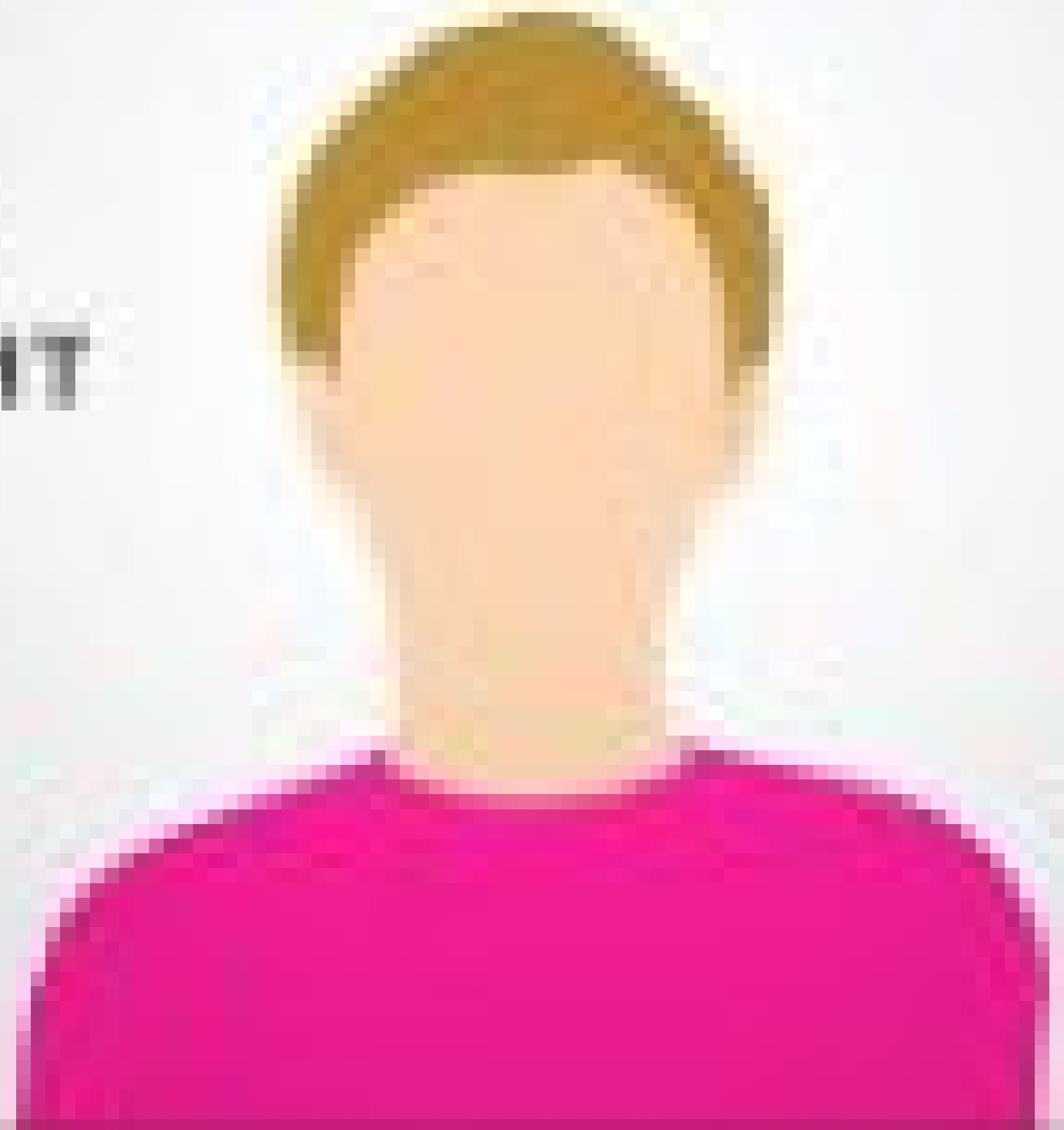
*david.corscadden@iua.ie*

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CAREER  
DEVELOPMENT

FUTURE  
PROOFING





## BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

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The creation of MicroCreds has enabled the **sharing of best practice across our partner universities** who benefit from learning from each other in multiple areas including teaching and learning, student recruitment and communications, and administrative systems and practices.

The project undertakes reviews and reporting on many aspects of the development, promotion and delivery of micro-credentials.

