



Seeking Safe Spaces:
Graduate Transitions
into a Digitally
Transformed Workplace

DECEMBER 2021

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FOREWORD

ICBE Advanced Productivity Skillnet conducted this research in response to findings from our Future of Work study in 2019. This study reinforced the significant impact of digital transformation on customer propositions, business operating models, and work processes, tasks and activities. It highlighted how these changes influence the social dynamic of the workplace from leadership styles and management practices to the very experience of work itself. One of the key findings was that, due to the automation of work, graduates are experiencing steeper learning curves while simultaneously experiencing an erosion of 'safe spaces' in which to learn. This has the potential to compromise their successful transition from college into the world of work and deserved further exploration.

This new study, conducted throughout 2021, captures insights from over 1000 people working in Ireland today and specifically examines how 12% of these respondents, Ireland's current graduates, experience the transition from college to work.

The research shows that graduates are indeed transitioning quickly into more advanced tasks and activities which demand higher levels of skill. It also highlights graduates are not confident about their business acumen, problem solving and technological skills. Most concerning of all however, are the levels of burnout graduates are reporting. It is possible that such levels of burnout are related to the erosion of the safe learning spaces graduates previously enjoyed.

The pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation of work. Hybrid working in particular has created many opportunities for attracting and retaining diverse talent but also presents significant challenges, particularly for new recruits, such as managing the pace of work, social isolation and a lack of team connectedness. Thus, ICBE members and Irish businesses are seeking knowledge to help them better understand these critical issues, appropriately plan for the successful transition of graduates and optimise their talent development for the workplace of the future.

We are delighted with this further advancement of our Future of Work research series and would like to acknowledge our partnership with Skillnet Ireland and thank them for their continued support and commitment to ICBE Skillnet research.

We also wish to thank Dr Sarah Kieran who has tirelessly led this research series and the research group in the Kemmy Business School WorkFutures Lab, UL.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study directly responds to higher education, policy-makers and businesses seeking to better understand today's graduate needs as they transition from college into the workplace by providing novel insights into graduates' own perceptions, experiences, and expectations of work. For the purposes of this study, graduates are defined as anyone entering an organisation directly from college in the last five years.

Comparing and contrasting graduates with all other types of employees in Ireland today, this research offers leaders and managers a **contemporary understanding of the opportunities and challenges around graduate on-boarding and development.** The findings will guide businesses, particularly those tasked with HR, as they advance their people strategy and practice to ensure graduates are skill-ready, experience a successful transition from college, and encounter positive and sustainable experiences as they enter this new world of work.

This research emerged from an analysis of graduate experiences of digital transformation identified during a 2019 ICBE Advanced Productivity Skillnet research study¹ which highlights how graduates increasingly experience a more complex and dynamic workplace that is significantly, if not totally, digitalised. As a result of digitalisation, the standard and routine work graduates typically engage in has been eroded, if not completely displaced. While sometimes perceived as cumbersome or boring work, it nevertheless provides graduates with a 'safe space' where they can learn about the organisation and develop their skills.

Post-digitalisation, graduates transition immediately into more advanced tasks and activities that demand higher skill levels. Furthermore, even prior to the Covid 19 pandemic, the concept of virtual work no longer pertained solely to global project teams but for many organisations includes remote and home working. Consequently, as many of their colleagues regularly work off-site, graduates' ability to build relationships, seek support, learn new tasks and skills through observation and interaction, and build their personal and professional network is increasingly and rapidly eroded. These trends of digitalisation and hybrid working have been further accelerated by the Covid 19 pandemic.

Research was undertaken via the Creating Work Futures survey of over 1000 people working in Ireland today. Approximately 12% of respondents were graduates who had entered their current organisation directly from college. The following is a high level summary of their experience of work:

1. Despite having very specific needs as they transition into the workplace, it is of concern to note that 23% of Ireland's graduates surveyed don't receive any type of formal on-boarding and a further 39% only receive a generic on-boarding programme alongside all other types of new recruits.
2. This study underpins the importance of tailored on-boarding to manage critical skill-gaps and other needs specific to the graduate transition. 38% of Ireland's graduates receive a formal, tailored on-boarding programme which is highly valued and seen to substantially improve their experiences of work.
 - Typically known for their annual Graduate Recruitment Programmes, tailored on-boarding is most prevalent in MNCs where **55% are offered a graduate specific programme.**
 - Only 36% of graduates entering MNCs in recent years received generic on-boarding and a further **9% did not receive any formal on-boarding.**
 - Graduate specific on-boarding reduces to 20% in the Public Sector, 18% for large Irish organisations, 11% for medium-sized, **and no graduates entering small businesses report receiving formal graduate-specific on-boarding.**

Graduate Needs

Social Supports create the Safe Spaces which are the most impactful method of ensuring a successful and sustainable graduate transition into the workplace.



3. Generally, graduate experiences of work in Ireland today are largely positive. They feel satisfied in their jobs, motivated by their work, supported generally by their supervisors and their organisations, and have a solid sense of purpose around their work and contribution.
4. **However, the most worrying finding in this study centres on the pace of work experienced by graduates with many working more than 40 hours per week, reporting high levels of burnout and feelings of being overwhelmed by work.** While many struggled with the pandemic, and this is no doubt a factor, it is concerning that most graduates see their future as lying outside their current organisation. It is possible that such levels of burnout are related to the erosion of the safe spaces graduates previously enjoyed. Digitalisation has increased the pace of work and level of problem solving activities for all but most employees experienced this change incrementally. Graduates today are entering a fast-paced environment and organisations need to consider an appropriate pace and level of work to ensure they have the opportunity to transition successfully.
5. Graduates report that their readiness for today's digitalised workplace is good when it comes to their basic work, communication, team and cultural awareness skills. They also feel they have learned many new skills during the recent pandemic.

6. However, graduates are less confident in their Business Acumen, with 70% needing a lot/some help with understanding and supporting their organisation's mission and goals and understanding their customers and products/services. It is important that this area of organisational awareness and acumen is addressed in the on-boarding process.
7. **Graduates are also less confident about their Problem Solving; their ability to identify key issues and gather data to support the decision-making process for a defined problem. 50% of graduates feel they need a lot/some help in this area.** This likely reflects the erosion of the safe space of routine and standard work tasks and the move towards more complex work post-digitalisation. It is less likely that problem-solving skills can be developed during an on-boarding programme but instead developed over time through a range of organisational supports such as graduate-specific training, shadowing, coaching, and supervisory/peer support as required.
8. Despite feeling confident in their ability to manage the pace of technological change and feeling supported by their organisations generally, they are also less confident in their technical skills. **Graduates' ability to use various data, software and systems is significantly lower than others working in Ireland today with 67% feeling they need a lot/some help as they transition to the workplace.** It is interesting that the perception of younger generations as more tech-savvy does not translate to the post-digitalised world of work and as such significant support in developing ICT skills is needed during on-boarding and beyond.
9. **Less than 30% of graduates report ongoing support to aid their transition.** 51% of graduates report that it takes them months to 'settle in' to the workplace with almost one in ten saying it took them over a year. Of those who did report some form of on-boarding, the need for a blend of transition supports around feedback, supervisor check-ins, coaching and specifically social support is clear from our findings. **In fact, given the pace of the contemporary workplace it is these social supports; the conversations, feedback and relationships that matter most to graduates' successful transition.**
10. Unsurprisingly, the study finds that graduates are very interested in flexible working and expect it as a norm into the future. However, they repeatedly highlight the need for creating opportunities and safe spaces to connect in this virtual world of work - beyond the on-boarding process, so ensuring these social networks and connections are sustained in the longer-term will be important.

¹<https://www.skillnetireland.ie/publication/digital-transformation-of-customer-service/>

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Section

2

Introduction

2. INTRODUCTION

The convergence of the digital and human world created by Industry 4.0 has led to a fundamental shift in how organisations strategize and operate; up-ending business models and necessitating a level of organisational transformation surpassing that of the industrial revolution in the 19th Century. Previous ICBE Skillnet research on the Digital Transformation of Cx Work in Global Business Services² highlights how digital transformation significantly increases the collective dexterity and individual density of the skills needed in organisations today. It also highlights the transversality of skills between roles and sectors, largely arising from the homogeneity of many work tasks and activities post-digitalisation.

