

target courses

PROMOTE REGION

enable investment

develop skills

# BUILDING IRELAND'S PREMIER CENTRE FOR BUSINESS, LIVING AND LEARNING

## Skill Needs

The Midlands Gateway:  
An assessment of skill needs

support investment

promote offerings

monitor skills

OFFER FLEXIBILITY

# FOREWORD

by Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin, President, Midlands Gateway Chamber



We are living in remarkable times. The deterioration in our organisational, national and international fortunes is shocking in its speed and daunting in the challenges it poses. The air is heavy with anger and frustration. Despite the prevailing negative sentiment, we must look to new, innovative ways of restoring our region's and our country's prosperity.

For its part, the Midlands Gateway Chamber is dedicated to the promotion of this region as a competitive and attractive option for business and population growth. We are committed to working with our public sector partners to drive further investment in Infrastructure, Enterprise and Quality of Life projects, so that the Midlands can be positioned as an attractive location in which to invest and live.

In addressing the Enterprise needs of the Midlands Gateway, the Chamber undertook this Skill Needs Assessment to understand the skills needs of organisations in the region. Those surveyed ranged from indigenous SMEs to large multinationals. While the needs of these employers varied depending on scale and industry sector, nevertheless a common platform emerged.

This research has highlighted the needs of organisations for staff with management, sales/marketing, and IT, technical and innovation skills. There is also a requirement for higher quality engagement with state agencies and with education and training providers. The basis of an action plan to address these priority skill needs is outlined here.

Successive reports and national policy documents have pointed to the need for Ireland to move more centrally into the knowledge economy space. For its part, the Midlands Gateway has a wealth of corporate and human resource talent to enable this development. However, we must be cognisant of shortfalls and lacunae in our offering and move to address these issues. This Skill Needs Assessment is a powerful tool to understanding our current skills position and the steps that are essential to fulfilling the region and its communities' true potential.

The Midlands Gateway Chamber is indebted to the Implementation Forum for their input and support in making this report possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Ciarán Ó Catháin'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above three horizontal lines.

**Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin**  
President

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study of the skills needs of organisations in the Midlands has been commissioned by the Midlands Gateway Chamber and sponsored by the Midlands Gateway Implementation Forum and was conducted between November 2008 and February 2009.

### *Background*

- The *Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway* identified the need to undertake research to profile the skills base and needs in the Midlands Region.
- The Midlands Gateway Chamber was given its mandate by the three Town Chambers of Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore and committed to conduct a skills audit of the Midlands Region.

### *Midland Region Profile*

- As of Q3 2007, there were approximately 131,500 persons in the conventional working age population in the Midland Region and approximately 96% (126,700) were in employment.
- Since mid-2007, the Midland Region has experienced a steady decline in the numbers in employment and more recently a significant decline of 3.7% from June-August 2008 to September-November 2008. As a result, the unemployment rate for the Midland Region has increased from 2.8% in June-August 2007 to 10% for the period September-November 2008.
- Approximately 24% of people in the Midland Region have attained a third level qualification. The National Skills Strategy for 2020 calls for this proportion to increase to 48% in order to meet the skills demand of a knowledge-based economy.

### *Skill Needs Assessment Survey Findings*

- The survey was primarily targeted at large organisations (employing 50 or more persons) in the Midlands and approximately 24% of large organisations surveyed completed the survey, plus an additional 107 smaller organisations.
- Almost 70% of smaller organisations did not have a dedicated Human Resources (HR) person and 46% of these organisations indicated that they not need to up-skill their employees so as to meet their business objectives. Approximately 84% of larger organisations did see a need to up-skill their employees.
- Approximately 29% of surveyed organisations do not feel that employers have a responsibility to raise literacy/numeracy standards within the workforce.
- For larger organisations, Management skills are a key need with almost 60% of organisations indicating this to be a priority and IT, Technical and Innovation skills are all top priorities for 10% of large organisations.
- For small organisations (employing less than 50 employees), Management skills are the highest priority for 25% of organisations, while Sales/Marketing skills are a priority for almost 50% of organisations surveyed.
- Organisations also experience shortages in the domain of soft skills, particularly in the areas of Communication, Customer Service and Interpersonal skills.
- Experience is the highest deficiency for graduate-level employees joining from Higher Education, as noted by 72% of larger and 69% of smaller organisations.

- On average organisations spend approximately 3.5% of annual turnover on training. Smaller organisations spend approximately 3.3% and larger organisations 3.9%.
- In-house training courses are popular and are used by 89% of larger organisations and 63% of smaller organisations.
- Making employees available for training and the availability of funding are the two most critical training issues for all organisations. Approximately 50% of both smaller and larger organisations identified availability of funding as a significant issue, while a total of 84% of larger organisations and 75% of smaller organisations indicated that making employees available for training is an issue.
- Respondents provided feedback for FÁS and Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) across a wide range of topics including:
  - Ensuring that organisations are more aware of course offerings,
  - Offering courses at flexible times and making access to courses easier, and
  - Learning more about the training and education needs of organisations.

### **Conclusions**

- Smaller organisations are not investing in up-skilling their employees and the benefits of training and Human Resources (HR) may not be fully appreciated.
- A significant proportion of surveyed organisations (29%) do not feel that employers have a responsibility to raise literacy/numeracy standards within the workforce. The proportion is quite similar across small and large organisations at 31% and 28% respectively, with a higher proportion of smaller companies (13% vs. 4%) strongly disagreeing with the statement.
- While in-house training courses are popular in all organisations, there are a number of learning methods where usage levels differ significantly between smaller and larger organisations, including:
  - Job rotation (13% in small vs. 46% in large organisations),
  - Coaching/Mentoring (40% vs. 65%), and
  - Skillnets (14% vs. 35%).

### **Key Recommendations**

- The Midlands Gateway Chamber and the Midlands Gateway Implementation Forum should agree a specific action plan for the Gateway with the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, FÁS, AIT, County Enterprise Boards (CEB), the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and other agencies to address the priority skill needs, including:
  - Developing a “one-stop” internet portal that brings together information on the training and education courses offered in the Midland Region.
  - Establishing a regular monitoring system to assess the region’s skills base and skills needs and conduct follow-up research on the education and training needs of the unemployed and those with low education attainment levels.
  - Educating and mentoring smaller organisations on the benefits and value of employee training and human resources.
- Education and training institutions should factor the priority skill needs into their course offerings, continue to improve the promotion their offerings and continue to enhance the flexibility of access to courses and programmes.
- Organisations in the Midlands should familiarise themselves with the comprehensive range of training and education courses on offer across the region.

## 2. SKILL NEEDS ASSESSMENT BACKGROUND

In late 2007, the *Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway*<sup>1</sup> was published and the Midlands Gateway Implementation Forum was established to oversee its implementation. The framework identified a number of key priority areas to be addressed to achieve effective development for the Midlands Gateway including the following three specific priority areas that form the background context to this skill needs assessment:

- Addressing the productivity gap,
- Enhancing educational attainment and the skills base, and
- Building identity and visibility for the Gateway/Region.

### *Addressing the productivity gap*

The report included a development strategy to foster a dynamic enterprise sector within the Midlands Gateway. The strategy called for targeting by the development agencies, development of closer linkages between third and fourth level educational sectors, and the implementation of measures to enhance educational levels and the skills base in the region.

### *Enhancing educational attainment and skills base*

The report noted that a specific challenge facing the Midlands Gateway and surrounding region is the level of educational attainment and skills base within the region. Specific recommendations were made to boost third level educational attainment levels and to ensure that the Midlands Gateway and surrounding region can compete successfully with other regions in relation to its skills base.

### *Building identity and visibility*

Finally, the report also identified the need for a marketing and branding strategy designed to build identity and visibility for the Gateway at national and international levels. The strategy included a number of specific actions, including the following;

- *“Development agencies and local authorities to develop detailed database and collaborative marketing outputs which provide information on available industrial and commercial sites, services and other facilities, the regional skills base and comparative labour and housing costs in the Midlands Gateway*
- *Development agencies to undertake research to identify skills profile and skills base among commuters from Midlands region.”*

### *Midlands Gateway Chamber*

The Chamber was given its mandate by the three Town Chambers of Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore in 2007. Following its formation, the Chamber published its vision for the future of the Midlands Gateway<sup>2</sup> and identified a number of initiatives to make the Gateway “the destination of choice for people deciding to locate in the Midlands.” In addressing the Enterprise needs of the Gateway, the Chamber committed to conduct a skills audit of the Midlands catchment area and to assess the skills needs of Midlands-based organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> Westmeath and Offaly County Councils, *Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway*, Prepared by Indecon International Economic Consultants and Keith Simpson & Associates, December 2006

<sup>2</sup> Midlands Gateway Chamber, *The Midlands Gateway: A vision for the future*, October 2007

### 3. MIDLAND REGION PROFILE

The following sections profile the structure of the labour market in the Midland Region and recent changes in the number of persons in employment and unemployed. The distribution of employment by economic sector and growth within each sector is profiled for the Midland Region and compared against national statistics.

In addition, the level of educational attainment for the Midland Region and the distribution by broad skill occupation of those in employment is also compared against the national profile. Finally, the distances travelled to work by persons in the Midland Region and counties is reviewed and compared to the national average.

#### Midland Region labour market

There were almost 205,000 people in the Midland Region aged 15 and over as of Quarter 3, 2007 – see note below<sup>3</sup>. The labour market status of this population shows that approximately 131,500 were in the conventional working age population and approximately 96% (126,700) were in employment, of which over 83% (105,300) were in full-time employment.

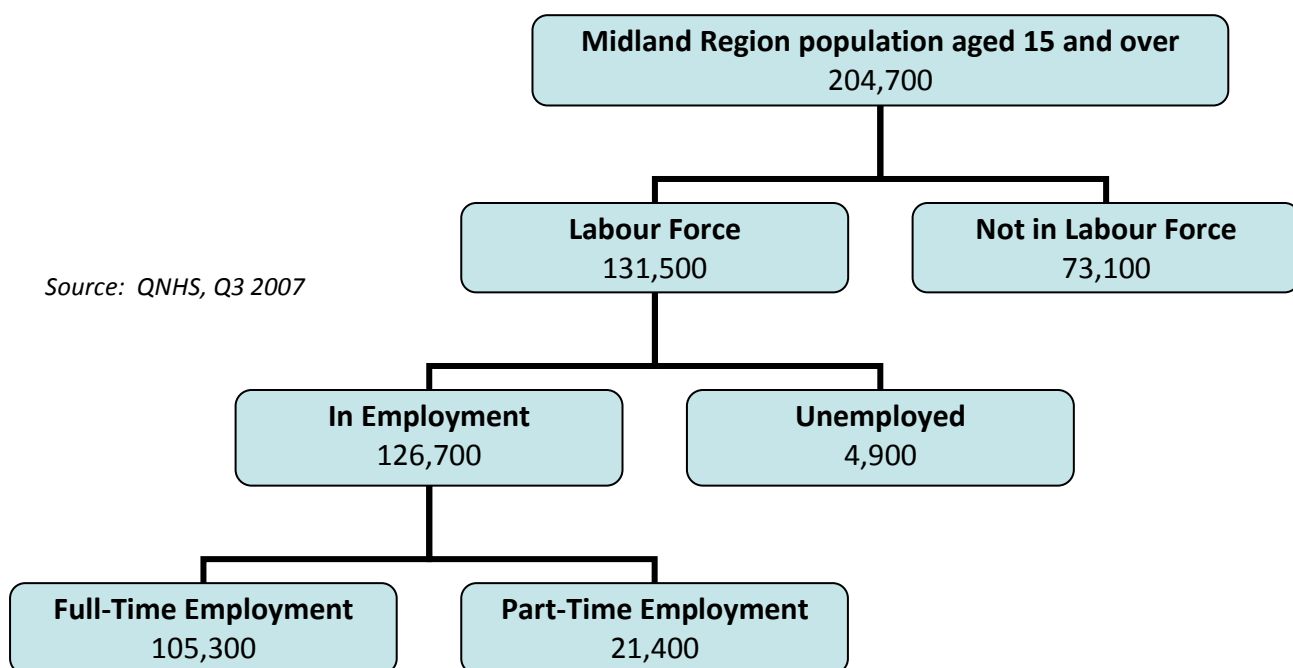


Figure 1: Persons in Midland Region aged 15 and over by Labour Market Status

The following chart shows that the structure of the Midland Region labour market is not very different from the State labour market.

<sup>3</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Quarterly National Household Survey*, Q3 2007

Note that regional labour market data for 2008 from the National Household Survey has not yet been published by the Central Statistics Office. However, regional employment and unemployment statistics for 2008 have been published and are included in this report.

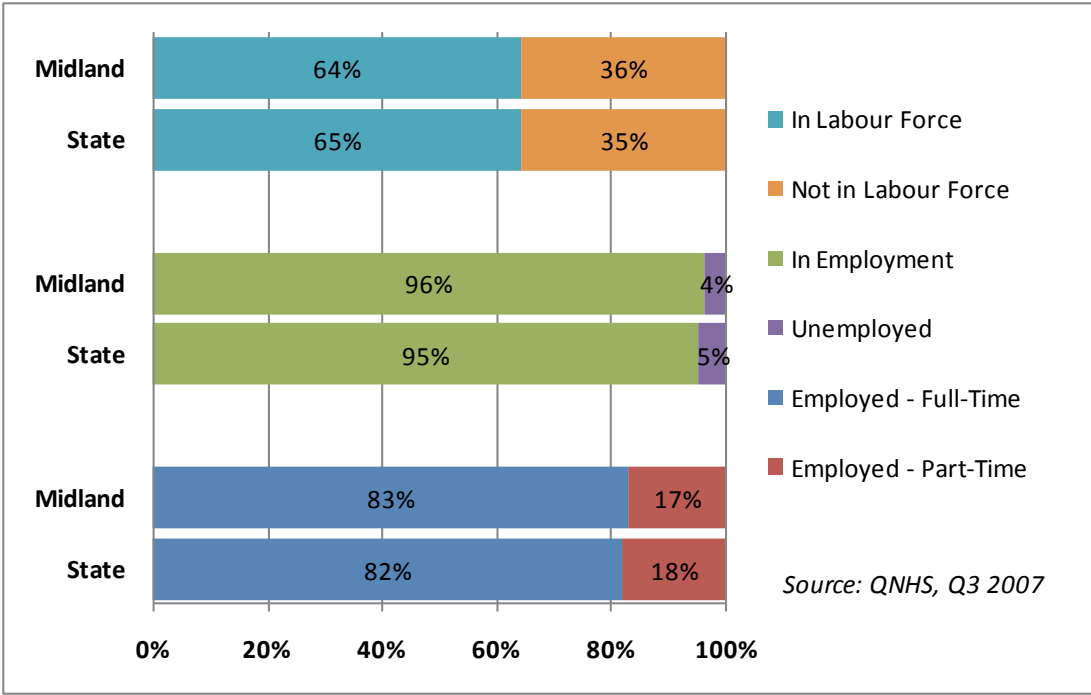


Figure 2: Comparison of State and Midland Region Labour Markets

However, there are differences in the growth in employment between the Midlands Region and the national average. The following figure shows that the growth in employment in the Midland region from March-May 2007 to June-August 2007 was 4.5% which was over twice the national growth rate of 2.1%<sup>4</sup>.

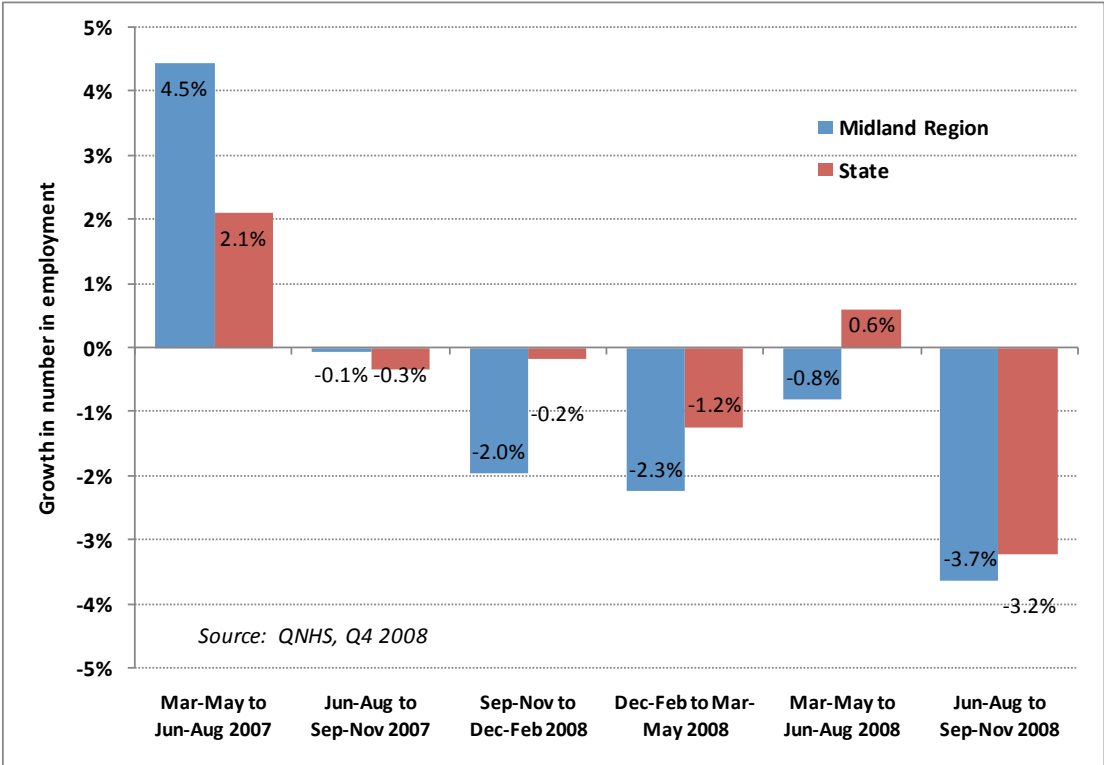


Figure 3: Growth in number in employment for State and Midland Region

<sup>4</sup> Central Statistics Office, Quarterly National Household Survey, Q3 2008

Unfortunately, since the middle of 2007 the Midland Region has experienced a consistent decline in the numbers in employment. The rate of decline in the Midland Region has been consistently greater than the national average since September-November 2007 and the most significant decline of 3.7% from June-August 2008 to September-November 2008 in the most recently reported data.

This has resulted in a steady increase in the unemployment rate from 2.8% in June-August 2007 which was below the national average of 4.8% as shown in the following figure. The most recently reported unemployment rate for the Midland Region is 10% for the period September-November 2008 which is 2.3 percentage points above the national rate of 7.7%.