Our governance and working groups provide an opportunity to **disseminate the findings and discuss successful impacts for shared best practice** for the benefit of our partner universities.



## 4 Strands of microcreds

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STRAND 1: **National Framework** for micro-credentials

STRAND 2: **MicroCreds Innovate** sustainable model of data informed university – enterprise collaboration

STRAND 3: **National Platform** linked to a digital credentialing solution (Europass early adopter)

STRAND 4: Agilely developed & flexibly delivered **suite of micro-credentials** across partner universities



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## What is A Micro - Credential ?

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Developing a National Framework for micro-credentials that recognises variance across the universities, enabling each to develop a portfolio consistent with its own strengths and missions and within its own enterprise eco-system and regional context:

- Small, focused courses
- Range from Undergraduate to Masters Level (levels 6-9 in Ireland's NFAQ)
- Credit Size 1-30 ECTS (1 ECT = 25 Learning Hours)
- University Quality Assured
- Standalone credentials, some may stack towards a larger award
- Developed in response to identified skills need



MicroCreds

I INNOVATE

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Sustainable model of data-informed university and enterprise collaboration through **MicroCreds Innovate.**

Structured process for meaningful and ongoing collaboration with enterprise.

Our Enterprise Advisory Group has a wide range of diverse enterprises, covering priority sectors and including SME representation, ensures enterprise-informed development, increasing the universities' capacity to anticipate, understand and respond to emerging skills needs.

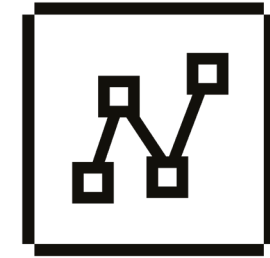
MicroCreds has been strengthened by harnessing local and regional university-enterprise links, including existing networks such as the Regional Skills Fora and Chambers of Commerce, as well as through targeted events.



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## Microcreds Innovate

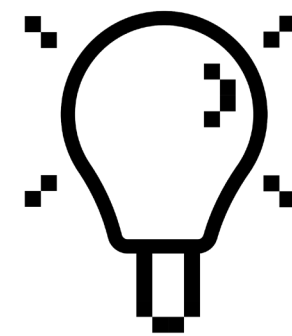
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Identification of  
Thematic Focus



Inputs are Evidence  
Based



Outputs Are Co-Designed  
Micro-credentials



2022

- ✓ Zero Carbon
- ✓ Digital Transformations & AI
- ✓ SMEs: Management & Leadership
- ✓ SMEs: Productivity

