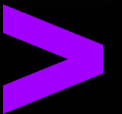


The background features a series of vertical bars of varying heights and colors, including shades of blue, purple, and teal. A faint silhouette of a person is visible in the center, appearing to walk through the bars. The overall aesthetic is modern and tech-oriented.

TALENT FOR TOMORROW

Reskilling to Power Ireland's Economy





Foreword

Opportunity from adversity



Unlikely as it may seem, the social and economic impact of the pandemic could provide Ireland with the prompt it needs to rethink some fundamentals about the way we want our country to evolve.

After the last recession we went through an uneven recovery with some sectors getting back on their feet more quickly than others. This time around, we need to make sure the recovery is balanced and inclusive – that means learning lessons from a year in lockdown and using the moment to address inequalities that the pandemic has exposed.

Around five years ago there was the first talk of every business becoming a digital business. Little did we know that it would take a global pandemic to provide the real tipping point. Home working has accelerated digital transformation

and created a momentum among employees we would be wise to build on. People are now using digital and transversal skills instinctively; skills that will be important to Ireland going forward.

At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted and further exacerbated how some parts of our society that are excluded from digital experiences. There are many reasons including socioeconomic, education and access – access to broadband in remote parts of the country, learning programmes or access to digital tools that could help people to re-skill.

Foreword

What we need to do now is ensure the two distinct groups – the people who are digitally excluded as well as those who have been newly empowered by technology – are made part of the nation's recovery plan as we emerge from a pandemic-induced recession.

A jobs and skills pipeline is as important to Accenture as any company. We know from our work across wide-ranging industries that there is a constant demand to refresh people's capabilities and that a talent pipeline must be nurtured to support multinational companies that have chosen Ireland as a European base. To sustain our success in attracting FDI (Foreign Direct Investment), we need to sustain our talent pool. But it is vital that we also enable the thousands of

local and indigenous businesses in Ireland - those small and medium sized businesses that are the backbone of employment and the economy.

This report is the latest in a series of Accenture reports – 'Learning to Lead', 'Bridging the Gap – Ireland's Digital Divide' and 'What Now for STEM?' – where we have tried to understand the challenges around growing a diverse and inclusive workforce. This time, a new survey and the impact of the pandemic have helped consolidate our thinking and fine-tune our recommendations.

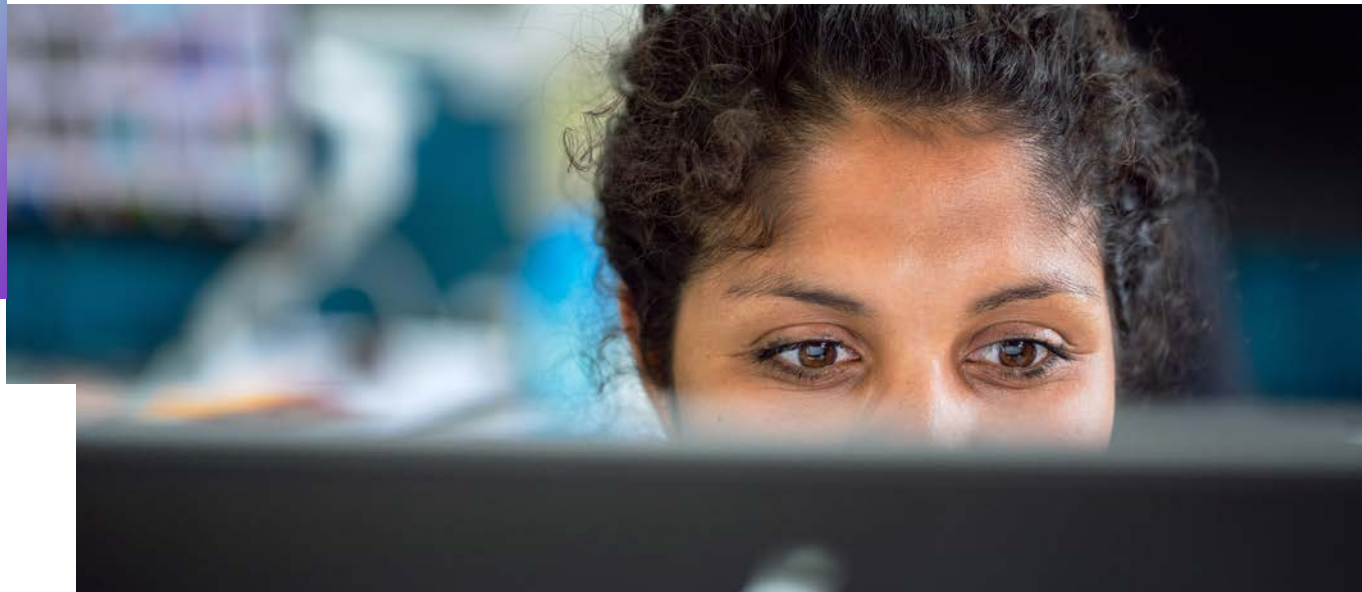
Among our recommendations is a proven model of public and private sector engagement that provides a template for what Ireland can achieve. Partnerships between government, education and industry have created thriving pharmaceutical and medtech clusters in Cork and Galway, to highlight two notable examples. Think what we would do if we could transpose similar models to towns and communities across Ireland.

How successfully we can 'upskill Ireland' to meet future job needs will ultimately come down to how well we can collaborate.

Given Ireland's position as a small, very global and open economy, adapting and adopting change quickly and successfully is critically important in staying innovative and competitive. We should all see this as a shared priority with social and economic implications - we need to solve the challenges together. Now is the perfect time to accelerate existing strategies and devise new ones to ensure we emerge better positioned as an economy, as communities and as a nation.



Alastair Blair
Country Managing Director
Accenture in Ireland



Summary findings

Re-skilling needed for road to recovery

Following the double hit of the pandemic-induced recession and Brexit disruption, Ireland needs to revisit its talent pipeline to help prepare for economic recovery and a new wave of growth.

The risk is that large sections of the population will not be able to catch the wave. According to our new research (see Methodology), they will miss out on emerging job opportunities because they lack skills, which will leave a hole in the workforce that could impact Ireland's innovation potential and attractiveness as a destination for Foreign Direct Investment.



Summary findings

Despite the disruption of 2020, Irish GDP is forecast to grow 5.3% in 2021.¹ The recovery is a testament to the robustness of the Irish economy, but economists warn it will be uneven. Sectors such as technology and life sciences are expected to grow significantly, whereas retail, tourism, and hospitality will continue to struggle for some time to come.

The divergence is reflected on two sides of the labour market. On one side, there is uncertainty and unemployment. The long-term effects of the pandemic are not yet clear, but almost half (48%) of organisations in a recent Ibec survey expect some job losses. With 1 in 10 anticipating substantial decreases in staffing levels,² a swell of people looking for employment is likely. Some of these people will need to be reskilled to be re-employed, and many will want to be reskilled.



Irish GDP is forecast to grow **5.3%** in 2021

On the other side, the pandemic has accelerated workplace transformation for people who have been fortunate to retain their jobs. Many industries have transitioned and embraced new technology during successive lockdowns. Thousands of people in Ireland will continue to work from home post-pandemic, which will have a positive impact on Ireland's sustainability targets and give a much-needed boost to rural areas. These employees will need to continue to enhance or improve their digital skills as employers rely more on technology to support a dispersed workforce.

Summary findings

The complex dynamics around people and their skills is captured in our survey. All respondents reveal some skills gaps, but the nature of the deficit changes reflects their different backgrounds and experiences. They range from employees feeling ill-prepared for new types of work to people who have fallen outside of learning pathways due to socioeconomic reasons:



Only 28% of respondents feel 'very well' prepared to find a new role if they lost their current one, reducing to 27% when asked about adapting to future roles as the workplace evolves.



A quarter had not undertaken any skills training in the past 12 months and were not expecting that to change in the year ahead. This group were even less confident in their ability to find a new job (20%) or in feeling prepared for future roles (17%).

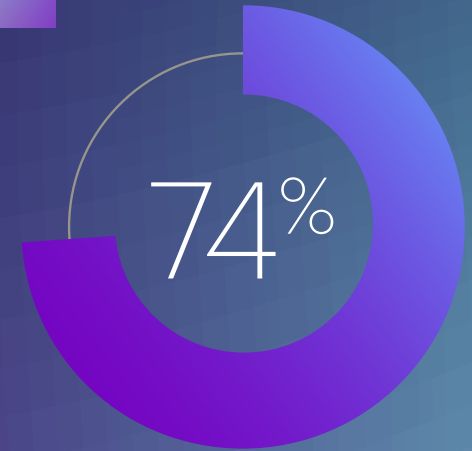


Nearly half (47%) of our respondents were not confident in the trio of digital literacy, general Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and innovation—skills that will be essential in Ireland's future economy. This rose to over half among people who had not taken any training in the past 12 months.