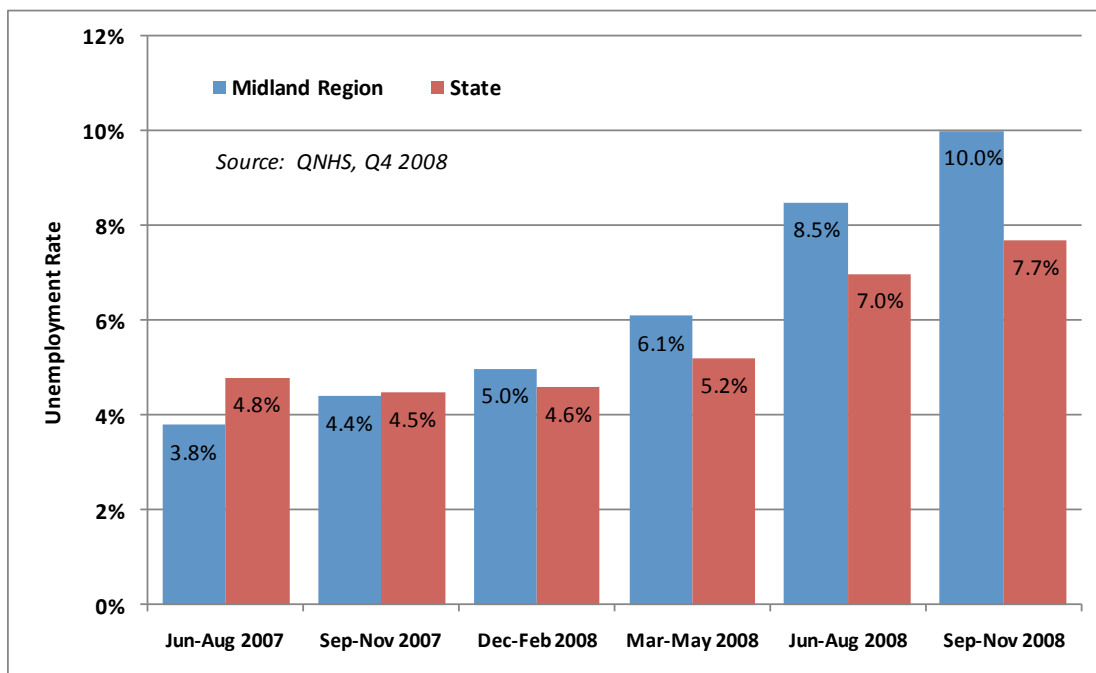


Figure 4: Midland Region and National unemployment rates

Employment and recruitment in the region is supported by a number of initiatives including the FÁS Jobs Ireland service<sup>5</sup>. This service is based on a recruitment database which provides access to thousands of potential employees through FÁS offices in the Midlands. Employers can view jobseekers CVs online arranged by multiple criteria including education level and location.

### Employment by sector

The following figure shows the distribution of persons aged 15 and over in employment by economic sector in the Midland Region and the State as of Q3 2007. The Midland Region had a higher proportion employed in the following sectors relative to the national average:

- Construction – 17% vs. a national average of 13%,
- Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing – 8% vs. 6%,
- Other Production Industries sectors – 16% vs. 14%, and
- Public Administration & Defence – 6% vs. 5%.

<sup>5</sup> FÁS Jobs Ireland is accessible online at [www.fas.ie](http://www.fas.ie) and via free phone 1800 611 116. The national call centre for FÁS Jobs Ireland is based in Edenderry, Co. Offaly.

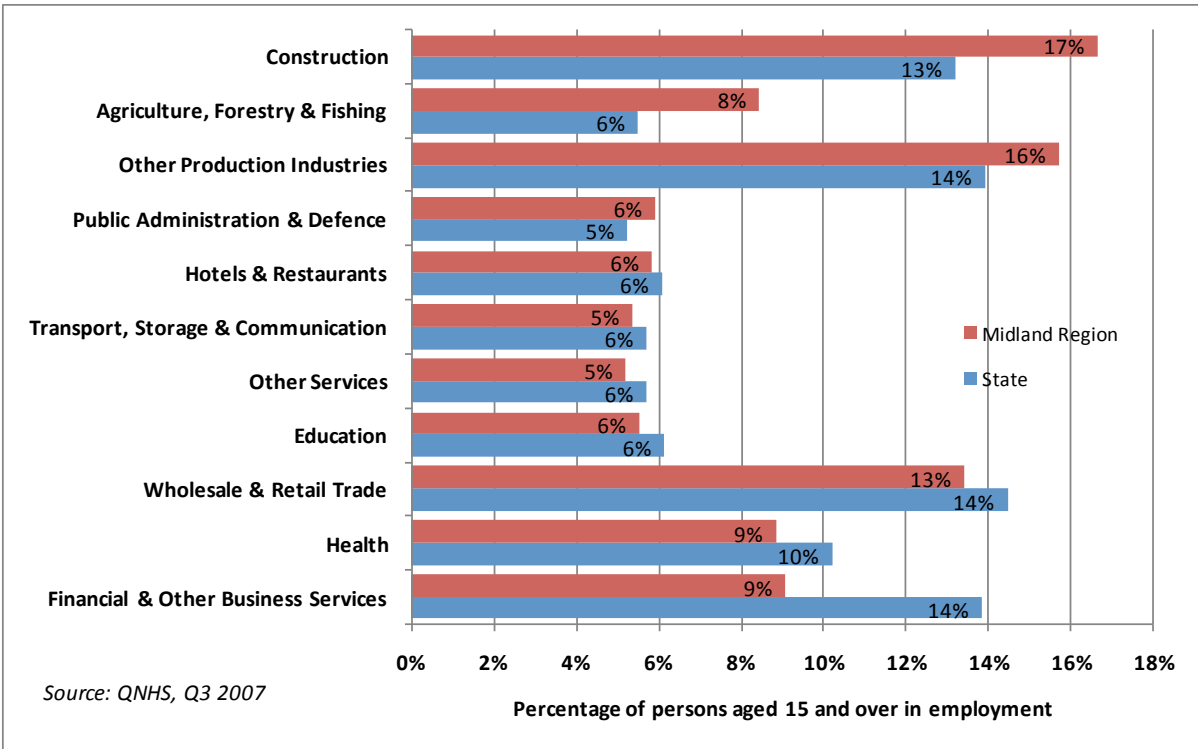


Figure 5: Distribution of persons employed by economic sector

The following chart compares the growth from 2002 to 2007 in persons employed by sector for the Midland Region with the national average. Across all sectors, employment in Midland Region grew by 4.8% vs. a national growth rate of 3.4%.

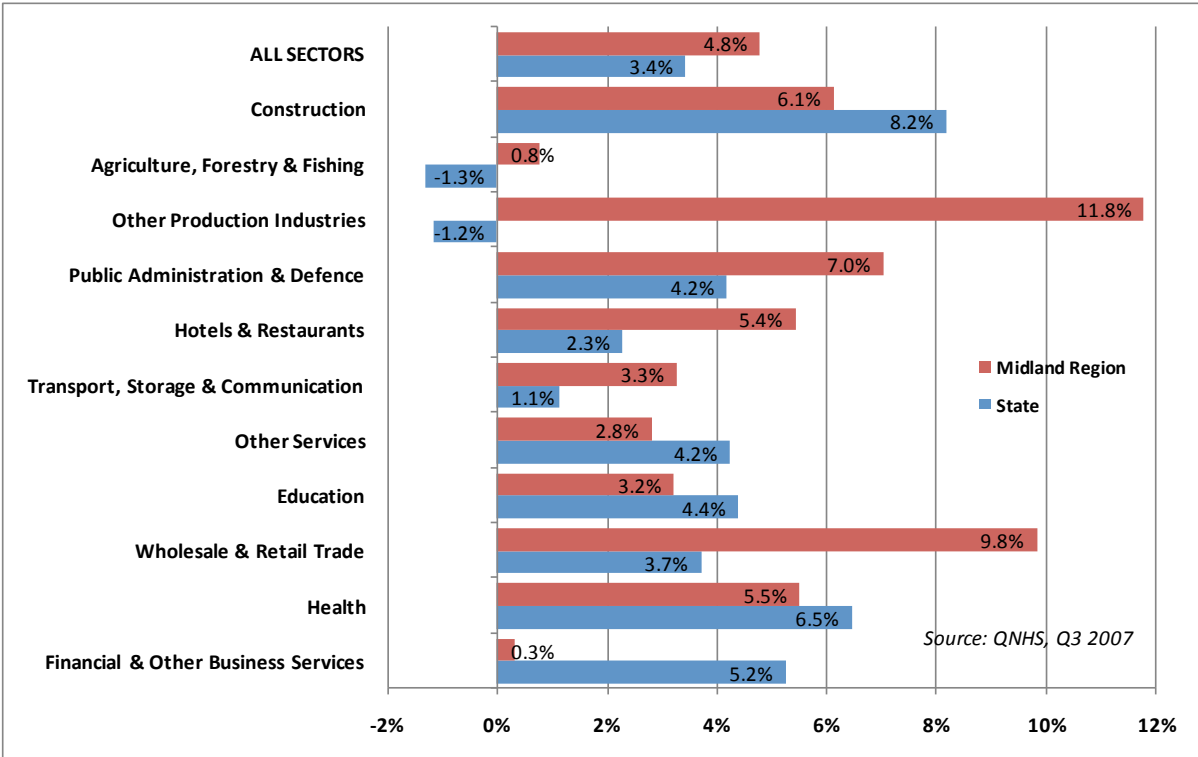


Figure 6: Growth from in employment by sector 2002-2007

## Investment in the Region

The IDA has supported a steady level of employment creation in the Midland Region, including the following recent investments:

- **PPD Inc** (*announced December 2008*)  
A leading global contract research organisation, PPD provides discovery, development and post-approval services to pharmaceutical, biotechnology, medical device companies, and academic and government agencies. It is establishing a contract research facility in Athlone that will conduct testing for clinical and commercial programmes spanning all phases of drug development. PPD plans to create approximately 250 high value-added positions over five years for PhD-level scientists, analytical laboratory staff and other clinical development professionals.
- **Abiomed Inc** (*announced August 2008*)  
A world leader in heart assist technologies, the company specialises in medical technologies designed to assist or replace the pumping function of the heart. It is to establish a global manufacturing facility for its Impella 2.5 cardiac assist device in Athlone, creating 250 new jobs over five years.
- **Intertek BioClin** (*announced July 2008*)  
A leading provider of quality and safety solutions serving a wide range of industries around the world. It officially opened the new, extended state-of-the-art 9,500 sq ft pharmaceutical laboratory facility in Athlone and employs 20 people, 95% of whom are science graduates or postgraduates.
- **Kinetic Concepts Inc** (*announced September 2007*)  
A leading medical technology company in advanced wound-care and therapeutic surfaces. It designs, manufactures, markets and services a wide range of proprietary products that can improve clinical outcomes and can help reduce the cost of patient care. It is establishing a global manufacturing operation at the IDA Business & Technology Park, Athlone. The investment will create up to 250 new jobs by 2012, with about one-fifth of the jobs requiring third level graduates.
- **Teleflex Medical** (*announced July 2007*)  
A global medical technology company providing medical devices used in respiratory care, anaesthesia, urology and a range of surgical procedures, is establishing its European Headquarters at the IDA Business & Technology Park in Athlone. It will create as many as 150 new high quality jobs by 2012, in areas such as multilingual customer service, finance, HR, IT, planning and administration.

## Skills required for continued investment

The *Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway*<sup>6</sup> called for an enterprise development strategy to foster a dynamic enterprise sector within the Midlands Gateway. The report noted that there must be a clear focus on the development of higher value-added industrial and internationally traded activities, which build on the existing strengths and emerging industrial clusters. The following priority actions were recommended:

- IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to give priority to incentivising and supporting private enterprises to invest in higher productivity and higher value activities in the Midlands.

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<sup>6</sup> Westmeath and Offaly County Councils, *Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway*, Prepared by Indecon International Economic Consultants and Keith Simpson & Associates, December 2006

- Priority to be given by IDA (Ireland) and Enterprise Ireland to develop and expand sector clusters as follows:
  - ICT, Pharmaceutical and education sectors in Athlone;
  - Medical devices/medical skills, Medtech, Consumer Foods in Tullamore; and
  - Engineering, consumer products financial services in Mullingar.

In keeping with these recommendations, the IDA is focusing on attracting investment to the Midland Region in the following two sectors:

- Med Tech, Pharma and Life Sciences, and
- Internationally Traded Services.

To attract companies in the Med Tech, Pharma and Life Sciences sector, the Midland Region will need to meet the skill needs of employers the following key areas:

- Life Sciences,
- Engineering,
- Information Technology,
- Management, and
- Laboratory Technicians and Supervisors.

The region will also need to provide employees with technical skills to assist Med Tech, Pharma and Life Sciences companies already located in the Midlands to increase the level of activity in the following important areas:

- Process development,
- Innovation, and
- Research and Development.

Within the Internationally Traded Services sector, the IDA is focused on attracting companies to the Midland Region from the following areas:

- Shared Services,
- Tech Support,
- Contact Centres, and
- Financial Services in particular.

To attract these companies, the Midland Region will need to meet the skill needs of employers in the following key areas;

- Information Technology
- European languages, and
- Financial skills.

## **Employment by broad skill/occupation**

The following figure shows the breakdown of the population by broad occupation group as of the 2006 Census for the State, the Midland Region and its counties. The region has higher proportions of Manufacturing and Building & Construction workers than the State, but a lower proportion of Professional and Sales workers.

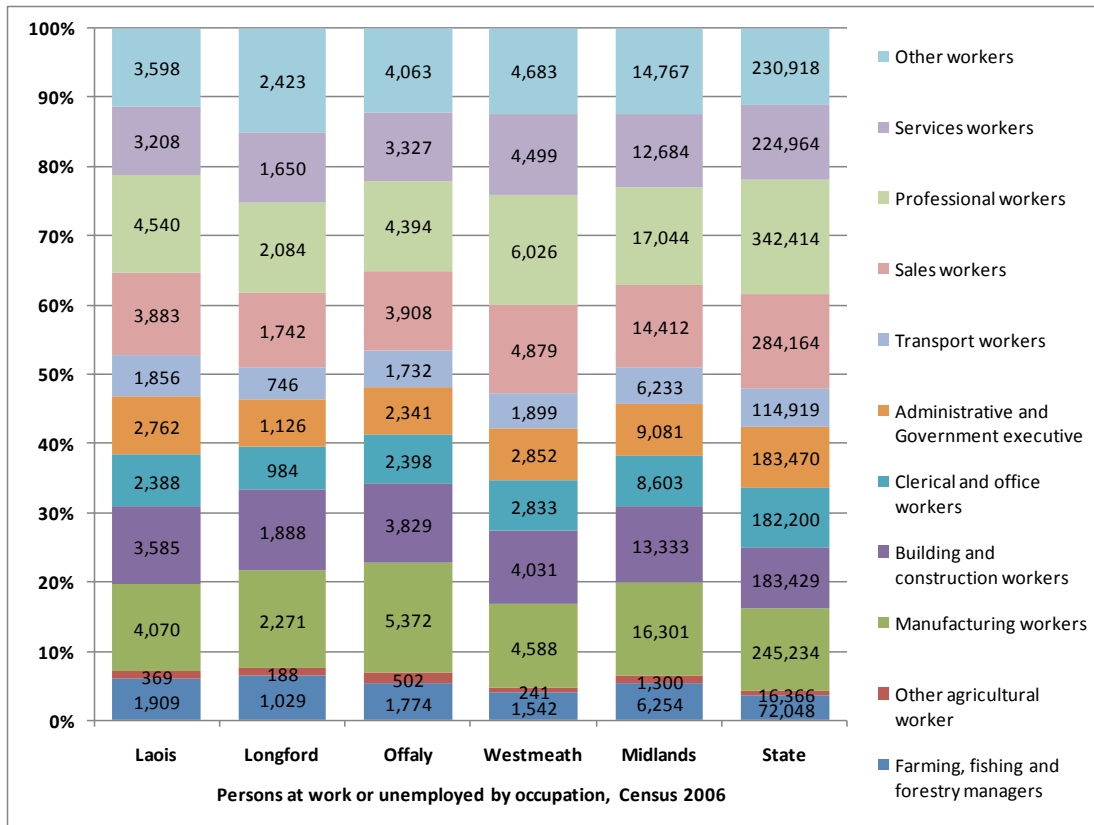


Figure 7: Population by occupation – Census 2006

The table below shows the number of persons aged 15 or over in the labour force by intermediate occupation group as of the 2006 Census for the State and the Midland Region. Table 3 in the Appendix on page 45 provides details on labour force by intermediate occupation across the four counties of the Midland Region.

Those occupations where the region has a significantly higher proportion relative to the State average are highlighted in green. Occupations highlighted in red are where the region has a significantly lower proportion relative to the State average.

Table 1: Persons aged 15 or over in the labour force by intermediate occupation group

	State	% of all occupations	Midland Region	% of all Occupations
Farming, fishing & forestry workers	88,414	4.3%	7,554	6.3%
Electrical trades workers	38,375	1.8%	2,237	1.9%
Engineering & allied trades workers	79,385	3.8%	5,577	4.6%
Textile, clothing & leather workers	7,416	0.4%	353	0.3%
Food, drink & tobacco production workers	26,076	1.3%	1,883	1.6%
Chemical, paper, wood, rubber, plastics & print workers	19,268	0.9%	1,237	1.0%
Other manufacturing workers	74,714	3.6%	5,014	4.2%
Building & construction workers	183,429	8.8%	13,333	11.1%
Managers & executives	125,398	6.0%	5,045	4.2%
Communication, warehouse & transport workers	114,919	5.5%	6,233	5.2%
Clerical & office workers	182,200	8.8%	8,603	7.2%
Sales occupations	205,102	9.9%	11,872	9.9%
Business & commerce occupations	79,062	3.8%	2,540	2.1%
Computer software occupations	45,588	2.2%	1,349	1.1%
Scientific & technical occupations	58,978	2.8%	2,866	2.4%

	State	% of all occupations	Midland Region	% of all Occupations
Health & related workers	93,065	4.5%	5,573	4.6%
Social workers & related occupations	17,694	0.9%	1,008	0.8%
Religious occupations	3,902	0.2%	218	0.2%
Other professional workers	42,289	2.0%	1,638	1.4%
Personal service & childcare workers	205,197	9.9%	11,161	9.3%
Teachers	80,898	3.9%	4,392	3.7%
Central & local government workers	58,072	2.8%	4,036	3.4%
Garda Síochána	12,325	0.6%	676	0.6%
Army occupations	7,442	0.4%	847	0.7%
Other gainful occupations (incl. not stated)	230,918	11.1%	14,767	12.3%
<b>All occupations</b>	<b>2,080,126</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>120,012</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Looking for first regular job	29,372		1,814	
<b>Total in labour force</b>	<b>2,109,498</b>		<b>121,826</b>	

The following figure shows the breakdown of the labour force by social class as of 2006 for the State, the Midland Region and its counties. The region has a lower proportion of persons employed in Professional Workers and Managerial and Technical occupations than the State, but a higher proportion of skilled manual workers.

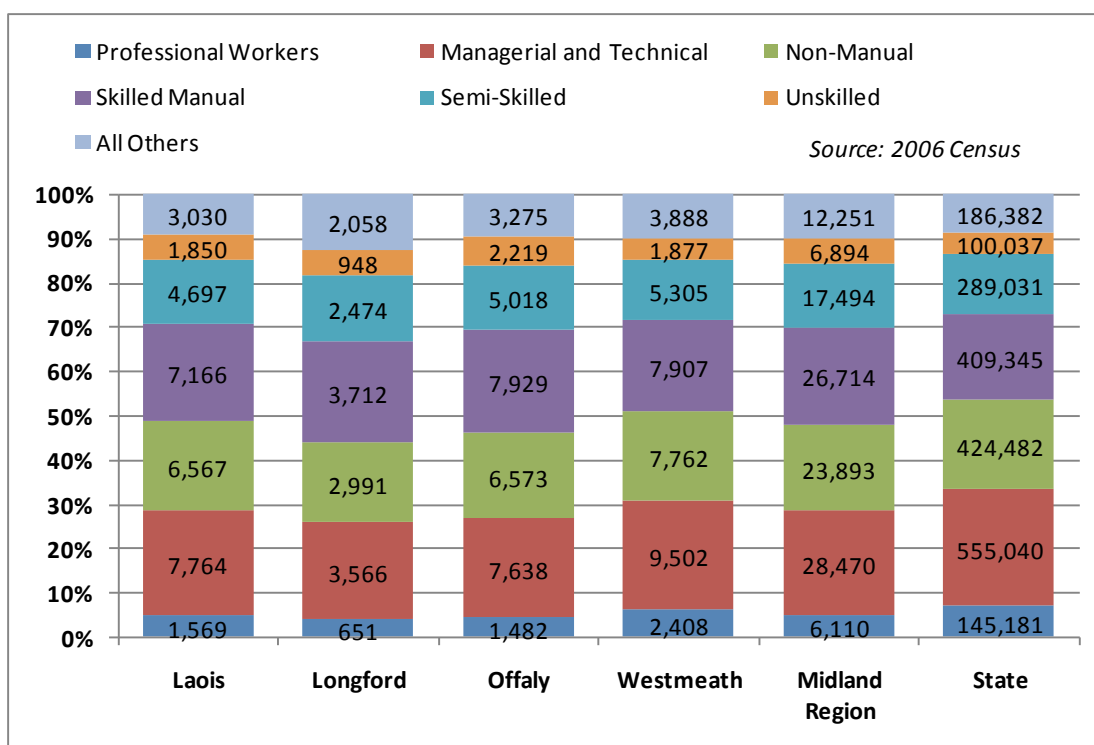


Figure 8: Population in the Labour Force by social class – Census 2006

## Educational attainment

The figure below shows the highest level of education achieved for persons aged 15 and over not in full-time education. The figure also shows that approximately 45% of persons in the Midland Region have attained at best a lower secondary or primary education<sup>7</sup>. Approximately 24% of people in the Midland Region have attained a third level qualification which is below the 30% national average.

