

# ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES: RESKILLING AND UPSKILLING ONTARIO'S WORKFORCE

**The Issue:** COVID-19 has created a shift in the types of skills employers need and has only accelerated change in an ever-evolving labour market. To help build a strong foundation for talent, now and in the future, Ontarians will need increased access to reskilling and upskilling opportunities, such as micro-credential, short-duration and continuing education programs, that also support life-long learning throughout their careers.



Ontario's universities remain committed to providing learners of all backgrounds with access to these types of in-demand programs, offering more than 3,500 continuing education courses and entering into more than 660 industry partnerships that help fill local, regional and provincial skills shortages. In fact, more than 120,000 students were enrolled in these programs at universities in 2020-21 – an increase of 27 per cent since 2017-18.

## Background

- As many Ontario businesses continue to navigate the impacts of COVID-19, ensuring students, learners and workers can gain new skills is critical to preparing them for a changing job market.
- A 2022 skills survey released by the Business + Higher Education Roundtable (BHER) and the Business Council of Canada (BCC) shows that the skills employers are demanding is evolving. The report notes that worker upskilling and reskilling is fast becoming a priority for employee training and development, particularly in transitioning employees to different jobs or sectors.
- Access to micro-credentials and continuing education programs will support life-long career success and ensure Ontarians of all backgrounds can continue to contribute meaningfully to Ontario's economic growth and prosperity.
- Not only are an increasing number of employers and businesses looking for these programs, but, in general, graduates from Ontario university programs enjoy success after graduation. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities' Ontario's Universities Graduate Survey of 2017 graduates found that undergraduates have an employment rate of more than 95 per cent two years after graduation, with almost 90 per cent of graduates finding full-time work that is either closely or somewhat related to the skills they developed at university.



More than 120,000 students were enrolled in continuing education programs at Ontario's universities in 2020-21, an increase of 27% since 2017-18.

When it comes to the impact of COVID-19 on training and development over the past 15 months, 21% of respondents signal that entry-level workers will require specific types of upskilling or reskilling. That number increased to 37% when it came to mid-career workers, according to a 2022 skills survey released by BHER and BCC.

## How Universities Are Supporting Ontario

As the needs of the job market and employers continue to evolve, Ontario's universities are helping build a strong talent pipeline and encouraging life-long learning by continuing to offer and create new micro-credential and continuing education programs and courses.

- An ever-increasing proportion of university programming consists of diplomas, certificates, micro-credentials and stand-alone courses that are industry-connected and aligned with specific occupational competencies.
- These offerings exceed the number of university micro-credentials that have been approved for the Ontario Student Assistance Program.
- By providing reskilling and upskilling programs, including in high-demand areas, such as engineering, computer science and health care, Ontario's universities continue to ensure all learners can develop critical and in-demand skills.

In 2020-21, Ontario's universities entered into more than 660 industry partnerships to deliver continuing education programs and courses. Universities will continue to partner with industry to adapt courses that can support Ontarians of all backgrounds.



From 2020 to 2022, businesses increased their investment in digital training programs by 35%, in micro-credentials by 23% and in bootcamps by 17%, according to the skills survey by BHER and BCC.

In 2020-21, Ontario's universities offered more than 3,500 continuing education courses and more than 630 continuing education programs.