Younger people (aged 18-24), seniors (aged 55 and above), those from a low-income background, and people with disabilities were all facing specific challenges in terms of their skills preparation and willingness to train. People with a household income below €20,000, for example, were less likely to say they would learn new skills in the year ahead.

Half of the people surveyed feel that businesses are cutting back their commitment to invest in skills, while 44% think that businesses are not willing to invest in 'people like me'.



of respondents saying they believe businesses have a responsibility to invest more in upskilling their employees, the onus is on industry to do more. Evidence suggests that they are falling short.

Summary findings

Action plan for tomorrow's talent

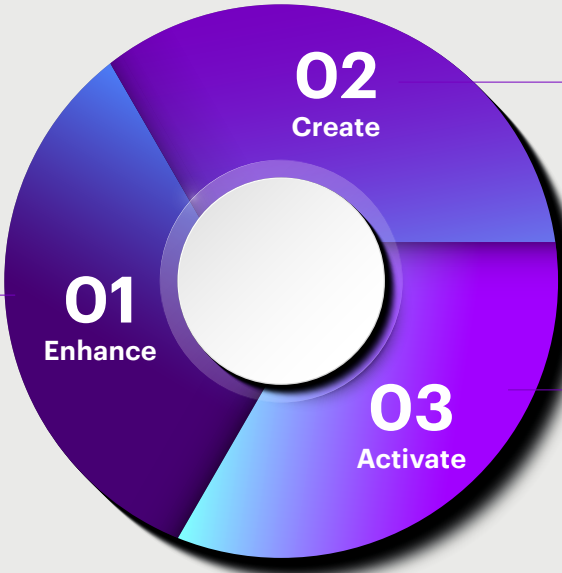
The events of the past year, enormous as their human impact has been, are also a stark reminder that we cannot be complacent when it comes to protecting the Irish economy. Investment in a talent pipeline is key to our national recovery.

Our survey highlights the scale of the skills challenge and offers clues to the solution. We believe that the following **three-point action plan** would address the key issues and provide a starting point for a talent-rich Ireland.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to work together across government, industry and the ecosystem of training initiatives. We have the chance to reset upskilling pathways and create a resilient and diverse talent pipeline for Ireland, while in the process ensure a fair and sustainable recovery for all. We must grasp it.

Three-point action plan

Enhance skills among the existing talent pool: upskill, reskill and boost access to skills of the future by rethinking and redesigning learning experiences inside organisations.



Create a learning ecosystem that works for all: build models exemplified by the life sciences sector where collaboration between government, industry and universities has created a continuous talent pool.

Activate untapped talent pools: open pathways for under-represented and disenfranchised groups to upskill through training and apprenticeships, to become job candidates for companies that have previously neglected them.

Skills need to be enhanced across all society



Our survey found that 75% of respondents had undertaken skills training to boost their employment opportunities, which means a quarter of the population has not – a cohort of different groups that are ill-prepared for a new era of employment.

Digging deeper into the survey, however, reveals that even the 75% face challenges when it comes to future skills needs. These findings put a question mark over the flexibility and capacity of Ireland's workforce to adapt to a changing economy.

Trained but not confident

Although 56% of respondents consider themselves 'very well' equipped in their existing skills for their current job, the number fell to 29% when they were asked about their capacity to progress; to 28% for finding a new role if they lost their current one, and dropping to 27% for readiness for future roles as the workplace evolves. Individuals that had not undertaken any skills-related training over the past year were even less likely to be confident in all of these areas (see Figure 1).

for readiness for future roles as the workplace evolves. Individuals that had not undertaken any skills-related training over the past year were even less likely to be confident in all of these areas (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: How well do you feel that the skills you have at the moment equip you... (percentage of respondents who said 'very well')



Resistance to learning

Given that training and updating skills lifts an individual's confidence in the labour market, we need to understand the reasons behind why people are resistant to training, and factors that might encourage them to learn new skills in the future.

Among individuals who had not taken any new skills training in the past 12 months, 70% had no intention to change the situation in the year ahead. This can be attributed to several factors (Figure 2). The main factors were access (20% were not offered any training) and the belief that training is not something that they need (19% said they have no reason to learn new skills).

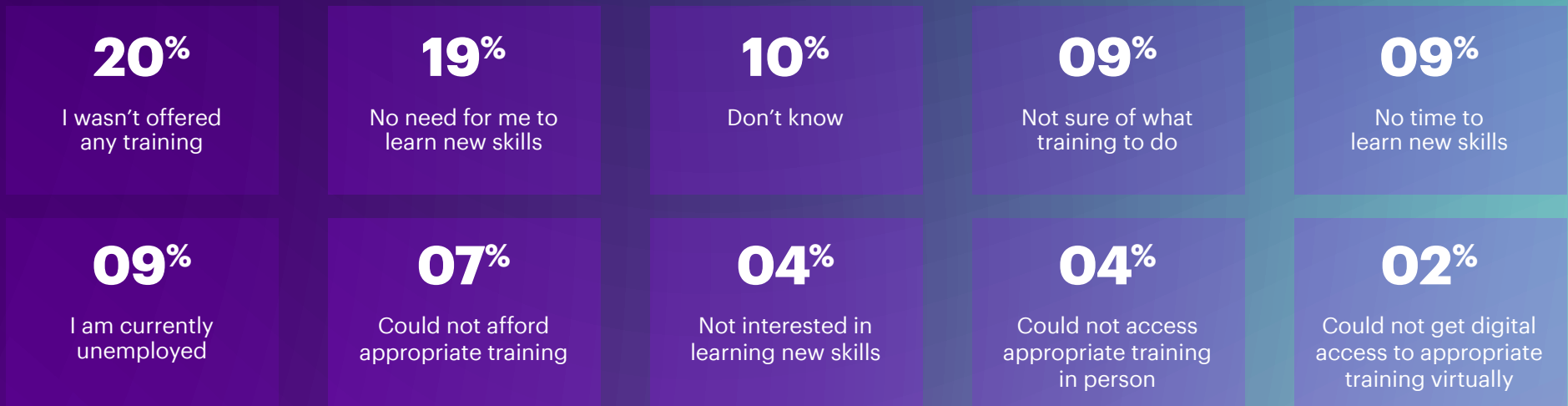


Figure 2: 'What was the main reason you did not undertake any skills training?' (percentage who selected each answer)

