



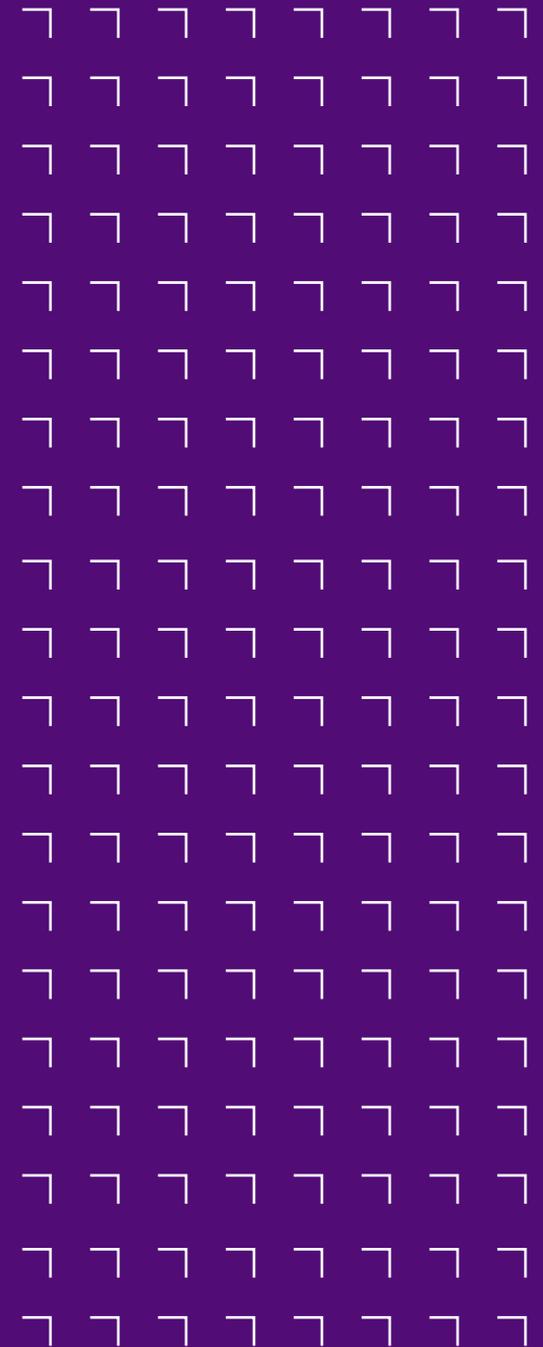
PROFESSIONAL
ACADEMY

Remaining Competitive Through Upskilling

The Key Challenges Facing Ireland's Workforce
October 2022



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Foreword

A key cornerstone of Ireland's success in attracting foreign direct investment has been the quality and talent of the workforce in the country.

IDA Ireland supports c1,700 multinational companies employing c275,300 people across the country. These companies require a variety of roles that focus on digitalisation, sustainability, and innovation and this is driving the need for basic data and digital skills among all workers as well as highly skilled roles. Most importantly, the flexibility and ability to re-skill and up-skill are now even more important to the Irish economy to meet the changing needs of enterprise.

With the pace of change increasing, driving the emergence of new business models and working practices, life-long learning is becoming more important and needs to become part of Irish daily working life. The

research completed by the UCD Professional Academy has revealed that an increasing number of Irish workers feel the need to upskill to keep pace with the changes they are seeing in their workplaces. Ensuring that Irish workers can easily access training and development opportunities will be crucial to supporting job creation, sustained investments and ultimately in our ability to continue attracting multinational companies to Ireland.

It is also encouraging to see those workers across many sectors and from all backgrounds are interested in professional upskilling courses. Ireland needs workers across all sectors and at all levels within businesses to be well trained and properly qualified to fill

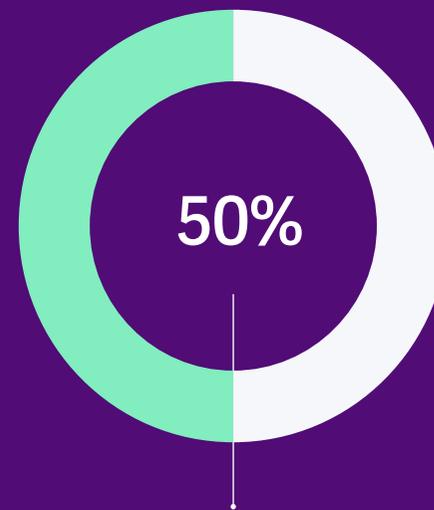
the positions that many of IDA Ireland's client companies have available. The insights from this report reveal that employers and workers in Ireland are willing and eager to engage in upskilling, whilst this is very encouraging, it is essential that we have in place a platform of learning opportunities that the Irish workforce can access in a flexible and cost-effective way that meets enterprise needs, provides employment choices for them and generates overall economic benefit.

Breda O'Toole,
Head of Department
Talent Transformation & Innovation
IDA Ireland

The Global Workforce Skills Challenge

The rapid rise of digital technologies is transforming the world of work, resulting in an urgent need for upskilling and reskilling on a global scale.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2020¹ states that half of all employees around the world will need reskilling by 2025; it also estimates that upskilling workforces could boost global GDP by \$6.5trillion by 2030².



50% of all employees will need reskilling by 2025¹



upskilling has the potential to boost global GDP by \$6.5t by 2030²

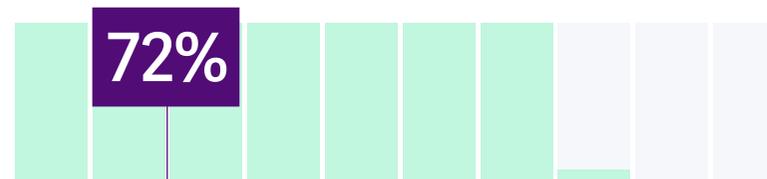
The Global Workforce Skills Challenge

This emerging challenge is identified not only by global policy advisors, but also business consultants with numerous reports by Deloitte³, PwC⁴ and Gartner⁵ citing the need to urgently address workforce skills gaps, or face economic growth constraints.

Policy makers, business leaders and individual workers all have a vested interest in solving the issue of workforce upskilling – answering how you equip people and organisations with the skills they need to participate and thrive within their economy.



of the workforce needs new skills to get their jobs done⁵



executives ranked “the ability of their people to adapt reskill and assume new roles” as the most or second most important factor³



CEOs said finding the right skills was a threat to their business⁴

³ Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends survey 2021 – Workforce Trends 2020: <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/human-capital-trends/2021/workforce-trends-2020.html>

⁴ PwC 23rd Annual Global CEO Survey: https://www.pwc.ie/publications/2020/sustaining-success-unpredictable-times-ceo-survey-ireland.pdf?utm_source=page&utm_medium=cta_hero&utm_campaign=ceo_survey_2020&utm_term=download_report&utm_content=top

⁵ Gartner TalentNeuron™ data HR Research 2021: <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2021-02-03-gartner-hr-research-finds-fifty-eight-percent-of-the-workforce-will-need-new-skill-sets-to-do-their-jobs-successfully>

Executive Summary



Aaron McKenna, CEO
UCD Professional Academy

The skills required for a competitive economy are evolving rapidly.

The UCD Professional Academy is Ireland's leading destination for workforce upskilling focusing on short skills-based training.

We have enrolled over 18,000 professional students in under three years. We want to continue developing the knowledge capital required for Ireland's organisations and workforce to thrive into the future.

To support this ambition, the UCD Professional Academy commissioned detailed market research in 2021 and again in 2022. Based on a nationally representative quantitative survey, the report seeks to further understand upskilling in an Irish context. It particularly seeks to gain a better understanding of how short professional courses are considered in

this context, what motivates potential students to pursue short professional courses and the barriers that prevent them from doing so.

This report is particularly opportune, coming at a time of major economic change as we continue to recover from the global Covid-19 pandemic, adapt to new ways of working and contend with growing geopolitical and global economic uncertainty. As the rate of economic change accelerates, continuous professional development will play an ever-increasing role in unlocking both the professional potential of individuals and the wider economic potential of the country.

Executive Summary

The findings in this report reflect this broader context. It is clear that demand for upskilling is high among the workforce in Ireland.

A quarter of those surveyed indicated that they intend to sign up for a short professional course within the next twelve months.

A further third of survey respondents indicated that they would consider a course in the next twelve months if the right one was available. Consideration for a course is even higher over the medium term, with two thirds of workers reporting that they would consider taking a course over the next 24-36 months.

We have also seen the Covid-19 pandemic affects how people want to access upskilling courses, with online and flexible learning options becoming increasingly popular, with **a quarter of the public wanting to take courses on a part-time basis** on weekday evenings, over a number of weeks and after they have finished

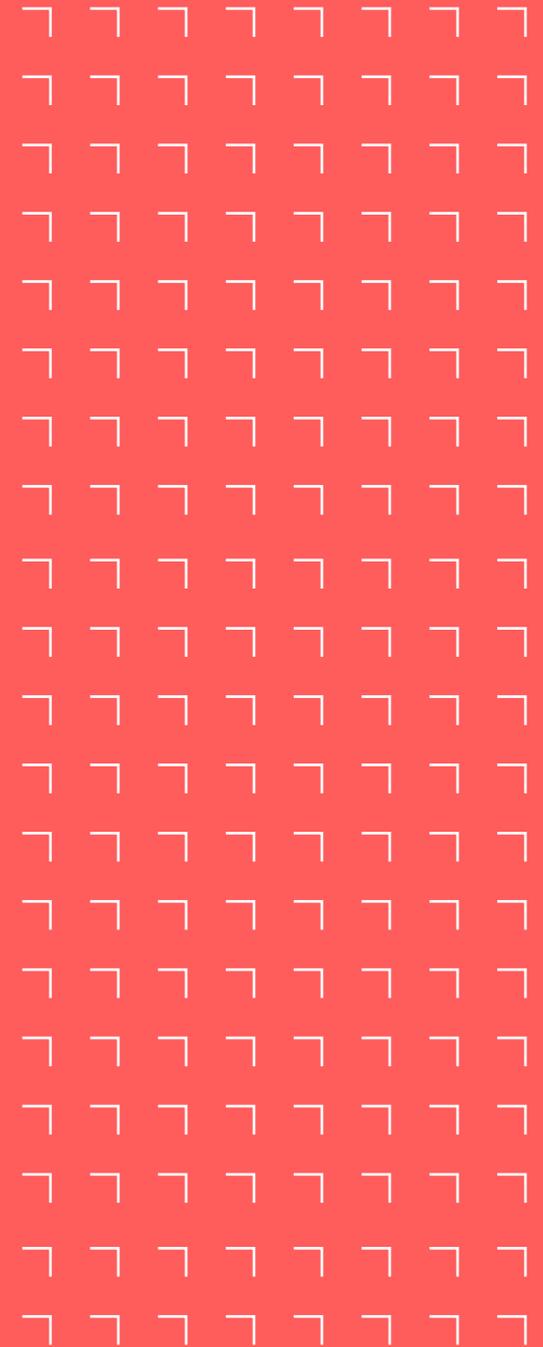
work; a hybrid of online and in person classes is the preferred delivery of just under a third of survey respondents.