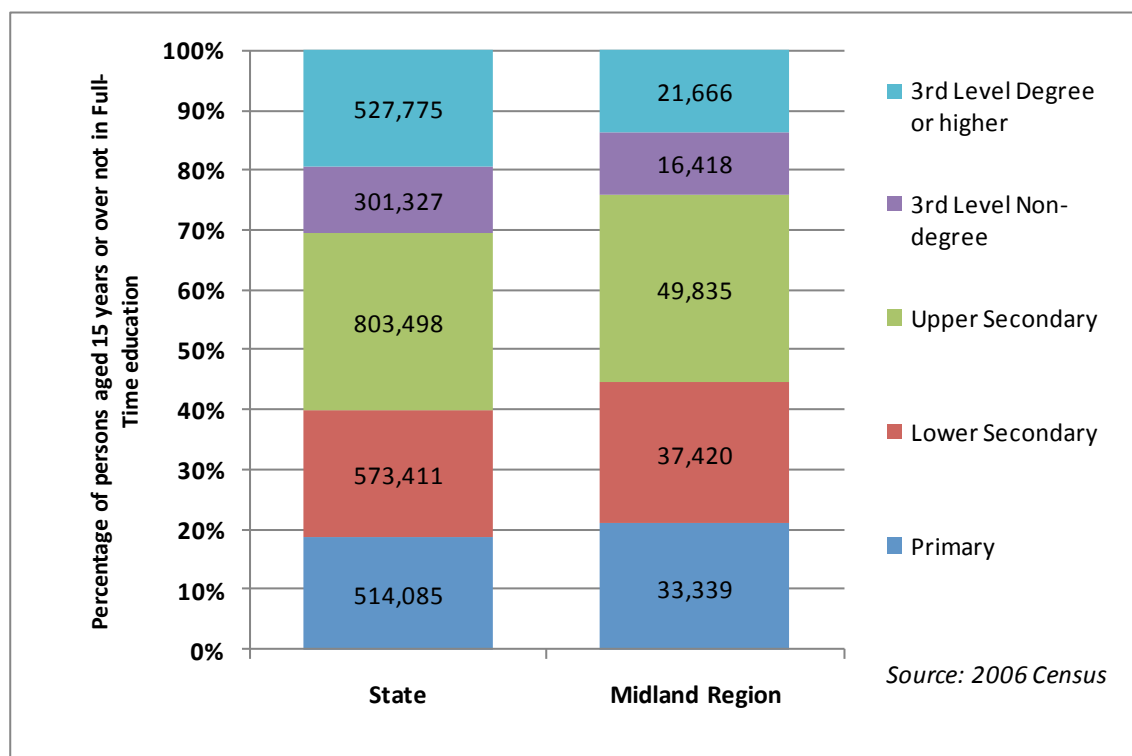


Figure 9: Highest level of education attained

The following table shows the detailed highest level of education completed for persons aged 15 years and over in the State and Midland as of the 2006 Census. Table 4 in the Appendix on page 46 provides detailed educational attainment levels for people across the four counties of the Midland Region. The proportion of person with education levels above “Upper Secondary and Technical or Vocational” is lower for the Midland Region than for the State average.

Table 2: Persons aged 15 years and over by detailed highest level of education completed

	State	% of those whose education has ceased	Midland Region	% of those whose education has ceased
No formal education	16,167	0.6%	1,176	0.7%
Primary	497,918	17.5%	32,143	19.2%
Lower secondary	573,411	20.1%	37,420	22.3%
Upper secondary	559,934	19.6%	34,478	20.6%
Technical or Vocational	159,200	5.6%	10,218	6.1%
Both Upper Secondary & Technical or	84,364	3.0%	5,139	3.1%

<sup>7</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Census 2006 Principal Socio-economic Results*, June 2007

	State	% of those whose education has ceased	Midland Region	% of those whose education has ceased
Vocational				
Third level, non-degree	301,327	10.6%	16,418	9.8%
Third level, primary degree	166,524	5.8%	6,881	4.1%
Professional qualification (of Degree status at least)	73,052	2.6%	3,376	2.0%
Both a Degree & a Professional qualification	98,217	3.4%	4,075	2.4%
Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma	90,942	3.2%	4,344	2.6%
Postgraduate Degree (Masters)	84,628	3.0%	2,648	1.6%
Doctorate (PhD)	14,412	0.5%	342	0.2%
Not stated	130,237	4.6%	9,023	5.4%
<b>Total whose full-time education has ceased</b>	<b>2,850,333</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>167,681</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Total at school, university, etc.	349,596		17,675	
Other	175,470		10,073	
<b>Total whose full-time education not ceased</b>	<b>525,066</b>		<b>27,748</b>	
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>3,375,399</b>		<b>195,429</b>	

The National Skills Strategy<sup>8</sup> developed a vision for educational attainment in Ireland that calls for 48% of the workforce to attain third level qualifications in order to meet the skills demand of a knowledge-based economy. The following figure compares the educational attainment levels in the Midland Region to the 2020 Skills Strategy vision. To meet this vision, the percentage of people in the Midlands with a third level qualification will need to double from 24% in 2006 to 48% in 2020.

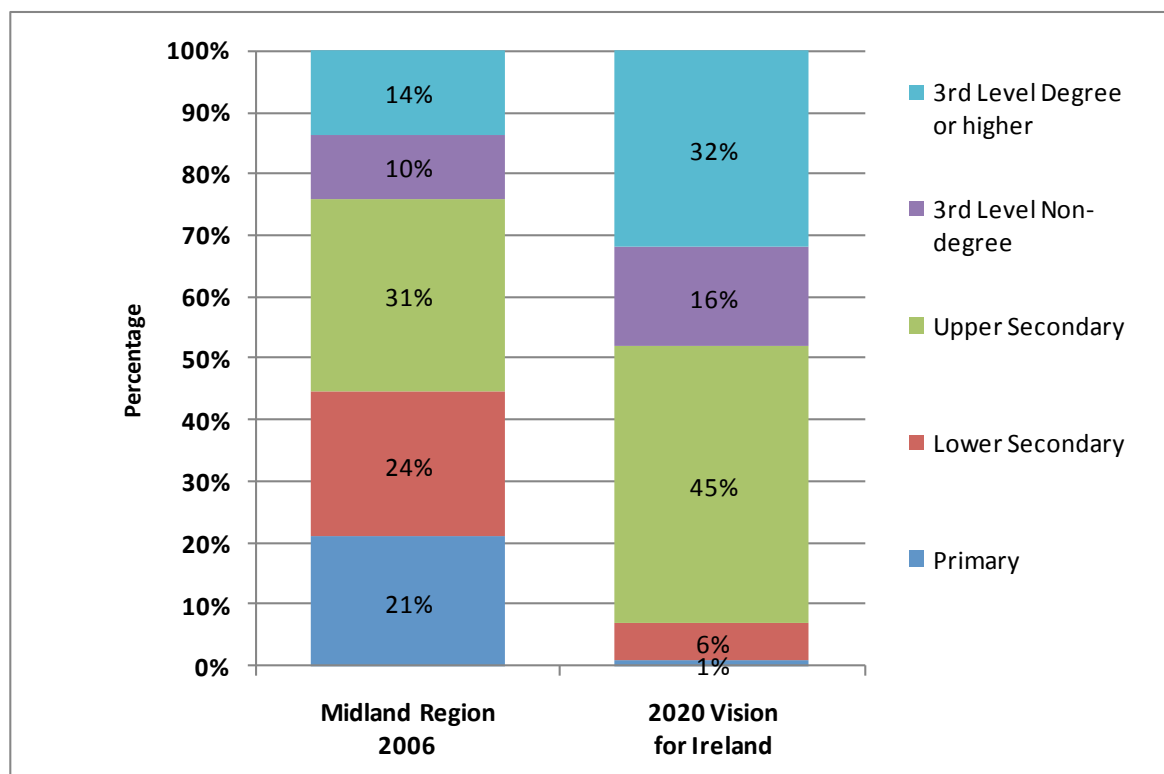


Figure 10: National Skills Strategy - education attainment vision

<sup>8</sup> Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy*, 2007

## Distance travelled to work

A sizeable percentage of persons in the Midland Region travel a significant distance to work, with many working outside the region. The following extract of a 2006 Census<sup>9</sup> map shows the proportion of people by electoral district that travel 30km or more to their place of work. The map shows that there are many locations in the east of the region where 30% and more of the people travel over 30 km to work, most likely towards the Dublin area.

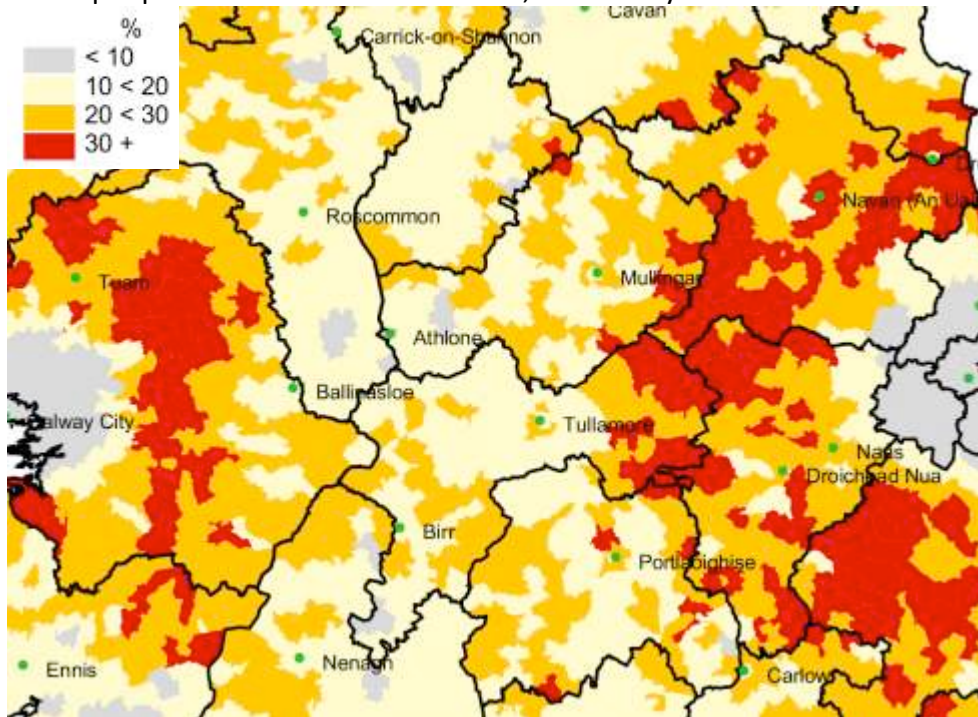


Figure 11: Percentage of workers in each Electoral Division who travel 30 km and over to work

The following figure shows the travel distance to work of people living in counties Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath as declared in the 2006 Census. Approximately 30% of people in the Midland Region travel a distance of 25km or more to work.

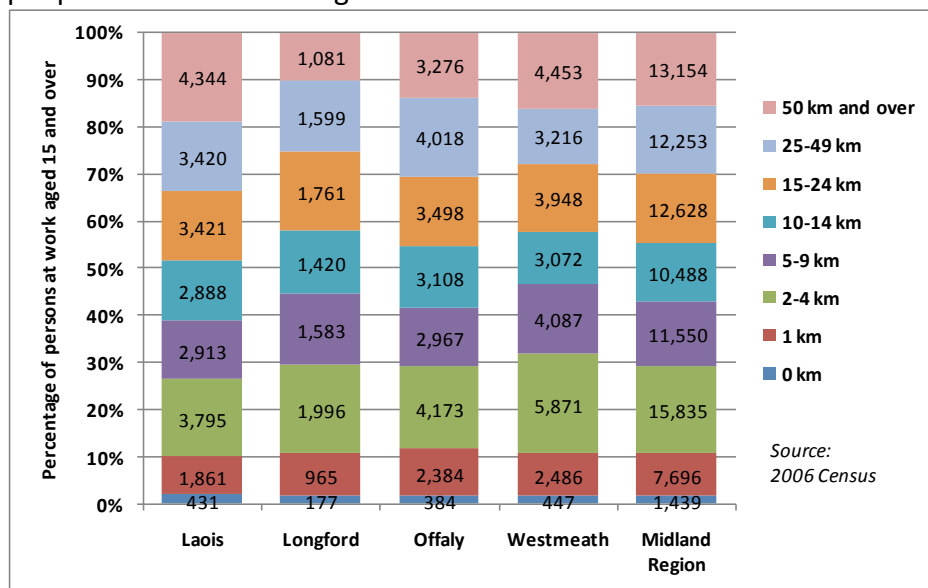


Figure 12: Travel distances of persons at work aged 15 and over

<sup>9</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Census 2006 Principal Socio-economic Results*, June 2007

## 4. SKILL NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

As part of the Midlands Region skills audit, the Midlands Gateway Chamber commissioned a survey of organisations in the Midland Region to identify those skills that employers feel are required to achieve their business objectives. The following sections summarise the approach used and the key findings of the survey which was conducted in December 2008.

### Survey approach and response rate

The survey was designed by the Enterprise Committee of the Midlands Gateway Chamber with input from the FÁS research unit responsible for the annual National Skills Bulletin<sup>10</sup>. The questionnaire focused on the following main questions:

- In what skill areas do organisations need to up-skill so as to achieve their business objectives?
- What occupation or labour shortages do organisations currently experience?
- In what areas are graduates joining from the education sector most deficient?
- How do employees learn and what training issues do organisations experience?

The survey was primarily targeted at large organisations in the Midlands that are either

- members of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Midlands Region,
- large Public Sector organisation in the Midlands, or
- Midland Region client companies of Enterprise Ireland, FÁS and the IDA.

While the IDA and FÁS include Roscommon and Kildare in their Midland Region organisations, it was decided to survey organisations in the Midland Counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon and Westmeath. The survey was also sent to a sample of smaller companies in these counties. In total, the survey was circulated to just over 1,000 organisations in these five counties either by email to members of the CIPD Midlands Region or by letter from the Midlands Gateway Chamber to all other organisations.

A total of 54 of the approximately 230 organisations employing 50 or more people in the five counties completed the survey, giving a response rate of approximately 24%. In addition, a total of 107 smaller organisations also completed the survey.

### Organisation details

The following chart shows the breakdown of responses by county, by economic sector<sup>11</sup> and by the number of people employed in Ireland. A broad range of organisation size is represented in the 161 survey respondents with approximately 43% of the organisations employing 50 or more people in Ireland. This split will be used in the following sections to highlight the difference in responses between small and large organisations.

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<sup>10</sup> Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, *National Skills Bulletin 2008*, Prepared by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in FÁS, September 2008.

<sup>11</sup> **Services** include Banking & Financial, Legal, Accounting & Professional and Other services.

**Public Sector** includes Public administration & Defence, Education and Health & Social Work.

**Other Sectors** include IT/Software Services, Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing, Utilities & Mining Activities, Print & Publishing, Chemicals, Plastics & Non-Metallic Materials.

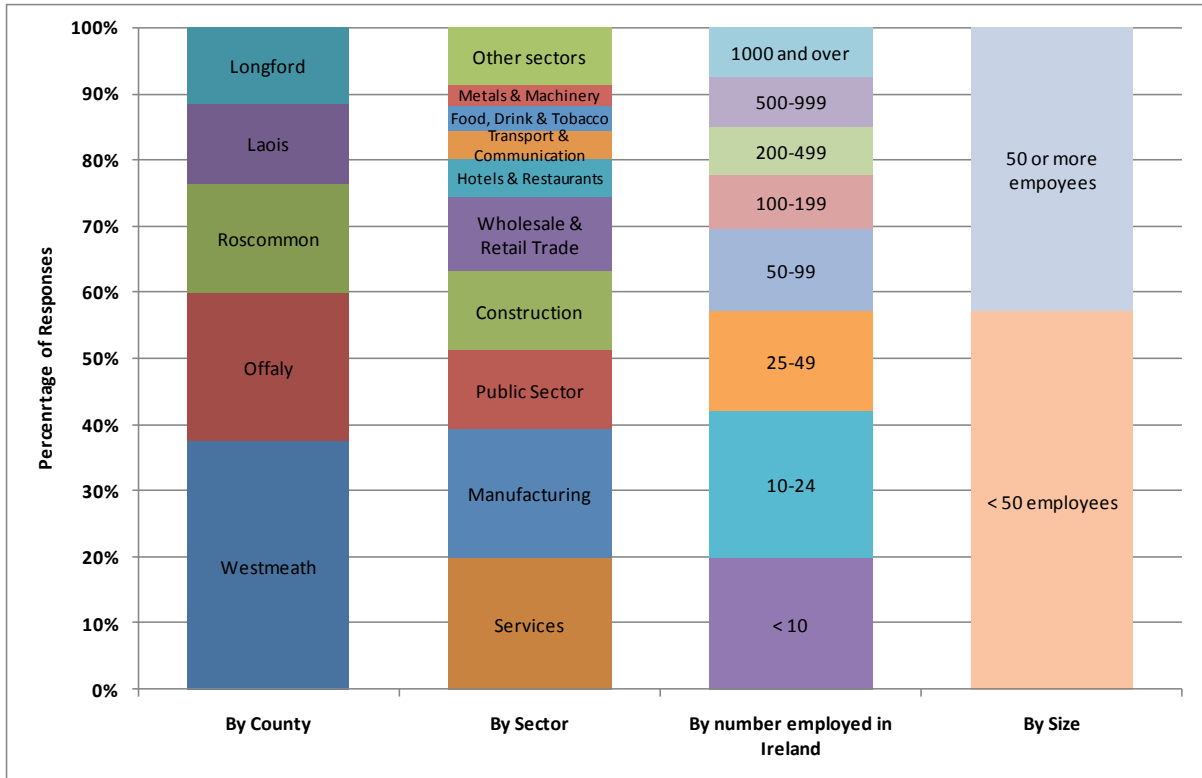


Figure 13: Profile of survey responses

### Years in operation

The vast majority of the survey respondents have been in operation in their location for over 5 years, with over 70% of smaller organisations and over 85% of larger organisations in operation for more than 10 years. Note that numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

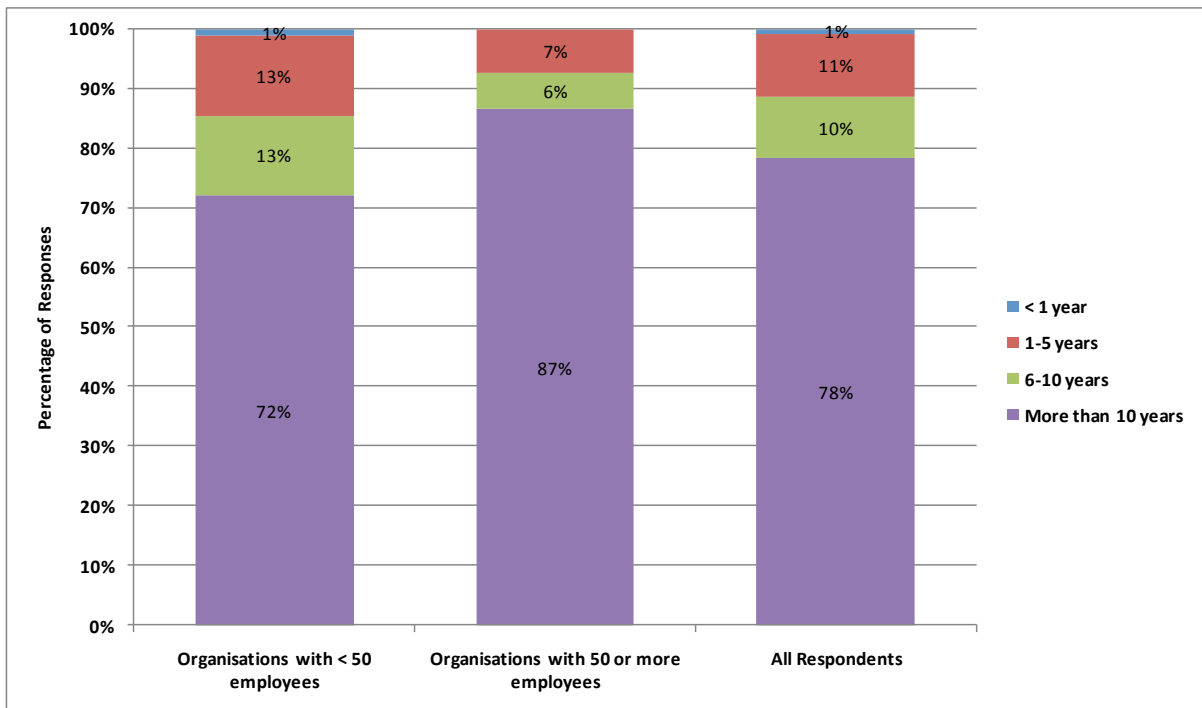


Figure 14: Years in operation

### Persons employed in the Midland counties

The following chart shows the breakdown of respondents by the number of people employed in the Midland counties with 25% of organisations employing 10 to 24 people.