2023

- ✓ BioPharmaChem
- ✓ AgriFood
- Transversal Skills

# Enterprise Insights

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Engagement  
Channels

Practicalities

ROI

Stacking

MicroCreds.ie

Language

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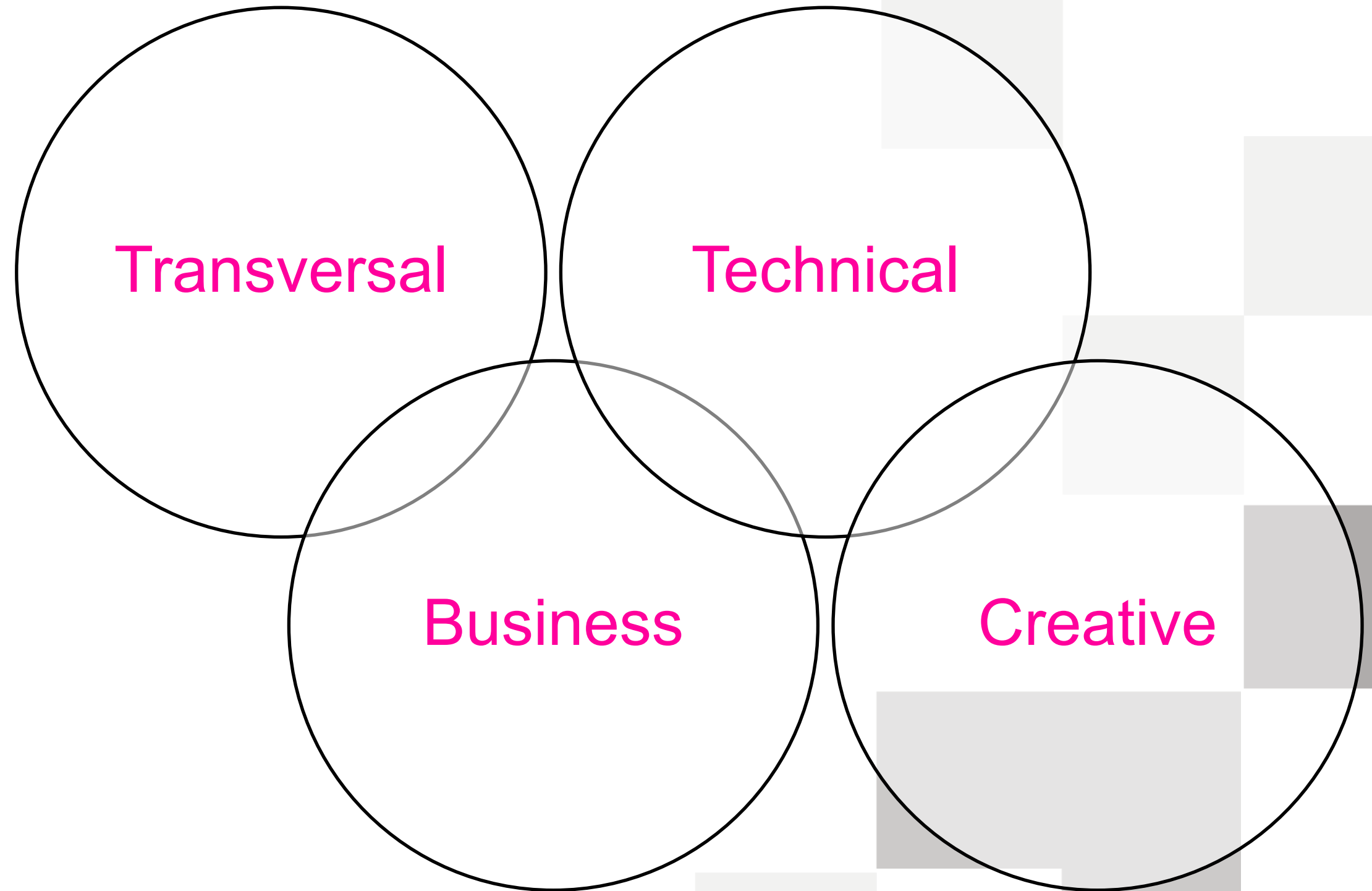


# SUITE OF MICRO - CREDENTIALS

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Supporting partner universities to create an agilely developed and flexibly-delivered suite of micro-credentials.

Micro-credentials developed at partner IUA universities are setting the national standard for excellence in flexible and agile learning.





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## Examples of Micro

- Credentials

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### Food Regulation

(University College Dublin)

### Driving Digital Innovation

(University College Cork)

### Data Analysis and Visualisation

(University of Galway)

### Data Science for Finance

(Dublin City University)

### Mentoring for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

(Maynooth University)

### Enhancing Critical and Innovative Thinking and Problem Solving

(University of Limerick)