The demand for higher-order problem solving, trouble shooting and value add services, which ‘back-fill’ the space created by the automation of routine work tasks, place additional pressure on the skills required by employees, their cognitive load and their work relationships. When this research was undertaken prior to Covid 19 in 2019, the findings presented as many challenges as opportunities for organisations and their members. One employee group which emerges as being particularly impacted by the pace and reach of digital transformation are Graduate Entrants, defined here as employees entering the organisation directly from college within the previous 5 years. While the number of graduates engaged in the 2019 research was small, they and their managers identify a number of issues which deserve further investigation.

The weight of digital transformation is carried by Leaders, Managers and Employees in different ways but together they must:

- Visualise, operationalise and sustain the business transformation.
- Scope and embed new technology while simultaneously figuring out how it alters their work tasks and activities.
- Upskill and/or reskill as these alterations impact their roles, often engaging in job-crafting as new requirements emerge through the transformation.
- Frequently contend with more demanding roles post-digitalisation as digitalised work processes intensify the pace and complexity of the work remaining.
- Embrace a new world of work which is increasingly global, virtual, hybrid and of course digital.

This presents particular challenges for everyone in the organisation as they learn to navigate their new environment. Importantly however, it highlights how digital transformation, while leading to efficiencies and improved service for the customer, does not always positively impact the employee’s experience of work.

These centre on the transition of organisations from a pre to a post digital era:

Pre-Digital Transformation	Post-Digital Transformation
Graduates enter traditional office/site environment.	Graduates enter hybrid/virtual work environment where their Team or Manager may or may not be on-site.
Graduates learn new skills while engaging in basic, standard and routine work tasks.	Basic graduate work being replaced by automation. Graduate work transitioning to more complex tasks requiring higher level skills around data and problem solving.

² <https://www.skillnetireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ICBE-Advanced-Productivity-Report-June-2019-Skillnet-Ireland.pdf>

Thus the research questions being addressed in this study are:

1. Are graduates 'Skill-Ready' for a transition from higher education to a post-digital workplace?

2. How can organisations create 'safe spaces' for graduates to develop key skills if basic, traditionally entry-level tasks have been digitalised?

3. How can graduates engage in informal learning, peer observation, coaching etc. in a hybrid/virtual work environment?

4. How can graduates develop social capital/critical networks in a hybrid/virtual work environment?

5. Is the Graduate Career Path changing for organisations?

How can organisations create 'safe spaces' for graduates to develop key skills if basic, traditionally entry-level tasks have been digitalised?

Section

3

Safeguarding the Graduate Transition

3.1. Graduate Recruitment Activity in Ireland

A survey by the University of Limerick in 2019³ showed the number of graduate vacancies in Ireland remained buoyant. 81% of respondents indicated they would recruit approximately the same, or possibly more, graduates in 2019 than the previous year, while 7% aimed to recruit greater than 200 graduate positions, an increase of 2% on 2018. Of course, the Covid 19 pandemic has disrupted plans. Reports from the CEO of IrishJobs.ie for example noted the pandemic had changed the hiring landscape with figures for July 2020 showing a 56% decrease in graduate vacancies compared to the same month the previous year.⁴ Nevertheless, as the economy recovers, indications are that graduate recruitment too will recover and continue to form a key part of an organisation's hiring strategy albeit in a world of work considerably altered by the pandemic. Consequently, understanding graduates' experiences of work, safe-guarding that critical transition from college to the workplace, and ensuring the appropriate on-boarding structures and supports are in place is as important as ever.

3.2. College to Workplace Transition

It is widely accepted that the transition from college to the workplace is a difficult one raising numerous personal and organisational challenges. This has been shown to be the case regardless of external context, although we argue here that the increased pace and reach of digital transformation make the transition more challenging. For graduates themselves, a smooth transition can have a substantial impact on career satisfaction and career success⁵, subjective wellbeing, and employment quality⁶. From an organisational perspective, the importance of successful transitioning of graduates impacts their work engagement, productivity, and organisational fit⁷ as well as having an effect on employer branding and the cost of employee turnover⁸. There are numerous factors that affect the graduate transition including individual psychological and personality traits of graduates, the nature and scope of graduate roles, and the socialisation and on-boarding processes within organisations. Furthermore, there are arguments that changing values mean the current generation

of graduates have unique work and career expectations which organisations must understand. More recently, a key question has arisen regarding the extent to which graduates are workplace ready⁹. This is a critical consideration for organisations when planning graduate recruitment, designing suitable roles and socialising graduates.

3.3. Graduate Socialisation

The socialisation process at work is intended to help employees become knowledgeable and accepting of three key domains: functional domains such as production, sales, marketing, finance and so on; hierarchical domains such as reporting relationships in the organisation, and inclusionary domains or the 'social fabric' of organisational life¹⁰. It is critical for HR Practitioners to understand new graduates' experiences so that they can effectively communicate expectations about the role, while Learning & Development Practitioners must ensure that graduates can be provided with the 'specific development and coaching strategies they need to grow into the role of leader and influencer over time'¹¹. Helping graduates to successfully navigate through the socialisation process is key to developing their commitment to the organisations' values and mission and understanding of their own role.

This, in turn, will promote longer-term commitment, higher productivity and long-term retention. Given the erosion of the safe space for learning by digital transformation, arguably the socialisation of graduates has never been more crucial. Yet the extent to which organisations successfully on-board and socialise graduates is unclear, particularly given the high rate of graduate turnover. While a certain level of attrition among graduates is natural, many organisations recruit graduates not for their current ability and skills but for their future potential thus creating a pipeline for future managers and leaders¹². Studies have shown that new employees want an on-boarding process that helps reduce their learning curve so they can perform successfully, with one in six considering quitting when they deem their on-boarding experience as 'ineffective'. The first

90 days is the most critical time for long term success in the new job¹³. A well-established on-boarding and integration process often results in a shorter learning curve that leads to talent retention¹⁴. Thus, effective on-boarding and socialisation processes for graduate entrants are critical, as the absence of such creates not only a greater skills gap but a higher likelihood of graduate turnover and loss of potential leaders.

3.4. Graduate Expectations

Another important consideration for organisations transitioning graduates into digitally transformed workplaces is the expectations of graduates themselves. Much social debate has arisen regarding generational difference in the workplace and the expectations of 'Millennials' or 'Generation Y'¹⁵. This generation, born between 1980 and 1994, are thought to have different outlooks and preferences regarding work and careers than previous generations. These differences relate to factors that are considered important or desirable to individuals in their working lives. They include values and expectations about pay, autonomy, working conditions as well as accomplishment and prestige and more intrinsic needs such as status, esteem, and self-actualisation. Work values are known to be relatively stable among individuals but can change over time. The period of graduate transition is critical as the relative stability of work values is lowest in emerging adulthood but becomes more stable as one enters the workforce¹⁶.

New graduates are often criticised for unrealistically high expectations of the workplace, and it is argued that these abate and adjust over time¹⁷. It is important therefore to explore whether 'Millennial' values are in fact different to previous generations or whether idealistic values reflect age rather than generation and gradually shift over time. If this is the case, then calls for disrupting tried and tested HR policies and practices to adapt to this new generation and fit their values are misplaced. However, previous research suggests that Millennials' work values do not differ greatly across the school/college to work transition.¹⁵

They suggest that Millennials just beginning their careers place importance on extrinsic work values such as interesting, meaningful work, a collegial work environment and a socially responsible culture, while more experienced Millennials require emphasis on working conditions and remuneration. These insights highlight the importance of crafting the appropriate HR policies to both attract and retain Millennial employees as they transition through the Graduate Career Pathway.