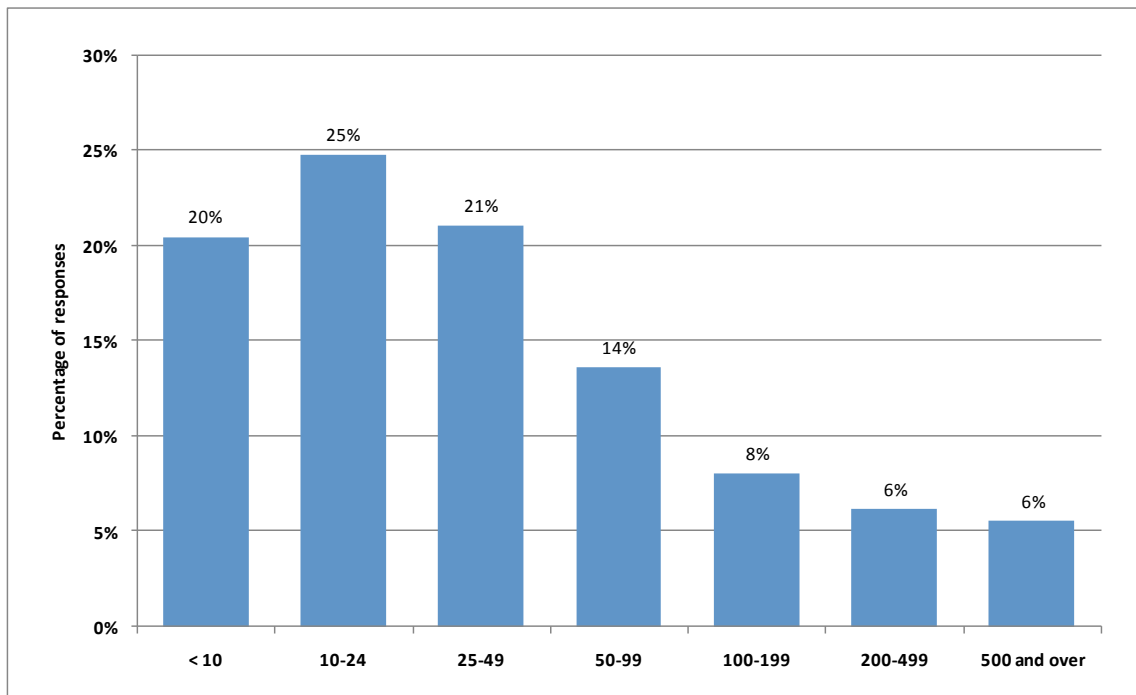


Figure 15: Survey responses by number of people employed

### People dedicated to Human Resources

Almost 70% of smaller organisations did not have a dedicated Human Resources (HR) person, while over 70% of organisations with 50 or more employees have at least one person or more dedicated to HR, as shown below.

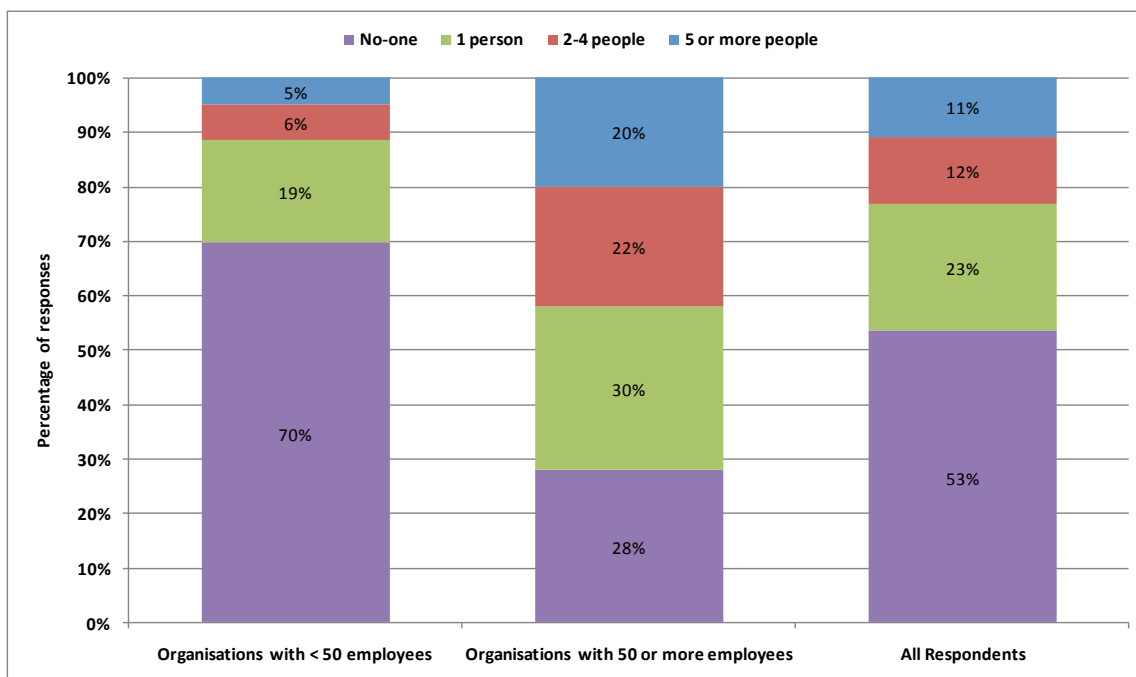


Figure 16: Profile of people dedicated to HR

## Attitudinal statements about skills

The organisations surveyed were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the following five statements:

1. The education sector (Schools, Institute of Technologies, etc.) produces appropriately skilled people for my organisation.
2. The training sector (FÁS, CEB, etc.) provides appropriate courses to develop the skills of the employees in my organisation.
3. It is the Government’s responsibility to ensure young people are educated to appropriate standards before entering the workforce.
4. Employers have a clear responsibility to increase their investment in employee skills, training and qualifications.
5. Employers have a responsibility to raise literacy/numeracy standards within the workforce.

The breakdown of responses in the chart below shows that 67% of respondents tend to agree with the first statement that the education sector produces appropriately skilled people while 55% of respondents tend to agree with the second statement that the training sector provides appropriate courses.

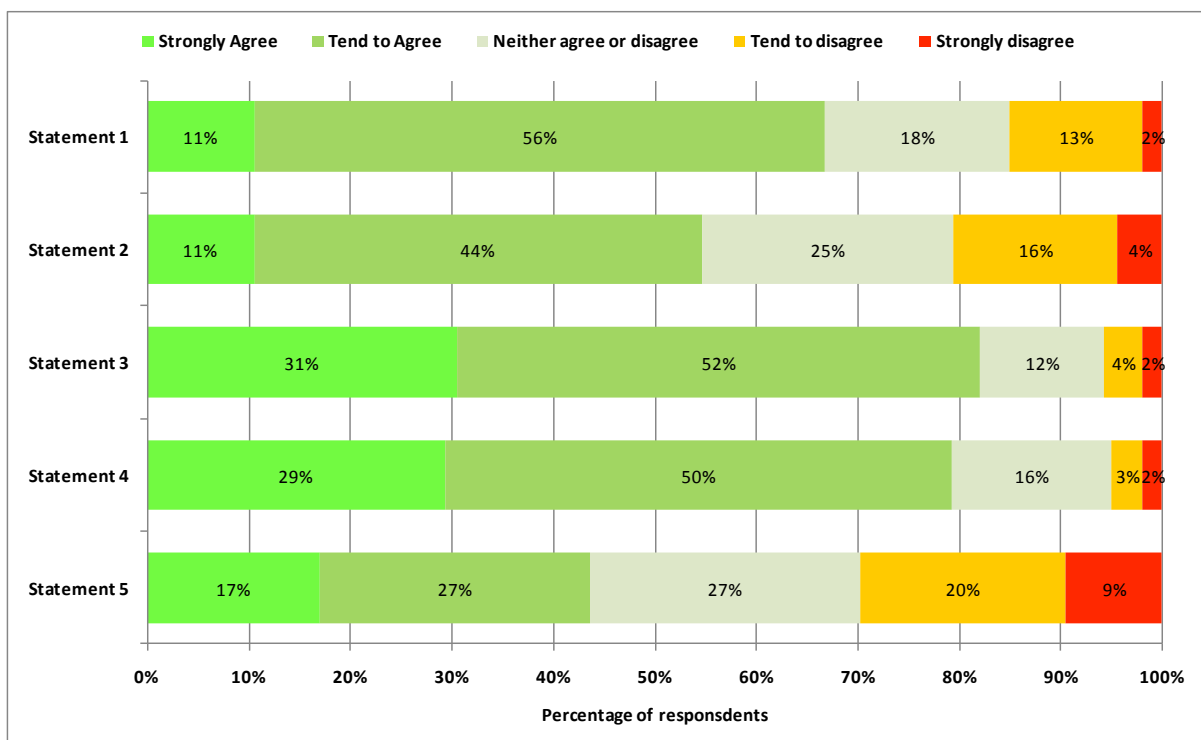


Figure 17: Levels of agreement with attitudinal statements

There are high levels of agreement (around 80%) for the third and fourth statements that it is the Government’s responsibility to ensure young people are educated to an appropriate standard and that employers have a responsibility to increase their investment in employee skills.

Finally, while 44% of respondents tend to agree that employers have a responsibility to raise literacy/numeracy standards in the workforce, there is a significant proportion (almost 30%)

of respondents who tend to disagree with this statement. The following chart shows the levels of agreement with the statement across smaller and larger organisations. While the proportion of smaller organisations that tend to strongly disagree is higher relative to larger organisations, the overall proportions that tend to disagree are quite similar.

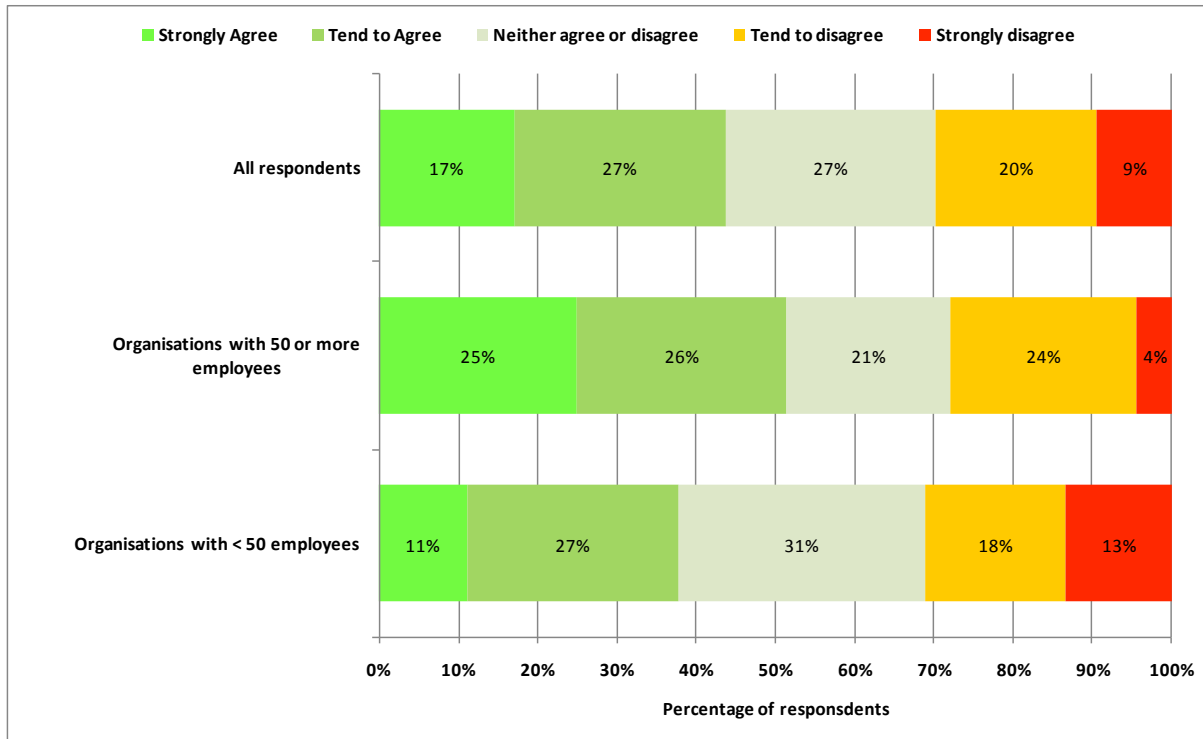


Figure 18: Levels of agreement to statement about employer's responsibility to raise literacy/numeracy

## Employee up-skilling

Questions were asked about the need for their employees to up-skill so that the business objectives can be achieved. Those organisations were then asked to identify their priority areas for up-skilling and areas where they experience skill shortages.

### Need to up-skill

A total of 67% of all respondents indicated that they needed to up-skill their employees so as to meet their organisation's business objectives. This proportion was 84% for larger organisations and 54% for those employing less than 50 people, as shown in the chart below.

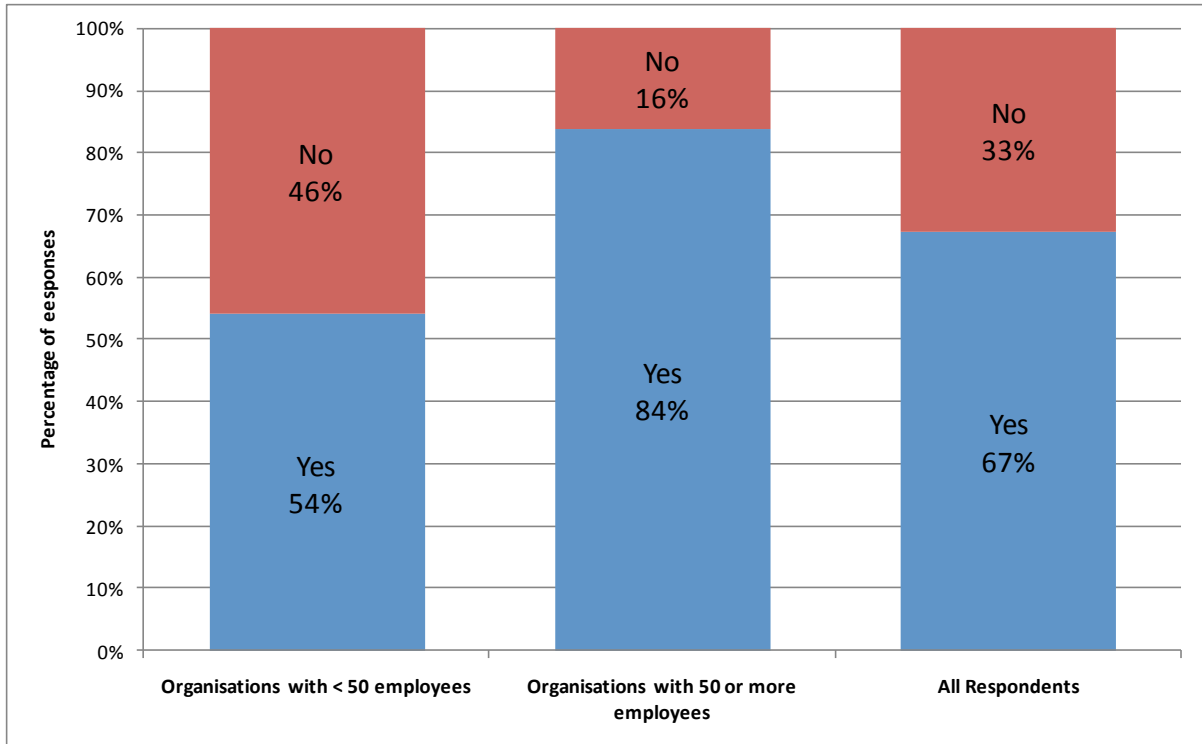


Figure 19: Need to up-skill employees

### Priority skills

Respondents were asked to indicate the top three priority skills required and the following chart shows that over 50% of respondents indicated that *Management* skills are their most pressing need. Almost 40% of respondents indicated a need for *Sales/Marketing* skills while over 10% of organisations indicated a priority need in *Technical* and *IT* skills.