### Digital Technologies in Human Services

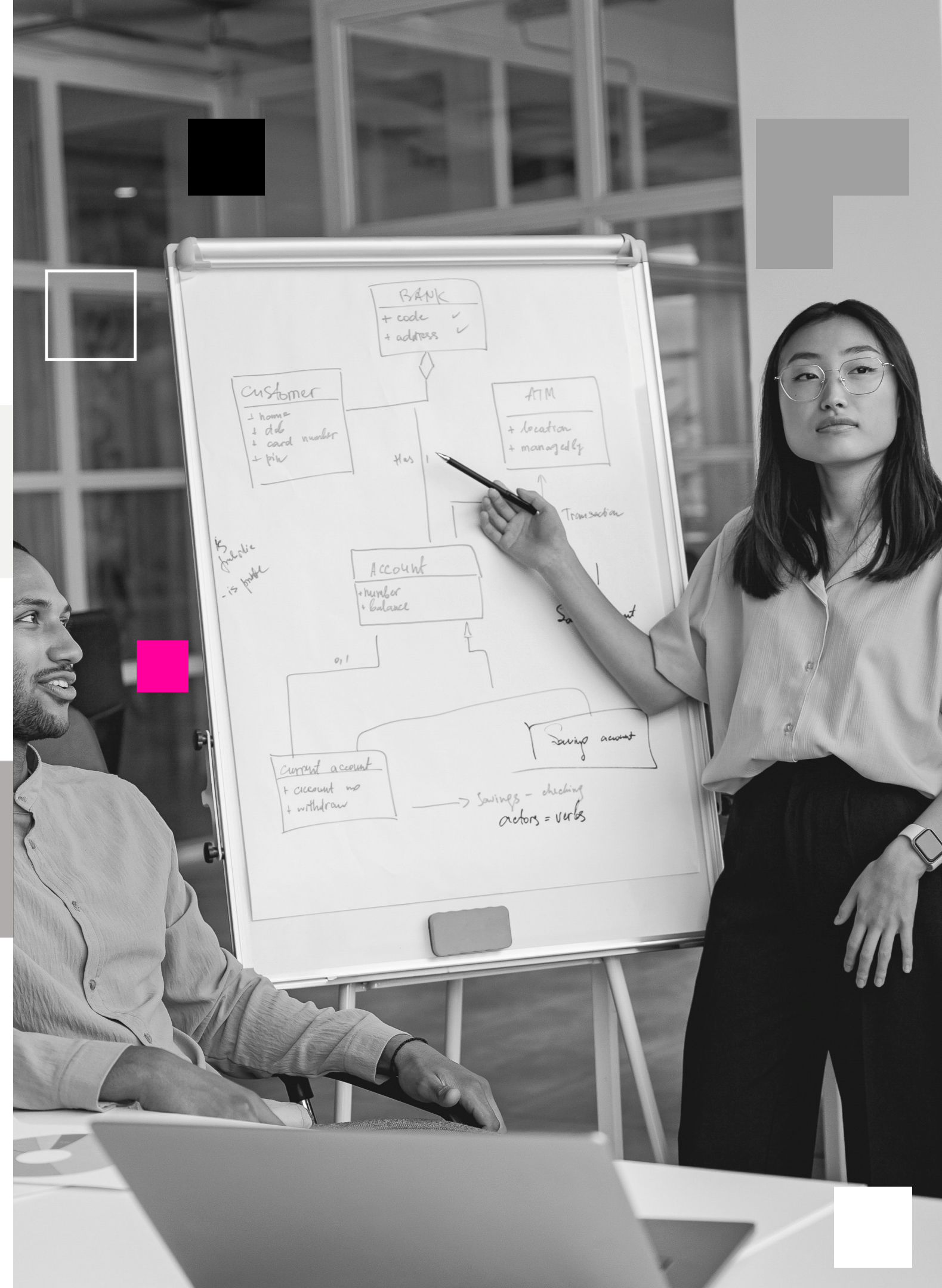
(Trinity College Dublin)

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# Our Future Vision

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**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)



## FUTURE VISION

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Our future vision for is for micro-credentials to be a recognised, accepted and **invaluable part of lifelong learning** in Ireland.

The continued expansion of micro-credentials can assist Ireland to **meet European and international benchmarks**.

The impact of MicroCreds is transformative across our partner universities and is **scalable across the entire national higher education system**.

The outcomes of the MicroCreds project will provide a basis for meaningful higher education system change to **support skills development** across enterprise and throughout the workforce in Ireland.

# CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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## **Landscape:**

Global megatrends such as globalisation, technological change, climate change and population ageing will continue to affect Irish society and economy, transforming jobs (OECD, 2023)

## **Meet lifelong learning targets:**

Ireland's 2030 target rate for adult participation in education and training is 64.2% (European Commission 2022)

## **Policy:**

Three opportunities for strengthening skills governance to build a joined-up skills ecosystem in Ireland (OECD Skills Strategy Ireland Assessment and Recommendations 2023):

- 1) promoting a whole-of-government and strategic approach to skills policy;
- 2) supporting effective engagement with stakeholders throughout the skills policy cycle; and
- 3) strengthening the collection, exchange and use of skills information

It is crucial that micro-credentials are valued by government and are supported through necessary policy developments and associated opportunities to fund future developments and access to courses.



The scale and pace of change globally is such that **Ireland's skills ecosystem is now required to take a leap forward.**

OECD Skills Strategy Ireland: Assessment and Recommendations May 2023

# Thank You!

Stay Connected with the project



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



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