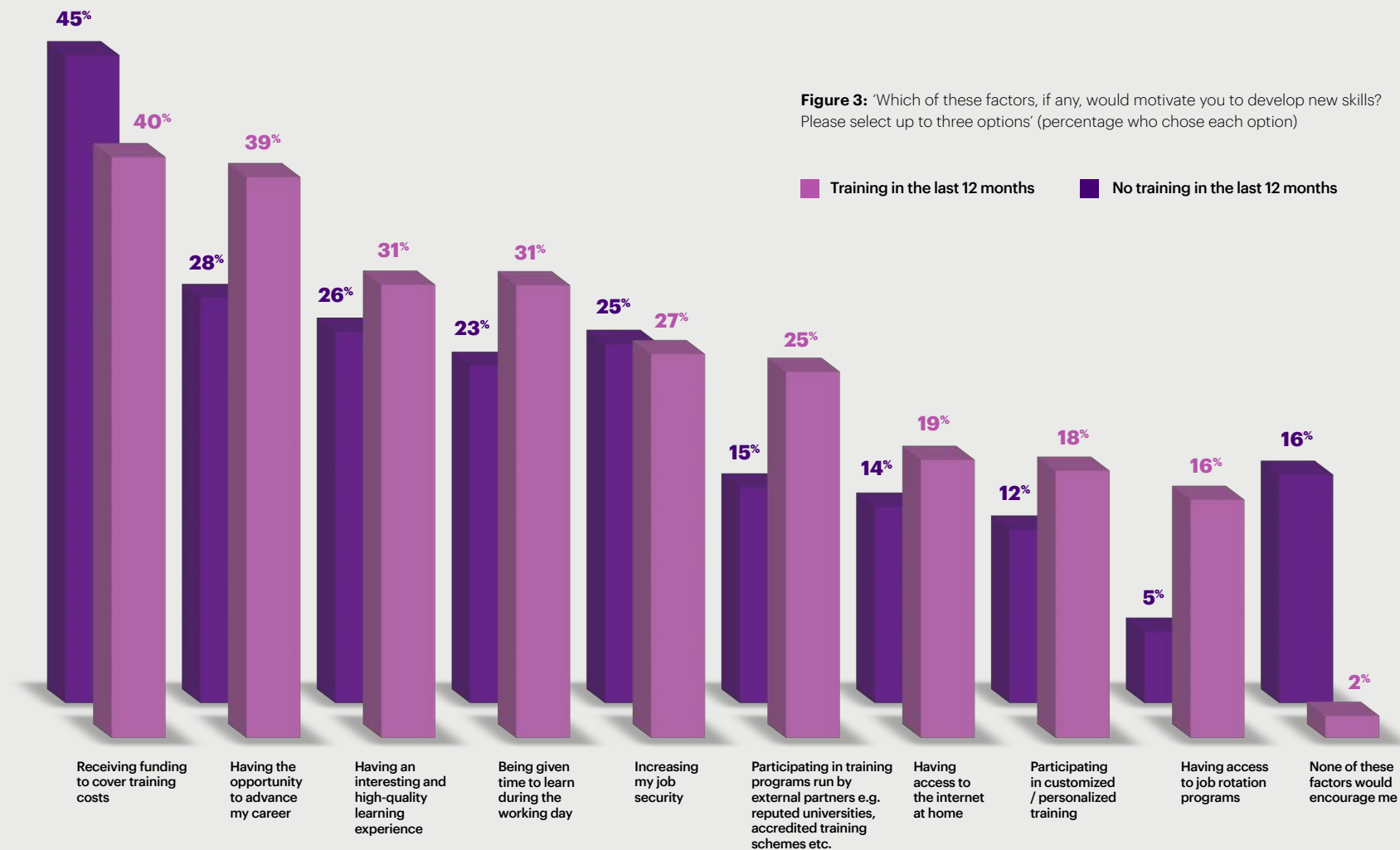
Overcoming obstacles

Although 16% of those with no training in the past 12 months said nothing would encourage them to develop new skills, 84% could be motivated through various actions (Figure 3).

Funding was the top enabler (40%) for those who have received training. Cost matters and so does delivery mechanism: a third of respondents say that they would respond to an interesting and high-quality learning experience.

Research from Talespin found that learners who used their extended reality (XR)-based training applications were 275% more confident to act on what they had learned and nearly four times more engaged than classroom-based learners.³ These findings show that new experiential techniques and personalised learning will drive engagement and help support people as they explore new career pathways.





Building businesses with a future-proof talent pipeline



Sandra Caffrey
HR Director
Diageo

Any graduate looking to work for Diageo, a global leader in the beverage alcohol market, will need to demonstrate strong business acumen regardless of the role they are applying for. Diageo is a company that is more focused on hiring for talent with future potential and strong leadership skills, than putting emphasis solely on top subject grades.

“We have an early career programme that it is designed to source talent that we believe will be future leaders in Diageo,” explained Sandra Caffrey, HR Director at Diageo. “Rather than looking for a strong functional capability in a particular discipline, we are looking for people who match our organisational values and align with our organisation’s purpose as well as demonstrating the right leadership potential”.

With thousands of applications for a small number of graduate positions, candidates are judged on their analytical abilities and other so-called ‘soft skills’ that Diageo believes are integral to strong leadership. “We want people to be able to identify trends, to use

analytics and data to generate insights that will drive really smart decision making,” she said.

The subject-centred curriculum of most universities is not a natural fit for the value that the company places on creative and original thinking. “I would say that it’s an underdeveloped skillset in candidates,” she said. “We develop it in our people as they enter into the workforce, but it would be really helpful to see it coming through as an area of focus in universities.”

Caffrey would also like the education system to reflect the increasing use of data in business. “I’d like to see graduates use analytics tools to present their work,” she said.

“There is a real opportunity for the education system to operate in a way that’s more closely aligned with how business works today.”

Interview

She also places great store on work experience, the work that give students a taste of the modern workplace.

“The Diageo graduate programme offers successful candidates a role in one of our business units. Coming out of full-time education into a role where you are fully accountable for delivery, such as a brand manager role, can be a big leap and the transition can be tough for some candidates. There is no doubt that students who have had some meaningful work experience tend to integrate quicker and are better equipped to deliver in a role with responsibilities.”

A focus on future skills requirements is a big part of what Caffrey and the HR department do, driven by the demands of a fast-changing business landscape in a volatile world. “All businesses need to be able to change, so we look for candidates who have resilience, an ability to pivot quickly and pursue a new course of direction,” she said.

As part of the pathway to becoming future leaders, employees are also encouraged to change roles and experience other parts of the business.

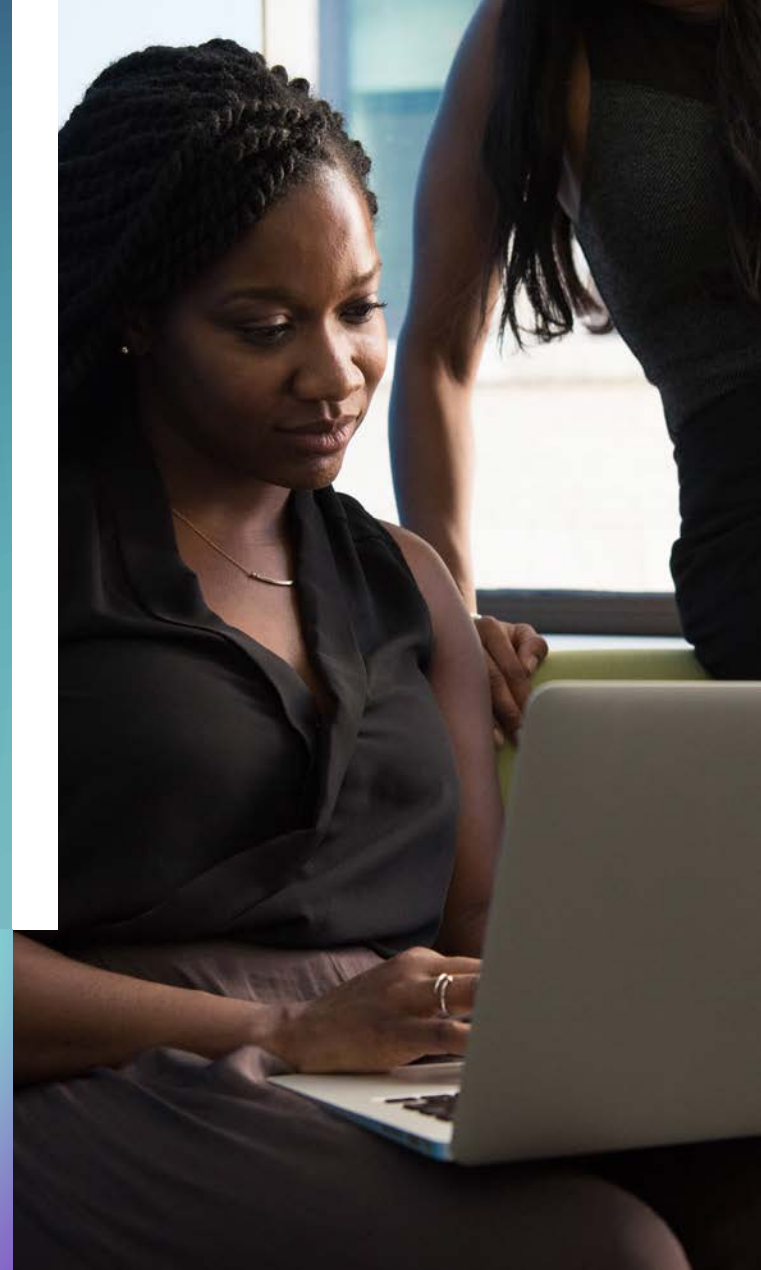
Many respondents in our survey complain about an absence of training in their workplace – which is not a problem at Diageo. The company runs extensive training programmes to facilitate continuous professional development, delivered from an online learning platform. There is mandatory training as well as optional programmes available.

“There is formalised training to build on core competencies or people can explore areas they might be curious about. We can track trending topics of interest and create content based on what people want,” she said.



Identifying future needs is built into the HR process. The company has a centre of excellence in learning and development that looks at likely talent and gaps for the future, informing HR of potential challenges in the talent pipeline, often in advance of a vacancy arising. Another priority is maintaining diversity. Core to the company values is a commitment to nurturing an inclusive workforce across gender and ethnicity. “We want to ensure that our decision makers reflect the diversity of our consumers and our customers and this is called out in Spirit of Progress, our 10-year action plan to help create a more inclusive world,” said Caffrey.