However, the report also clearly demonstrates the impact of rising living costs on the capacity to pursue professional development opportunities. **Affordability is the most significant barrier to pursuing a short professional course**, with just under a third of survey respondents listing this as an issue. Unsurprisingly, this issue was most apparent for those from lower socio-economic groups.

The UCD Professional Academy hopes that the insights provided in this report can inform the upskilling of Ireland's workforce, which is essential to ensuring that Ireland can continue to thrive into the future.



Research Methodology



Fieldwork Details

Nationally-representative quantitative survey, with 1001 adults 18+.

Fieldwork conducted between: Thur 17th June 2021 - Mon 28th June 2021
and Wed 15th June 2022 – Mon 27th June 2022.

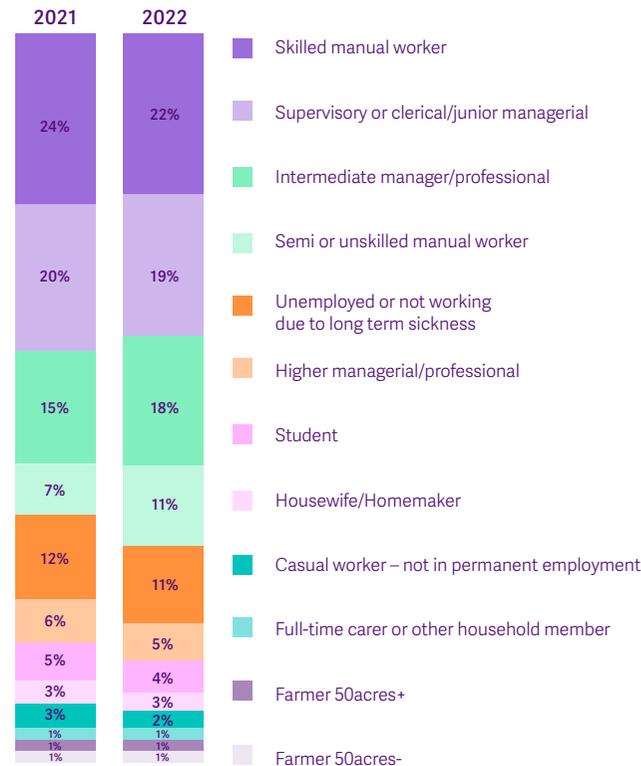
Age				
	2021		2022	
18 to 24	142	13%	113	11%
25 to 34	209	19%	167	17%
35 to 44	255	23%	206	21%
45 to 54	187	17%	180	18%
55 to 64	155	14%	143	14%
65+	153	14%	193	19%
Total	1101	100%	1001	100%

Socio-economic group				
	2021		2022	
ABC1	485	44%	440	44%
C2DEF	616	56%	561	56%
Total	1101	100%	1001	100%

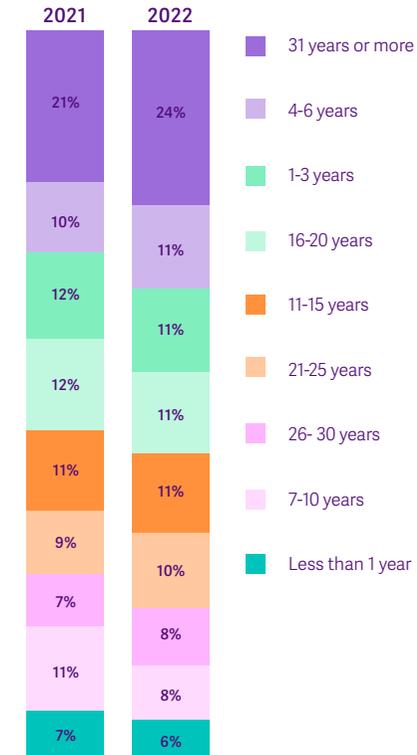
Region				
	2021		2022	
Dublin	344	31%	289	29%
Leinster Ex Dublin	299	27%	268	27%
Munster	277	25%	268	27%
Connaught/ Ulster	181	16%	176	18%
Total	1101	100%	1001	100%

Gender				
	2021		2022	
Male	540	49%	491	49%
Female	554	50%	510	51%
Transgender	5	<1%	0	0%
I do not identify as female, male or transgender	2	<1%	0	0%
Total	1101	100%	1001	100%

Occupation



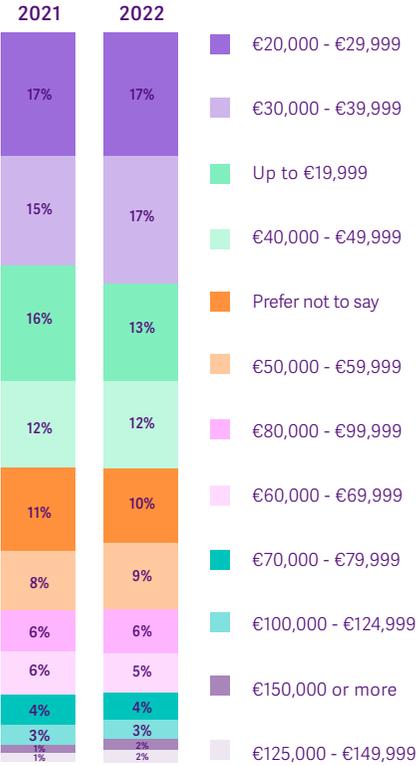
Years in Workforce



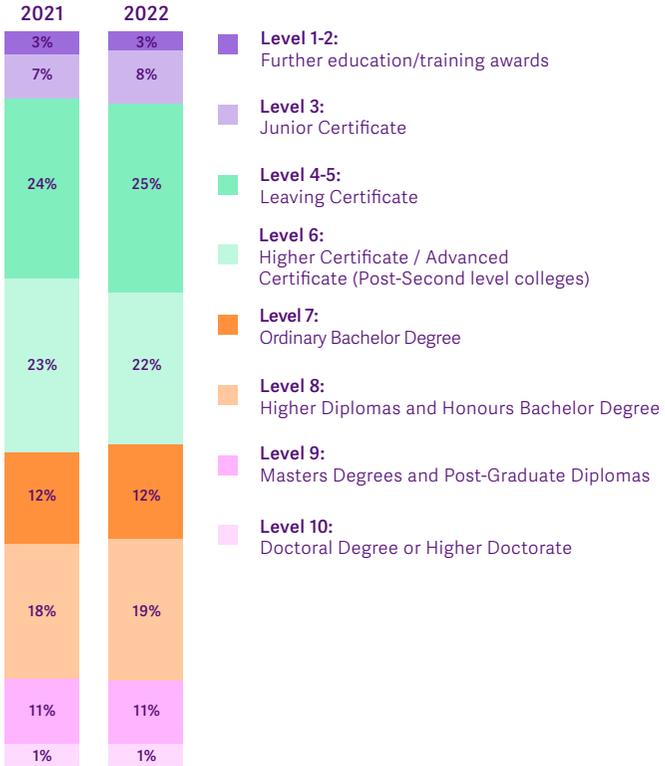
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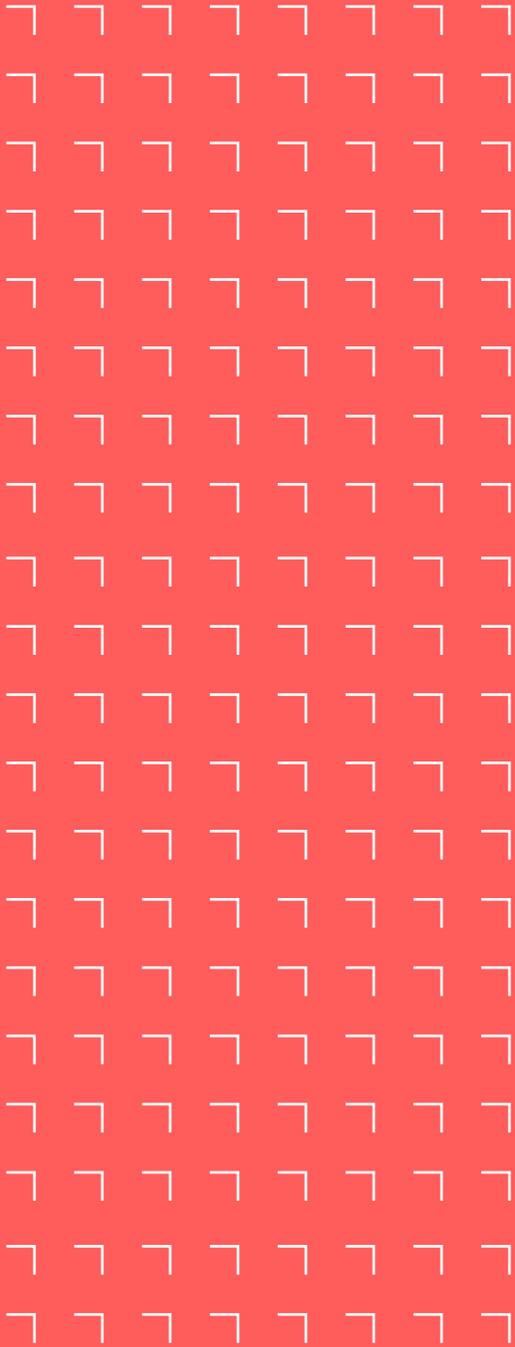
Income



Educational Attainment Profile



Key Findings



Appetite for Upskilling

Ireland's workforce is deeply committed to lifelong learning, provided it is offered and delivered in a manner which suits their individual circumstances.