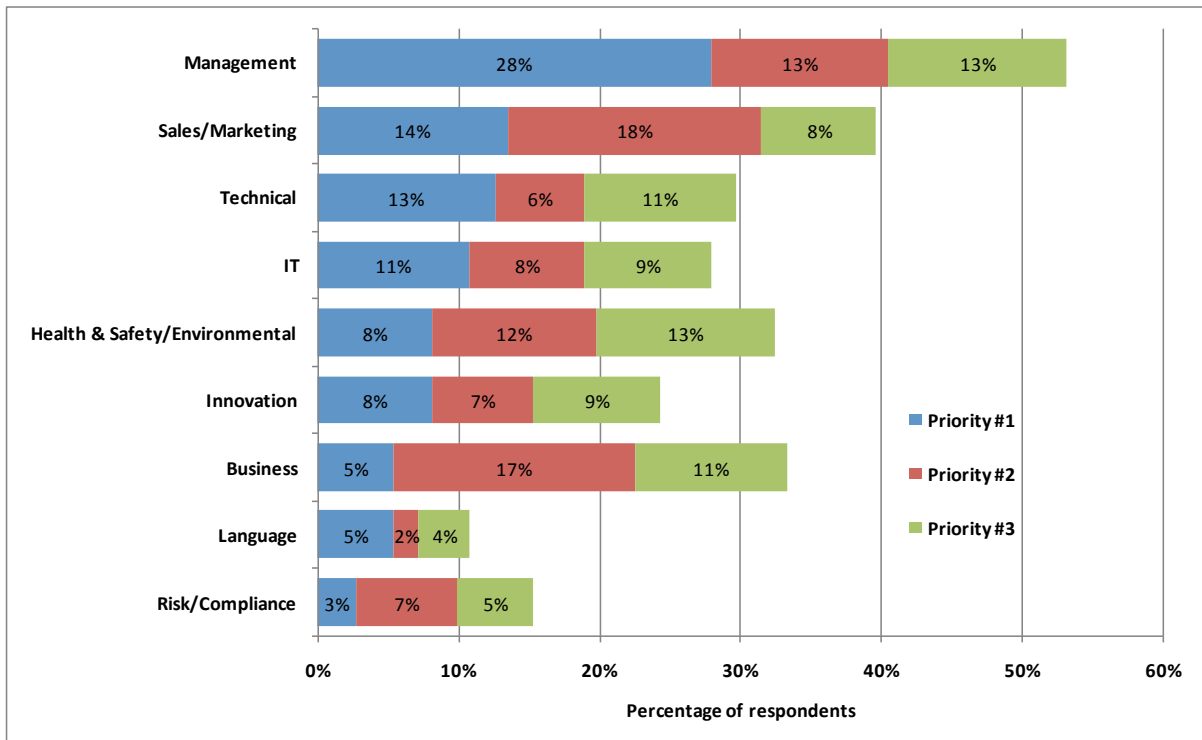


Figure 20: All organisations - percentage requiring priority skills

For small organisations (employing less than 50 employees) *Management* skills are the highest priority for 25% of organisations while *Sales/Marketing* skills are a priority for almost 50% of smaller organisations surveyed, as shown in the chart below.

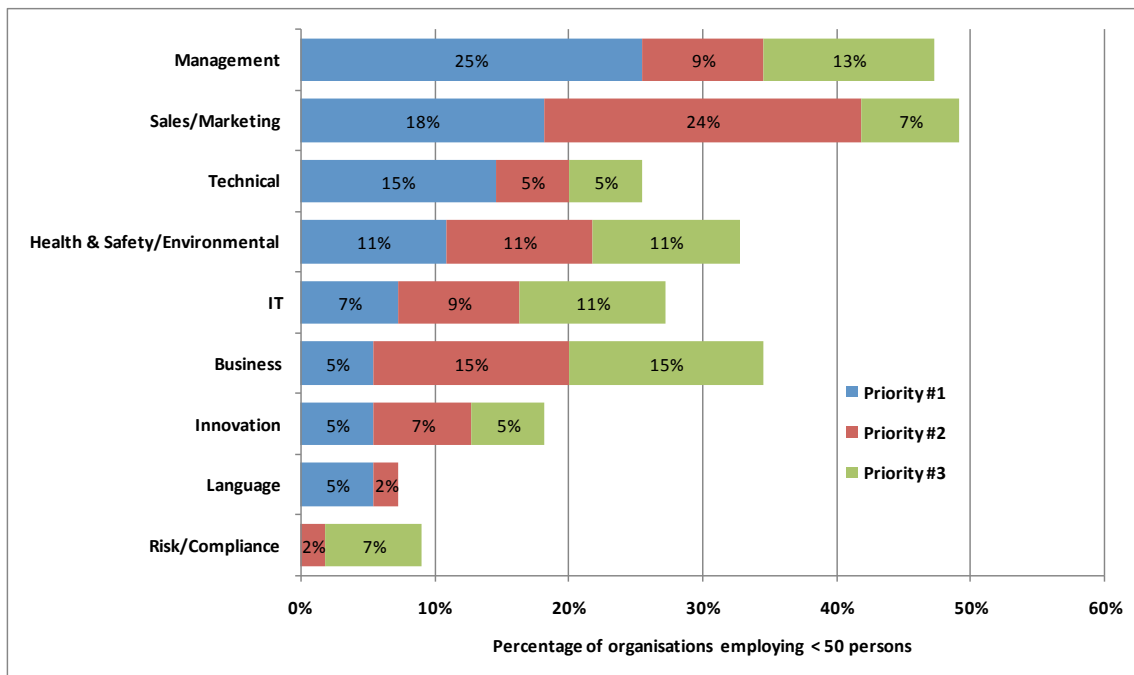


Figure 21: Small organisations - percentage requiring priority skills

For larger organisations employing 50 or more people *Management* skills are a key need with almost 60% of organisations indicating this to be a priority, as shown below. *IT*, *Technical* and *Innovation* skills were all a top priority for 10% of large organisations.

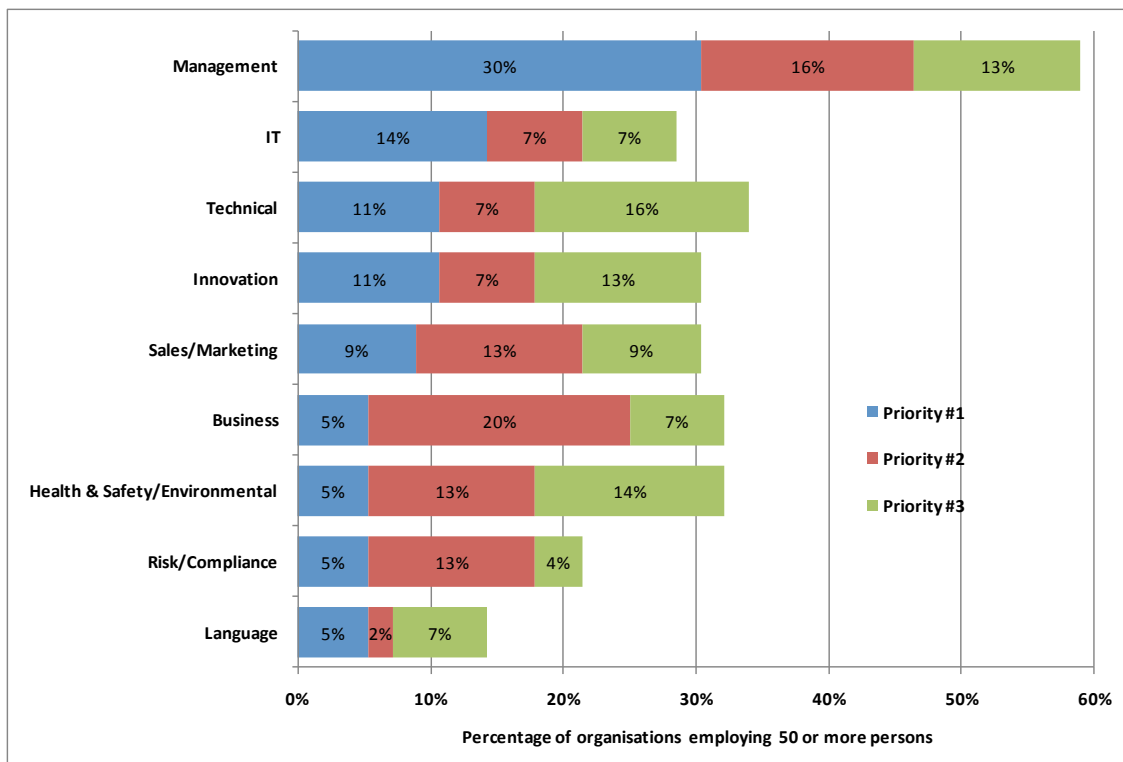


Figure 22: Large organisations - percentage requiring priority skills

The following charts show the distribution of priority skills across the following six economic sectors that accounted for 80% of survey responses:

- Services,
- Manufacturing,
- Public Sector,
- Construction,
- Wholesale & Retail Trade,
- Hotels & Restaurants.

### Services<sup>12</sup>

Over 60% of Services organisations identified *Management* skills as a priority need. While *Sales/Marketing* and *Business* skills are key needs for over 40% and 30% of Services organisations respectively, *IT* and *Innovation* skills are a top priority for 16% of Services organisations.

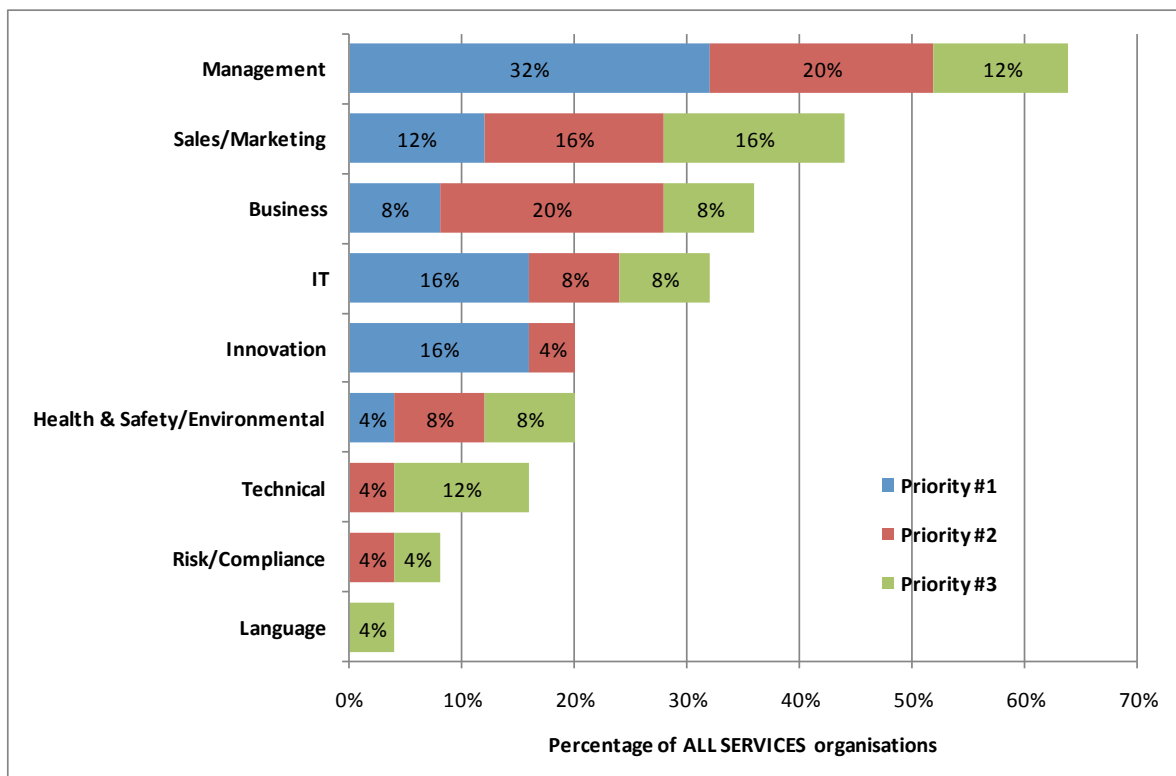


Figure 23: Priority skill needs for Services organisations

### Manufacturing

The following figure shows that over 50% of Manufacturing organisations identified *Management* and *Technical* skills as a priority need. *Innovation* skills are a key need for over 40% of organisations and *IT* skills are a top priority for 16% of manufacturing organisations. Furthermore, *Health & Safety/Environmental* skills are a top priority for 11% of organisations.

<sup>12</sup> Services includes Banking & Financial, Legal, Accounting & Professional and Other services

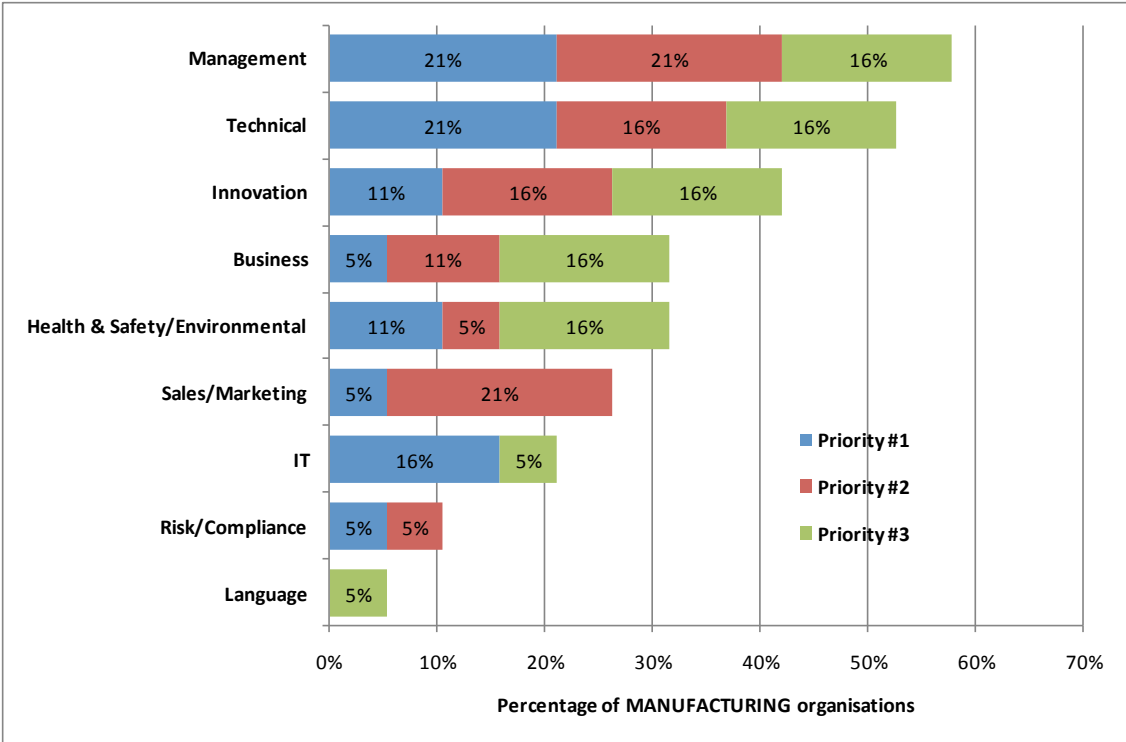


Figure 24: Priority skill needs for manufacturing organisations

**Public Sector<sup>13</sup>**

The clear priority for Public Sector organisations is *Management* skills which was identified as a priority need by over 80% of surveyed organisations. *Health & Safety/Environmental* and *Risk/Compliance* skills are the next most important for 45% and 36% of organisations.

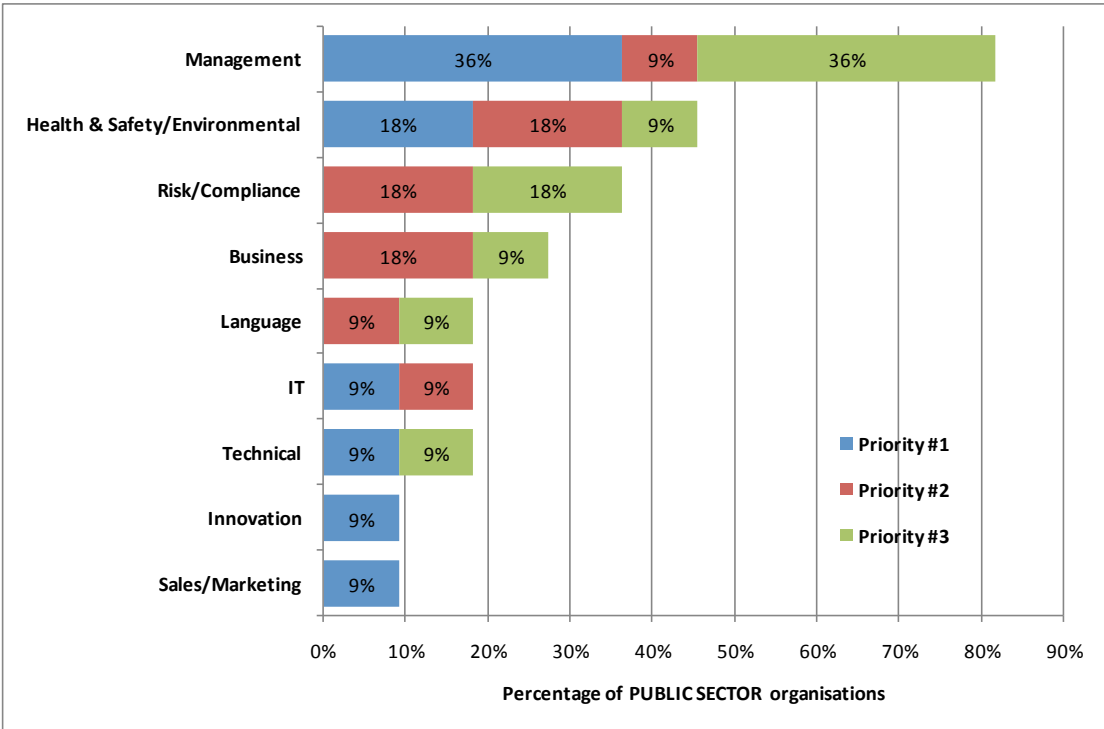


Figure 25: Priority skill needs for Public Sector organisations

<sup>13</sup> Public Sector includes Public administration & Defence, Education and Health & Social Work.

## Construction

Over 50% of the organisations surveyed in the Construction sector identified *Health & Safety/Environmental* as a key priority. However, 31% of organisation noted that *Management* and *Technical* skills were a number one priority for their organisations.

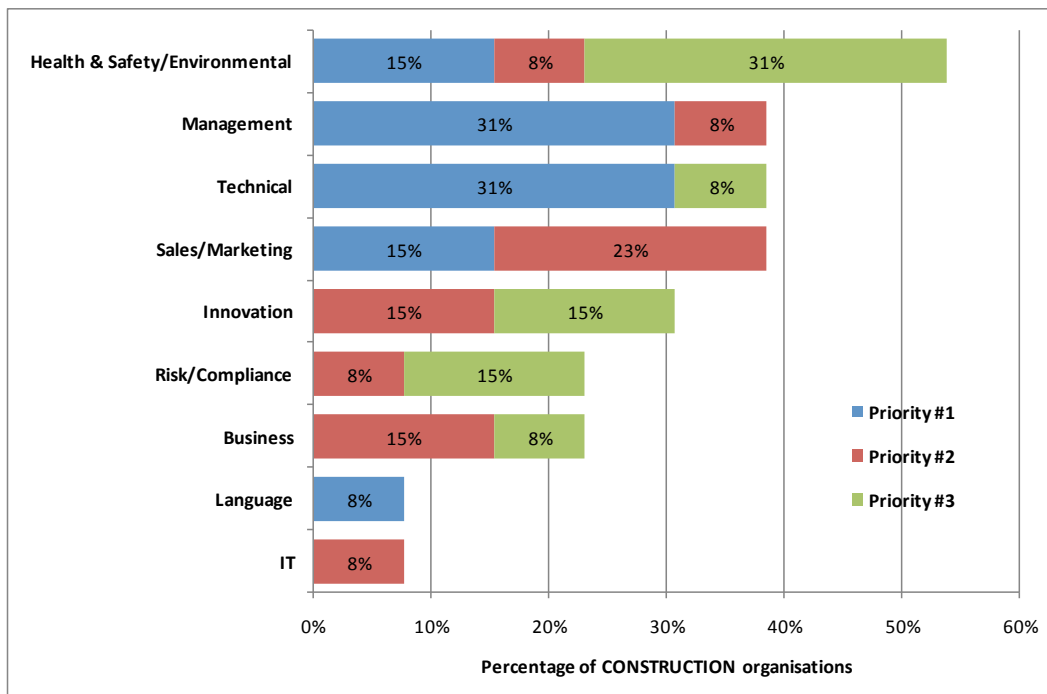


Figure 26: Priority skill needs for Construction organisations

## Wholesale & Retail Trade

*Sales/Marketing* skills are a priority for over 70% of *Wholesale & Retail Trade* organisations while a total of 53% of organisations identified *Management* skills as a top priority skill need.