Building a balanced and inclusive recovery



One positive from the pandemic may be a new appetite for societal change. The uneven impact the pandemic has had on different groups, particularly the more vulnerable elements⁴ of society, has highlighted inequalities that need to be addressed. A feeling of personal displacement in aspects of daily life, such as education, work, parenting, health and wellbeing, were heightened for people already socially disadvantaged.

There is an opportunity to reset upskilling initiatives and build a balanced and inclusive recovery. Our survey points to distinct groups who face barriers that need to be removed.

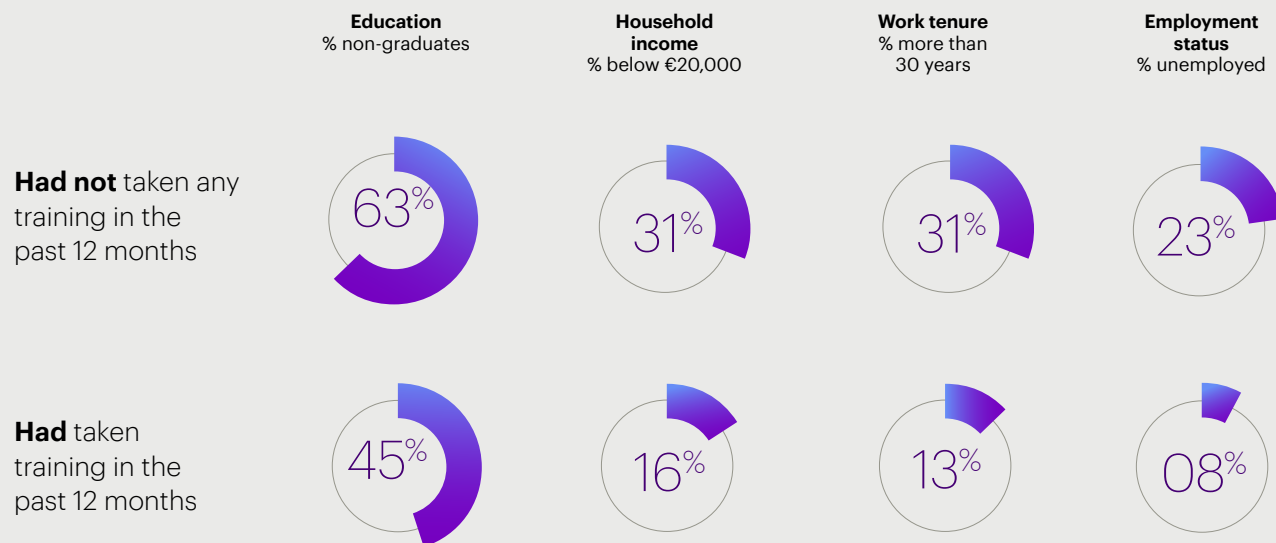
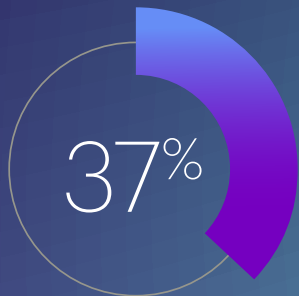


Figure 4: Profile of respondents who had not taken any training in the last year and those who had...



of 18-24 year olds said
it's hard to learn new skills



believe that employers
are not willing to invest in
training for 'people like them'

Young people need to be empowered

With the highest proportion of under fifteens in the EU, Ireland's young population should be a source of competitive advantage, but due to the pandemic, around half of the young population were jobless at one point in 2020.⁵ Many were employed in sectors that have suffered the most – hospitality, food, retail and tourism. They were already over-represented in insecure employment areas, with 31% of young employees (aged 18-24) on temporary contracts compared to 5-6% of older age groups.⁶

Our survey reveals a sense of disempowerment and disenchantment among 18–24-year-olds in their attitudes towards learning new skills (Figure 5). Surprisingly, 37% say it's hard to learn new skills and more than half (55%) believe that employers are not willing to invest in training for 'people like them'.

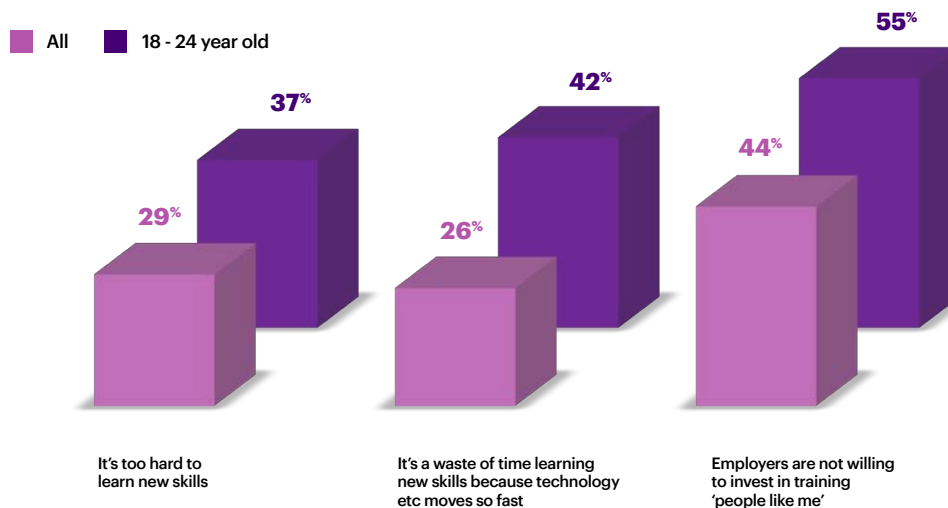


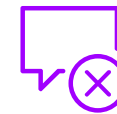
Figure 5: 'To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?' (percentage who said 'strongly agree' or 'agree')



Older age groups need to be incentivised to upskill

National statistics indicate that labour force participation rates drop dramatically with age; dropping from 81.6% to 73.2% for 55–59-year-olds, and then to 54.9% among the 60–64-year-olds.⁷ As Ireland's population ages, however, the average retirement age will too, requiring an extended working timespan, and a boost to the low labour force participation rate of older age groups.

The good news is that 9 in 10 of survey respondents aged 55 or above could be encouraged to learn new skills if they receive funding or are given time to learn during their working hours. Other findings suggest that a 'carrot and stick' approach is essential. Only 1 in 3 (33%) of the same age group are more likely to learn new skills (Figure 6). Nearly half (45%) have not taken any training in the last 12 months

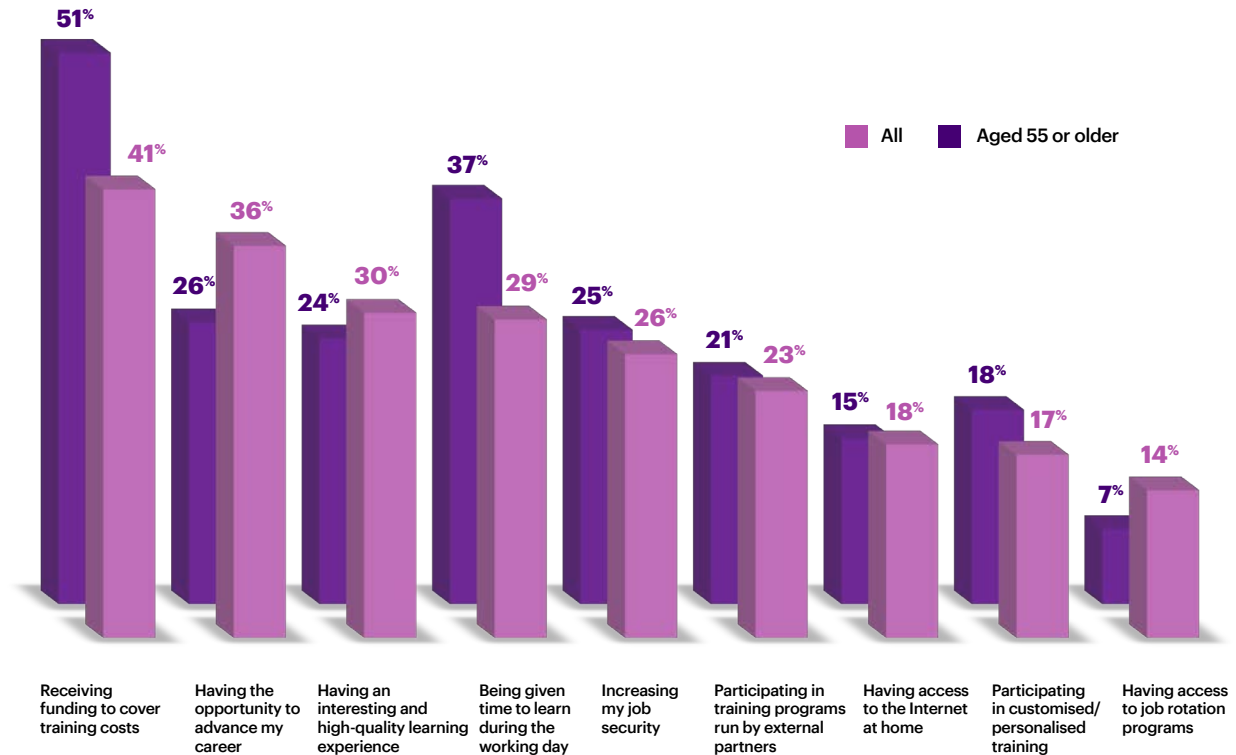


45% of 55+ have not taken any training in the last 12 months

(compared to 25% on average) with 30% not seeing a need to learn new skills. The positive here is that the older demographic is as willing and able to learn as the younger generation.