A working population that takes responsibility and interest in its own upskilling is a very strong starting point. Further on in the report we'll explore which barriers stand in their way, and how we can work to overcome them.

63%

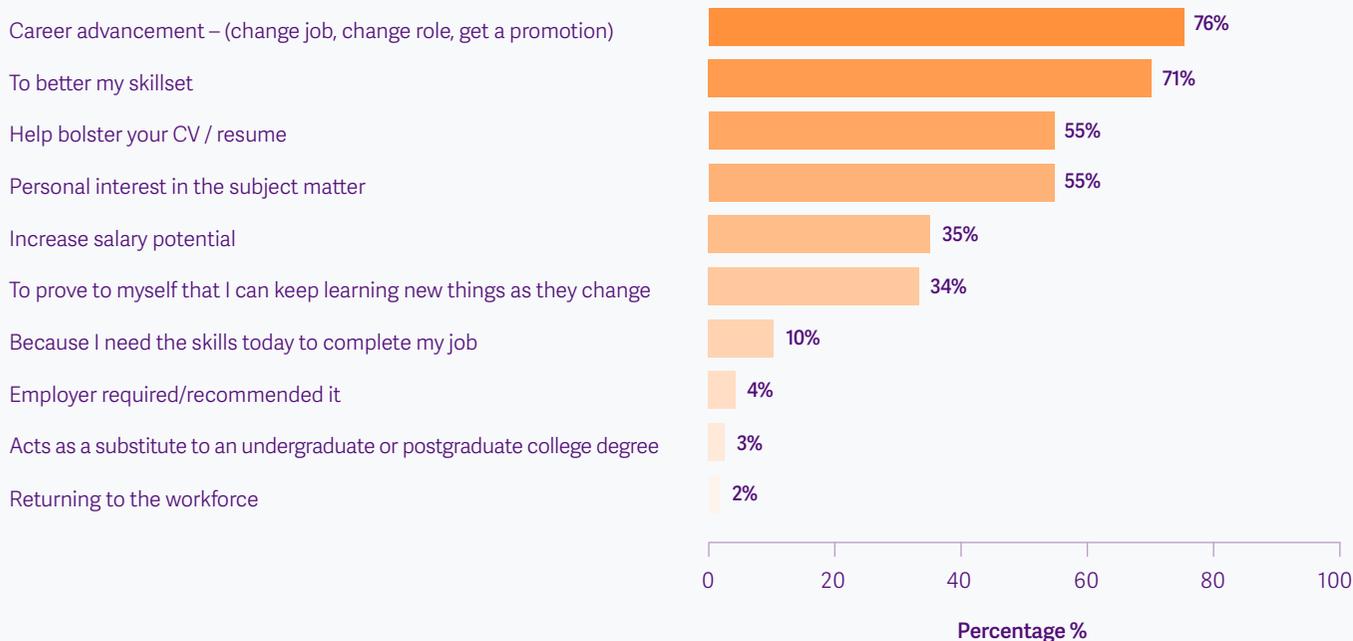
of the population have undertaken professional short courses since completing their formal education.

24%

of the population claims to have signed up to study, or are in the final stages of signing up to study a course starting within the next 12 months.

Career advancement is the most popular reason to take a course

Reasons for taking a course



Summary:

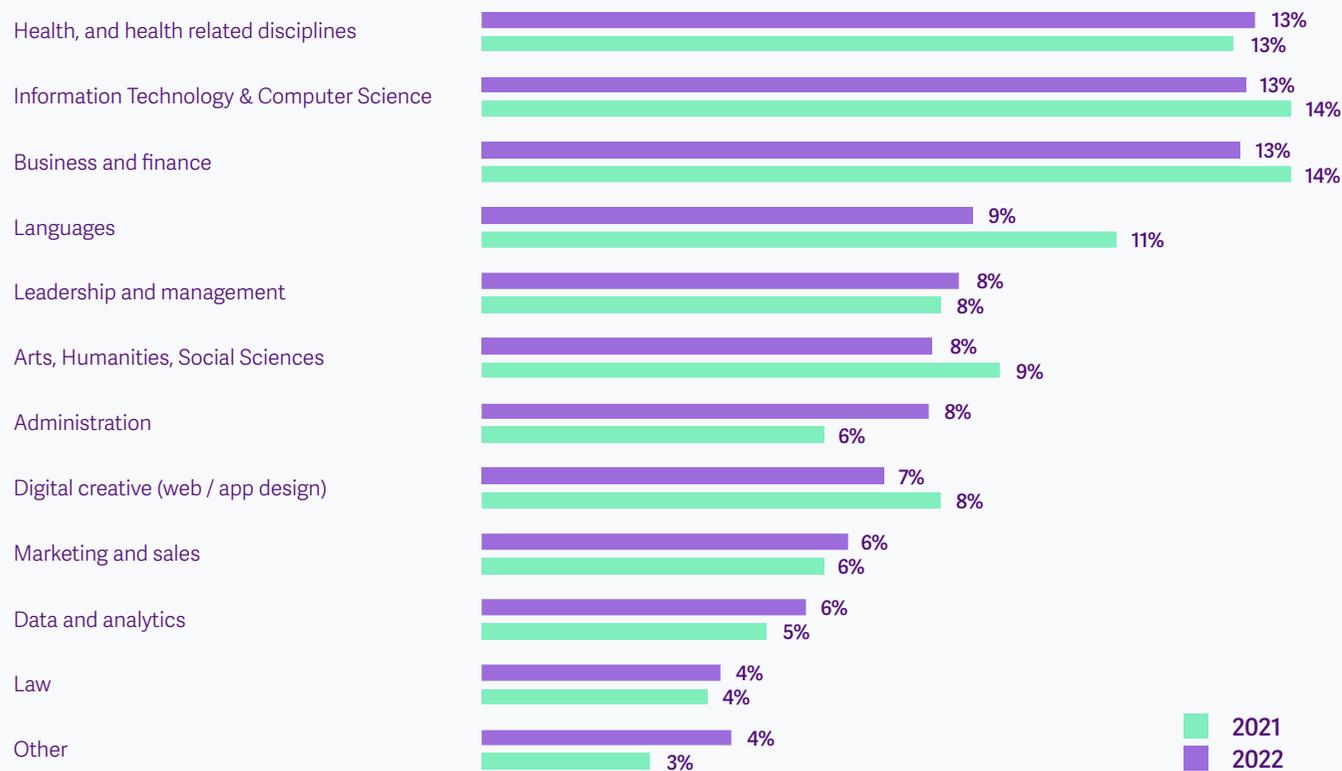
Workers are clear on their reasons for engaging with professional education. Overwhelmingly people cite 'career advancement' as the leading motivator, followed by 'Bettering my skillset' and 'Bolstering my CV'. The Irish workforce has very clear objectives when deciding to dedicate their time to upskilling.

Recommendation:

Courses must be practical, pragmatic and aligned fully to industry or role specific needs. As well as measuring learning outcomes, quality should be assessed on impact i.e. Does the learner feel the course helped them advance in their career? If an organisation wants its staff to engage fully with upskilling, they must also link it to specific career advancement goals.

Core business and digital skills are in high demand

Subjects areas respondents are most interested in



Summary:

When asked which areas they wanted to upskill in, people leaned into core business and digital skills.

Both soft and technical skills requirements are sought after with course subjects skewing towards skills such as IT and computer science, alongside business, finance and leadership skills.

It is interesting that whilst data analytics is one of the most in demand skills requirements for businesses today, relatively few learners showed an appetite for study in this area.