3.5 The Impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic

The Covid 19 pandemic has meant that many graduates (and other new employees) have spent a long time working in organisations where they have not met any colleagues face to face. It is recognised that good relationships with colleagues and managers are important for work performance and work satisfaction¹⁸. Thus, the challenges of transitioning graduates during the pandemic were twofold – the need to work from home (WFH) generally and virtual on-boarding. A key worry for many organisations regarding the move to WFH was the impact on new employees who were less embedded in the organisation, had fewer established work relationships, and less understanding of the organisation's culture, processes and workplace roles as compared to existing employees. WFH, or any form of virtual work, can cause professional and social isolation¹⁹ which is particularly pronounced for younger employees²⁰ at a time when building networks and developing work relationships is critical.

Many positives of digital on-boarding have been suggested²¹ including the automation of manual tasks to provide a more modernised experience, clear and straightforward objectives, a sense of familiarity for employees and ease of communication and feedback. Still however, it is equally argued that virtual or online on-boarding processes may be less effective. It has also been suggested that employees taking part in digital on-boarding have less understanding of their role and organisation than those who attended regular, face-to-face on-boarding. Therefore, while WFH and virtual on-boarding²² can have many benefits including cost effectiveness and flexibility, both present challenges for organisations and employees, particularly recent graduates transitioning to the workplace.

3.6. Summary

It is clear the Graduate Transition remains critical for organisations to manage. Graduates continue to provide a large and diverse talent pipeline for organisations and bring many benefits including diversity, creativity, fresh ideas, innovation, new perspectives and so on. They are also a crucial source of potential for future managers and leaders. Digital transformation has had a significant impact on all these issues, and this has been accelerated and exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic. In developing these insights, the views of leaders and managers are no doubt important. However, arguably the most important stakeholders in providing such insights are those currently undertaking these changing roles and embarking on these transitions - the graduates themselves.

It is clear the Graduate Transition remains critical for organisations to manage. Graduates continue to provide a large and diverse talent pipeline for organisations **and bring many benefits including diversity, creativity - fresh ideas.**

It is timely to review Graduate Transitions given several key issues including:

- The extent to which graduates are workplace ready and have the necessary skills.
- The erosion of 'safe spaces' for graduate learning and development requirements.
- The suitability of graduate roles impacted by digitalisation.
- The need for effective socialisation and on-boarding of graduates.
- The implications of graduate expectations on career pathways.

¹³University of Limerick (2019). Graduate Market Survey, 2019. UL Cooperative Education and Careers Division.

¹⁴McGuire, P. (2020). Graduating in 2020: hiring landscape has changed but opportunities beckon. The Irish Times, 25th September 2020.

¹⁵Koen, J., Klehe, U.C. and Van Vianen, A.E.M. (2012). Training career adaptability to facilitate a successful school-to-work transition. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 81: 395-408.

¹⁶Monteiro, S. & Almeida, L.S. (2015). The relation of career adaptability to work experience, extracurricular activities, and work transition in Portuguese graduate students. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 91:106-112.

¹⁷Ziden, A. A. & Joob, O. C. (2020). Exploring Digital Onboarding for Organisations: A Concept Paper. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 13(9): 734-750.

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²²Pollard, E., Hirsh, W., Williams, M., Buzzeo, J., Marvell, R., Tassinari, A., Bertram, C., Fletcher, L., Artess, J., Redman, J., & Ball, C. (2015). Understanding employers' graduate recruitment and selection practices. UK: Institute for Employment Studies (IES).

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²⁴Field, R. (2015). Newcomer learning and adjustment in small firms: Social Networks as a Mechanism Underpinning the Socialization Process (Doctoral dissertation).

²⁵Kuron,L.K.J, Lyons, S.T., Schweitzer, L. and Ng, E.S.W. (2015). Millennials' work values: differences across the school to work transition *Personnel Review* 44(6): 991-100.

²⁶Jin, J. and Rounds, J. (2012). Stability and change in work values: a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(2): 326-339.

²⁷Perrone, L. and Vickers, M.H. (2003). "Life after graduation as a 'very uncomfortable world': an Australian case study", *Education and Training*, 45(2): 69-78.

²⁸Bauer, T. N. (2011). Onboarding new employees: maximising success. Alexandria: SHRM Foundation.

Section

4

Research
Methodology

This research was commissioned by ICBE Advanced Productivity Skillnet. Data for the study was gathered initially in 2019 through 11 employee focus groups (59 participants in total) exploring the digitalisation of work in global business services in two Multi-National Corporations. While 'graduate transitions' was not the specific focus of this first, qualitative study, the key findings which emerged around graduate experiences highlighted perceptions of graduates themselves and the people who manage them. These findings were then further investigated in a second study undertaken via an online survey in 2021. Titled Creating Work Futures, this survey was designed as part of a broader effort to understand the work perspectives, experiences and expectations of people working in Ireland today so, while including graduates, it also included respondents from different types and sizes of organisation, different business sectors and all types of roles.

The central survey instrument was Karasek's Job Content Questionnaire²³ which investigates critical dimensions of work characteristics and relationships such as an employee's general perception of their organisation, the nature of their job, psychological demands, decision latitude, organisation supports and relationships with their supervisor/manager, colleagues and team. Critical to this research, it also includes measures relating to technology in the workplace and perceptions of individual skill capability.

The JCQ instrument was supplemented with an indicator to identify the respondent's role. Where respondents self-identified as a graduate entrant (defined here as entering their organisation directly from college within the previous five years) they were also presented with a range of questions specific to the graduate experience such as skill perceptions on entering the workplace and experiences of on-boarding. Finally, a number of contextual questions were added relating to the COVID 19 pandemic and the current social and political focus

on flexible working practices and future expectations of the world of work. The survey was approximately 20 minutes in length incorporating a broad range of measures and open-ended responses. Thus, respondents had the opportunity to share a rich insight into their experiences of work and expectations for the future world of work. Table I provides a simple overview of the key areas covered. The survey was distributed online using Qualtrics Software and promoted by the ICBE, members of the KBS WorkFutures Lab, and across various social media channels. Following an initial cleaning of the data the survey produced 1035 completed responses from a broad range of people currently working in Ireland. Of these 1035 respondents, approximately 12%, 126 respondents were graduates.

The central survey instrument was Karasek's Job Content Questionnaire²³ which investigates critical dimensions of work characteristics and relationships such as an employee's general perception of their organisation, **the nature of their job, psychological demands, decision latitude, organisation supports and relationships with their supervisor/manager, colleagues and team.**

19 Klotopetek, M. (2017) The advantages and disadvantages of remote working from the perspective of young employees. *Organization and Management Quarterly*, 40:39-49.

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Table I: Creating Work Futures Survey 2021

Tell us about You?	Tell us about Your Job?	Tell us about Your Boss?	Tell us about Your Co-Workers	Tell us about Digital Transformation?	Tell us about Your Career?
Personal Demographics relating to Age, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Ethnicity, Caring Responsibilities, Special Needs, Education, Location, Time in Organisation, Industry Sector & Role.	Type of Work, Pace of Work, Job Motivation & Satisfaction, Task Identity & Variety, Sense of Purpose, Level of Autonomy & Influence etc.	Support, Level of Feedback, Listening, Understanding, Level of Prioritisation, Removal of Barriers to Work etc.	Support, Level of Feedback, Listening, Understanding, Level of Collaboration, Removal of Barriers to Work etc.	Advantages & Disadvantages for Work Activities & Processes, Pace of Transformation, Technology Performance Quality, Technology Skills etc.	Skill Gaps, Future Plans, Job Security, Organisational Support etc.

Graduate Transition Experience & On-Boarding

Flexible Working Practices & The Future of Work

The survey results were analysed using Qualtrics and SPSS software. It should be noted that percentages have been rounded up where appropriate and for ease of understanding.

Therefore, in some of the data presented those who responded 'Not Applicable', 'Other' or 'I would prefer not to disclose' have been removed as appropriate. As such, in some tables or graphs presented the total percentage may not add up to 100%.

Following an initial cleaning of the data the survey produced 1035 completed responses from a broad range of people currently working in Ireland. Of these 1035 respondents, approximately 12%, 126 respondents were graduates.