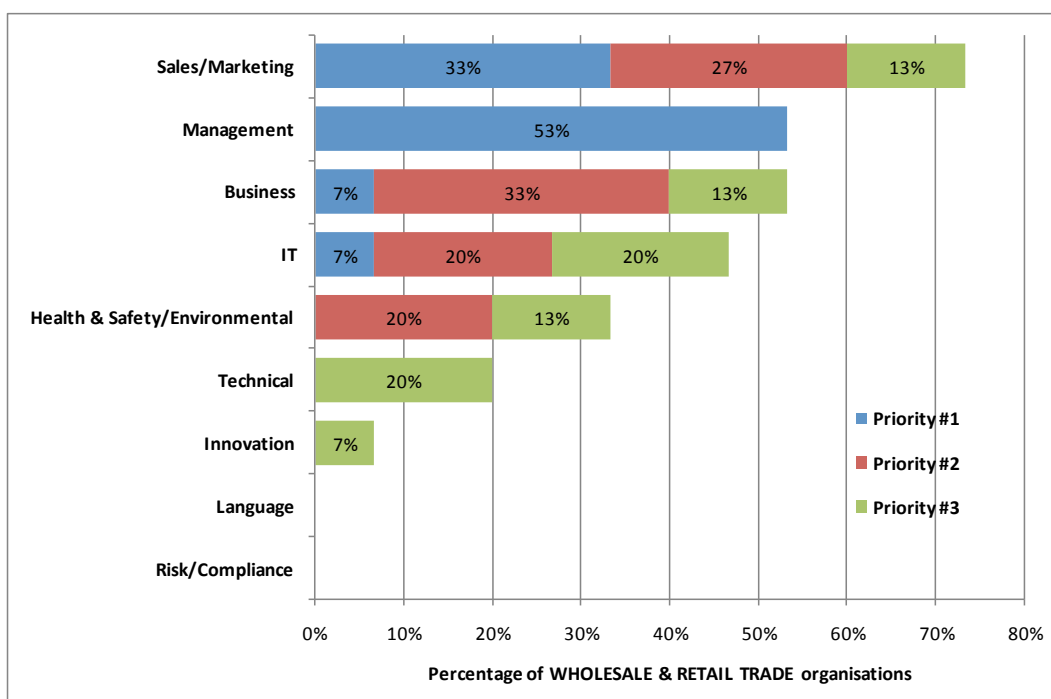


Figure 27: Priority skill needs for Wholesale and Retail organisations

## Hotels & Restaurants

A total of 63% of the Hotels & Restaurants survey indicated that *Management* skills as a key priority and 50% of organisations noted that *Sales/Marketing* and *IT* are also priority needs. *Language* skills are a top priority for a quarter of Hotels & Restaurants surveyed.

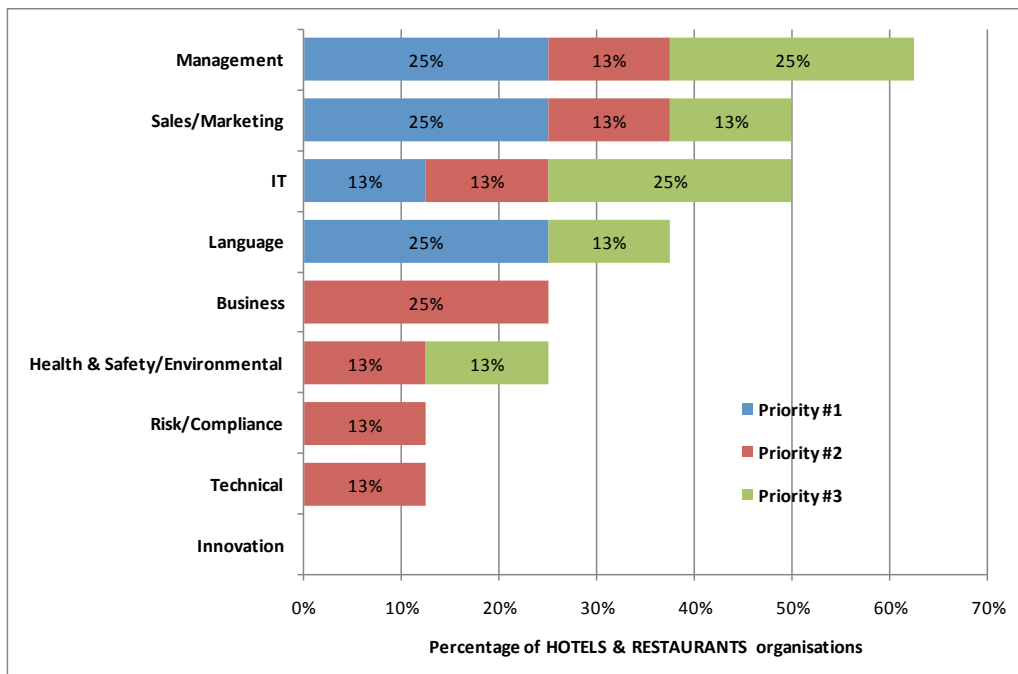


Figure 28: Priority skill needs for Hotels and Restaurants

## Other key skills

Organisations were also asked about the extent to which they experience skill shortages in Communication, Interpersonal, Customer service and literacy/numeracy. The next chart shows that larger organisations experience the highest shortage in *Interpersonal* skills while *Customer Service* and *Communication* skills are key shortages for smaller organisations.

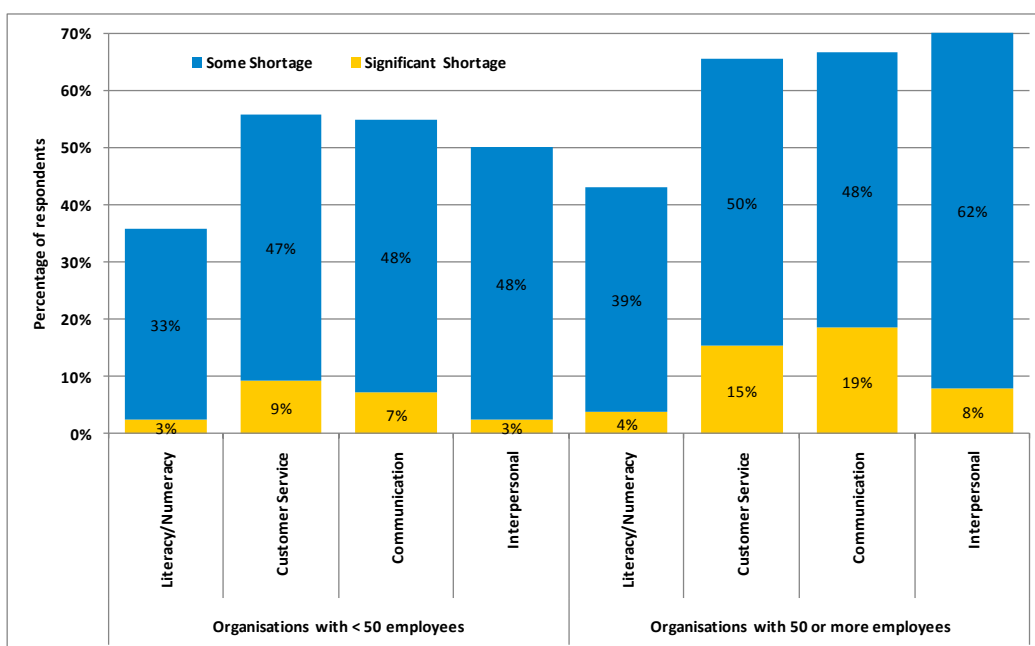


Figure 29: Key skill needs by organisation size

## Recruitment

Organisations were asked about their needs and difficulties in recruiting new employees. Questions were asked about occupation shortages, skills that are most difficult to sources and skill deficiencies when joining from the education sector.

### Occupation shortages

Despite the current economic difficulties, some occupation shortages do exist. Approximately 7% of small organisations employing less than 50 persons indicated a significant shortage in *Sales/Marketing* occupations, with a further 16% experiencing some shortage in this area. Approximately 4% of organisations experience a significant shortage of *Scientists, Chemists & Laboratory Technicians* and *IT Professionals*, as shown in the following chart.

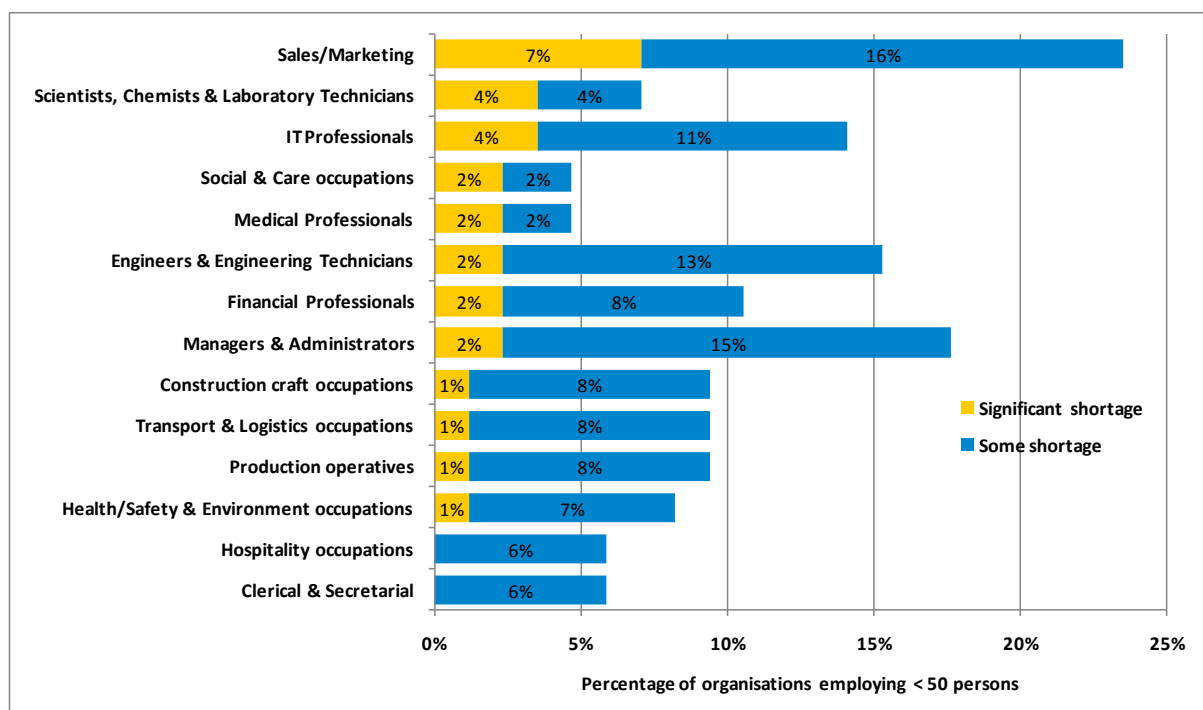


Figure 30: Smaller organisations - occupation shortages

The two occupations with the highest levels of significant shortage as experienced by larger organisations employing 50 or more persons are *Sales/Marketing* and *Engineers & Engineering Technicians*. The shortages across a range of 14 occupations within these larger organisations are shown in the following chart.

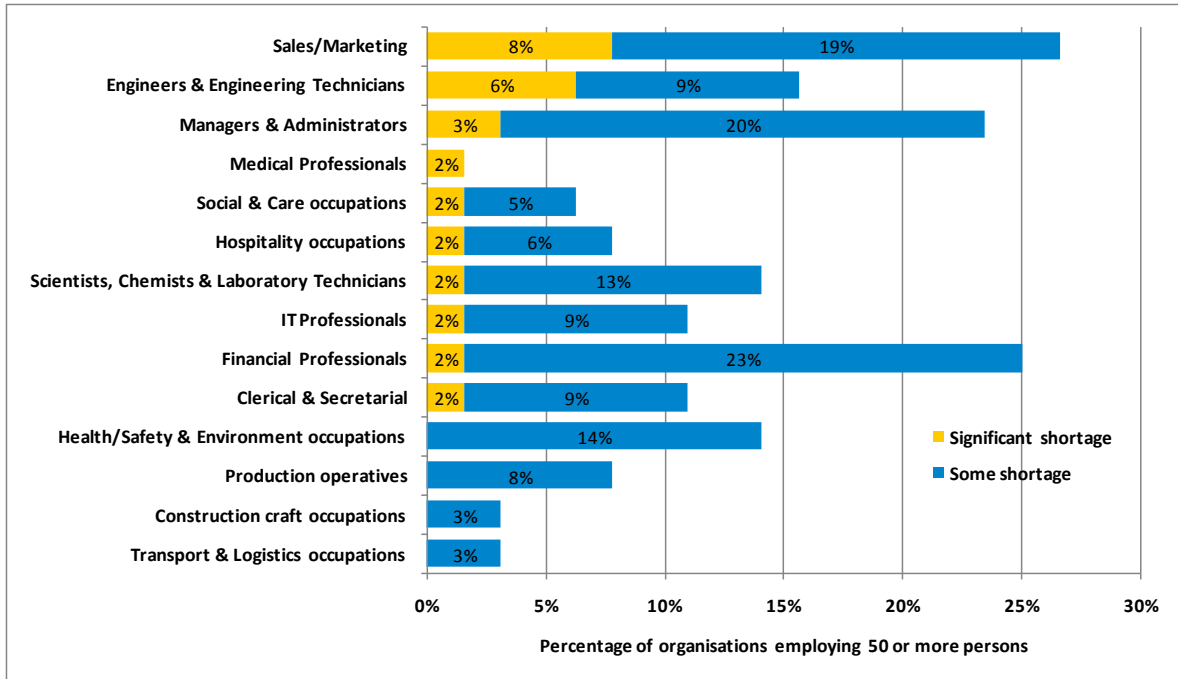


Figure 31: Larger organisations - occupation shortages

*Skills that are most difficult to source*

Organisations were also asked about the occupation or combination of skills that they find most difficult to source and a total of 90 responses were provided. Approximately 10% of respondents noted that they were having no difficulty sourcing the skills they need particularly given the current economic situation. The following chart shows the frequency of responses grouped by occupation/skills categories.

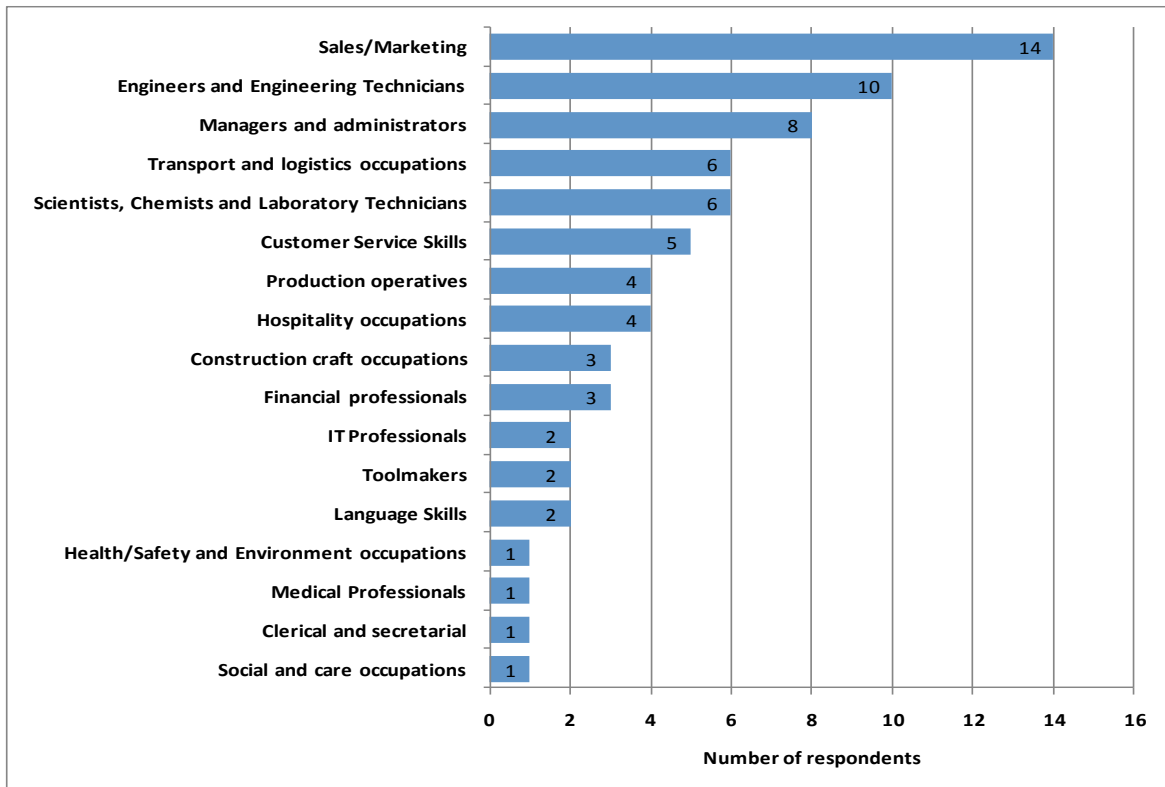


Figure 32: Frequency of responses by most difficult occupation/skill to recruit

### Skills deficiencies when joining from Higher Education

Experience was cited as the highest deficiency for graduate-level employees joining from Higher Education, with 72% of larger organisations and 69% of smaller organisations noting this deficit, as shown in the chart below.

For smaller organisations, the next most significant deficiency is *Business Acumen and Commercial Awareness* as noted by 34% of respondents. However, the second most important deficiency for larger organisations is skill in *Leadership/Management*.

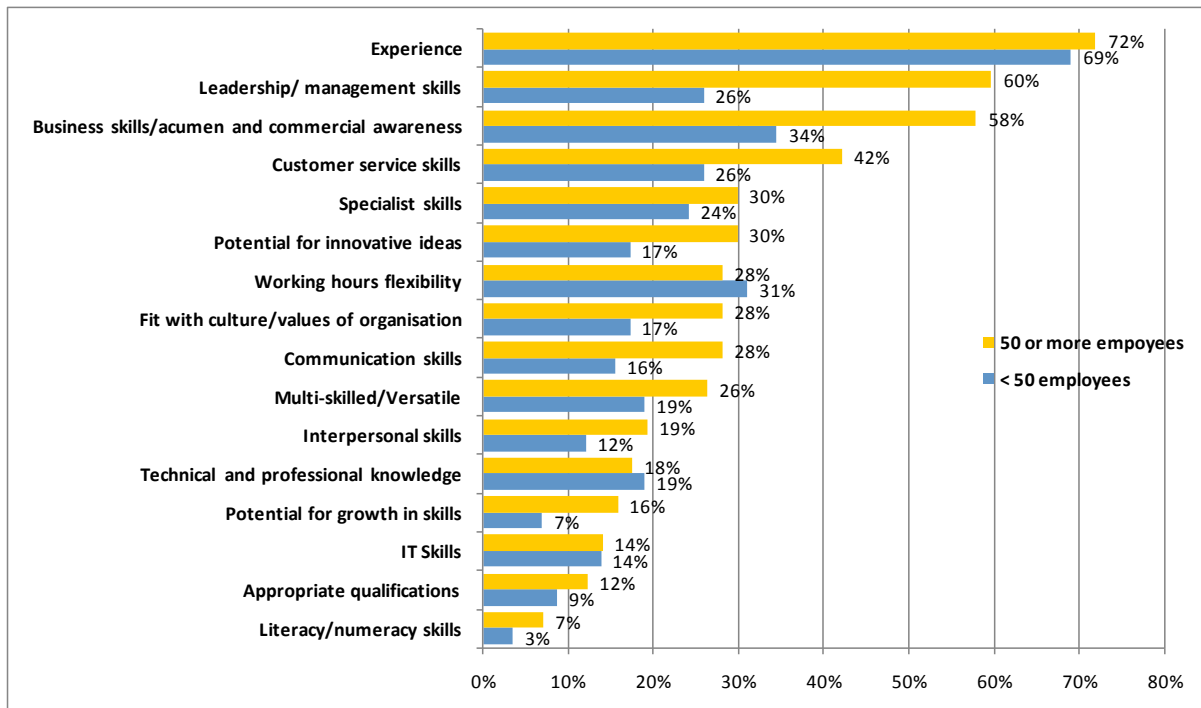


Figure 33: Skills deficiencies when joining from Higher Education

### Training and Education

Organisations were also surveyed about their training and education activities and were asked about their training budgets, methods of learning and training issues. Respondents were also asked to provide feedback for Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) and FÁS.