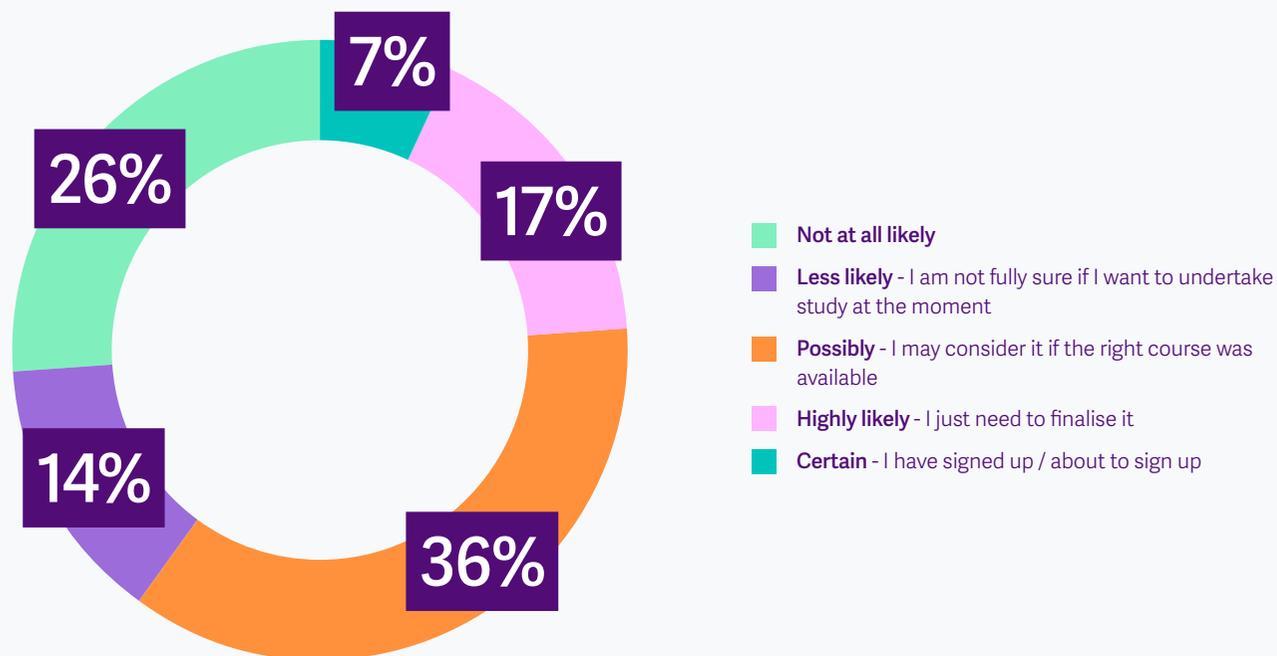
Recommendation:

Relevant, applicable business and digital skills need to be readily accessible, on terms that suit the learner.

Increasingly roles require a blend of both soft and technical skills. In technical areas where there is a known skills shortage, study topics need to be clarified and made accessible to a wider audience, who might otherwise not consider themselves suitable for the learning path.

Meeting learners on their terms could more than double those engaging in short form upskilling

Next 12 months



Summary:

Over a third (36%) of the population say they “might consider it if the right course was available” both in terms of content and accessibility of delivery. An additional 14% say they are not likely to undertake any study as they’re not fully sure they want to at the moment.

Recommendation:

Skills strategies at a national and organisational level should consider both what we teach, but how we teach it, making it accessible to as wide an audience as possible.

Relevant, applicable business and digital skills need to be readily accessible. There is a massive opportunity to activate latent demand in the market and get increasing numbers of people into upskilling, if we get the skills offer and delivery right.

Barriers & Solutions

3/4's of UCD Professional Academy learners have more than seven years' work experience; most are aged between 25 - 44 years old⁶. They are juggling busy professional and personal life commitments, and although they acknowledge the importance of upskilling, they have competing demands on their time and money.

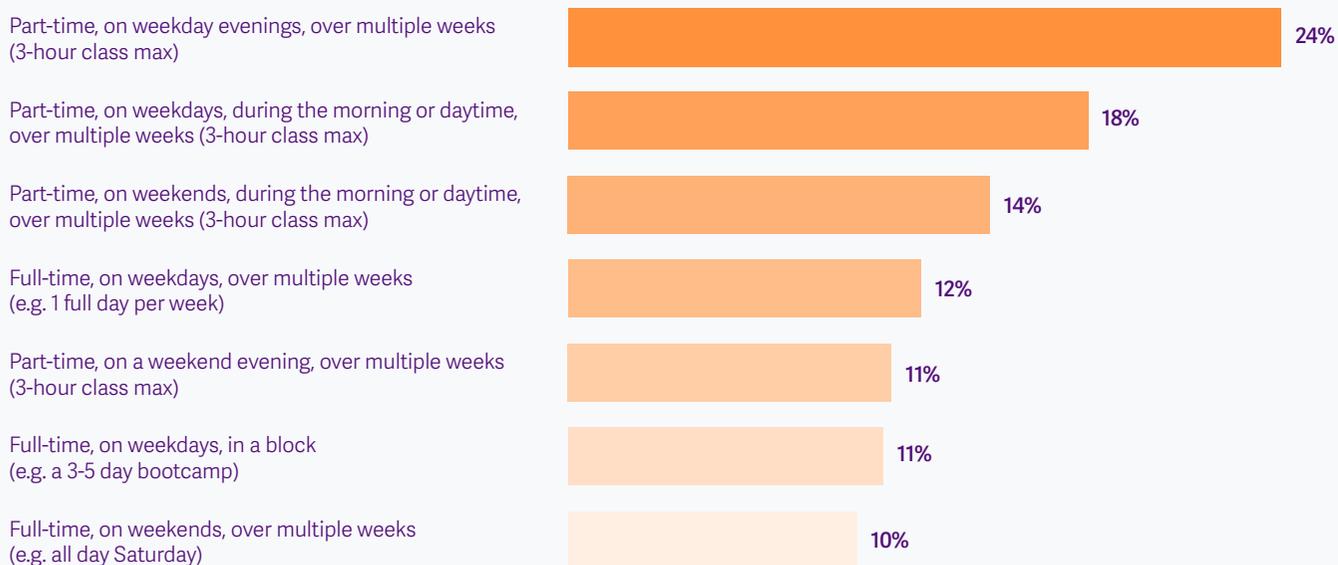
To engage Ireland's workforce in continuous professional development, we must consider accessibility through funding and convenience. Furthermore, learning must be compelling, engaging and enriching for people to stick with it.

We have to meet working professionals on their terms regarding subject matter, accessibility, convenience and engagement to achieve the cut through required. Simply put, people need compelling reasons to commit their scant time and resources to their individual upskilling.



A course not being available at the right time is a major barrier to study

Preferred days and times to take a short professional education course



Summary:

When we ask people what might prevent them from taking a course, 40% answered “if the course is not available at a convenient time for me.”

Trying to fit upskilling into traditional educational delivery models and timetables does not work for a great many people. **When** we deliver is as important as **what** we deliver to maximise upskilling opportunities for people and organisations.

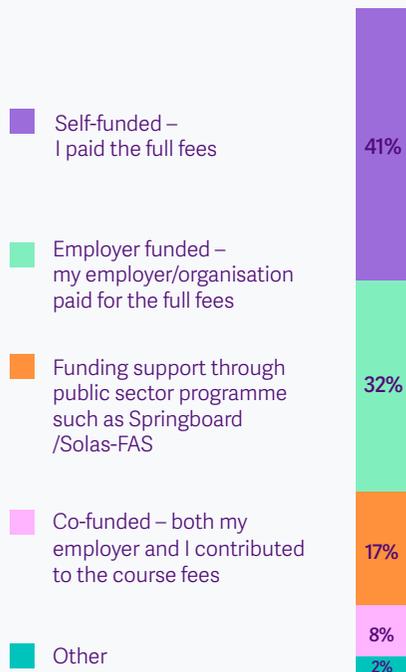
People tell us that part-time on weekday evenings is the most popular time to take a course. But this can be quite challenging for traditional providers who are geared towards full time provision within term timetables. The majority of people want flexible schedules, rather than learning in full time blocks. At times, there can be a disconnect between the times working professionals are available to learn and the times many upskilling courses are being run (e.g., in full time blocks during the working day).

Recommendation:

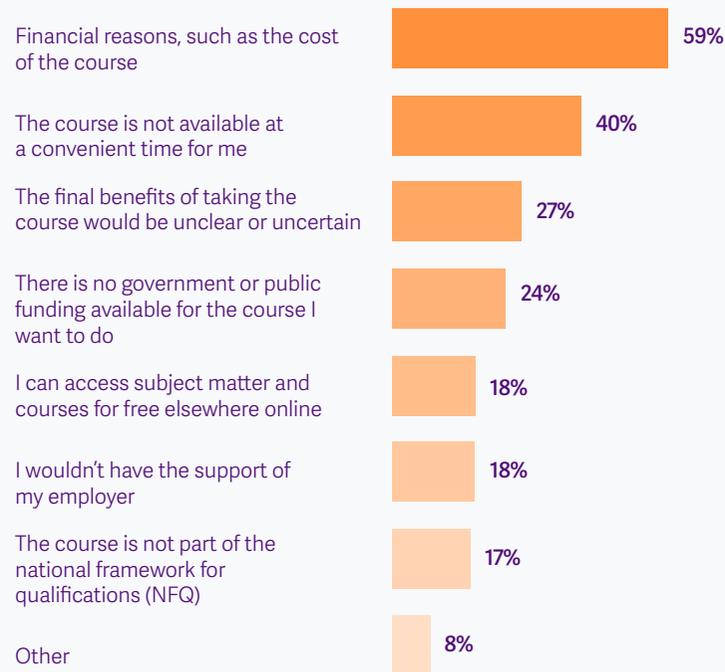
Providers should flex their operating models as much as possible to offer the same course through multiple timetable modes. Less than half of the population want a course delivered within the 9-5, Monday-Friday envelope of traditional timetables. Employers should take care to note employee preferences around when they can fit in upskilling around busy lives. We must provide upskilling opportunities at a time that suits working professionals in order to make it stick.

Cost is the biggest barrier to study

Funding for most recent professional education short course



Barriers to taking another short professional education course



Summary:

41% of people pay for their own course, 40% are funded in full or part by their employer, and the balance are primarily funded by the state. 59% of people say that financial reasons are the biggest barrier to taking a course.