Section

5

Graduate Experiences of Work

The following section provides an overview of the demographic composition of the graduate respondents and investigates the question **'Who are the graduates working in Ireland today?'**

The location of graduates in large urban centres is evident with 18% residing in Limerick, 12% in Cork, 12% in Dublin and 9% in Galway. However, it is interesting to note that graduates are also residing in more rural locations – whether that is due to the WFH pivot arising from the pandemic at this time or not is unknown. As might be expected from younger employees, 88% of graduates do not have any caring responsibilities. However, of those surveyed 4% report caring responsibilities as they are living in houses with elderly relatives, 3% are caring for people with special needs, and 3% are caring for children. Furthermore, 5% of graduates surveyed here describe themselves as having special needs.

5.1. Who are Ireland's Graduates?

For the purposes of the study, graduates were self-identified as employees who entered their current organisation directly from college in the last five years. Following an initial cleaning of the data, the survey produced 126 fully completed, in-depth responses.

Table II: Graduate Respondents Composition

1035 fully completed, in-depth responses.	12%, 126 respondents, were graduates.
Of these graduate respondents: 40% identified as male 60% as female .8% as non-binary.	57% described their relationship status as single and 42% as partnered/married.
While the vast majority of graduates identify as heterosexual, 1% describe themselves as homosexual, 5% as bisexual and 1% as pansexual or queer. Thus 7% of the graduate population, as presented here, is part of the LGBTQ community.	In exploring the tenure of these graduates in their organisations, 25% had joined less than 6 months previously and 24% between 6 and 12 months, thus 48%, nearly half of respondents, had joined their organisation during the COVID 19 pandemic.

From an education perspective, 51% of graduates are educated to degree level, around 5% to post-graduate level, 38% to Masters level and just under 1% of graduates surveyed here have PhDs.

34% describe themselves as Graduate Trainees, while many others who only entered the organisation from college in recent years now describe themselves as Team Members (52%) or Team Leaders (14%). Of those Team Leaders, 30% are managing teams of up to 30 people and 12% of more than 30 people.

5.2. Where are Graduates Working?

Of the respondents to the survey, 59% are working in Multi-National Companies (MNCs), 15% in Large Irish Companies, 8% in Medium, 9% in Small Businesses and another 9% in the Irish Public Sector. These results are mirrored in the industry sectors where we find most graduates in the large MNC industries of Financial Services (24%), ICT (12%), Medical Devices (15%) and PharmaChem (9%) dominate. However the number of graduates in Education (13%) and Health Services (7%) is also significant.

The type of business domains into which graduates enter is quite varied. However, we can see higher results in some key domains of Information & Communications Technology (18%), Operations (9%) and Customer/Frontline Services (5+3%). The majority of graduates are entering organisations on full-time, permanent employment contracts (67%).

The type of business domains into which graduates enter is quite varied. **However, we can see higher results in some key domains of Information & Communications Technology (18%), Operations (9%) and Customer/ Frontline Services (5+3%).**

'I worry about our graduates' ability to keep up with the pace of work though, we are travelling at the speed of light around here and I worry that they are lost at times with the pace of it all'.

Line Manager Comment

It is worrying to note that many graduates are working more hours than employee legislation permits with over 40% working between 40 and 50 hours per week, 6% between 50 and 60 hours per week and just under 1% describing themselves as working over 60 hours per week.

Figure 1: Graduates by Type of Organisation

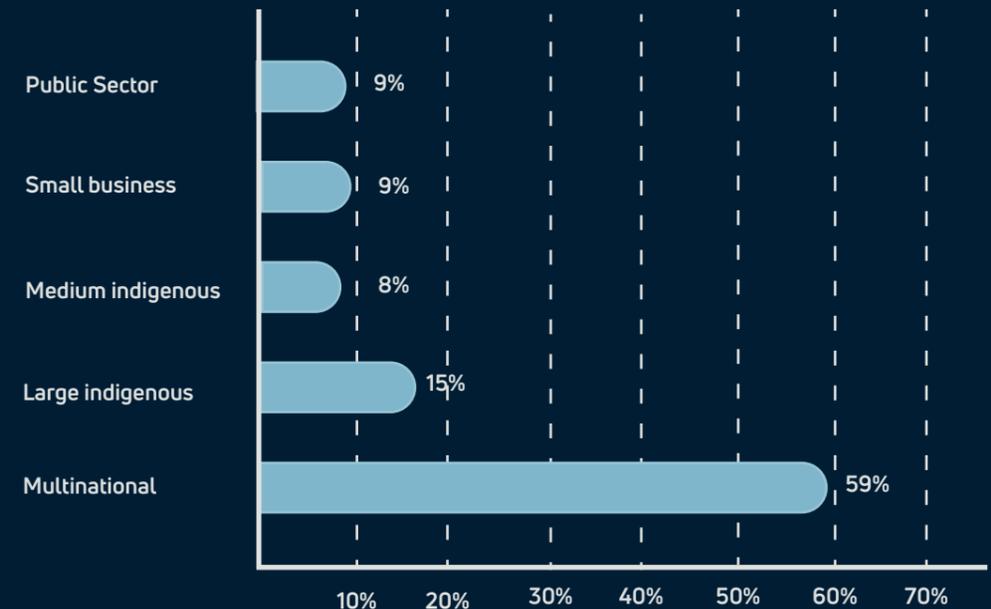
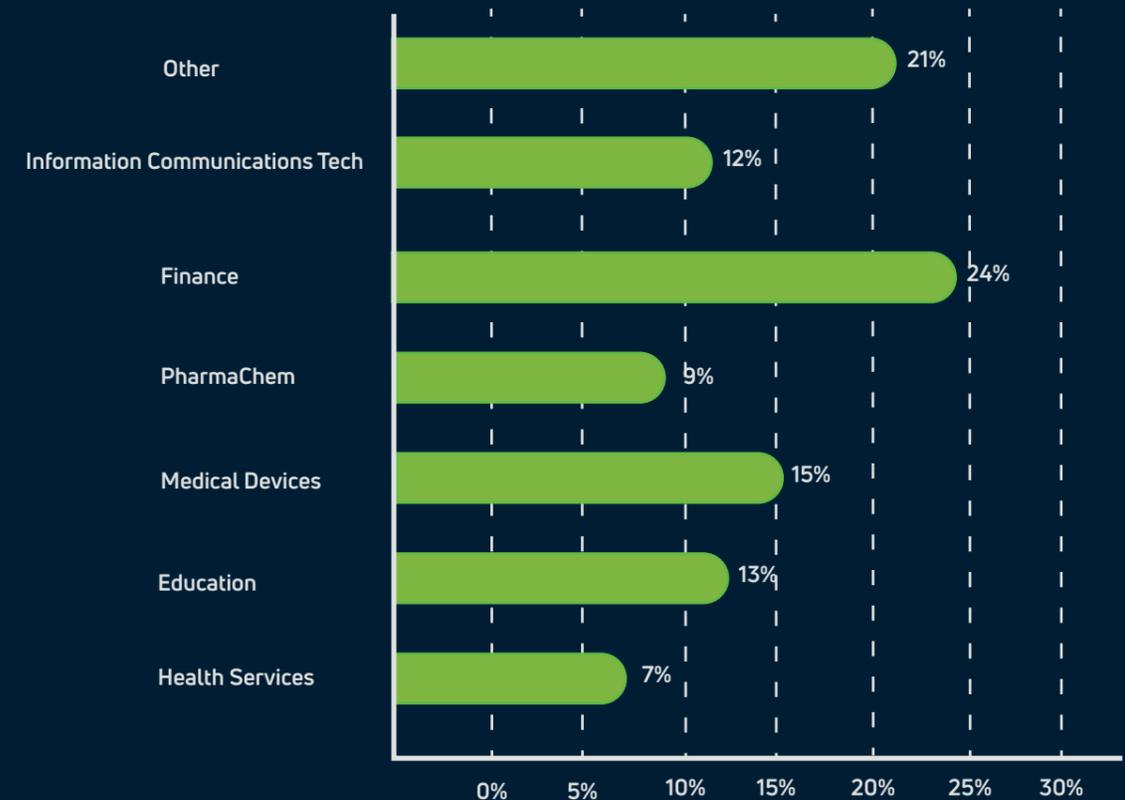


Figure 2: Respondents by Industry Sector



5.3. Graduate Readiness: Skill Perceptions

Graduates were asked to rate their level of ability across a range of skill groups typically identified as general graduate attributes in higher education. Their self-rating was based on whether they felt they needed lots of help, some help, or no help in these skills areas on entering their organisation, or if indeed they felt strong enough in this skill area to actually help others.

