

LEARNING TO LEARN THROUGH MICRO-CREDENTIALS IN A REGIONAL SETTING



POLICY BRIEF

Ireland

The Erasmus+ project “Learning to Learn through Micro-credentials in a Regional Setting” ([L2L MicroCred](#)) is a two-year initiative (2024-2026) aimed at boosting adult self-efficacy and employability in regional contexts. The international consortium brings together the University of Inland Norway (Norway), LUMSA University (Italy), the University of Limerick (Ireland), and Central Queensland University (Australia) to deliver high-quality, open-access micro-credentials tailored to local needs, fostering social inclusion and learner motivation.

FROM THE IRISH EXPERIENCE

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE PROJECT

Through its participation in L2L MicroCred project, the University of Limerick (UL) has advanced the state of the art in micro-credentials development by adopting a learner-centric, evidence-informed design approach. Through the use of the Open Box Model and Pedagogical Toolbox, UL has facilitated translating transnational research on disadvantaged adult learners into a viable course model that combines local applicability with international pedagogical insights. This structure ensured that self-efficacy, specific competence needs, distinct learning preferences, and targeted support mechanisms were fully embedded across course design, delivery, and assessment.

The impact of the project extends far beyond a single course implementation, driving a long-lasting institutional shift at UL. The learning design methodologies refined during L2L MicroCred now serve as best-practice guidelines across the university for designing micro-credentials and broader professional education programs. Furthermore, the development of the Pedagogical Toolbox provided UL with an important opportunity to engage deeply with adult-learning theory and to test these theoretical principles against primary research findings from all four L2L partner contexts. The strong alignment between the theory and the cross-partner research findings was particularly valuable, as it validated the learner-centred assumptions underpinning the project and directly informed the final structure of the toolbox.

NATIONAL OUTPUTS

University of Limerick piloted and developed the micro-credential ***Sustainable Organisations and Decision-Making*** to address the skills deficits experienced by SME employees across Ireland's Mid-West region. This micro-credential was designed using a collaborative research methodology common to all participants in the L2L MicroCred project; i.e., regional analyses of data, stakeholder consultations and qualitative interviews with SME employees. Through these methodologies, three critical competency areas were identified: sustainability, leadership, and decision making; and the need for short, flexible and relevant-to-the-workplace training and learning experiences. The programme consisted of asynchronous learning materials, weekly live online sessions, reflective exercises, practical work-based activities, and peer engagement. Learners studied sustainable frameworks, leadership models, organisational change strategies, and responsible decision-making with an emphasis on the application of each concept in learners' own professional contexts.

Learners reported increased confidence, improved awareness of sustainable practices, and implemented practical changes in their workplace including conducting sustainability audits, measuring carbon emissions, and discussing companies adoption of B Corp principles. The course also offered a stackable pathway into UL's Sustainable Work Diploma, a 30 ECTS Professional Education programme, also flexibly delivered, allowing learners to continue engaging in lifelong learning and professional development.

6 Weekly Modules	30 Activities	Synchronous and asynchronous sessions	6 ECTS
------------------	---------------	---------------------------------------	--------

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MICRO-CREDENTIALS

1 *Adopt the EU micro-credential framework*

Will allow HEI's and learner cohorts benefit from the clear advantages offered by micro-credentials as outlined in the [Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability](#). Institutional implementation will allow educators use established systems and processes to develop and deliver micro-credentials.

2 *Begin with a structured needs-analysis process*

Micro-credentials should not be designed from content alone. They should be grounded in evidence about target learners' competence needs, learning preferences, barriers to participation, and workplace realities. This ensures that the course responds to genuine skills gaps and is relevant to both learners and employers.

3 *Design micro-credentials around flexibility, accessibility, and realistic learner workload*

Disadvantaged learners often face time, work, family, cost, and confidence-related barriers. Micro-credentials should therefore be short, modular, clearly structured, and supported by flexible modes of participation, including asynchronous learning materials, live engagement opportunities, and accessible resources.

4 *Ensure that learning activities and assessments are directly connected to learners' professional contexts.*

Micro-credentials are most effective when learners can immediately apply new knowledge to real workplace challenges. Work-based assignments, reflective activities, case examples, and practical projects help learners see the relevance of the course and support swift transfer of learning into professional practice.

5 *Embed inclusive learning design principles from the beginning.*

Successful micro-credentials should actively support learner confidence, self-efficacy, and engagement. This includes using Universal Design for Learning principles, providing materials in multiple formats, offering clear guidance and expectations, creating opportunities for peer interaction, and designing supportive rather than overly complex learning environments.

LEARN MORE ABOUT MICRO-CREDENTIALS



Micro-credentials are central tools for acknowledging and documenting learning achievements gained through short, targeted training activities. Their core purpose is to enable continuous upskilling and reskilling by allowing adults to update and expand their competences throughout their working lives within a lifelong learning pathway. In response to rapid labor market shifts, rising competence demands, and the risk of social exclusion, micro-credentials directly address current workforce challenges by filling the gap for flexible learning opportunities.

EUROPEAN RECOGNITION

The strategic global value of micro-credentials is recognized by major international policy frameworks, including the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, the Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, UNESCO, and the OECD, positioning them as a key lever for building flexible, inclusive, and resilient learning.



THE EUROPEAN PROJECT LANDSCAPE

L2L MicroCred builds on nearly a decade of EU-funded work on micro-credentials: from mapping and standards (MicroHE) to a common policy framework (MICROBOL) and dialogue between universities, the world of work and learners (MicroCredX). European University Alliances are now testing issuance, quality assurance and recognition at scale through policy experimentation (4EU+MICI), e-sealed European Digital Credentials (ECIU) and shared design practices (CHARM-EU, Osservatorio Unico per le Microcredenziali – Digital Education). CRED4TEACH and the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies such as EduSTA apply micro-credentials to teachers' professional development. L2L MicroCred adds a complementary perspective: micro-credentials designed for regional contexts, focused on adult self-efficacy and inclusion.

ACTIONS FOR SCALABILITY

Adaptive Scalability Model

Evidence from pilot phases in Norway, Italy, Ireland, and Australia supports adaptive scalability rather than direct course replication.

To expand the reach of micro-credentials without compromising quality or exacerbating the digital divide, the framework leverages a shared digital architecture while embedding localized support, stackable learning pathways, and targeted tutoring.

Seven Key Components

1. Tools for learning needs and target group definition
2. Modular and adaptable course design
3. Authentic tasks and formative assessment
4. Differentiated levels of difficulty
5. Tutorship and possibility for peer and social interaction
6. Transparent progression and certification
7. Support of local associations and institutions for delivery





Discover more on
<https://www.l2lmicrocred.net/>



Co-funded by
the European Union



Universitetet
i Innlandet



LUMSA
UNIVERSITÀ



UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUMNIGH



University
AUSTRALIA