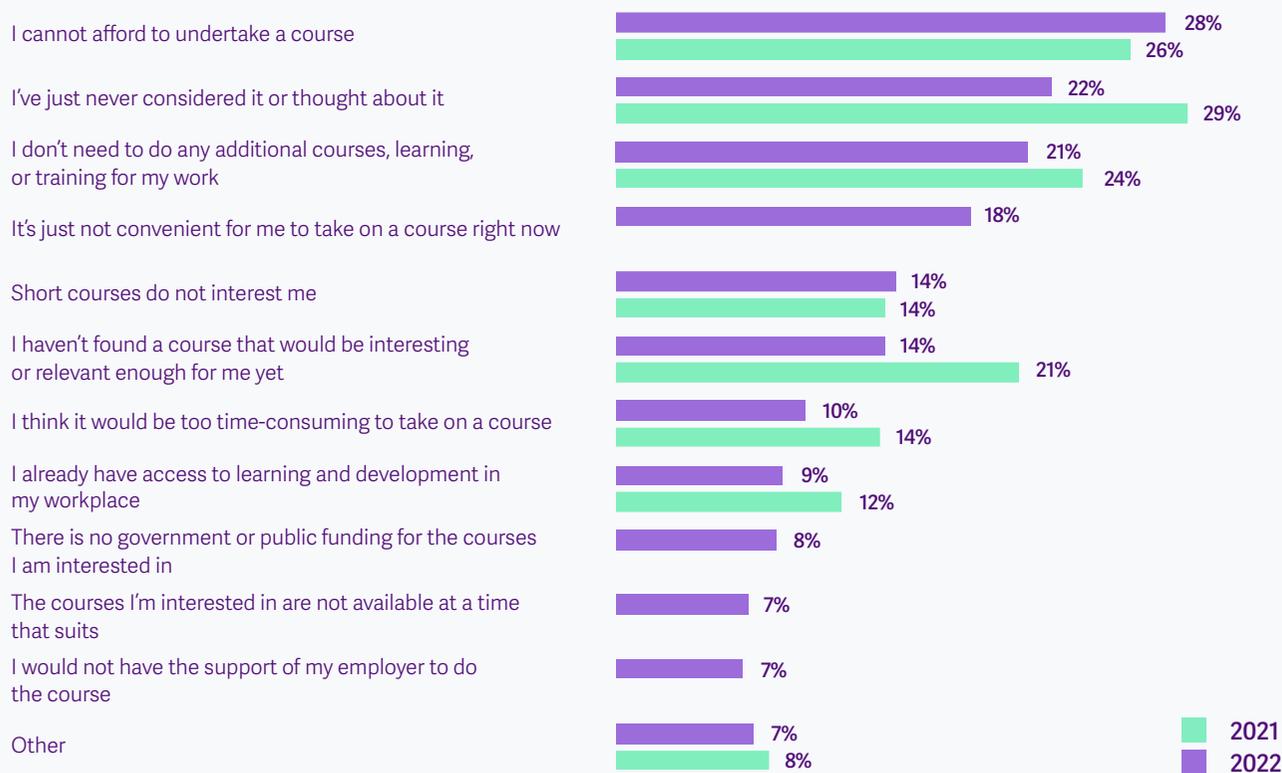
If we accept that upskilling is vital for our national competitiveness, it is impressive to note that half of individuals are either fully or partially paying for their own study. It takes a significant investment of both time and money to take a course, and a large number of people already show a high level of commitment to do so.

Recommendation:

Policymakers should consider ways to make the wide range of high quality upskilling options more affordable for individuals, for example through income tax rebates or vouchers to study across as wide a variety of courses as practicable. There are many supports through Skillnets, for example, for employers to engage with the National Training Fund and increase their training budgets. Similar supports for individuals should be better highlighted and be expanded. Employers should widen participation in part or fully paid courses as a way to drive both productivity and employee retention.

After affordability, the biggest barriers to upskilling are inertia and inconvenience

Barriers to taking any short professional education courses



Summary:

When asked why people had not undertaken any professional education short courses, the most popular response this year was affordability; the next highest response highlighted a cohort who had simply not considered participating in a course, followed by a perceived lack of skills requirement and then convenience.

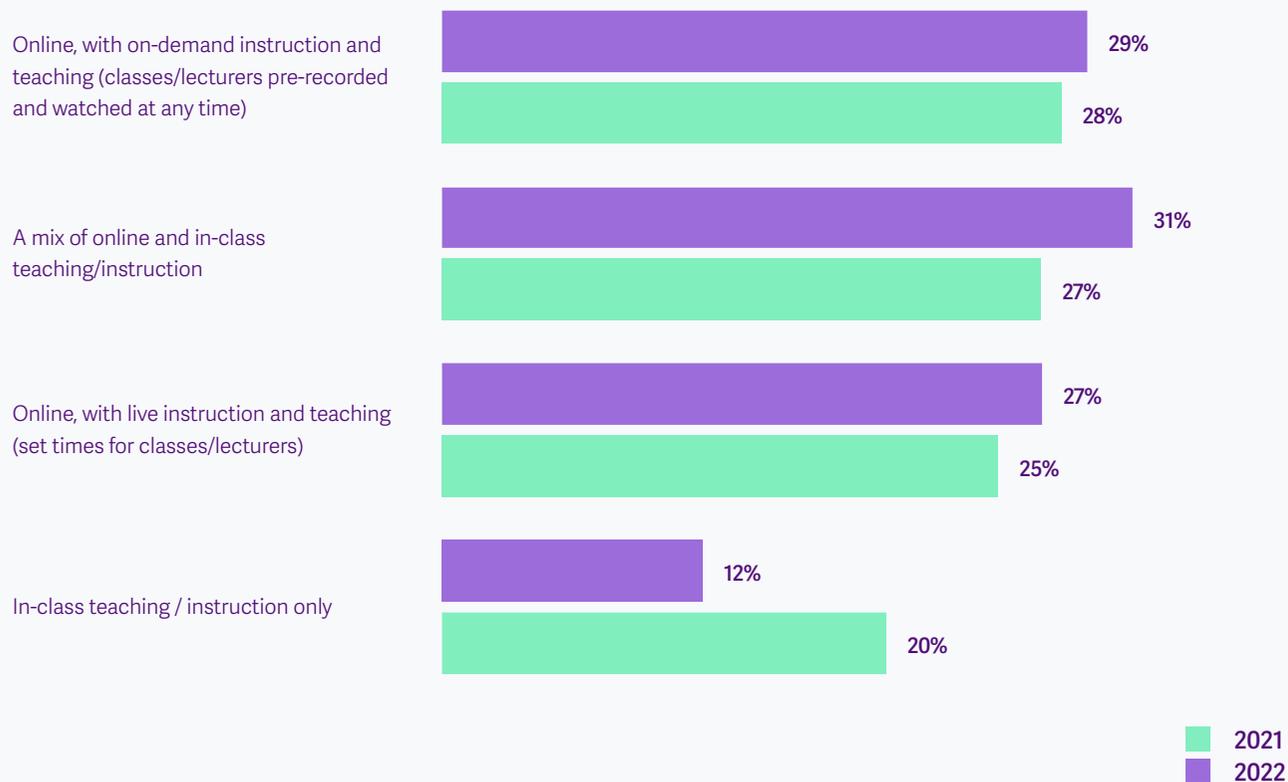
Recommendation:

There is a requirement for providers and employers to better communicate the value of investing time in professional upskilling, working to demonstrate the value to the individual learner's career advancement.

Convenience is a consistent issue for professional upskillers, as they already have busy work / life schedules to factor in. Providers must meet learners on their terms, providing study options to fit within existing lifestyles.

Only 12% of people want classroom-only courses, down from 20% a year earlier

Preferred methods of taking a professional education short course



Summary:

The pandemic has moved the needle for online activity in a significant way. Only 12% of people in Ireland would prefer to take an upskilling course entirely in the classroom. 29% want a pre-recorded, on-demand course, 27% want live but fully-online learning and 31% would like a blend of online and in-class study.

There are significant differences in preference between age groups. 19% of 55-65 year olds would prefer a classroom only course, falling to 9% among 25-44 year olds.

88% of learners want online delivery in some way, shape or form. The majority of people still want live, interactive classes, but a significant portion of learners now also want on-demand courseware.

Recommendation:

Courses should be run across multiple platforms and settings throughout the year to ensure participants have the best chance to learn in the right way for them. Providers need to continue producing high quality online learning, be it live or on demand, and policymakers could assist here with additional funding for the cost intensive nature of this work.

There is a significant class divide in areas like business, management and data analytics

Course subject areas

	2022 ABC1	2022 C2DEF
Information Technology & Computer Science	24%	21%
Administration	19%	19%
Business and finance	22%	14%
Leadership and management	25%	8%
Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences	10%	11%
Data and analytics	14%	2%

Summary:

While individuals from the ABC1 and C2DEF socio-economic groupings are about as likely as one another to take a course in computer science, administration or arts, ABC1's are far more likely to take a course in business and finance (1.5 x more likely), leadership and management (3 x more likely), or data and analytics (7 x more likely). We need to ensure that opportunities for upskilling into high-skilled, high-paying areas are spread equally.

Recommendation:

Short upskilling courses can be an excellent way to get people to explore a particular area and start a reskilling journey. Providers should ensure courses and their related promotional materials are accessible and inclusive. Policymakers should continue to make upskilling a visible option and pay particular attention to promoting study in these areas of critical skills shortage.

Embedding upskilling

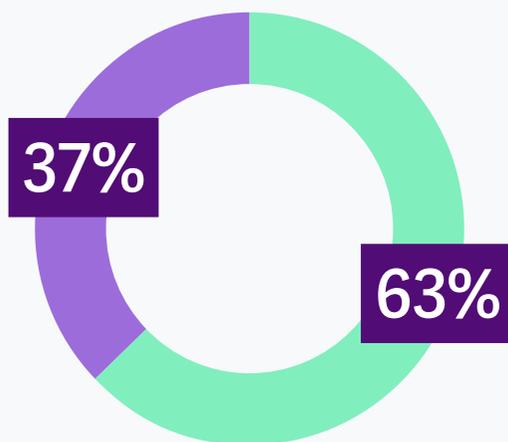
Our research shows that when an individual overcomes the barriers and engages in upskilling, they are far more likely to continue taking courses in the future. If we can get an individual through one course, we can build a habit of ongoing upskilling.

Having overcome the barriers we have outlined, and achieved success through short-form upskilling, we see that professionals are more engaged with longer form study, enriching their skills and CVs with more in-depth learning credentials, enhancing their value to the workforce and workplace.