- **Basic Work Skills:** Timekeeping, complying with company policy and procedures, and being organized.
- **Communication Skills:** Listening to others, participating effectively in meetings, communicating ideas and concepts clearly.
- **Problem-Solving Skills:** Identifying key issues and gathering data to support the decision-making process for a defined problem.
- **Interpersonal/Teamwork Skills:** Supporting and contributing to a team environment, building a good rapport with a wide range of people.
- **Cultural/International Skills:** Being conscious of different cultural values, sensitive to others with different cultural backgrounds, being able to get work done across different cultures.
- **ICT/Technical Skills:** Using appropriate data and software to assist with your daily work.
- **Business Acumen:** Understanding & supporting your organisation's mission and goals, understanding the customers and products/services.

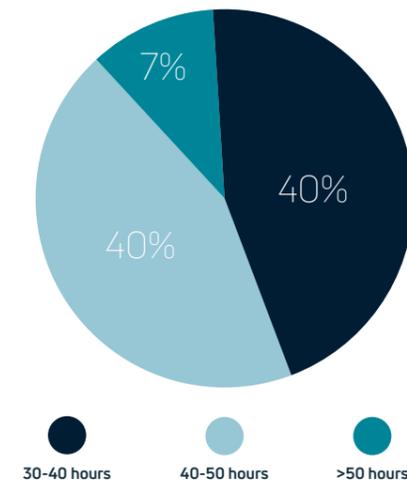
Generally, most graduates feel they had the necessary skills when they entered their organisation; with over 50% on average feeling they did not require any help with basic work skills, communications skills, team working skills and cultural awareness skills. Furthermore, on average, an additional 20% of graduates perceive these skills to have been strong enough to offer help to their peers and team mates. Despite these strong skill perceptions however, it is important to note that on average about 20% describe themselves as needing some help across these skills on entering the organisation.

'Coming in here first from college well it was like going in and learning Chinese to be honest but it makes you pretty resilient.'
Graduate Comment

'Because we are so automated in some parts of the business now some of our people, graduates in recent years mainly, don't actually know how the back-end works so their ability to trouble shoot anomalies isn't there, at best its compromised. So we have built some space into our on-boarding for manual work, engineered this space, sometimes with just pencils and paper to teach them how things were done in the old days. They need to know the business processes whether they are automated or not but they don't get the opportunity to do that on-the-job anymore.'
Line Manager Comment

There is a broad consistency in graduate perceptions of their skill-readiness across all types of organisation in Ireland today. There are some clear indications that graduates entering smaller organisations feel more ready for the workplace than those entering larger organisations. This may be simply related to the smaller team size and the graduates' ability to engage more closely with support as and when needed.

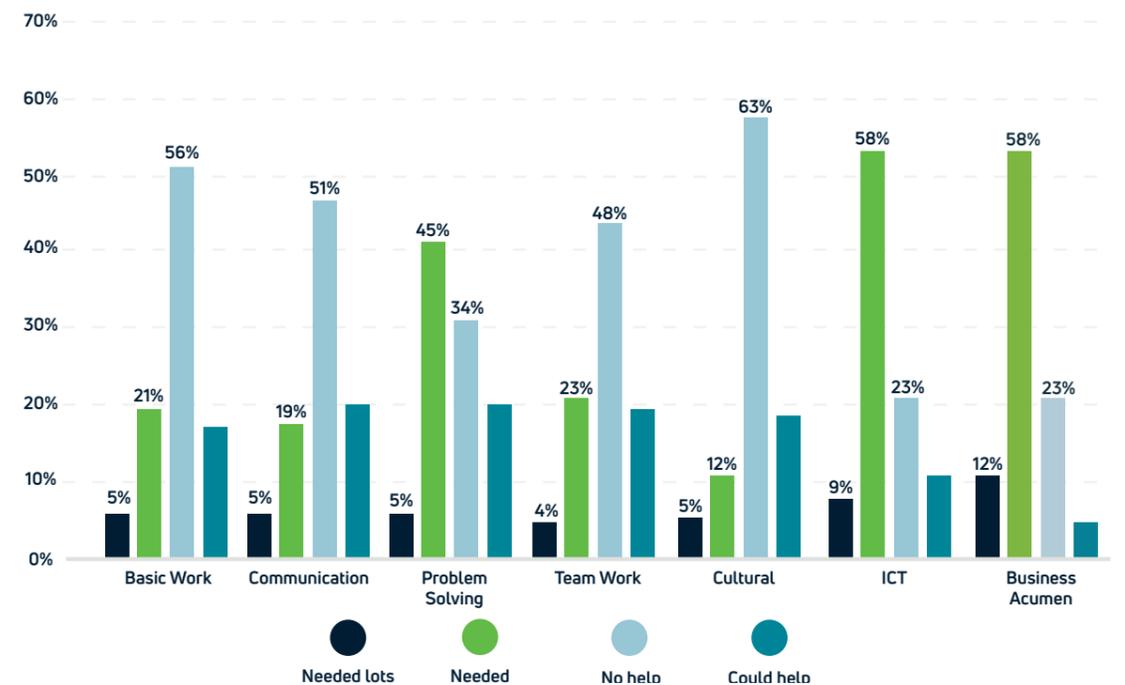
Figure 3: Graduate Working Hours Per Week



The three skill areas which appear to require the most help are:



Figure 4: Graduate Perception of Skills



‘From my perspective I feel like some of my skills are being wasted, that I’m not utilising some of my coding skills because everything is automated now. It’s like people always ask me for small monotonous things, I’m like – guys I’ll write the script and I’ll pop that in so I’m integrating it in there with my programming skills, which I am predominantly very skilled at.....but then my team is very resistant against implementing any kind of code because, if you start, like so...it could cause problems with the machine.....but I think I am losing some of my skills now because of the automation’.

Graduate Comment

5.4 On-Boarding Programmes & Transition Supports

So now let us consider graduates’ experiences of the transition into the workplace in terms of how they might be supported through a formal structure of organisational on-boarding, either tailored specifically to graduates or more generic for all new entrants. 38% of Ireland’s graduates receive a formal, tailored on-boarding programme. It is most prevalent in MNCs with 55% being offered a graduate specific programme. This reduces to 20% in the Public Sector, 18% for large Irish organisations, 11% for medium, and no graduates entering small businesses report receiving formal graduate-specific on-boarding.

Despite the importance of support as graduates’ transition into the workplace, **it is of concern to note that 39% of Ireland’s graduates as surveyed here only receive generic on-boarding programmes while 23% don’t receive any formal on-boarding.**

We then asked respondents to describe the other types of support they receive as they transition into the workplace. Again, MNCs are by far the strongest across the range of transition activities suggested with a strong spread of formal training days supported by feedback, graduate peer discussion groups, supervisor check-ins and ad-hoc coaching.

While they vary by organisation type, the picture is very average for graduate supports generally. **Less than 30% of graduates receive a consistent spread of supports as they settle into their organisation.**

The range of on-boarding supports offered is likely related to the time it takes graduates to ‘settle in’ to the organisation. This is interesting in that many graduates (37% on average) report settling in to the organisation within a matter of weeks. An average of 51% report it taking some months. 9% report settling in took them over a year.

It is worth noting that, despite the low levels of on-boarding activities, 78% of graduates entering small Irish organisations report settling in within weeks. Again, while the numbers of respondents here are small it likely indicates the close proximity of a smaller number of employees to the graduate, thereby ensuring a better transition.