9 in 10 of survey respondents aged 55 or above could be encouraged to learn new skills if they receive funding or are given time to learn during their working hours.

Figure 6: 'Which of these factors, if any, would motivate you to develop new skills? Please select up to three options' (percentage who chose each option)

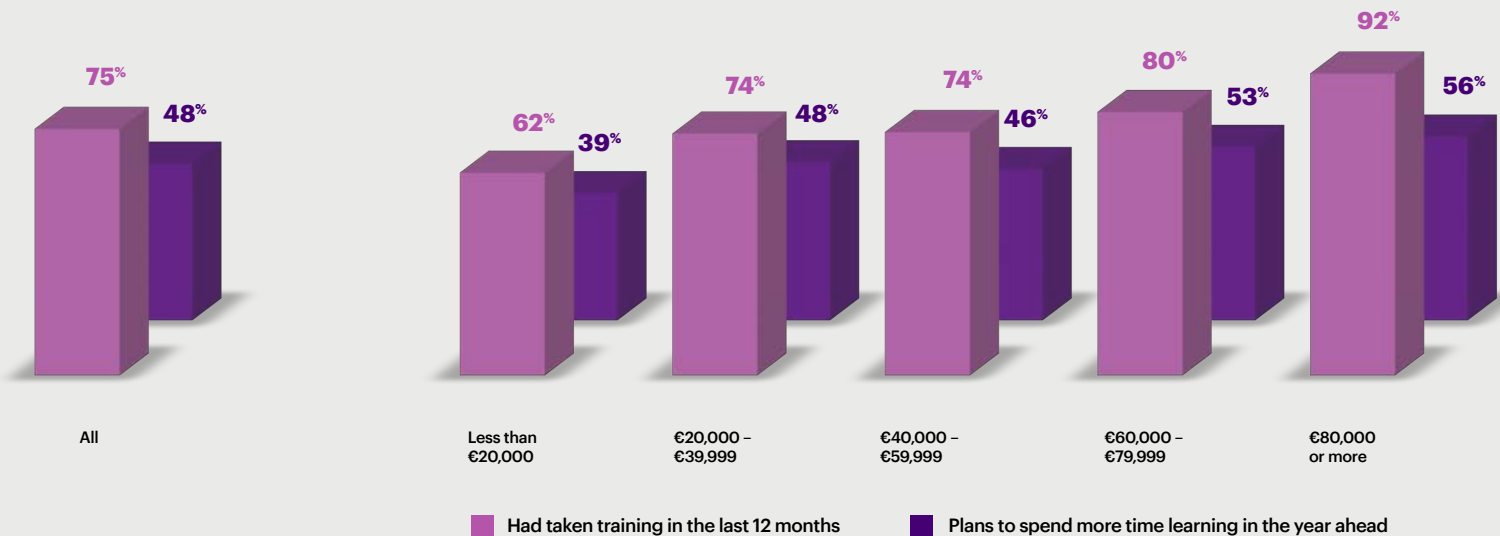


Low-income groups need access to training

More than half of minimum wage employees in Ireland work in the retail, accommodation and food sectors - the businesses that experienced widespread closures due to the pandemic, suggesting that low-wage employees may be disproportionately impacted by job losses.⁸ Our survey found that people with an income of less than €20,000 were more likely to be unemployed or working part-time.

If this group lose their jobs, they face a greater risk of long-term unemployment. A concerning trend is that they are persistently under-trained (Figure 7); only 62% of people from low income households have taken training in the last 12 months (compared with 75% on average), and fewer of them were likely to say that they would learn new skills in the year ahead (39% compared with 48% on average).

Figure 7: 'What type of skills training, if any, have you taken within the past 12 months?' (percentage who had taken any training) and 'How, if at all, has the pandemic changed your training and upskilling plans?' (percentage who said 'More likely to learn new skills')





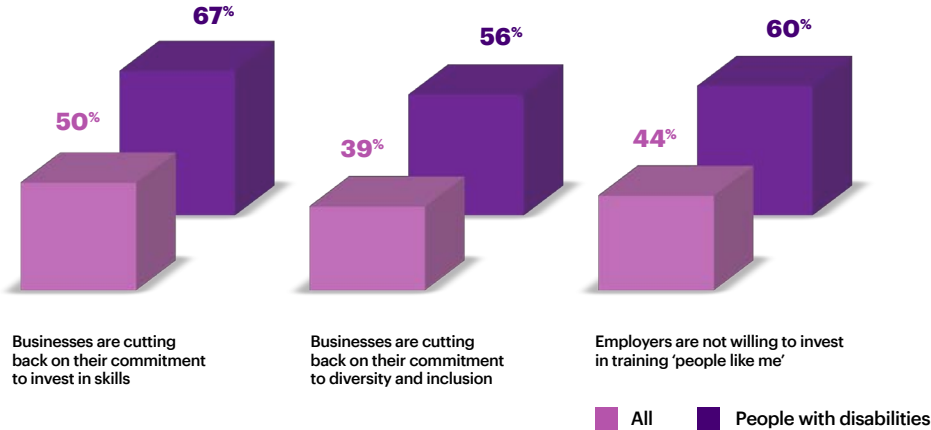
People with disabilities need training support

Labour force participation and employment rates for the 12% of the Irish population who have disabilities are among the lowest in Europe – 49.7% compared to 36.5% – and are paid 21.3% less on average than their non-disabled colleagues.⁹

Yet our study shows that 68% have strong skills in new technologies, compared to 46% of all

respondents, with 62% planning to spend more time learning new skills next year, compared to 56%. But they need more support. More than half say it's hard to learn new skills (54% compared to 29%); 3 in 5 report that employers are not willing to invest in training 'people like them', and 56% say that businesses in Ireland are cutting back on their commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents who said 'strongly agree' or 'agree' when asked 'To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree, that as a result of the pandemic...'



Upskilling citizens through apprenticeships



Peter Davitt
Chief Executive Officer
FIT

With over 21,000 people having completed FIT programmes and more than 15,000 in secure employment, the case for apprenticeships providing an alternative talent pipeline to more traditional education is clear, but Peter Davitt, CEO of FIT, believes the contribution could be even greater if the technology sector changed its mindset.

“There is an overfocus on third level education as being the only means and method by which someone can pursue a professional career” he said. “We should encourage those students who aspire to a third level qualification as a means to a rewarding career, but to suggest it’s the only vehicle for attaining relevant qualifications or competencies is a misnomer.”

Research repeatedly highlights the effectiveness of an apprenticeship-style learning experience, combining theory, practice and the application of learning, which FIT embodies with skills development pathways such as

Tech Apprenticeships that embrace dual education as a means of combining technical competency with the application of learning.

“In reality Ireland is playing ‘catch-up’ as Modern Apprenticeships are the primary vehicle for skills development across most European countries” he said.

The importance of having alternative learning journeys is reflected in the Accenture survey, which reveals a lack of confidence among different groups when it comes to retraining and upskilling. Davitt believes it is a reflection of an education system that does not equally value varied learning styles, accolading academic as superior. “If you have a gone through an education process that says the only route to a fulfilling career is a third level qualification and you don’t fulfil that expectation, then of course your confidence will be undermined” he said.

Interview

Davitt makes a compelling case for apprenticeships being a better fit for filling skills gaps in the technology sector, with FIT being industry led and more than able to devise new courses around emerging technologies. “We build robust programmes that are focused on where the ball is going, not where the ball is at.”