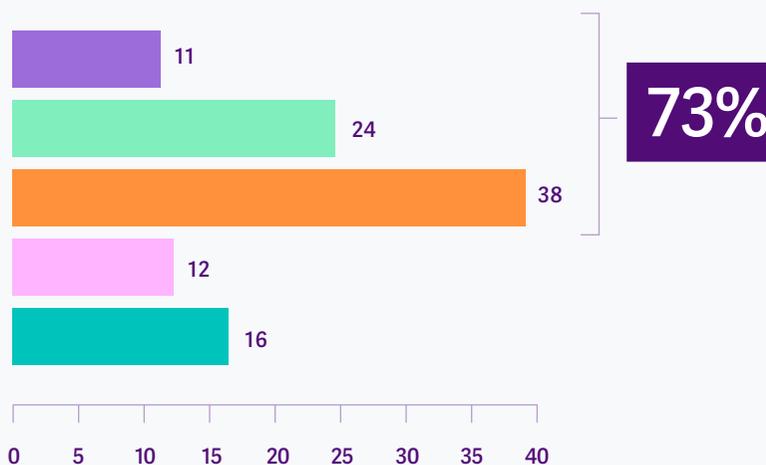
Once you get into the habit of upskilling, you're far more likely to do it again

63% of people have taken a short course



Yes
No

of those, 73% are considering further study in the next year



Certain
Highly likely
Possibly
Less likely
Not at all likely

Summary:

If you've taken a course in the past you're more likely to take a course in the future. It creates a positive habit for learning and development. **73% of people currently considering a course have done another course in the past. People who have not taken a course in the past are considerably less likely to be thinking about doing one in the near future.**

From qualitative interviews with UCD Professional Academy students we find insecurity and uncertainty around their capacity for re-engaging successfully with learning to be a major barrier.

Recommendation:

Breaking down the barriers to start people back into lifelong learning, and building their confidence through short courses will likely set someone up for a lifetime of upskilling.

Providers should seek to clarify and reassure learners about what commitment they are undertaking with short course upskilling, with clear walkthroughs of what it practically takes to complete a course. Sample lectures or even micro-courses of study should be facilitated to help learners get into upskilling. Policymakers should focus some of their public awareness campaigns on upskilling around the uncertainties people have getting back into education. Once individuals have successfully completed any form of substantive upskilling, they will be far more likely to stay engaged for the long term.

Left: Since finishing your formal education, have you undertaken any professional education short courses?

Right: Thinking about the next 12 months, how likely are you to undertake a professional education short course, or a learning & development course?

Source: UCD Professional Academy x Genesis 2022 Quant Benchmarking

9 in 10 people taking a short course were not considering longer form study

89%

were not considering a longer form course.

42%

are now more likely to, having completed a short course.

Left: At the time you were considering taking a course with the UCD Professional Academy, did you also consider taking a course with any other part of UCD (eg Smurfit Business School)?

Right: After completing a course with UCD Professional Academy, do you think you are more or less likely to consider taking a longer accredited course (for example, a Masters) with UCD?

Source: UCD Professional Academy student census Oct 21 - June 22

Summary:

The individual looking to take on a substantial course of educational study does not cross over with the individual looking to take some short, sharp upskilling. However, we've found that having successfully completed a short course, 42% of people say they are more likely to consider taking something more substantial, such as a masters. While many people might take another short course, there is a pipeline of postgraduate students now at UCD who began their study with the short courses of the Professional Academy. Short courses offer an excellent entry point for more in-depth upskilling.

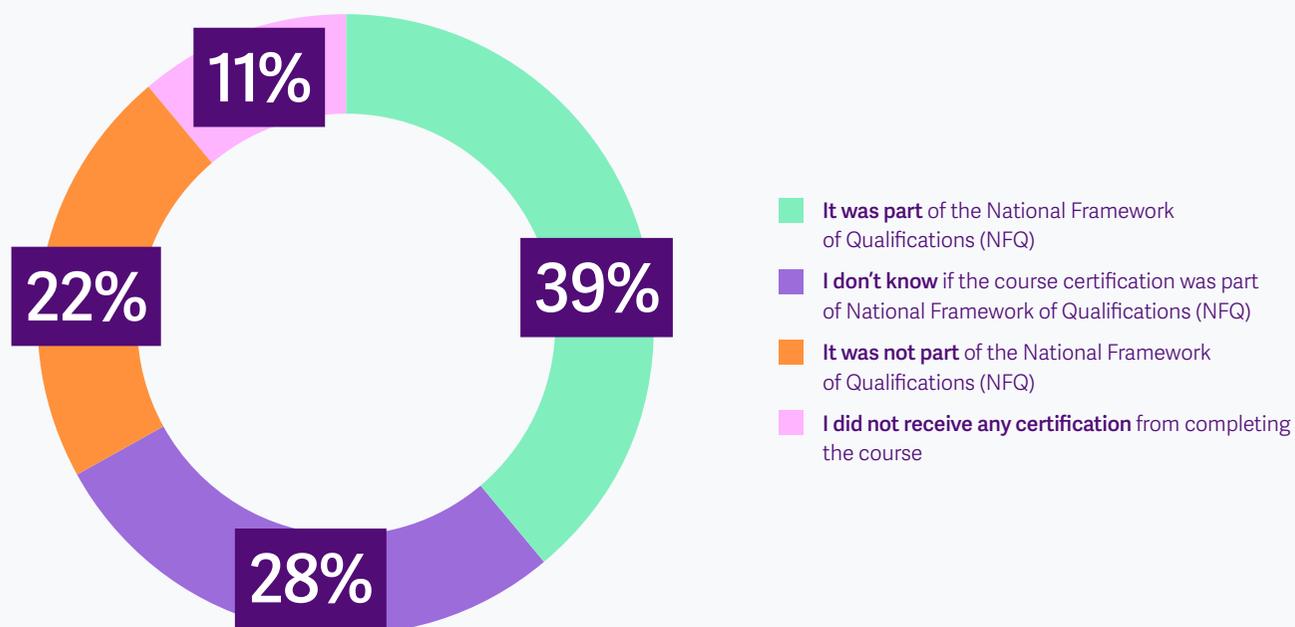
Recommendation:

The recent OECD Recognition of Prior Learning report⁷ explains 'Upskilling and reskilling should be among governments' key priorities in the context of evolving skill needs and changing labour markets. As highlighted by the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, "everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that allow full participation in society and successful transitions in the labour market" (European Commission, 2017).'

Providers should not fear cannibalisation from developing a well-structured upskilling offer, and those who have significant postgraduate offerings should be exposing short course takers to options for further study. Policymakers should continue to invest in recognition of prior learning efforts and create cross-institutional routes for learners to progress from initial exploration to more in-depth postgraduate study.

Upskilling is occurring inside and outside traditional educational frameworks

Certifications or qualifications received from most recent short course



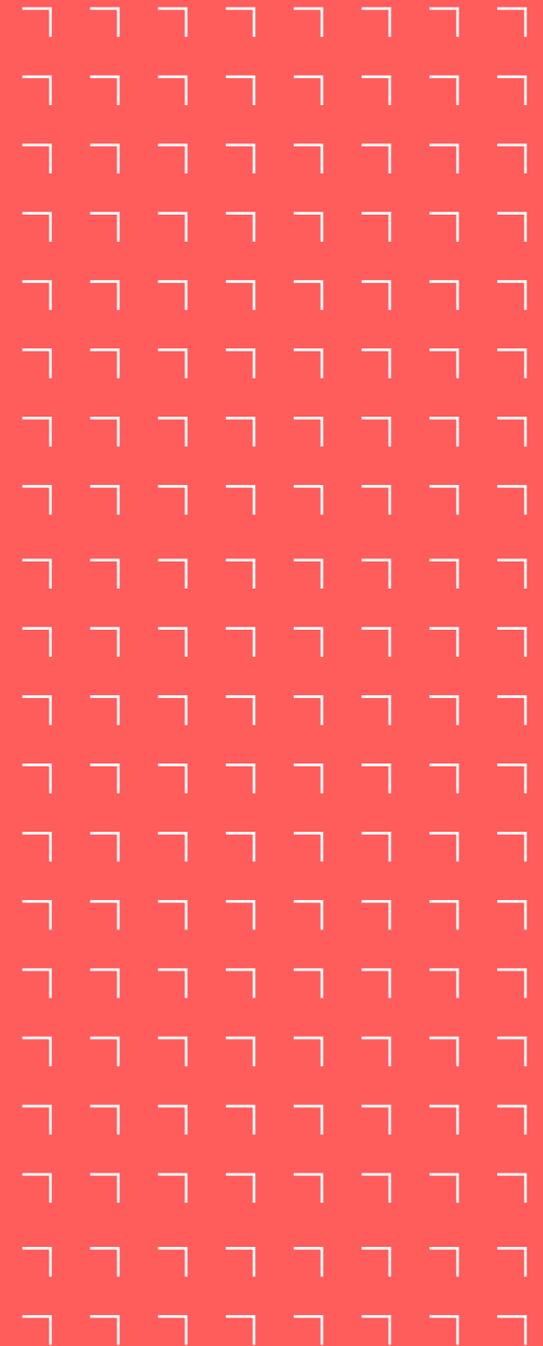
Summary:

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is the reference standard for traditional education provision. Our research shows that a significant amount of upskilling occurs outside the NFQ framework, and for example the UCD Professional Academy has largely offered a provision of courses that do not lead to a traditional award. There are efforts underway to ensure that Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is incorporated into our education system in a more formal way. The ecosystem of upskilling is significant and for learners and employers the focus can be on a course that is available at the right time, with the right learning outcomes, delivered in an accessible fashion.

Recommendation:

Stakeholders should recognise the significant space for upskilling inside and outside the formal NFQ. Robust quality assurance mechanisms are required and are often provided at an institutional level, and policymakers should continue work to promote the recognition of prior learning obtained through high quality alternative credentials and include these credentials in upskilling portals and other initiatives in future.

