



# Navigating Successful Transitions in Education and the Workforce

Whitepaper

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# Transitions through the Learning Journey

As students progress through their educational journey, moving from compulsory education (elementary to middle school and high school) to further or higher education, they embark on a period of exploration and newfound independence. These transitions impact learners emotionally, socially, and academically.

## Use this Whitepaper to:

- » Learn about students' challenges during their educational journey, including transitions from school to college or higher education to employment.
- » Explore strategies and best practices to ensure a successful and seamless transition for students from school to higher education.
- » Discover approaches to equip students with the necessary skills for the evolving job market.

Throughout these educational transitions, there are many challenges faced. [Here you can learn](#)<sup>1</sup> the key elements that can influence the learner's successful progression from one stage of their education and career path to the next. Many students harbor uncertainty about the true value of higher education, with an increasing number questioning its [worth](#)<sup>2</sup>.

Yet, successful transitioning into higher education has been linked to reduced dropout rates, and research shows that positive transition experiences significantly boost retention rates, sustain motivation, and enhance academic [potential](#)<sup>3</sup>. (Welsh Government, [2018](#)<sup>4</sup>). Higher education institutions must rethink their recruitment and

retention strategies, emphasizing the benefits of higher education and supporting students' transition and learning experiences.

## Transition into Employment

Beyond the educational realm lies the challenging transition to the workforce. Research highlights that numerous students feel ill-prepared for the job market, particularly in the face of technological advancements like automation and AI.

[Early Careers Survey 2021](#)<sup>5</sup> found that nearly half (45%) of university students felt unprepared for employment, while 96% of respondents said they faced barriers when looking for jobs or apprenticeships.

The most significant obstacle reported was the need for work experience, followed closely by limited opportunities to apply the necessary skills gained during further education when entering the job market.

Higher education institutions must also provide solutions that can aid students in effectively navigating and being well-prepared for the transition from education to employment.

This whitepaper provides valuable insights and explores practical strategies for educational institutions to facilitate successful transitions, ultimately maximizing learning outcomes and equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the future of work.

## Exploring Students’ Perspectives on Higher Education

Financial pressure is a significant concern for students, seen across some major countries:

Country	Factors
US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>38% of students</b><sup>14</sup> didn’t enroll because of fears about the cost of college and amassing debt.</li> <li>» <b>70% agreed</b> that on-the-job training was the best way to advance in a career.</li> <li>» <b>26% believed</b> it was more important to work and learn money.</li> </ul>
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>58%</b><sup>15</sup> believe “a university degree does not prepare students for the real world”.</li> <li>» <b>71%</b> believe the cost of living and economic crisis will deter people from going to university in the next few years.</li> </ul>
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>A strong labor market and the rising cost</b><sup>16</sup> of living are driving down domestic enrollments in Australia.</li> </ul>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» 15% increase in domestic tuition fees. However, despite the rising tuition fees, <b>studies</b><sup>17</sup> suggest that universities may not adequately equip graduates with the critical thinking skills required by employers, leading some to question the value of a university degree.</li> </ul>

### Are Students Ready for Employment?

- » **Early Careers Survey 2021**<sup>11</sup> found that nearly half (45%) of university students felt unprepared for employment.
- » There are 11 skills that would boost graduate employability but **only 27% of students**<sup>12</sup> can confidently demonstrate them.
- » **Nearly 80% of employers** believe graduates aren’t work-ready to enter the employment market.

- » **Nearly 3 in 4 employers**<sup>13</sup> say they have difficulty finding graduates with the soft skills their companies need.

*“The job openings that exist are typically for higher-skilled positions and many people who are looking for work don’t have the skill sets employers are looking for...it’s a structural mismatch within the job market – and one that is growing more urgent as the adoption of automation technologies accelerates.”*

**McKinsey Global Institute, May 2022**

## Challenges Faced by Students During Transition



Students face numerous challenges when transitioning through their education. It's crucial for higher education institutions to understand these challenges to improve their overall perception and outcomes. Transitioning smoothly into higher education can greatly enhance students' learning experience and academic achievement, increasing their motivation and reducing the **risk of dropping out**<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, educational institutions must prioritize this aspect of student success.

Some key challenges faced by students that could cause transition difficulties and leave them feeling unprepared:

### Uncertainty about ROI

Higher education comes with substantial costs, including tuition fees and accommodation. If institutions fail to 'guarantee' career opportunities and higher earning potential, they may hesitate to take on the financial burden.

### Lack of information transparency

Without transparent and detailed information about various courses and majors, students may struggle to choose the right program that best suits their academic strengths, passions, and career aspirations.

### Uncertainty and indecision

Graduates may feel unsure about which career path to pursue, leading to indecision and anxiety. In fact, almost **two-thirds**<sup>7</sup> of students feel overwhelmed by the process of selecting a major. This could cause a pressured and unpleasant transition from school to higher education.