Graduates were then asked some open-ended questions around their transition experiences and, following a thematic analysis, a number of key findings emerged which highlight the critical nature of building personal relationships, business networks and social capital for graduates.

These more dynamic and social supports are highly valued by graduates as they transition into organisational life and while many are informal in nature, a structured approach was deemed important.

'Networking and meeting new people is crucial to how I move around my organisation; some of the projects and extra activities I took up were a result purely of putting myself out there or meeting new people. Importantly, though, the role of a graduate unlocks a mind-set that supports this way of working and approaching people. I think it plays a big role in that I allow myself to make mistakes and expose myself, rock up to people and strike a conversation, and I guarantee you, if I weren't in a graduate scheme I'd feel scared to do it'.

'I think coming in as a graduate I was shocked that I had the option to work from home. I thought great, fantastic, you jump at the opportunity....but then talking with the others you're seeing that after your first six months it's like maybe one day I will see you or then you but its random and then you can just lose the run of yourself'.

'People in the company were strongly encouraged to make conversation with the interns and make them feel welcome. Phone calls from fellow employees asking how I was getting on'.

'I found it very lonely the first few weeks even though my manager could not have been more helpful and IT were very helpful getting set up from home but it still felt quite hard to settle in. It's funny though but talking to some that came in before covid they said it was hard for them too, people are on the go so much sometimes you can be on your own in the office as well quite a bit. Some of them said they felt I was getting more support than they got 2 years ago'.

Graduate Commentary

Figure 5: Prevalence of On-Boarding Programmes

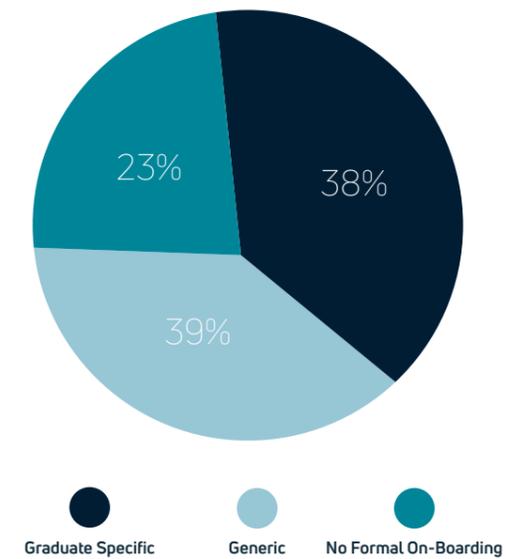
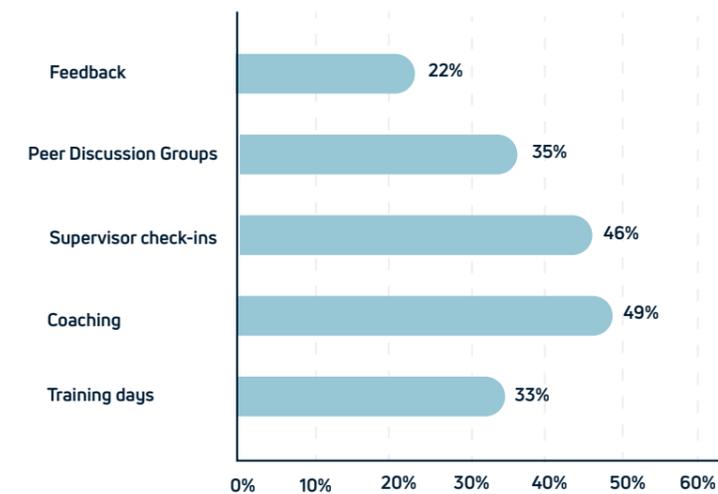


Figure 6: Prevalence of Other Graduate Transition Supports



'A colleague made a very good point that when he has an issue and he needs someone outside the team, he's built up such a network 'cos he's constantly in here and he can ping someone and he'll immediately get an answer. What I found about maybe grads, you don't have team members in here and you don't form relationships in the office.'

Line Manager Comment

5.5. Graduates and their Jobs

This section of the report focuses on the experiences graduates have of their jobs in comparison to those in other roles. By comparing the 12% of graduate respondents within the much larger pool of 1035 respondents a picture of the graduate experience becomes clearer. We can see if their experience is similar or differs from the general experience of people working in Ireland today. The survey asked respondents to rate statements about aspects of their jobs using a four-point scale; strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. For the purpose of this analysis, percentages presenting agreement from respondents are a combination of those who chose strongly agree and agree. The statements in this section of the report look at aspects of the job which include the requirement to learn new things, creativity, decision making, job security and job satisfaction.

Responses from graduates are on par with other roles when it comes to most aspects of their jobs. Decision latitude and job security are lower for graduates however given the nature of their roles and early career stages this might be expected. Importantly, graduates feel largely as able to make sense of their work as other roles, a critical element in creativity and innovation for organisations (87%/93%).

However, an important and concerning response to report is that of feeling burned out from work. **Over a third of graduates (40%) feel burned out in comparison to all others at 38%.**

In order to fully understand the graduate experience of work, it is warranted to examine the results in light of different organisational types. How do graduate experiences of their job compare to other people working in Ireland today? One interesting differentiator, as illustrated in Figure 7, is that 100% of graduate respondents who work in small businesses (SME) expect to work outside of their current organisation in their future career. While the actual number of respondents here is small, it still indicates a sharp contrast from those working in other types of organisations. For example, only 60% of graduates working in MNCs and 55% of graduates in the Irish Public Sector feel the same way.

Overall, graduates are mostly satisfied with their current jobs. A majority are required to be creative, learn new things, are able to make sense of what is required of their jobs and have enough time to get their jobs done. **One area in which graduates fall behind other roles is having freedom to decide how to do their jobs. Another area of potential concern is burnout and a culture entailing long hours, with over a third of graduates feeling burned out from work.**

The Importance of Interaction with other Employees

The Value in Formal/Structured Supports:
Role Plays, Shadowing/Observation, Discussion Groups.

Creating Graduate Networks:
Internal (locally and across sites) and externally via University Networks.

Team & Co-Worker Support:
Opportunity to discuss work informally in a safe space.

Time & Space: Generating time for co-workers to engage and space for learning and reflection.

The Social Factor:
Building relationships and friendships.

Table III: Graduate Experiences of their Jobs

Statement	Grad (%)	Other (%)
My job requires that I learn new things.	88	91
My job requires me to be creative.	63	66
My job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own.	68	79
I get to do a variety of different things in my job.	81	84
My job security is good.	78	89
I feel burned out from work.	40	39
I am able to make sense of what is required of me in my job.	87	93

5.6. Graduates and their Co-Workers

Having looked at graduate experiences in terms of characteristics of their jobs, this section of the report focuses on their experiences with their co-workers. It examines certain aspects of teamwork such as team size and decision making, as well as dynamic between respondents and their co-workers.

One interesting area to report, where graduates had different experiences to others surveyed, was having influence over decisions in their teams. Less than half (45%) of graduates agree that they have significant influence over decisions in their team compared to all others at (68%). Another area in which there was a notable difference in responses between graduates and others surveyed is the belief that their skills and abilities are vital to their team. Far less graduates than other surveyed believe that their skills and abilities are vital to their team. While a majority (68%) still agree that they make a vital contribution, almost a third (32%) of graduates don't.

Considering the results of the survey overall, when it comes to experiences with their co-workers, graduates are largely satisfied. They receive feedback from co-workers, believe their co-workers are competent in doing their jobs, and are friendly and helpful. However, when it comes to having influence over decisions in their teams, over half of graduates do not agree that they have significant influence.

5.7. Graduates and their Supervisor

This section of the report focuses specifically on graduate experiences with their boss, referred to here as the supervisor. Table V illustrates statements which examined perceptions of supervisors being concerned for the welfare of their graduates, paying attention to them, providing feedback and making time for them. In general, the analysis suggests that graduates have positive experiences with their supervisors.