#### Training budget

Approximately 44% of respondents indicated that there is a dedicated training budget within their organisation. This proportion increases to 66% for larger organisations, while it decreases to only 28% in organisations where fewer than 50 people are employed. On average, organisations spend approximately 3.5% of turnover on training. The average spend for a smaller organisation is approximately 3.3% and 3.9% for larger organisations. The chart below shows the profile of the percentage of turnover spent on training by organisation size.



Figure 34: Training spends as percentage of turnover

### Methods of learning

The most popular methods of learning in larger organisations are *in-house training courses* and *coaching and/or mentoring* and these methods are used by 89% and 65% of organisations respectively, as shown in the chart below. *In-house training courses* are also the most popular learning method in smaller organisations (63%), while *FÁS courses* are the second most popular method of learning (45%), as shown below.

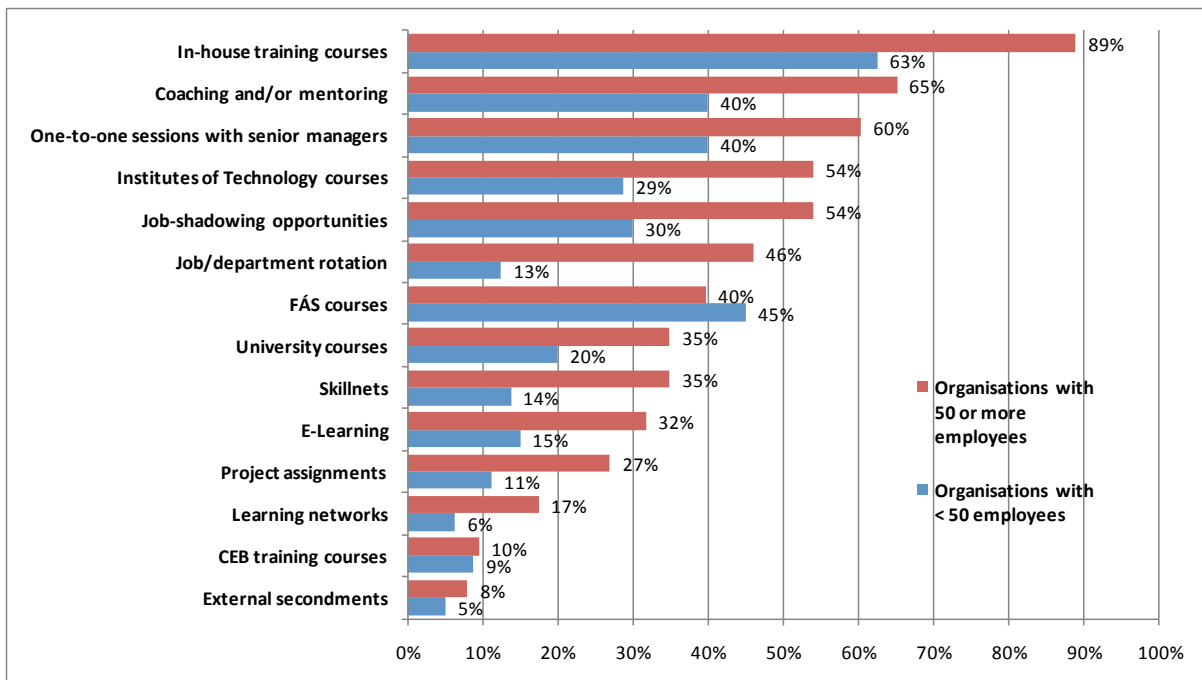


Figure 35: Methods of learning

Courses in Institutes of Technology are used by 54% of larger organisations and only 29% of smaller organisations, while FÁS courses are used by 40% of larger and 45% of smaller organisations. Skillnets are used by 35% of larger organisations, but by only 14% of smaller organisations.

### *In-house training courses*

Organisations offer in-house training courses in a wide range of areas, as shown in the following chart. The three most frequent areas for larger organisations are:

- Customer Service skills (65% of respondents)
- Risk/Compliance awareness and skills (61%), and
- Management skills (59%).

The three most frequent areas for smaller organisations are

- Customer Service skills (43%)
- Technical skills (40%), and
- IT skills (36%).

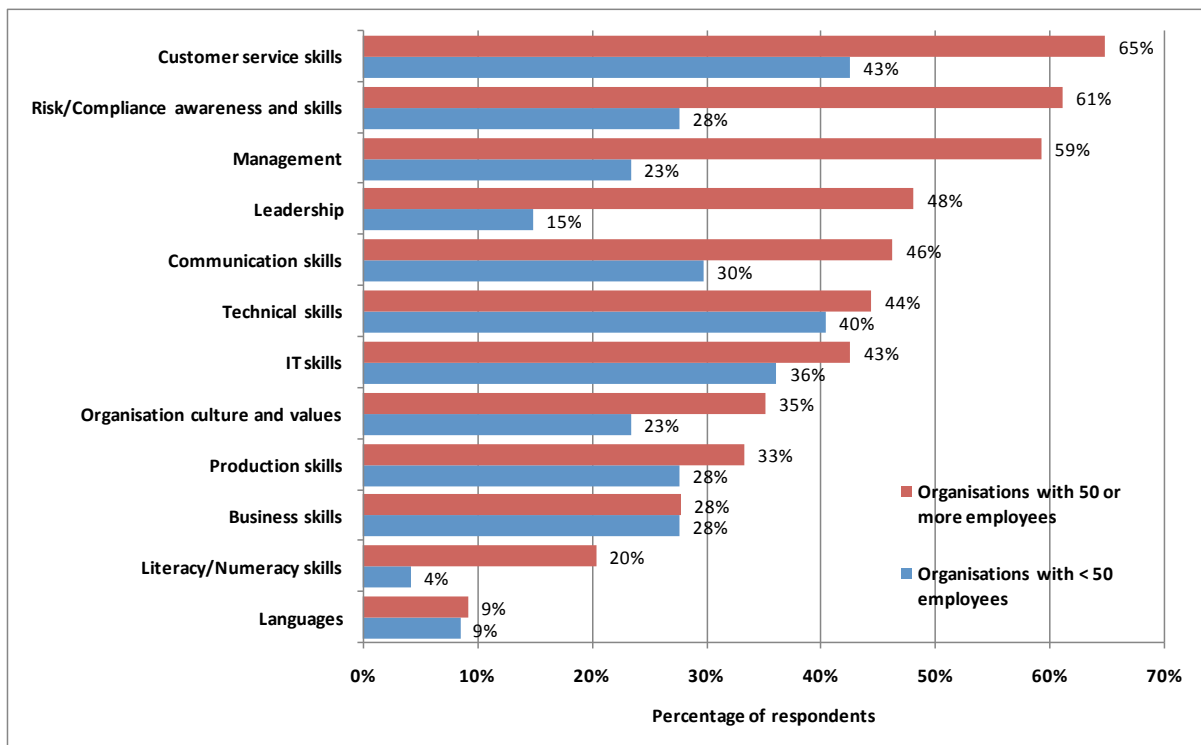


Figure 36: In-house training courses

### *Customised training programs*

Almost 60% of larger organisations have developed their own customised training programmes, while this percentage drops to just 29% for smaller organisations.

Organisations have developed courses in the following ten areas:

- Operations
- Health & Safety
- Customer Service
- Induction
- Management

- Engineering & Technical
- Finance
- IT
- Quality
- Sales

Just over 40% of respondents indicated an interest in developing customised training programmes for their employees. This level of interest increases to almost 60% for larger organisations as shown in the chart below.



Figure 37: Interest in developing customised training courses

Organisations are interested in developing customised course in the following ten areas:

- Customer Service
- Management
- Sales
- Health & Safety
- Operational
- Engineering & Technical
- IT
- Induction
- Finance
- Quality

### **Training issues**

The survey asked respondents to identify the significant and minor training issues that exist in their organisation. These issues are summarised for smaller and larger organisations in the following charts.

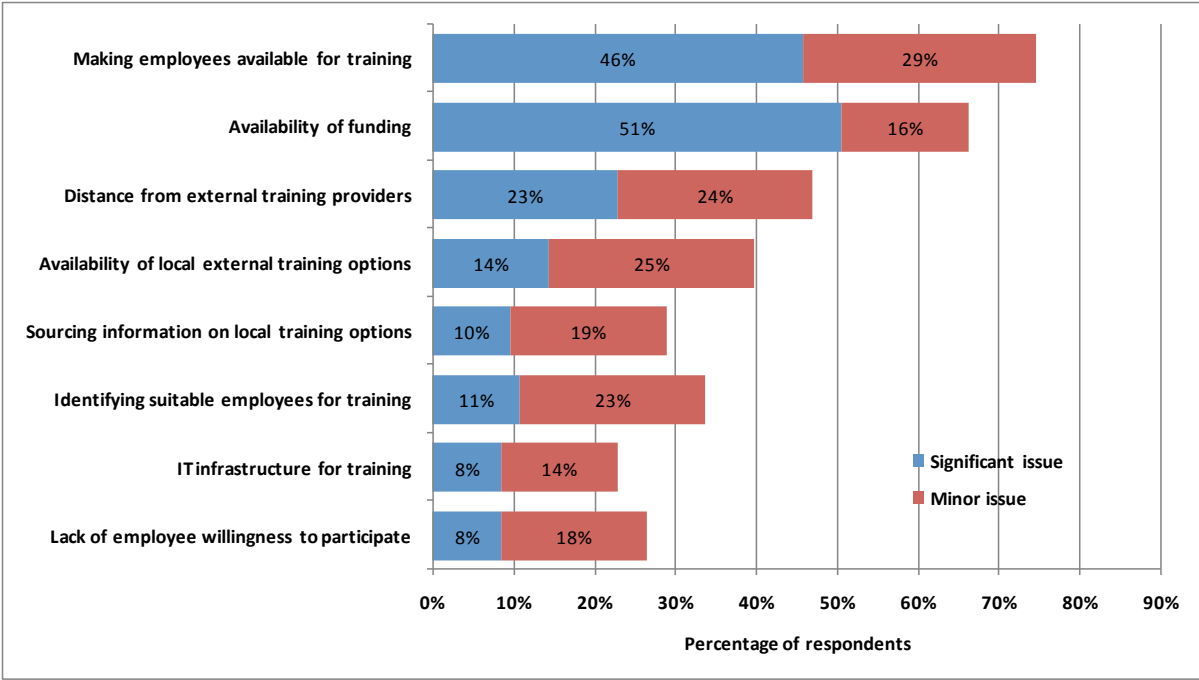


Figure 38: Smaller organisations - training issues

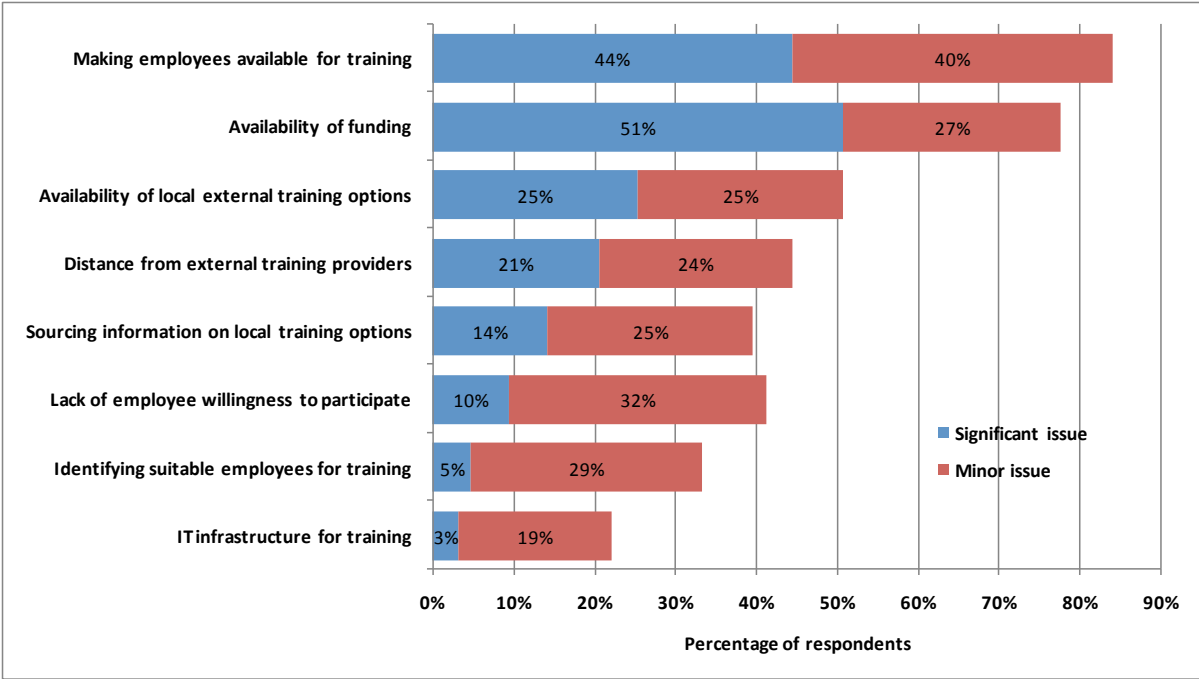


Figure 39: Larger organisations - training issues

The two most critical issues for both smaller and larger organisations are *making employees available for training* and the *availability of funding*. Approximately 50% of both smaller and larger organisations identified *availability of funding* as a significant issue, while a total of 84% of larger organisations and 75% of smaller organisations indicated that *making employees available for training* is an issue.

### **Feedback for FÁS**

Respondents were asked to suggest actions that FÁS could take to assist in the training and development of the employees in their organisation. A total of 87 organisations provided a suggestion and their answers can be grouped into the following eight categories:

1. Promote courses better
2. Enable easier access to courses
3. Find out what companies need
4. Provide a greater selection of courses
5. Offer more flexible course times
6. Include more practical experience
7. Enable on-site or more local training
8. Provide specific courses

### **Feedback for Athlone Institute of Technology**

Respondents were also asked to suggest actions that Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) could take to students for the workplace and to help in the training and development of existing employees. A total of 77 organisations provided suggestions and their answers can be grouped into the following seven categories:

1. Promote courses better
2. Develop customised courses
3. Find out what companies need
4. Offer more flexible courses
5. Include more work-placement & practical experience
6. Increase outreach & use of e-learning
7. Offer specific courses

## **Conclusions**

The following conclusions have been drawn from the survey findings outlined above.

- Smaller companies are not investing in up-skilling their employees and they may not fully appreciate the benefits of training and Human Resources (HR).
  - Approximately 46% of smaller companies surveyed indicated that they did not need to up-skill their employees to achieve business objectives.
  - Approximately 70% of smaller companies have no-one dedicated to HR.
- A significant proportion of surveyed organisations (29%) do not feel that employers have a responsibility to raise literacy/numeracy standards within the workforce. The proportion is quite similar across small and large organisations at 31% and 28% respectively, with a higher proportion of smaller companies (13% vs. 4%) strongly disagreeing with the statement.
- The priority areas where organisations need to up-skill their employees are:
  - *Management* skills which are a priority for 47% of small organisations and 59% of larger organisations, and
  - *Sales & Marketing* skills which are a priority for 49% of small organisations and 30% of large organisations.

- Other than *Management* skills, larger organisations have the highest priority need to up-skill in *IT*, *Technical* and *Innovation* skills as selected by 14%, 11% and 11% of larger organisations.
- The up-skilling needs vary by key economic sector as follows and will require targeted responses by the education and training sector:

Economic Sector	Most pressing skill need	Next most pressing need
Services	Management	Sales & Marketing
Manufacturing	Management	Technical
Public Sector	Management	Health & Safety/Environmental
Construction	Health & Safety/Environmental	Management
Wholesale & Retail	Sales & Marketing	Management and Business
Hotels & Restaurant	Management	Sales & Marketing and IT

- Organisations also experience shortages in the area of soft skills, particularly in the areas of *Communication*, *Customer Service* and *Interpersonal* skills.
  - Across smaller organisations, approximately 9% of respondents identified a significant shortage in *Customer Service* skills, while 7% indicated a shortage in *Communication* skills.
  - Across larger organisations, approximately 19% indicated a significant shortage in *Communication* skills and 15% indicated a significant shortage in *Customer Service* skills.
  - Finally, a total of 70% of large organisations indicated some level of shortage in the area of *Interpersonal* skills.
- In December 2008, despite the declining economic climate, a small proportion of organisations indicated that they had hiring difficulties in specific skill areas.
  - There were significant shortages in Sales/Marketing occupations for approximately 7% of large organisations and 8% of smaller organisations.
  - Shortages exist also in technical areas, as around 4% of large organisations experienced a significant shortage in Scientists, Chemists & Laboratory Technicians and 6% of small organisations experienced a shortage in Engineers & Engineering Technicians.
- All respondents noted that experience is the most significant deficiency in graduate-level persons joining from Higher Education, as indicated by 72% of large organisations and 69% of smaller organisations.
  - Deficiencies in Leadership/Management and Business Acumen were identified by 60% and 58% of large organisations.
  - Business Acumen and Flexibility were deficiencies for 34% and 31% of smaller organisations.

- The average spend on training for a large organisation is approximately 3.9% of annual turnover and 3.3% for smaller organisations. However, a total of 42% of smaller organisations spend 1% or less of annual turnover on training.
- In-house training courses are popular and are used by 89% of larger organisations and 63% of smaller organisations. However, there are a number of learning methods where usage levels differ significantly between smaller and larger organisations.

Learning Method	Used by % of Small Organisations	Used by % of Large Organisations
Job rotation	13%	46%
Coaching/Mentoring	40%	65%
Skillnets	14%	35%
Institute of Technology Courses	29%	54%
1-to-1 session with senior managers	40%	60%

- Organisations develop a wide range of in-house training courses.
  - Around 60% of larger organisations provide courses in Customer Service skills, Risk/Compliance awareness and Management.
  - Smaller organisations tend to focus on Technical skills (40%) and IT skills (36%), in addition to Customer Service skills (43%).
  - In-house Management courses are provided by 59% of large and 23% of small organisations, as Management Skills are a key priority for up-skilling.
- There is a significant level of interest in customised training programmes.
  - Almost 60% of larger organisations and 29% of smaller organisations have already developed their own customised training programs.
  - Approximately 33% of smaller and 60% of larger organisations indicated an interest in developing customised training programmes for their employees.
- There are two key training issues faced by both small and large organisations.
  - *Making employees available for training* is a significant issue for 46% of small and 44% of large organisations.
  - *Availability of funding* is a significant issue for 51% of both small and large organisations and is also a minor issue for an additional 16% of small and 27% of large organisations. Funding availability is likely to have become a more significant issue since December given the recent deterioration in the economy.
- Finally, the feedback from respondents indicated that both FÁS and Athlone Institute of Technology could help organisations in the Midlands by:
  - Ensuring that organisations are more aware of course offerings,
  - Offering courses at flexible times and making access to courses easier, and
  - Learning more about the training and education needs of companies.

## 5. SKILL NEEDS ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendations below have been developed for the following three groups based on an analysis of the findings of the Midlands skills survey:

- Midlands Gateway Chamber and Midlands Gateway Implementation Forum,
- Training, Education and Development Agencies, and
- Employers in the Midlands Region.