UCD Professional Academy > Case study



UCD Professional Academy > Case study

From start up to Irish market leader in short, professional course provision in three years. How UCD Professional Academy re-imagined the Irish workforce upskilling response.

UCD Professional Academy is an independent wholly owned part of UCD designed to address the need for skills development in the workforce. Courses are short, sharp, focused, and impactful, designed and delivered by industry practitioners. Course awards are not credit rated nor part of traditional University award; they are widely accepted by employers and many students are sponsored to study by their organisation.

“We have become the leader, not just because we have a high quality brand, but because we deliver on the promise of that brand as a relentlessly customer-centric, data-obsessed organisation.”

Aaron McKenna, CEO
UCD Professional Academy

18,000+

professionals have enrolled with us

500+

companies have trusted us to train their teams

40+

Professional Academy Certifications and Diplomas to help staff go further

UCD Professional Academy > Case study

UCD Professional Academy was founded to address workforce upskilling through lifelong learning: Working professionals were looking for trustworthy career oriented education, accessible on their terms; employers were seeking cost-effective training with high impact and learner engagement. A clear gap was identified for high quality, focussed training relevant to professional roles, at a convenient time and delivery format. UCD positioned itself to bring together a high quality brand, a portfolio of excellent in-demand courses, and a highly structured sales, marketing and delivery engine to maximise on the opportunity.

The UCD Professional Academy launched in December 2019 and initially enrolled 200 students across 10 courses. In under three years, the program portfolio has grown to over 18,000 enrolments in 40+ courses, with 20 more in the pipeline, which span a range of in-demand, practical and immediately applicable skills areas

such as data analytics, leadership, HR, project management, and coding. As learners build their competencies, many return to engage in complementary learning pathways.

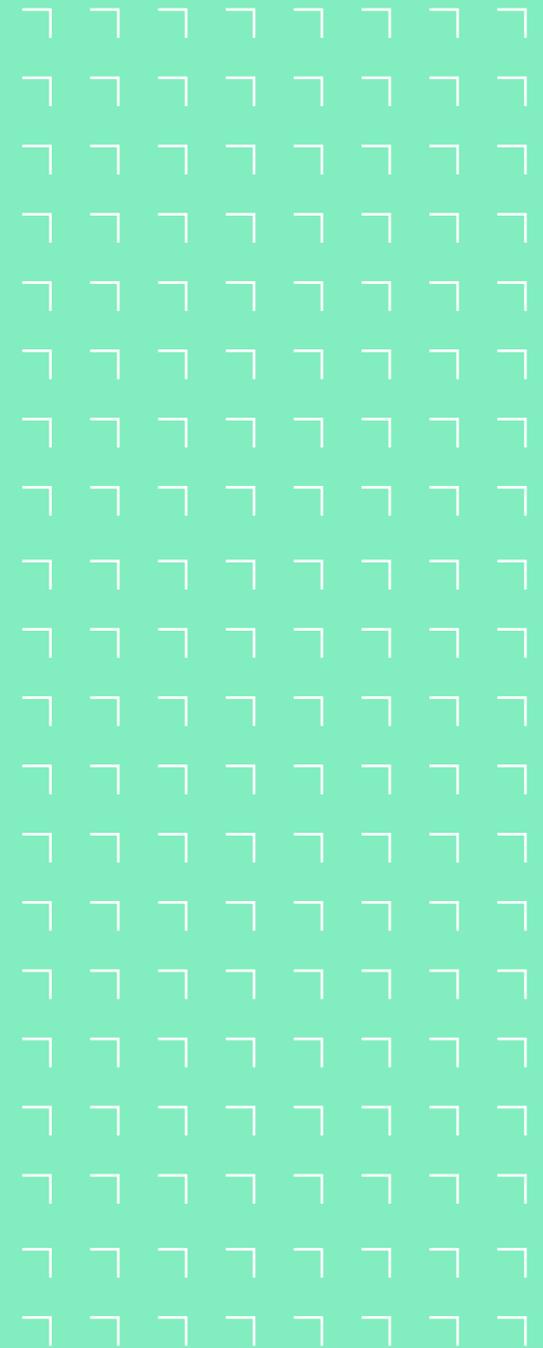
Course duration is typically 36 hours, with live sessions delivered on-demand, live online and in classroom. Teaching is scheduled and designed around the needs of working professionals, with classes in the early evenings. Learners are able to enrol in non-credit courses year round to suit their needs, and are awarded digital badges on completion.

UCD Professional Academy represents a new model for the University and adopts a highly disciplined approach to product strategy and market needs analysis. The customer experience was designed and built from the ground up for professional adult learners. With 500+ corporate accounts, the team is also considering how to build on these relationships, and how to create further cross-pollination opportunities across the University as a whole.

“We’ve built a super-optimised experience for learners, from their first engagement through to lifelong relationship management; it’s right-sized for workforce training, while embedding quality at all levels.”