To provide an alternative pipeline that industry would buy into, FIT set about building closer ties to the technology sector. Davitt proved that Level 5 and Level 6 courses in the National Framework of Qualifications can be vocationally specific to industry requirements and help fill skills gaps. Today, the FIT board is comprised of a long list of representatives from technology companies, including Accenture, Cisco, IBM, Microsoft and SAP – a testament to the power of cross-industry collaboration and the growing confidence in the capacity of vocational education and training programmes as a credible talent pipeline.

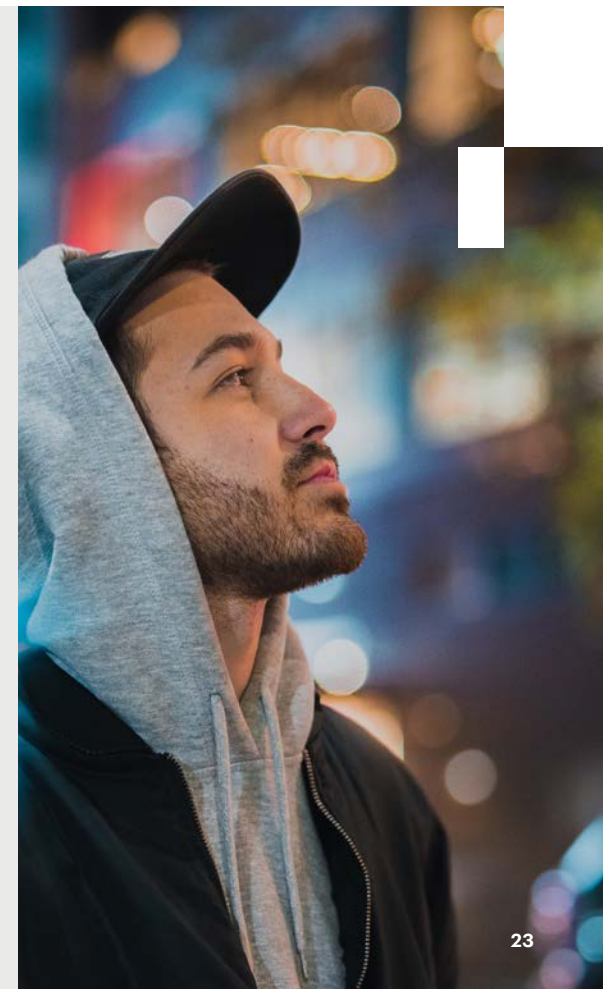
Since the commencement of Tech Apprenticeships in 2018, over 170 enterprises (large, small and the public service) have recruited over 350 Tech Apprentices and this figure is forecast to rise to beyond 1,000 by the end

of 2022. But Davitt believes this is just the tip of the iceberg.

“We have gone beyond inertia and the growing momentum will shape the future” he said, pointing to greater adoption of apprenticeships in other European countries.

“Ireland has circa 70% participation rate in third level and a far less representation in further and vocational education; in the powerhouse that is Germany it’s the other way around.”

The purpose of an education system must be to enable the latent talent of all individuals and to maximise potential through creating an educational infrastructure that supports and values varied learning styles and capacity. In this regard we have to make it clear that apprenticeships and other further education and training options, are an additional route for talent development that complement higher education options and enrich the talent ecosystem.”



Preparing for the future world of work



The future of work will be about the intersection between human ingenuity and technological capability.

Human skills, like problem solving, communication and creativity, will be augmented by machine skills, like automation and AI-driven analysis. Transitioning people from their current skillsets to competencies that can contribute to the future is the challenge.

To help map this journey, we asked our survey respondents to assess the extent as to which they think the skills they have today will be important for them in the future (Figure 9).

Three broad skills clusters emerged:



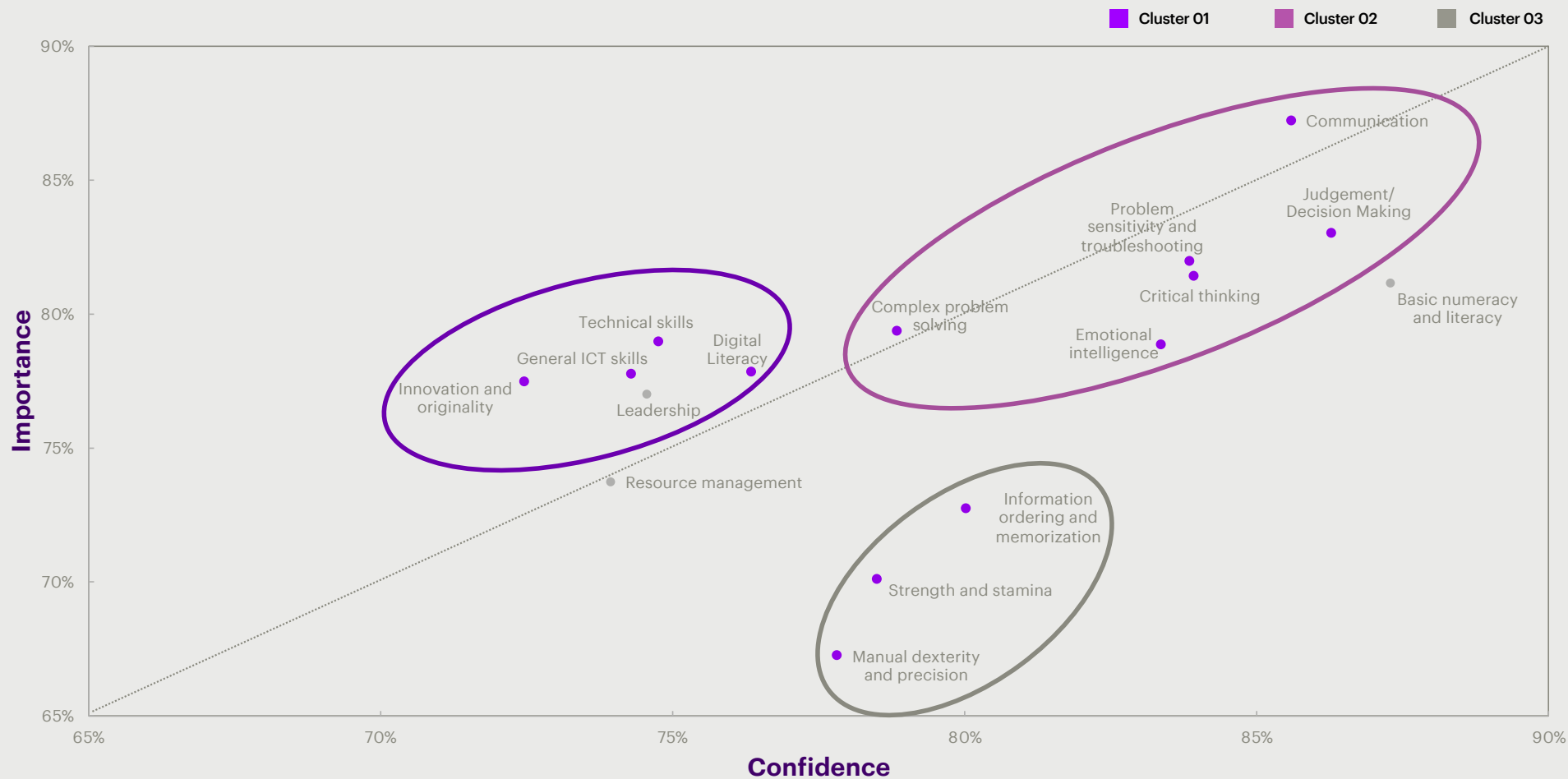


Figure 9: 'In terms of skills that you currently have, how confident are you in each of these areas?' (percentage who said 'very confident' or 'somewhat confident'), and 'To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree that having each of the following skills will be important for you in the future?' (percentage who said 'strongly agree' or 'agree')



Prioritising digital skills and innovative thinking

The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI),¹¹ which tracks a range of indicators on the digital performance of EU countries, shows that Ireland has an above-average share of ICT specialists and ICT graduates (7% against EU average of 3.5%), but is below-average in terms of ensuring that all adults have at least basic digital skills.¹²

The DESI findings are echoed in the survey. Over half (56%) of the respondents who had not had training in the last 12 months were not confident

in the trio of digital literacy, general ICT and innovation. An added challenge is that digital skills need to evolve to support fast-changing technology, therefore training needs to be 'always-on', continuous and needs to encourage a growth mindset.

Innovation and originality - the ability to apply fresh thinking to work-related problems - ranked as the second least important skill in the survey, yet it is top of the list for many employers.