### Midlands Gateway Chamber & Midlands Gateway Implementation Forum

The Midlands Gateway Chamber and the Implementation Forum should agree a specific action plan for the Gateway with the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, FÁS, AIT and other relevant agencies to address the top 5 priority skill needs across the Region:

- Management,
- Sales/Marketing,
- Technical,
- IT, and
- Health & Safety/Environmental.

This action plan should include the following three items:

- Guide and coordinate the development a “one-stop” internet portal<sup>14</sup> that brings together information on the training and education courses offered by the public sector and qualified private institutions operating in the Midland Region.
  - Course offerings should be organised for employers and for individuals.
  - This portal will help training users better negotiate the considerable and complex set of offerings available and will also enhance the awareness of training and education courses within organisations.
- Establish a system to regularly assess the Region’s skills base and skills needs.
  - In 2006 the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs<sup>15</sup> identified a “**critically important need to strengthen regional labour market knowledge and to build the capacity for capturing and disseminating knowledge of labour market processes**”. It recommended that “**HEIs are provided with timely, regular and accurate information on the recruitment needs of local firms and that employability issues inform curriculum design**”.
  - This monitoring system should include regular surveys and consultative industry associations to better identify key training and recruitment needs.
- Profile and assess the needs of the following three important groups in the Midland Region who were not within the scope of this skills audit:
  - Unemployed persons:  
With almost 13,000 people unemployed in the Midlands as of November 2008, research is required to determine their skill profile and their education

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<sup>14</sup> See [www.tusnua.ie](http://www.tusnua.ie) for a recently developed example of such an internet portal for the MidWest Region.

<sup>15</sup> Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, *Skills at Regional Level in Ireland*, Prepared by Public and Corporate Economic Consultants, May 2006

and training needs to assist them in gaining employment.

- Persons who did not complete second level education:  
Over 70,000 persons in the Midlands did not complete second level education. Research is required to identify the education and training programmes necessary for the Midland Region to achieve the educational attainment vision set out in the National Skills Strategy for 2020.
- Persons living in the region and working in another region:  
Over 25,000 persons in the Midlands Region travel over 25km to work. The 2006 Census of Place of Work<sup>16</sup> should be analysed to profile the occupation and industry sectors of those from the Midlands that work outside the region.

## Training, Education and Development Agencies

### *Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)*

- AIT should continue to develop and deliver modules and programmes to address the key skills needs identified in the skills survey such as *Management, Sales/Marketing, IT and Innovation*.
  - The Work Based Learning (WBL) development officer at AIT is reviewing the survey findings to inform decisions on the creation of new training programmes that can be delivered in the workplace.
  - AIT is conducting a programmatic review of all courses in 2009/2010 and will incorporate the findings of the survey into the review.
  - AIT has developed customised and dedicated training programmes for organisations in the past, including an MSc in Software Engineering and a full training programme for the start-up of a Medical Devices organisation.
- AIT should continue to promote its programme offerings and should evaluate opportunities to enhance information flows to organisations about their offerings
  - AIT recently circulated 120,000 copies of a dedicated institute magazine in local newspapers.
  - AIT should support the “one-stop” internet portal outlined above.
- AIT should continue to provide flexible access mechanisms to their programmes and identify opportunities to enhance the flexibility of access.
  - By mid-2010, AIT plans to offer over 70% of programmes via e-learning, subject to demand.
  - AIT offers evening courses to approximately 2,000 persons is continually reviewing its offering with regard to the National Framework of Qualifications.
  - AIT is also examining the potential to offer programmes in various locations in the Midland Region outside Athlone.

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<sup>16</sup> See [www.cso.ie/census/POWCAR\\_2006.htm](http://www.cso.ie/census/POWCAR_2006.htm) for more details.

- AIT should continue to increase the opportunities for work-placement across programmes, so as to enable students to graduate with valuable job experience. However, achieving this will require organisations to provide an increased number of meaningful work placements in the Midlands Region.

## FÁS

- FÁS should continue to provide training in the deficit areas highlighted in the skill needs assessment survey such as *Management, Sales/Marketing, Technical, IT and Health & Safety/Environmental* skills.
  - FÁS currently provides up-skilling opportunities to over 4,000 persons in employment in the Midlands and will continue to review and develop courses.
  - FÁS is planning to provide innovative new courses in areas such as Management Development & Networking, Blended E-learning and Innovation.
  - FÁS will continue to develop up-skilling programmes through its “One Step Up” programme to deliver those courses needed to address skill deficits.
  - FÁS assists SME companies throughout the region<sup>17</sup> through training supports/development programmes and is proactively engaged in supporting companies who have announced or are threatened by job losses.
  - FÁS in partnership with FETAC and the Department of Education and Science (DES) will continue to evaluate progression routes for individuals who wish to further their education and broaden their skills in the Technical/Engineering/Construction and Mechanical areas.
- FÁS should continue to promote its services to businesses and individuals through its website [www.fas.ie](http://www.fas.ie), the media, its local offices and via direct contact with clients.
  - FÁS has public offices in all major towns in the region and provides services in clinics, job clubs, community employment schemes, external training, etc.
  - FÁS will continue to promote Excellence through People (ETP) as a means of raising awareness of the benefits of investing in people to increase the competitiveness of organisations, through activities such as breakfast briefings, direct marketing campaign and direct company contacts.
  - FÁS will continue to work closely with other agencies throughout the region to promote Employment & Training, including DES, Enterprise Ireland (EI), IDA, the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) and County Enterprise Boards (CEBs).
- FÁS should continue to offer flexible course delivery and access to programmes via its main centres, outreach centres and its established eCollege programme.
  - In 2009, FÁS is planning to provide over 210+ day and evening training courses for over 6,000 participants in 30 or more locations throughout the FÁS Midlands Region. This represents a threefold increase on 2008 numbers.
  - FÁS continues to offer practical support and allowances to enable and assist the participation of people with a disability to enter/re-enter the labour force.

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<sup>17</sup> FÁS Midlands Region includes the counties of Kildare, Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath.

- FÁS's eCollege programme offers self-paced, online distance learning courses in a wide range of areas such as Business, IT and Health & Safety. FÁS will provide almost 1,700 places on eCollege courses including tutor support and an e-learning support centre.
- In 2009, FÁS plans to provide services to over 45,000 clients in the FÁS Midlands Region through its four business units as follows:
  - FÁS Employment Services Unit will provide services to 41,000 clients to help jobseekers find the best possible job and employers the most suitable staff.
  - FÁS Services to Business Unit will provide training/up-skilling to over 4,000 people, particularly those employed in Small to Medium-Sized Enterprises.
  - FÁS Training Services Unit plans to deliver in excess of 6,000 training places to the unemployed and to employees and employers in training centres across 30 or more locations in the region.
  - FÁS Community Services Unit will provide over 5,000 places in Community Employment initiatives including Job Clubs, Local Training Initiatives and Specialist Training and Supported Employment for People with disabilities.

#### **Other agencies and joint recommendations**

- The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), FÁS, Athlone Institute of Technology and Enterprise Ireland should educate smaller organisations on the benefits and value of employee training and human resources.
  - Existing programs such as FÁS's Excellence through People (ETP) should be incorporated into the education process.
  - CIPD could organise HR initiatives for the benefit of managers of smaller organisations. These could include
    - a HR forum or network where managers can get help to address difficult HR issues, or
    - a mentoring programme where experienced HR managers in large organisations offer a sounding board to those in smaller organisations who are dealing with HR related issues.
- Other education and training institutions in the region such as Enterprise Ireland, County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) and Skillnets should factor the skills needs identified in the survey into the ongoing development of their offerings.
  - EI already helps companies to develop leadership and management capabilities by providing programmes under four broad themes:
    - Sales and Marketing
    - Strategy and Leadership
    - Entrepreneurship
    - Innovation and R&D Management

## Employers in the Midlands Region

- Organisations should urgently address the key training issue identified in the survey of making employees available for training. Employers should enhance the mechanisms to allow employees take advantage of the flexible course offerings of the education and training sector.
- All organisations have a responsibility for the training of their workforce and that includes raising literacy/numeracy standards. Where necessary, organisations should provide opportunities for their employees to improve their skills in this area.
- Organisations should familiarise themselves with the wide range of training and education courses on offer from the various training and education institutions and development agencies.
- Smaller organisations should invest more in employee training and consider the benefits of increased attention to Human Resources.
  - Only 54% of smaller organisations indicated a need to up-skill their employees and approximately 70% of smaller organisations have no one dedicated to HR.
- Smaller organisations should more frequently implement some of the learning methods used by larger organisations such as job rotation, mentoring and Skillnets.

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Golden Grill Portlaoise	Solanotech
Harmac Medical Products Ltd	Standish Sawmills
Heatwise	State Examinations Commission
Hodson Bay Hotel	The Office Centre
Image Furnishings Ltd	Tullamore Social Services Ltd
Irish Wheelchair Association	Westmeath Local Authority
John Madden & Associates Ltd	Wineport Lodge
Johnston Farm Equipment Ltd	

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- Midlands Gateway Chamber, *The Midlands Gateway: A vision for the future*, October 2007
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## 8. APPENDIX: OCCUPATION AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The following tables from the 2006 Census have been prepared by the CSO and show the following data for the Midland Region and counties Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath;

- Labour force classified by intermediate occupational group,
- Persons aged 15 years and over classified by detailed highest level of education,
- Persons aged 15 years and over classified by county, broad occupational group and highest level of education achieved.

**Table 3: Persons aged 15 years and over in the labour force and present in the State on Census Night, classified by county and intermediate occupational group, 2006**

		Midland Region	Laois	Longford	Offaly	Westmeath
<b>Total</b>		<b>121,826</b>	<b>32,643</b>	<b>16,400</b>	<b>34,134</b>	<b>38,649</b>
<b>Looking for first regular job</b>		<b>1,814</b>	475	269	494	576
<b>Intermediate occupational group</b>	<b>All occupations</b>	<b>120,012</b>	32,168	16,131	33,640	38,073
	Farming, fishing & forestry workers	<b>7,554</b>	2,278	1,217	2,276	1,783
	Electrical trades workers	<b>2,237</b>	670	251	615	701
	Engineering & allied trades workers	<b>5,577</b>	1,414	717	1,907	1,539
	Textile, clothing & leather workers	<b>353</b>	97	32	116	108
	Food, drink & tobacco production workers	<b>1,883</b>	404	495	600	384
	Chemical, paper, wood, rubber, plastics & printing workers	<b>1,237</b>	243	126	423	445
	Other manufacturing workers	<b>5,014</b>	1,242	650	1,711	1,411
	Building & construction workers	<b>13,333</b>	3,585	1,888	3,829	4,031
	Managers & executives	<b>5,045</b>	1,283	589	1,360	1,813
	Communication, warehouse & transport workers	<b>6,233</b>	1,856	746	1,732	1,899
	Clerical & office workers	<b>8,603</b>	2,388	984	2,398	2,833
	Sales occupations	<b>11,872</b>	3,205	1,439	3,262	3,966
	Business & commerce occupations	<b>2,540</b>	678	303	646	913
	Computer software occupations	<b>1,349</b>	307	128	305	609
	Scientific & technical occupations	<b>2,866</b>	721	358	715	1,072
	Health & related workers	<b>5,573</b>	1,560	608	1,513	1,892
	Social workers & related occupations	<b>1,008</b>	301	128	234	345
	Religious occupations	<b>218</b>	60	23	61	74
	Other professional workers	<b>1,638</b>	408	211	433	586
	Personal service & childcare workers	<b>11,161</b>	2,826	1,498	3,019	3,818
Teachers	<b>4,392</b>	1,183	628	1,133	1,448	
Central & local government workers	<b>4,036</b>	1,479	537	981	1,039	
Garda Síochána	<b>676</b>	210	72	176	218	
Army occupations	<b>847</b>	172	80	132	463	
Other gainful occupations (incl. not stated)	<b>14,767</b>	3,598	2,423	4,063	4,683	

Table 4: Persons aged 15 years and over and present in the State on Census Night, classified by county and detailed highest level of education achieved, 2006

		Midland Region	Laois	Longford	Offaly	Westmeath	
<b>Overall Total</b>		<b>195,429</b>	<b>51,895</b>	<b>26,928</b>	<b>54,911</b>	<b>61,695</b>	
<b>Total whose full-time education has ceased</b>		<b>167,681</b>	<b>44,934</b>	<b>23,062</b>	<b>47,453</b>	<b>52,232</b>	
<b>Highest level of education achieved</b>	<b>No formal education</b>	<b>1,176</b>	292	166	300	418	
	<b>Primary</b>	<b>32,143</b>	8,229	5,057	9,609	9,248	
	<b>Second level</b>	Lower secondary	<b>37,420</b>	10,284	4,942	11,244	10,950
		Upper secondary	<b>34,478</b>	9,466	4,386	9,761	10,865
		Technical or Vocational	<b>10,218</b>	2,649	1,554	2,927	3,088
		Both Upper Secondary and Technical or Vocational	<b>5,139</b>	1,432	691	1,358	1,658
	<b>Third level</b>	Non-degree	<b>16,418</b>	4,472	2,090	4,450	5,406
		Primary Degree	<b>6,881</b>	1,813	861	1,660	2,547
		Professional qualification (of Degree status at least)	<b>3,376</b>	861	448	868	1,199
		Both a Degree and a Professional qualification	<b>4,075</b>	1,040	552	1,038	1,445
		Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma	<b>4,344</b>	1,133	525	1,137	1,549
		Postgraduate Degree (Masters)	<b>2,648</b>	635	289	634	1,090
		Doctorate (Ph.D)	<b>342</b>	61	47	78	156
	<b>Not Stated</b>	<b>9,023</b>	2,567	1,454	2,389	2,613	
<b>Total whose full-time education has not ceased</b>		<b>27,748</b>	<b>6,961</b>	<b>3,866</b>	<b>7,458</b>	<b>9,463</b>	
<b>Economic status</b>	<b>Total at school, university, etc.</b>	<b>17,675</b>	<b>4,398</b>	<b>2,400</b>	<b>4,784</b>	<b>6,093</b>	
	<b>Other</b>	<b>10,073</b>	<b>2,563</b>	<b>1,466</b>	<b>2,674</b>	<b>3,370</b>	

**Table 5: Persons aged 15 years and over and present in the State on Census Night, classified by county, broad occupational group and highest level of education achieved, 2006**

Broad Occupational Group	Total	Total whose full-time education has ceased	Highest level of education achieved						Total whose full-time education has not ceased
			Primary (incl. no formal education)	Lower second level	Upper second level	Third Level		Not stated	
						Non-degree	Degree or higher		
<b>Midland Region</b>									
<b>All occupations</b>	<b>195,429</b>	<b>167,681</b>	<b>33,319</b>	<b>37,420</b>	<b>49,835</b>	<b>16,418</b>	<b>21,666</b>	<b>9,023</b>	<b>27,748</b>
Farming, fishing & forestry workers	10,494	10,201	4,252	2,537	2,190	643	296	283	293
Manufacturing workers	18,031	16,834	2,640	4,870	7,079	1,136	704	405	1,197
Building & construction workers	14,363	13,345	2,437	4,494	4,832	634	563	385	1,018
Clerical, managing & government workers	19,284	18,640	662	2,460	8,296	3,662	3,353	207	644
Communication & transport workers	6,992	6,713	1,462	2,212	2,257	402	218	162	279
Sales & commerce workers	15,706	14,792	1,293	3,119	5,843	1,696	2,589	252	914
Professional, technical & health workers	19,658	18,664	551	1,173	2,415	3,888	10,412	225	994
Services workers	14,268	13,267	2,107	3,326	4,694	1,698	1,103	339	1,001
Other workers (incl. not stated)	76,633	55,225	17,915	13,229	12,229	2,659	2,428	6,765	21,408
<b>Laois</b>									
<b>All occupations</b>	<b>51,895</b>	<b>44,934</b>	<b>8,521</b>	<b>10,284</b>	<b>13,547</b>	<b>4,472</b>	<b>5,543</b>	<b>2,567</b>	<b>6,961</b>
Farming, fishing & forestry workers	3,076	2,986	1,254	773	634	190	87	48	90
Manufacturing workers	4,480	4,207	641	1,289	1,744	287	157	89	273
Building & construction workers	3,842	3,531	623	1,208	1,290	170	150	90	311
Clerical, managing & government workers	5,597	5,406	186	716	2,535	1,017	884	68	191
Communication & transport workers	2,056	1,988	401	654	714	128	48	43	68
Sales & commerce workers	4,228	3,994	333	867	1,572	465	693	64	234
Professional, technical & health workers	5,170	4,895	144	321	656	1,053	2,649	72	275
Services workers	3,534	3,298	440	822	1,241	441	272	82	236
Other workers (incl. not stated)	19,912	14,629	4,499	3,634	3,161	721	603	2,011	5,283
<b>Longford</b>									
<b>All occupations</b>	<b>26,928</b>	<b>23,062</b>	<b>5,223</b>	<b>4,942</b>	<b>6,631</b>	<b>2,090</b>	<b>2,722</b>	<b>1,454</b>	<b>3,866</b>
Farming, fishing & forestry workers	1,748	1,702	770	362	348	100	36	86	46
Manufacturing workers	2,460	2,264	346	598	955	170	117	78	196
Building & construction workers	2,044	1,906	348	624	707	93	69	65	138
Clerical, managing & government workers	2,295	2,228	105	309	1,008	435	348	23	67
Communication & transport workers	860	834	209	275	243	52	26	29	26
Sales & commerce workers	1,895	1,785	167	394	693	188	306	37	110
Professional, technical & health workers	2,474	2,375	61	141	283	473	1,386	31	99
Services workers	1,864	1,711	313	459	572	195	122	50	153
Other workers (incl. not stated)	11,288	8,257	2,904	1,780	1,822	384	312	1,055	3,031
<b>Offaly</b>									
<b>All occupations</b>	<b>54,911</b>	<b>47,453</b>	<b>9,909</b>	<b>11,244</b>	<b>14,046</b>	<b>4,450</b>	<b>5,415</b>	<b>2,389</b>	<b>7,458</b>
Farming, fishing & forestry workers	3,161	3,079	1,320	765	675	165	85	69	82
Manufacturing workers	6,040	5,664	998	1,725	2,326	303	180	132	376
Building & construction workers	4,132	3,866	734	1,330	1,381	162	147	112	266
Clerical, managing & government workers	5,148	4,974	164	675	2,181	1,038	861	55	174
Communication & transport workers	1,953	1,873	432	663	591	94	51	42	80
Sales & commerce workers	4,266	4,004	356	879	1,585	471	631	82	262
Professional, technical & health workers	5,039	4,799	151	308	662	1,028	2,592	58	240
Services workers	3,700	3,465	554	860	1,192	492	273	94	235
Other workers (incl. not stated)	21,472	15,729	5,200	4,039	3,453	697	595	1,745	5,743
<b>Westmeath</b>									
<b>All occupations</b>	<b>61,695</b>	<b>52,232</b>	<b>9,666</b>	<b>10,950</b>	<b>15,611</b>	<b>5,406</b>	<b>7,986</b>	<b>2,613</b>	<b>9,463</b>
Farming, fishing & forestry workers	2,509	2,434	908	637	533	188	88	80	75
Manufacturing workers	5,051	4,699	655	1,258	2,054	376	250	106	352
Building & construction workers	4,345	4,042	732	1,332	1,454	209	197	118	303
Clerical, managing & government workers	6,244	6,032	207	760	2,572	1,172	1,260	61	212
Communication & transport workers	2,123	2,018	420	620	709	128	93	48	105
Sales & commerce workers	5,317	5,009	437	979	1,993	572	959	69	308
Professional, technical & health workers	6,975	6,595	195	403	814	1,334	3,785	64	380
Services workers	5,170	4,793	800	1,185	1,689	570	436	113	377
Other workers (incl. not stated)	23,961	16,610	5,312	3,776	3,793	857	918	1,954	7,351



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