### Skills gap

Students may find that their academic education does not fully align with the specific skills and competencies demanded by employers, leading to a gap between their qualifications and the practical requirements of the job.

### Limited work experience

**Finding relevant work experience**<sup>8</sup> was the main struggle for job-seeking students. However, many entry-level positions require prior work experience. This is a crucial challenge for recent graduates.

### Lack of practical skills




While students may have acquired theoretical knowledge during their education, they may lack the practical skills necessary to perform specific job tasks effectively.



### Job market competition

Graduates face stiff competition in the job market, particularly during economic downturns and with the growth of AI. [[Discover more the growth of AI and importance of soft skills in our whitepaper](#)<sup>9</sup>]

## Strategies to Address the Challenges

Higher education institutions can use various strategies, including digital credentials, to showcase their value to students, helping them feel more confident during their transition from school to the workforce.

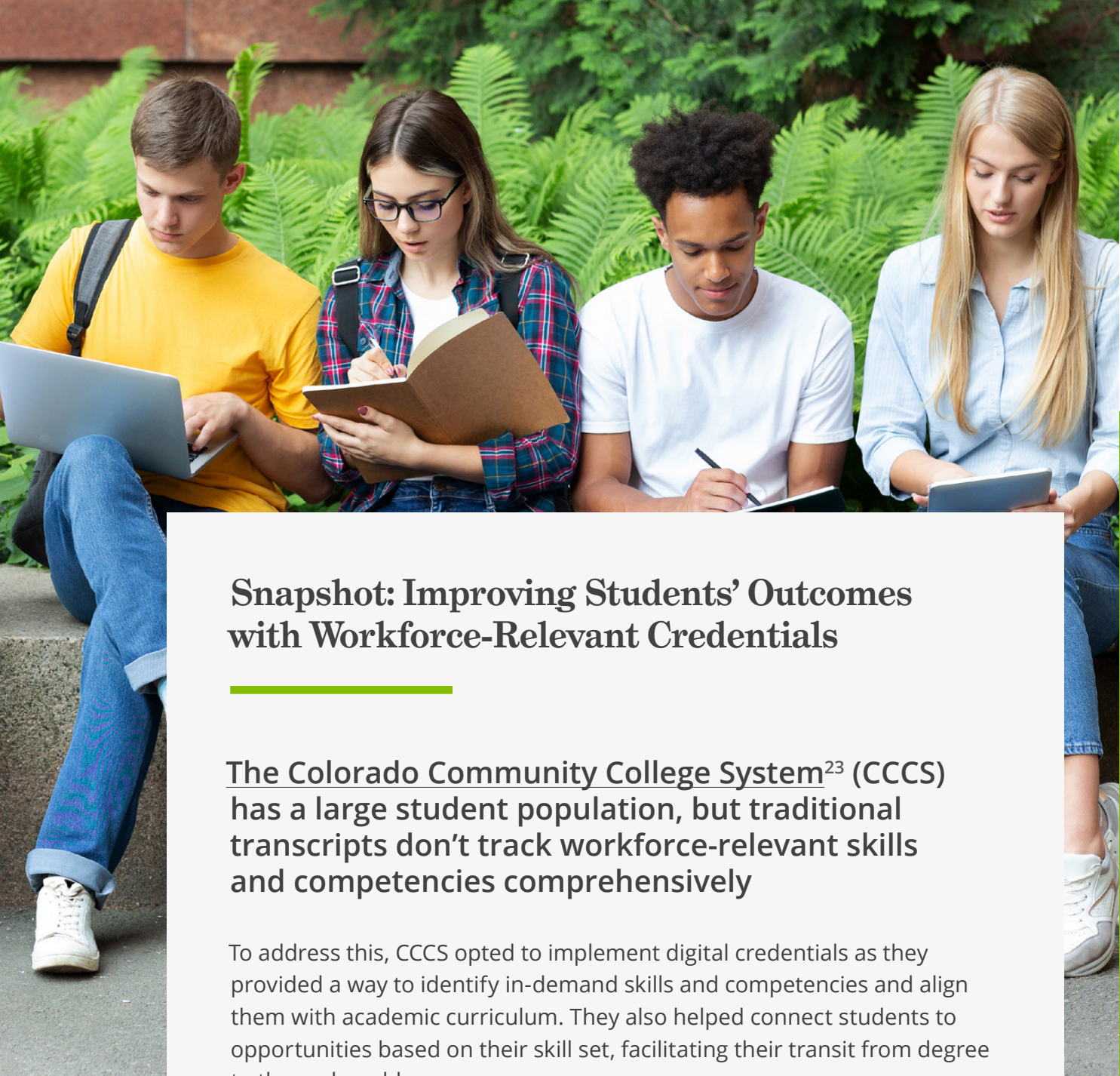
Strategies	How Can Digital Credentials Help?
<p>» <b>Early Exposure to College or University Experience:</b> Short courses for high school students offer an early glimpse into higher education life. This can make the transition to further education or higher education less intimidating.</p>	<p>» Issuing digital credentials at the end of the short courses recognizes students' achievements and skills. These digital credentials serve as tangible evidence of their dedication to continuous improvement and skill development.</p> <p><b>Badge example:</b> Patcham High School Career Explorer Colleges Issued by <u>Future Creators</u><sup>18</sup></p> 
<p>» <b>Address Skills Gap:</b> Integrate practical learning experiences and internships into the curriculum, ensuring students develop the necessary skills demanded by employers.</p>	<p>» Award digital credentials for completing internships or practical training, which students can add to their profile for job applications.</p> <p><b>Badge example:</b> Workplace Soft Skills Issued by <u>University of Central Oklahoma</u><sup>19</sup></p> 
<p>» <b>Foster partnership:</b> Develop partnerships with local businesses and organizations to offer students more internships and work-study opportunities.</p>	<p>» After finishing a work-study program, students can be awarded digital credentials to prove they completed an internship. This will highlight their work experience and make them more appealing to potential employers.</p> <p><b>Badge example:</b> Internship Completion Issued by <u>University of Utah</u><sup>20</sup></p> 