In a recent Ibec survey, 73% of business leaders reported that the impact of the pandemic on collaboration and innovation was a major challenge for their business.¹³ Similarly, the government's ambition to become a global innovation leader will depend on people with transversal skills that are not limited to a specific job or defined by an educational discipline. There is a gap in this particular talent pipeline that badly needs to be filled.

Solving inequality through community engagement



Prof. Anne Looney
Executive Dean
DCU Institute of
Education
Dublin City University

In her role as Executive Dean of DCU and formerly as Chief Executive of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Anne Looney has always made it her business to highlight and address inequality in education.

Inequality undermines life and career opportunities for many people and effectively side-lines them from the mission to 'upskill Ireland'. "I agree with the survey findings that there is a group of people in the 'estuary' who need to get into the talent pipeline, groups we do need to work harder to connect with" Anne said.

Her fear is that deeply embedded inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic, particularly with schools closing. "There is a silent group of parents and families of children who have disappeared out of the education system since lockdown" she said. "Talk to school principals in some urban and rural areas and they will tell you that entire families and communities are missing from that engagement. The longer that goes on, the bigger the impact."

There has been much discussion about schools in

disadvantaged areas not having enough resources to teach online effectively, but Looney's concern is that it runs much deeper than access to technology and knowing how to use the internet. "The digital divide is a divide before it's digital" she said.

"A lot of these families have devices, they have the ability to connect, but they don't have the social capital that you need to consciously engage with learning. The pandemic has highlighted the scale of this problem."

The limitations of online learning have been apparent for some time, according to Looney. She gives the example of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Course) which were supposed to revolutionise and democratise education by making online courses available to everyone. The theory was that everyone had the chance to pursue the highest of higher education courses. "The reality is that the same kind of people who engaged in face-to-face education engaged with MOOCs" she said.

Interview

More community-based programmes are needed to target people who have fallen outside the education sector and found themselves excluded from the labour market.

“For the people who are not going to engage with educational institutions, and not going to engage online, we need to create networks where they can connect informally, meet local champions and people like themselves who can help them connect with learning” said Looney. “It’s the fourth space that is embedded in communities where people live, like Dublin’s Local Area Partnerships and the Leader programmes in rural communities.”

Looney believes that more investment is needed at a grassroots level to encourage people into the talent pipeline, and to build on social inclusion and activation

programmes. “There are people that we really do need to work hard to connect with but who are inevitably hard to reach” she said. “It will cost money and require consistent investment, but their invisibility in an online space that worked so well for so many other people during the pandemic, is a stark reminder that the problem hasn’t gone away.”

She praises the work of SOLAS and the local Education and Training Boards in developing learning pathways and is optimistic that the country is heading in the right direction. “If you think about our apprenticeships, work-based learning models and further education, we now have a really comprehensive strategy in Ireland and we’re getting better at lifelong learning” she said.

“The Further Education Strategy shows a lot of promise. Within universities, we are looking to build better relationships with the further education sector and better pathways for learners. The portents are good.”



Stronger together: what we can do today



“There has never been a more important time for Irish businesses to adapt and innovate. Not only has Covid-19 fundamentally shifted many traditional ways of working, but technological change too is transforming so many aspects of our lives, having a profound impact on our society and economy.”¹⁴

Leo Varadkar, Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

The need to develop Ireland’s talent pipeline and future-proof our economy is now recognised by politicians and industry leaders as a national imperative. Ensuring that everyone has the skills to succeed in Ireland’s future economy is essential at multiple levels. At an individual level, it brings employment opportunities and benefits, such as better pay, job satisfaction and improved quality of life. At an organisational level, it drives innovation, business advantage and profitability. All of which will benefit society as a whole.

Upskilling Ireland will inevitably lead to more inclusive workplaces, with people from different backgrounds qualifying to take roles that would not have previously been available to them.

This will have a positive effect on workplace culture. We have studied the impact of having a workplace culture of inclusiveness and found that a 10% improvement in workplace inclusiveness will lead to an 11% increase in its innovation mindset. On a national level, that could increase Irish GDP by up to 1.4% each year and boost the Irish economy by €59bn between 2020 and 2030.¹⁵

Out of adversity comes opportunity. One positive from the dual impact of the pandemic-induced recession and Brexit is that it has forced us to think about the fastest path to recovery. Upskilling and training should be integral to the discussion.



There is an opportunity to rethink and reset our approach.

A **three-step action plan** is required that will address the barriers to upskilling highlighted in this survey:



01

Enhance skills among the existing talent pool

Recent Accenture research has found that high-growth companies are over three times more likely than laggards to invest in creating a talent-rich business, building competitive advantage through their workforce.¹⁶ As employers, businesses have an enormous role to play in upskilling and reskilling people and boosting their access to the skills of the future. They also have a responsibility to provide training support for people with mental or physical health challenges, to help empower them and bring their skills to the workplace. Businesses will also benefit from building a culture of continuous learning.

More funding needs to be made available, not just to expand existing training initiatives, but to develop rich learning experiences that the survey suggests will encourage more people to upskill. Business leaders can contribute by building up the technology quotient (TQ) among employees, which will enhance their ability to adapt and work with technology, regardless of the role. Accenture is rolling out TQ training to over half a million employees around the world, to help every individual understand, articulate, and apply technology concepts.

A three-step action plan is required that will address the barriers to upskilling highlighted in this survey [contd.]

02

Create a learning ecosystem that works for all

Upskilling Ireland is too big a mission for the State to do on its own. Industry needs to partner with the government and the ecosystem, enabling public and private organisations to collaborate and build skills across all segments of society. The goal should not just be about making learning accessible to all, but to make it available as a lifecycle of continuous learning.

Ireland has already demonstrated how collaboration can make a difference. Our life sciences sector, which now accounts for 32% of GDP, was built on collaboration between university research centres and government initiatives such as the National Institute for Bioprocessing Research and Training and capital investment by biopharmaceutical companies.¹⁷ A tripartite model that has been hugely successful for one sector could be a template for much broader engagement, enabling citizens from all walks of life to enhance their skills and participate in the country's economic recovery.

03

Activate untapped talent pools

The survey reveals disenfranchised groups who feel excluded from upskilling, a broad cross section of society which includes disaffected people at both ends of the age spectrum, low-income groups, and people with disabilities. Many of the respondents in these groups share the viewpoint that training initiatives are not aimed 'at people like me'. Businesses struggling to fill positions because of skill shortages need to think about these 'hidden workers'.¹⁸

Businesses will need to adapt their 'one-size-fits-all' hiring practices to a more targeted, skills-based approach. The 'perfect candidate' may well be hiding in plain sight, an individual who for various reasons has not been able to make the transition into the workforce. If we can remove the barriers and instigate better training and more apprenticeships, skills shortages will become much less of an obstacle for future growth. It's important for businesses to set clear goals around inclusion in all their talent acquisition and development strategies, and to be transparent about their goals and their progress against them.

Methodology

Accenture commissioned YouGov to conduct a survey of the Irish population to understand attitudes and behaviors in relation to skills and skills needs (including digital skills).

All respondents are economically active (i.e. in work or looking for work) Irish citizens aged 18-66. The sample is broadly nationally representative in terms of age, gender, region and ethnicity.

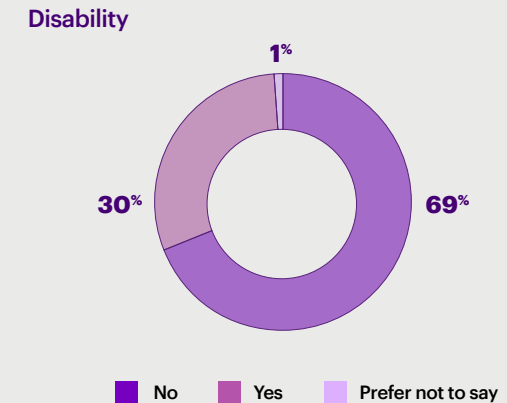
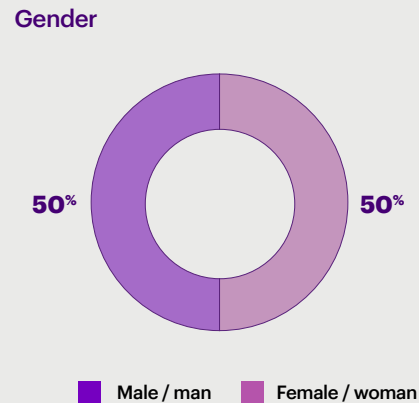
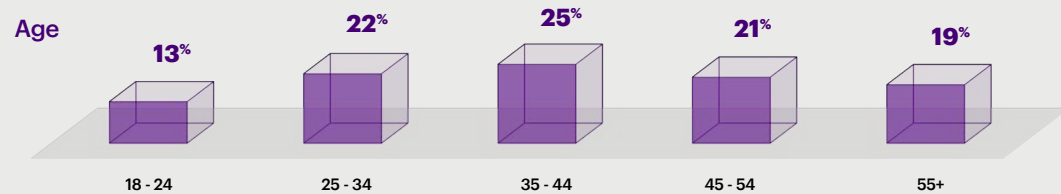
Most of the fieldwork was carried out online, however, due to the focus on digital skills it was important to ensure that the survey included the views of those who are not online. These respondents were interviewed by telephone (CATI).