In summary, graduates have signalled a largely positive level of satisfaction with their boss. They agree that their supervisor is concerned about their welfare and makes time to help, both them as individuals, and their teams, make sense of things. The graduates had a similar experience to those in other roles across organisations.

5.8. Graduates and their Career

This section will examine graduate career prospects. The survey asked respondents about being respected in their organisation, as well as their prospects for career development and whether or not their future careers were likely to be with the same organisation they were in at the time of responding. One area of potential concern for graduates was the prospect of losing their jobs. Over a third (38%) feel it is likely that they might lose their job in the next couple of years. This was significantly higher than other roles (21%). In addition to the fear of losing their jobs, respondents were also asked about the threat of global competition to job security. 41% of graduates agree that they have less job security due to global competition, with the other roles not having the same level of concern at 26%.

Figure 7 : My Future Career lies Outside of this Organisation

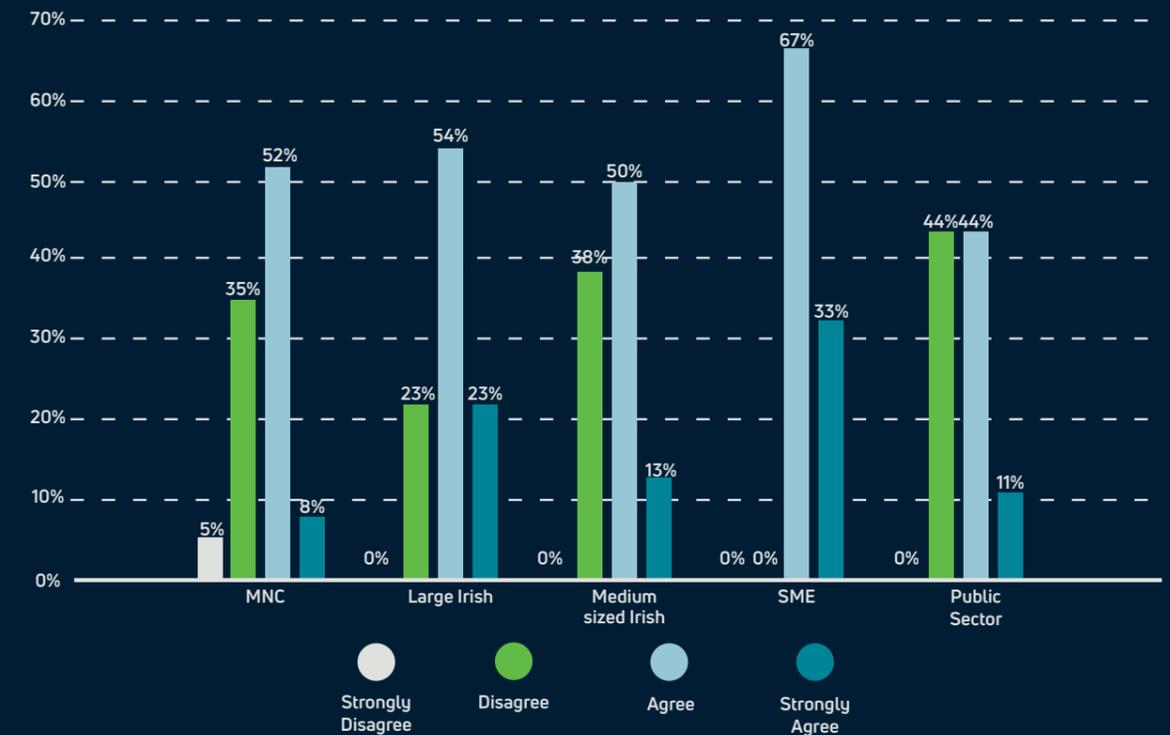


Table IV: Graduates Experiences of their Co-Workers

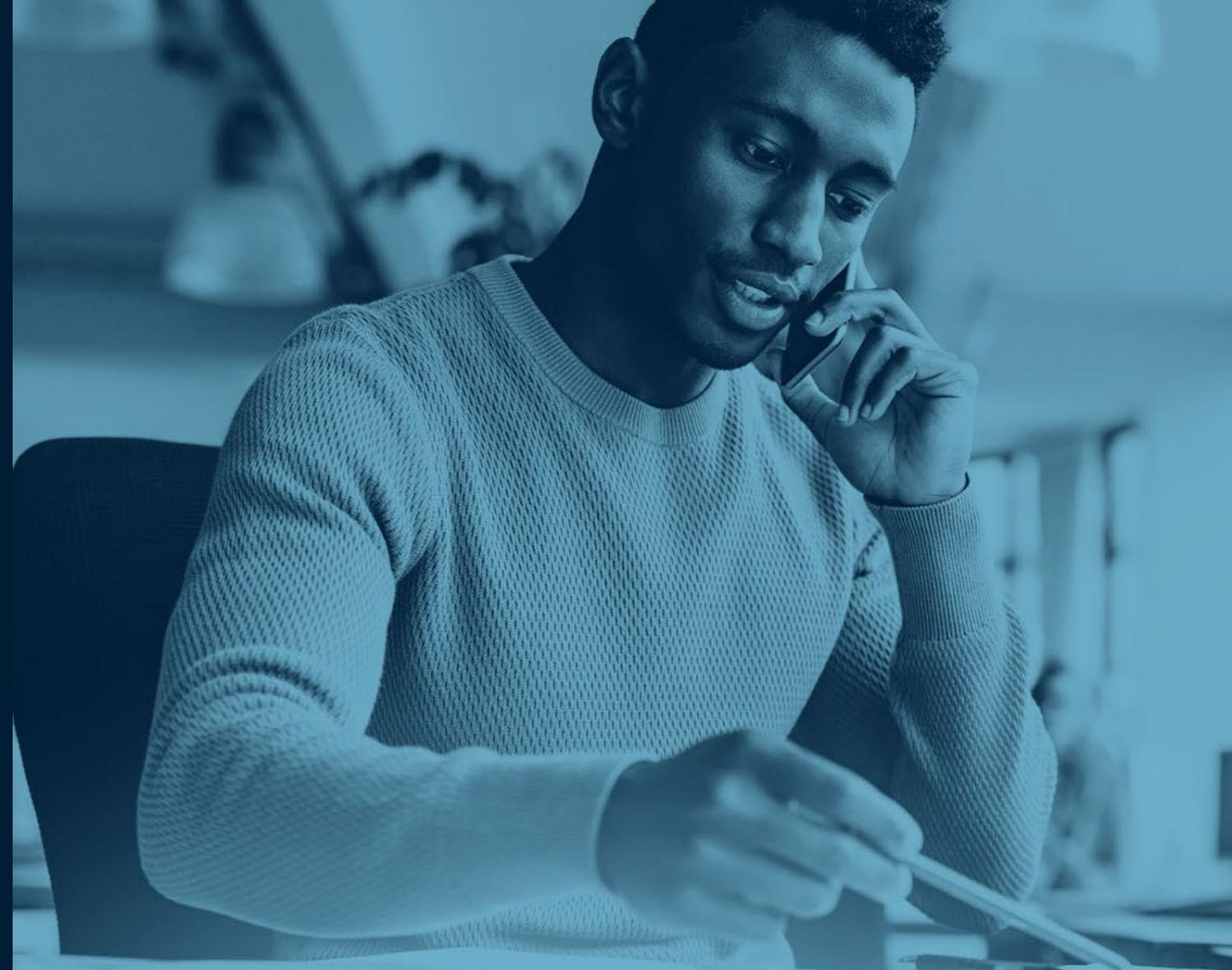
Statement	Grad (%)	Other (%)
My team size is appropriate.	67	72
My team makes decisions democratically.	76	73
I get information/feedback from my co-workers about how well I do my job.	78	66
My co-workers are competent in doing their jobs.	90	94
My co-workers are friendly.	96	97
My team makes an important contribution to society.	82	80

Table V: Graduate Experiences of their Supervisor

Statement	Grad (%)	Other (%)
My supervisor is concerned about the welfare of those under him/her.	82	85
My supervisor pays attention to what I am saying.	88	89
My supervisor is helpful in getting the job done.	81	87
I get feedback/information from my supervisor about how well I do my job.	86	84
My supervisor makes time for our team to make sense of things.	86	84
I have some chance that my ideas/work concerns will be considered by my supervisor.	94	90

Table VI: Graduates and their Career

Statement	Grad (%)	Other (%)
I have some chance that my ideas/work concerns will be considered in the organisation.	80	81
My prospects for career development and promotion in this organisation are good.	71	62
In 5 years my skills will still be valuable.	94	92
I am appropriately respected and rewarded by my organisation for my work.	82	77



Overall, while graduates are satisfied with recognition, reward and voice in their current organisations, they are more concerned than other roles about losing their jobs in the next number of years.