Strategies	How Can Digital Credentials Help?
<p>» <b>In-study &amp; work experience opportunities:</b> Offer workshops, boot camps, or certificate programs focusing on developing specific practical skills relevant to the job market.</p>	<p>» Issue digital credentials for completing these skill-specific programs, allowing students to showcase their proficiency in practical areas.</p> <p><b>Badge example:</b> Career Exploration (Work Experience) Issued by <b><u>Bishop Druitt College</u></b><sup>21</sup></p> 
<p>» <b>Improve flexible pathways:</b> Create multiple entry points to accommodate learners' diverse needs and preferences, like part-time, accelerated, or modular courses.</p>	<p>» Digital credentials that are stackable can be utilized to recognize the completion of these flexible learning modules, allowing students to build qualifications incrementally.</p> <p><b>Badge example:</b> Math-Essential Math Mastery Issued by <b><u>Colorado Community College System</u></b><sup>22</sup></p> 
<p>» <b>Build a personal brand:</b> Provide personal branding workshops and seminars to help students identify their strengths and craft a compelling brand narrative.</p>	<p>» Students can use digital credentials to showcase their skills and knowledge gained from personal branding workshops on platforms like LinkedIn.</p>

Educational institutions can enhance the recognition and validation of students' accomplishments, skills, and experiences by integrating digital credentials into their strategies.

Digital credentials empower students to showcase their readiness for higher education or employment, giving them a competitive edge in the job market and facilitating a smoother transition.

Graduates can also benefit from digital badges by using them to grow their careers and provide evidence of ongoing learning and skill development.



## Snapshot: Improving Students' Outcomes with Workforce-Relevant Credentials

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**The Colorado Community College System<sup>23</sup> (CCCS) has a large student population, but traditional transcripts don't track workforce-relevant skills and competencies comprehensively**

To address this, CCCS opted to implement digital credentials as they provided a way to identify in-demand skills and competencies and align them with academic curriculum. They also helped connect students to opportunities based on their skill set, facilitating their transit from degree to the real world.

Their initiative led to increased job placements for students as employers recognized the transparency of relevant skills and began seeking CCCS students with specific digital credentials.

*"CCCS was able to supply the firm with a list of students who had earned digital credentials to match the employer's specific needs, and the firm filled three positions within 72 hours."*

**Brenda Perea** | Former Instructional Design Project Manager

## Checklist for Assisting Students' Smooth Transition from School to the Workforce

### 01 Offer comprehensive career counseling

Provide career counseling to students, helping them choose a career path, match academic choices to career goals, and understand the job market.

### 02 Host personal branding workshops

Offer workshops on personal branding to help students discover their strengths and create powerful personal brand stories.

### 03 Integrate career readiness programs

Offer career readiness programs that cover job search tactics, resume writing sessions, and practice interviews to improve students' job readiness.

### 04 Enhance industry partnerships

Establish strong industry partnerships to gain insights into evolving job market needs and facilitate job placements for graduates.

### 05 Facilitate work experience opportunities

Collaborate with industries to offer internships and work experiences, allowing students to gain practical skills and industry exposure.

### 06 Implement digital credentialing system

Adopt a digital credentialing system to recognize and award students for their achievements, skills, and experiences throughout their academic journey.