Aaron McKenna, CEO
UCD Professional Academy

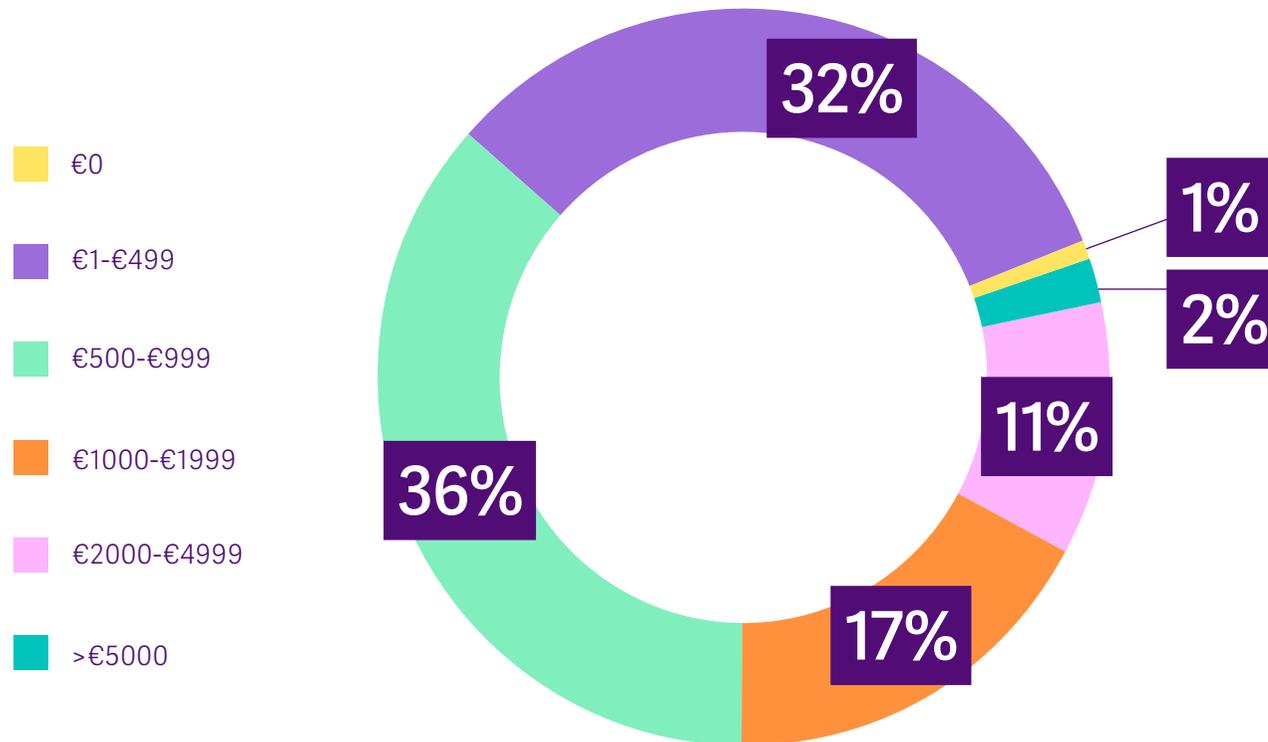
Appendix



Additional interesting data findings

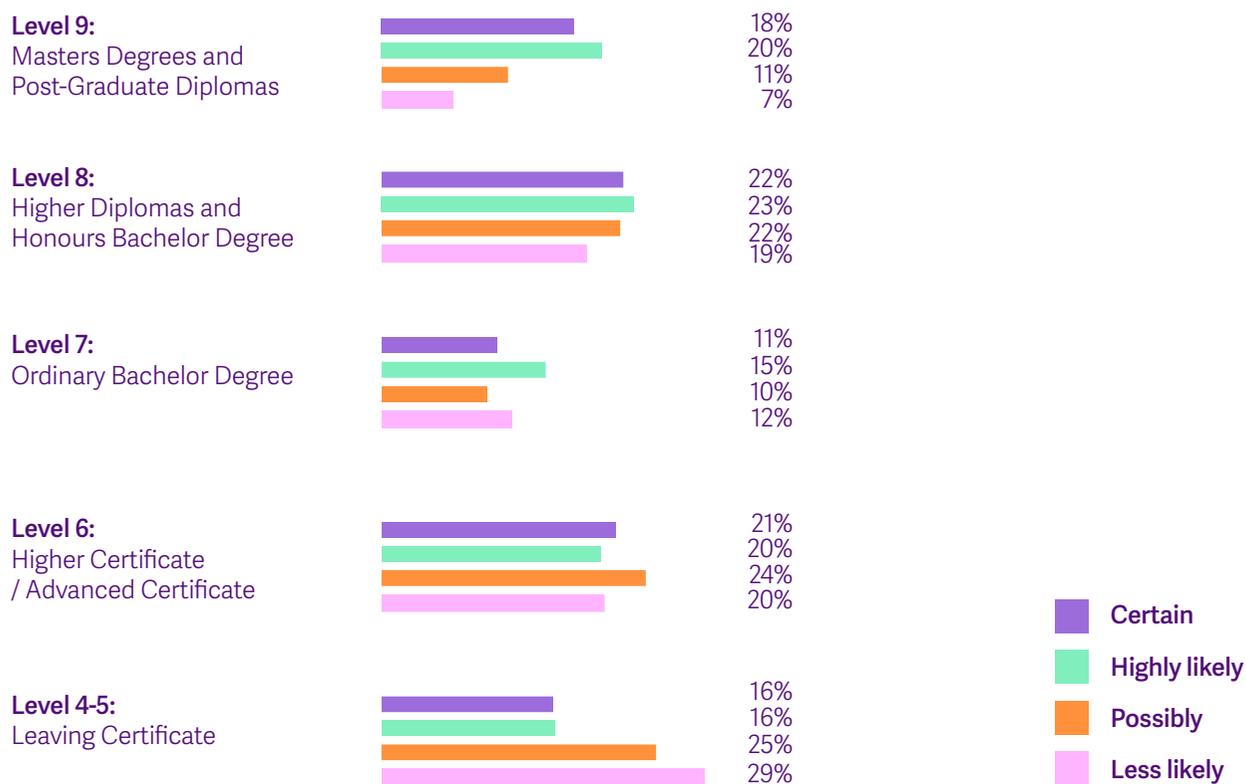
Future course pricing expectations

68% expect to pay up to €1,000, 17% expect to pay up to €2,000



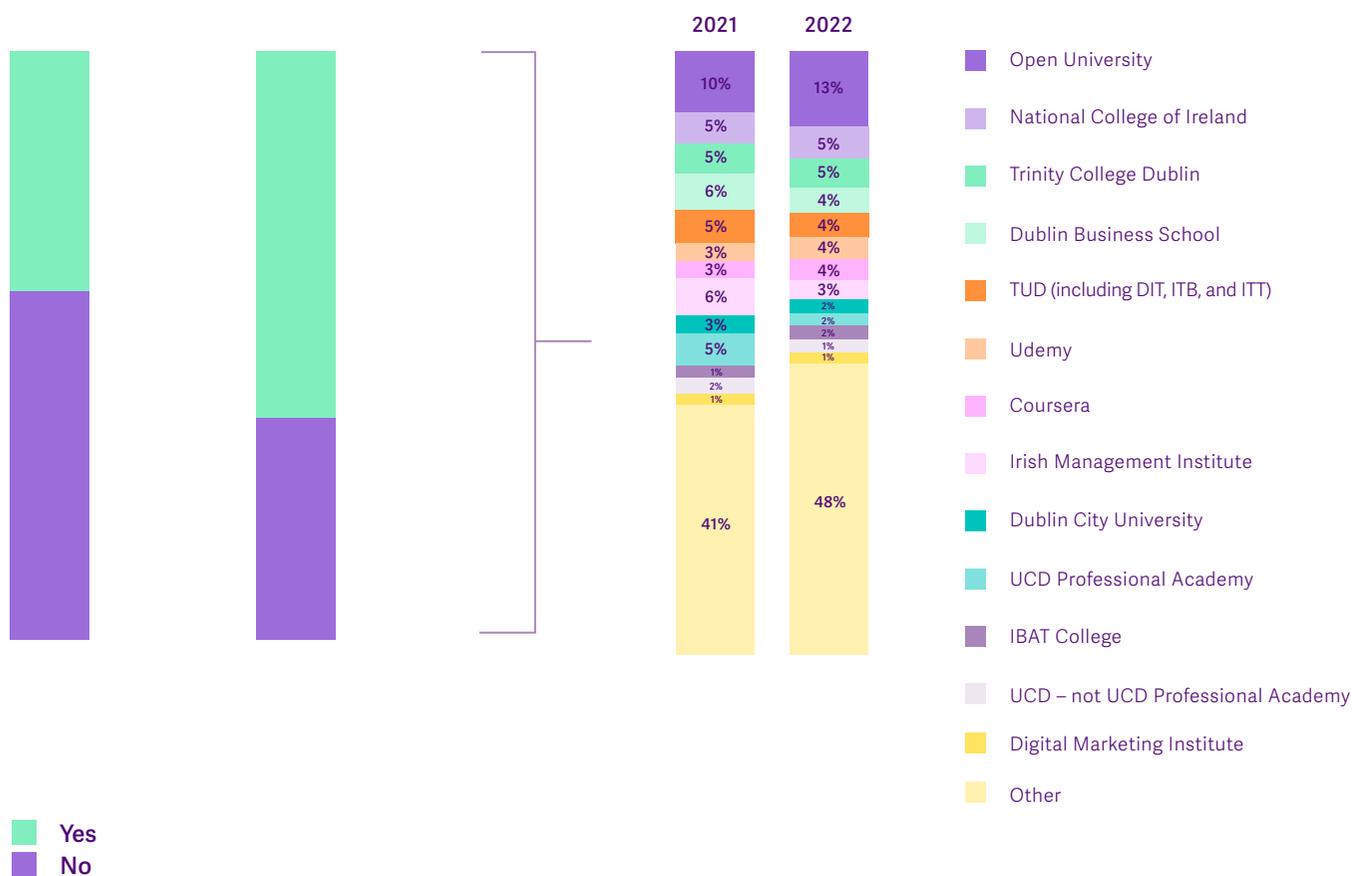
Additional interesting data findings

Course consideration within the next 12 months (by past educational attainment)



Additional interesting data findings

The majority of respondents are not required to complete any formal CPD, and yet, 63% have undertaken professional education short courses regardless.



The workforce upskilling market remains fragmented with many different providers.

From left to right:

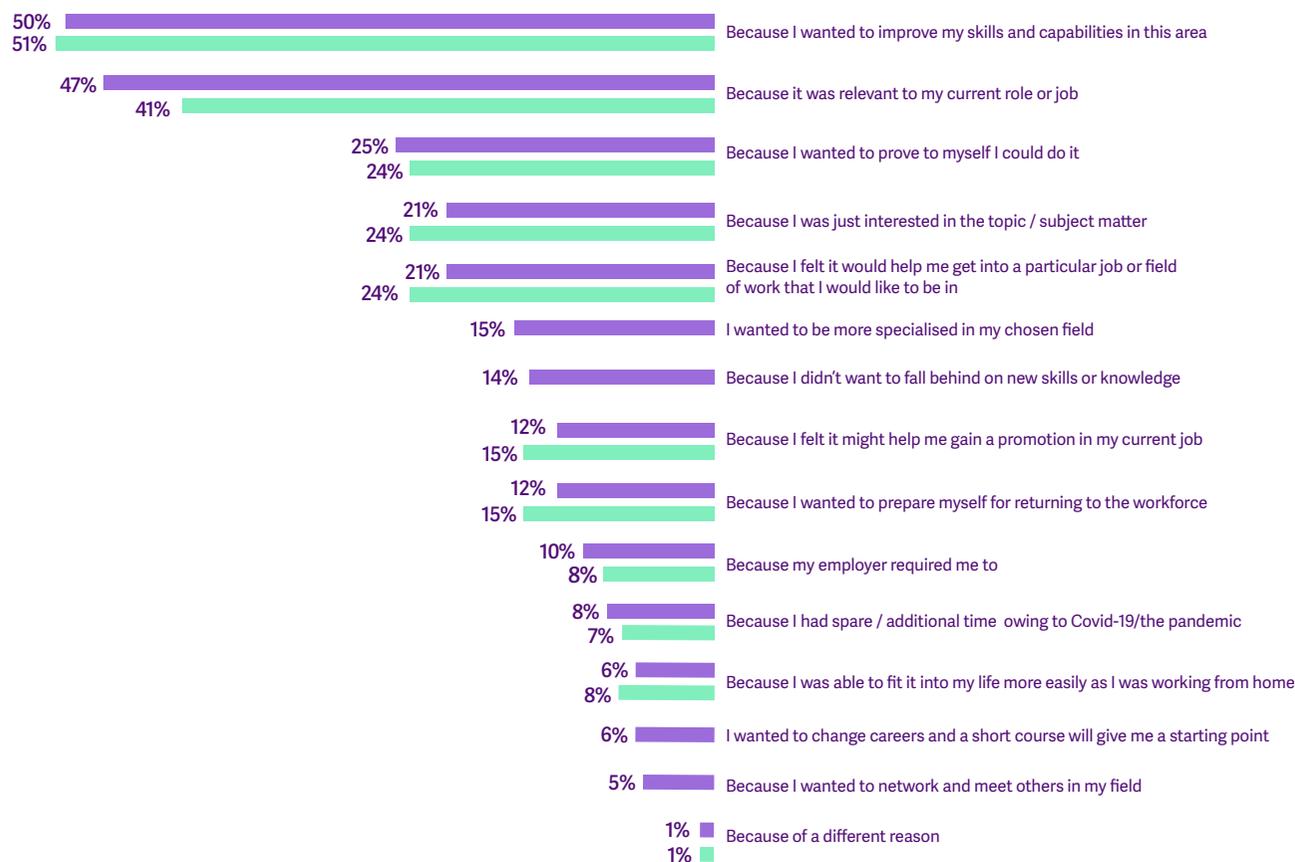
Q: Does your job or profession require you to undertake regular Continuous Professional Development (CPD)?

Q: Since finishing your formal education, have you undertaken any professional education short courses?

Q: Who did you undertake your most recent professional education short course with?

Additional interesting data findings

Improving skills / capabilities is the top reason for undertaking their most recent short professional education course



The key motivator for having taken a short professional education course is still all about improving and developing skills and capabilities that can be applied to their job of work – this accounts for over half of the responses.

About 1 in 6 are taking a course because they don't want to fall behind on new skills or knowledge.

Little to no change in people's perceptions of Covid or increased home working making any real difference to consideration.



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