In total, 1,003 respondents were interviewed:

- **952 completed an online survey**
- **51 completed a CATI survey**

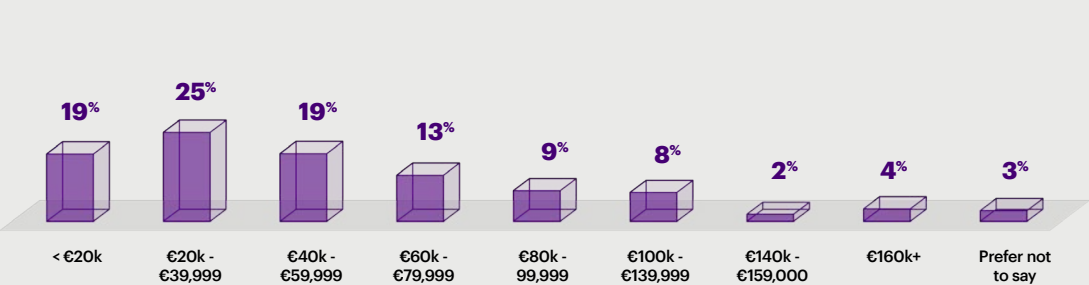
Fieldwork was conducted between December 4th – 21st 2020.

Our sample demographics in terms of age, gender and disability status are:

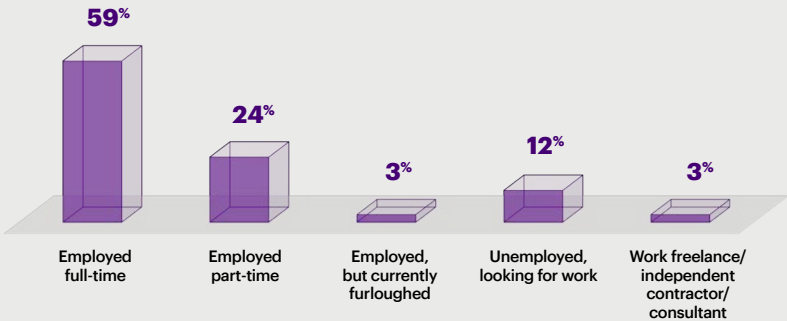


Our sample demographics in terms of household income, working status and education level are:

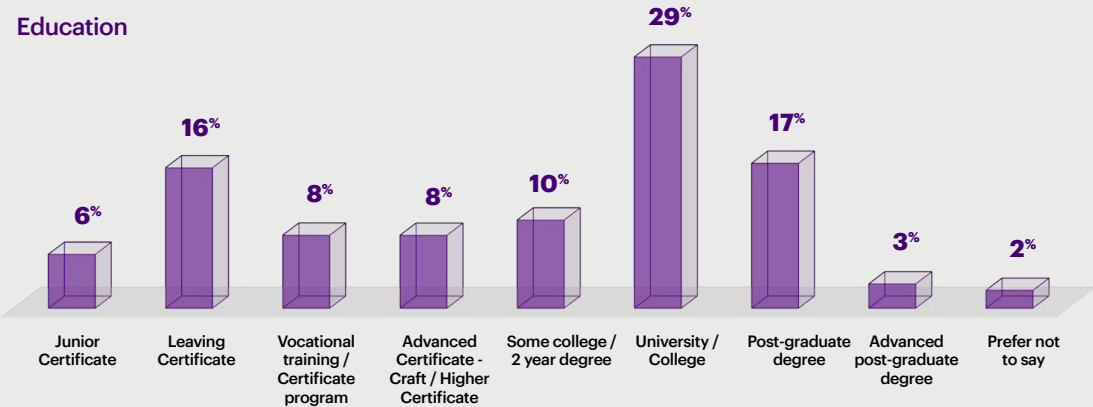
Household income



Working status



Education



References

- 1 Ibec, Ibec Quarterly Economic Outlook, Q4 2020, <https://www.ibec.ie/connect-and-learn/insights/insights/2020/12/15/ceo-update-latest-economic-outlook-report-gives-cause-for-optimism>
- 2 Ibec, Ibec submission to special committee on covid-a9 response on social protection expenditure, 9 June 2020, https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/special_committee_on_covid_19_response/submissions/2020/2020-09-30_submission-maeve-mcelwee-director-of-employer-relations-ibec-scc19r-r-0187_en.pdf
- 3 Talespin, <https://www.talespin.com/vr-soft-skills-training-study>, accessed 20 01 2021
- 4 Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment Protection, May 2020, The initial impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic on Ireland's labour market, <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/97112d-minister-doherty-announces-the-publication-of-a-working-paper-on-the/>
- 5 RTE, National Youth Council of Ireland calls for EUR190m package to tackle youth unemployment issue, Friday 17 July 2020. <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2020/0717/1154020-unemployment-youth-covid-19/>
- 6 ESRI, 22 July 2020, The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for policy in relation to children and young people: a research review, https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/SUSTAT94_3.pdf
- 7 CSO, Labour Force Survey, Q3 2020, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lfs/labourforcesurveylfsquarter32020/>
- 8 Economic and Social Research Institute, Minimum Wage Policy in Ireland, May 2020, <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/BP202102%20Final.pdf>
- 9 National Disability Authority, Employment Briefing Information, May 2019, <http://nda.ie/Resources/Factsheets/NDA-Factsheet-2-Employment/NDA-Factsheet-2-Employment-Briefing-Information1.pdf>
- 10 Accenture, 'It's Learning. Just not as we know it.', https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/Thought-Leadership-Assets/PDF/Accenture-Education-and-Technology-Skills-Research.pdf#zoom=50
- 11 The Digital Economy and Society Index, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-economy-and-society-index-desi>, accessed 20 01 2021
- 12 EU average for 'At least Basic Digital Skills' is 58.3% for 2020, for Ireland it was 53.4%. Indicator is for individuals aged 16-74 years old.
- 13 Ibec, Business leaders look ahead to key 2021 challenges, 18 January 2021, <https://www.ibec.ie/connect-and-learn/media/2021/01/17/business-leaders-look-ahead-to-key-2021-challenges>
- 14 'Government funds cutting-edge technology', 24 September 2020, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/News-And-Events/Department-News/2020/September/24092020.html>
- 15 Accenture Research analysis based on Accenture's 'Equality = Innovation' 2020 research program.
- 16 Accenture, New Skilling for Growth, 2019, https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/PDF-102/Accenture-Strategy-New-Skilling-for-Growth-POV-2019.pdf#zoom=50
- 17 IDA Ireland, Bio-pharmaceutical industry Ireland Statistics, accessed 19 01 2021, <https://www.idaireland.com/doing-business-here/industry-sectors/bio-pharmaceuticals>
- 18 Harvard Business Review, 'How Businesses can find Hidden Workers', 24 December 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/12/how-businesses-can-find-hidden-workers>

About Accenture Research

Accenture Research shapes trends and creates data-driven insights about the most pressing issues global organizations face. Combining the power of innovative research techniques with a deep understanding of our clients' industries. Our team of 300 researchers and analysts spans 20 countries and publishes hundreds of reports, articles and points of view every year. Our thought-provoking research – supported by proprietary data and partnerships with leading organizations, such as MIT and Harvard – guides our innovations and allows us to transform theories and fresh ideas into real-world solutions for our clients.

For more information, visit
www.accenture.com/research

About Accenture

Accenture is a global professional services company with leading capabilities in digital, cloud and security. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries, we offer Strategy and Consulting, Interactive, Technology and Operations services—all powered by the world's largest network of Advanced Technology and Intelligent Operations centers. Our 514,000 people deliver on the promise of technology and human ingenuity every day, serving clients in more than 120 countries. We embrace the power of change to create value and shared success for our clients, people, shareholders, partners and communities.

Visit us at **www.accenture.com**