### 07 Encourage digital portfolio development

Encourage students to create online portfolios highlighting their academic achievements, projects, and activities outside of class, to improve their personal image.

### 08 Foster alumni engagement

Engage alumni to serve as mentors, providing guidance and networking opportunities to current students as they transition to the workforce.

### 09 Promote lifelong learning culture

Foster a culture of lifelong learning, encouraging students to continuously update their skills and adapt to changing job market demands.

### 10 Stay abreast of industry trends

Stay informed about industry trends and employer expectations to align curricula with real-world job requirements.

### 11 Track student outcomes

Keep track of how well students do after transitional support programs by analyzing digital credentials data<sup>10</sup> on employment and career success.

## Nurturing the Workforce of Tomorrow

Digital credentials can help higher education institutions position themselves as more modern and innovative establishments that understand and respond to student needs and interests.

In today's rapidly changing job market, characterized by constant technological advancements, shifting industry demands, and the need for adaptable skill sets, higher education institutions' role in nurturing tomorrow's workforce has never been more critical. Institutions have a distinctive chance to take the lead in preparing students for the future of work by implementing forward-thinking strategies that facilitate seamless transitions from various stages in the education journey to the workforce.

With the help of digital credentials, you can facilitate smooth transitions from school to the workforce and equip graduates with the necessary skills and mindset for career success.



## Want to learn more?

Acclaim is the network of choice where 3,500+ certification, assessment, and training providers and employers issue their credentials. With a notable 76 Net Promoter Score, our secure, user-friendly, and data-rich platform is a reliable choice for supporting your institution and students. To explore how digital credentials can contribute to your institution's growth and commercial goals, schedule a demo now.

## Endnotes

- 1 Here You Can Learn <https://learn.credly.com/guides/key-transitions-how-to-successfully-progress-in-education-and-career>
- 2 Topic - Eab <https://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/eab/>
- 3 Potential <https://nasenjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-8578.12409#bjsp12409-bib-0052>
- 4 Be prepared and give it a go! <https://nasenjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-8578.12409#bjsp12409-bib-0052>
- 5 Early Careers Survey 2021: Jobs, apprenticeships and postgraduate <https://luminate.prospects.ac.uk/early-careers-survey-2021-jobs-apprenticeships-and-postgraduate-study>
- 6 Student transition into higher education: Time for a rethink within the subject of sport and exercise science? <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2022.1049672/full>
- 7 New Survey: Student Confusion Selecting Majors Increases Higher Education Cost and Time to Earn Degree <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20191014005009/en/New-Survey-Student-Confusion-Selecting-Majors-Increases-Higher-Education-Cost-and-Time-to-Earn-Degree>
- 8 Early Careers Survey 2021: Work experience during a crisis <https://luminate.prospects.ac.uk/early-careers-survey-2021-work-experience-during-a-crisis>
- 9 Meeting the Demands of the Future Workforce: Soft Skills Training for the AI Revolution <https://learn.credly.com/guides/meeting-the-demands-future-workforce-soft-skills-training-for-ai-revolution>
- 10 Acclaim Analytics <https://info.credly.com/product/analytics>
- 11 Early Careers Survey 2021: Jobs, apprenticeships and postgraduate study <https://luminate.prospects.ac.uk/early-careers-survey-2021-jobs-apprenticeships-and-postgraduate-study>
- 12 Are graduates ready for work? New CMI research <https://www.managers.org.uk/knowledge-and-insights/news/are-graduates-ready-for-work-new-cmi-research/>
- 13 Employers Say Students Aren't Learning Soft Skills in College <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/employers-say-students-arent-learning-soft-skills-in-college.aspx>
- 14 Why Would-Be Students Aren't Choosing College <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/09/29/new-study-explores-why-people-drop-out-or-dont-enroll>
- 15 The 'Mickey Mouse' degrees that could damage your career prospects <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/consumer-affairs/worst-university-degrees-damage-career-prospects/>
- 16 Australia Recovers With Foreign Students, but Not Domestic <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/global/2023/04/13/australia-recovers-foreign-students-not-domestic>
- 17 Why universities are failing to prepare students for the job market <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/why-universities-are-failing-to-prepare-students-for-the-job-market-1.6208196>
- 18 Future Creators <https://www.credly.com/organizations/future-creators/badges>
- 19 University of Central Oklahoma <https://www.credly.com/organizations/university-of-central-oklahoma/badges>
- 20 University of Utah <https://www.credly.com/organizations/university-of-utah/badges>
- 21 Bishop Druitt College <https://www.credly.com/organizations/bishop-druitt-college/badges>
- 22 Colorado Community College System <https://www.credly.com/organizations/cccs/badges>
- 23 Colorado Community College System <https://learn.credly.com/case-study/case-study-colorado-community-college-system>

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