Section

6

Graduates and the Future of Work

6.1. Digital Transformation

Overall, the data reveals that both graduates and other employees have similar experiences of working with technology in the workplace. The majority of all employees believe that the pace of technological change in their jobs is manageable and that their organisation supports them through technological change in their jobs. Importantly, both groups currently feel appropriately skilled to work with the technology they need to do their jobs.

Of note here is that almost twice as many graduates (20%) as other employees (11%) believe it is difficult to learn how to use the technology with which they work. In addition, over double the number of graduates (8%) also believe that the technology they use requires using complicated language and or procedures when compared to other employees (3%). Connected with this issue, both groups of employees note that they often have to rely on other teams or support staff in order to deal with technology issues that arise while they are working with graduates and all others on a par at 51% and 50% respectively.

These results for graduates would reflect their perceptions of their own skills entering organisations. It was noted earlier that ICT skills were a key area of concern (skill gap) for graduates in making the transition from college to the workplace. Additionally, both groups indicate that the use of technology in the workplace keeps them constantly busy, however graduates are significantly more likely to believe that it does not overwhelm them.

6.2. Flexible Working Practices

Importantly, given a stated interest in remote working, we asked employees how easy they think it will be for employees in their organisation to secure remote working post-pandemic. Graduates were equally split in their answers, with one third indicating they believe it would be very difficult to work remotely all the time; one third saying it would be possible in special circumstances and one third noting it would be easy to work from home all the time as their organisation is very flexible about work practices.

In relation to the option of a compressed working week (undertaking 5 days' work in 4 days) graduates were more interested in this option than other employees prior to the pandemic (46%/35%).

Interestingly, there was a clear majority of graduates who believe it will be easy (60%) and possible (32%) to work in a hybrid manner post-pandemic. We also asked graduates if their organisation would allow them to work remotely outside of Ireland; 46% indicated it would be very difficult with 54% identifying that it would be easy and possible in certain circumstances.

Importantly for organisations, both graduates and other employees view their technology skills as having transferability to another organisation. The use of technology to track the speed and accuracy of work is clearly prevalent in the contemporary world of work. **Yet graduates are more likely to believe that their supervisor supports them through technological changes in their job.**

'Just say it's now been shown a lot of people don't necessarily have to be in the office every day and as companies may consider hybrid models going forward it has to have some societal benefits. Less emissions, less congestion/accidents and better work/life balance for people. The extra freedom and responsibility given by not being in the office was a help to adapt to a new work place....but the job helped me understand the work life balance. Given the fact that I was working from home, it was a challenge to set a routine similar, or somewhat close, to what one would have experienced in an office setting'.

Graduate Comment

6.3. Graduate Working Post-Pandemic

There is a lot of agreement between graduates and other employees in relation to how their organisations managed the challenges posed by the pandemic. The majority of employees believed the organisation's leadership were good at handling the challenges (88% of graduates and 83% of other employees); and had sourced the appropriate technology to manage these challenges (87% of graduates and 87% of other employees). When we examine the skills needed to work during the pandemic, most employees indicated that although they had the work skills needed, they still had to learn new work skills in order to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic. In line with this, it is clear the organisation provided appropriate supports to assist all employees manage the challenges posed by the crisis, with graduates reporting slightly more positive results. The majority of employees also indicated that they

received enough support from their co-workers and from their supervisors to manage the challenges posed by the pandemic. Given the pivot to working-from-home during the pandemic, many of these insights can be carried forward into graduate transitions into a hybrid model of work. The key findings highlight the importance of social supports for networking, learning, wellbeing and the expectation of hybrid working into the future while still acknowledging the need to manage the separation and balance of work and life.

Graduate Supports related to Hybrid Working Post-Pandemic

Building Constructive Relationships:

Networks and Social Supports to build professional and personal relationships. Create opportunities for observation and learning from co-workers.

The Value of Hybrid Working:

Focus on a blended approach to get value from the hybrid work model.

Work/Life Balance:

Wellbeing Support and Work-Time Guidelines.

ICT Support:

Hardware & Software Set Up & 'Wriggle Room' for managing connectivity issues.



Section

7

Impact and Next Steps

This portrait of the graduate experience of work in Ireland today is largely positive. Ireland's graduates feel satisfied in their jobs, motivated by their work, supported generally and have a solid sense of purpose around their work and contribution. They feel skill-ready in their basic work, communication, team and cultural awareness skills but are less confident about their problem-solving skills and business acumen. Despite feeling confident in their ability to manage the pace of technological change, they are also less confident in their technical skills than others working in Ireland today.

While many are offered tailored, structured on-boarding, many are not. The need for a blend of transition supports around feedback, supervisor check-ins, coaching and specifically social support is vital for successful transitions, particularly as graduates are very interested in flexible working and expect it as a norm into the future. The most worrying finding in this study centres on the pace of work experienced by graduates with many working more than 40 hours per week and reporting high levels of burnout and feelings of being overwhelmed by work. While the pandemic has to be a factor, increased social supports to create meaningful connections, more conversations around graduate career pathways, and addressing the pace of work in organisations today are critically important. The following recommendations provide clear direction on each of these points:

7.1. Skill-Readiness: Develop Graduate Self-Awareness through regular supervisor and peer feedback.

While it is good to see the skill-readiness in Ireland's graduates around basic work, communications and team work skills, it will be important for organisations to provide regular feedback to ensure graduates' self-awareness is in line with the organisation's perceptions. Also, it is important to note that this still leaves many (between 20 and 30%) feeling ill-prepared in these areas which puts the onus on higher education to address the readiness challenge and on organisations to manage the transition through tailored on-boarding. These findings could also be explored in-depth among Line Managers to see if the graduate self-assessment indicated here matches the organisation's experience of their skills.

7.2. Problem Solving Skills: Exposure to and engagement with problem solving opportunities in safe spaces.

'Problem-solving in a post-digitalised workplace' is recognised as difficult by many graduates with over 50% feeling they need 'some' or 'a lot' of help here. While there is already a significant focus in higher-education on problem-solving it is almost impossible to replicate the problem-solving context of the workplace. It would follow therefore that building problem-solving skills on entry to the organisation through focused development and support is increasingly important. The need to manufacture 'safe spaces' where graduates can engage in problem solving scenarios with more experienced colleagues, shadow co-workers (virtually or in-person) as they problem solve, receive regular, focused feedback and steadily increase these skills is vital.

7.3. Technical Skills: Targeted sector-specific technical knowledge and know-how.

Generally graduates along with others working in Ireland today feel positive about the digital transformation underway. They feel the pace of technological change is manageable, their organisations support them through this change, the technology quality is good, and they feel able to work with new technologies and transfer these skills to other organisations. However, despite the widely held view that younger generations are more tech-savvy than other workers, it is clear here graduates need additional support with the technology they encounter. How digital skills are addressed in higher education is already garnering attention but more work is needed. How organisations further transition this skill development in relation to their own technologies needs to be addressed in on-boarding, and be closely monitored by organisations during the graduate transition and into their early years in the workplace.

7.4. Business Acumen: Organisational awareness, culture and customer proposition knowledge-transfer.

The final skill area which graduates identify as challenging is that of their Business Acumen. This finding makes sense in so far as each organisation will have different customer propositions, structures, culture etc. Business Acumen is a straightforward skill area for organisations to develop in that it is largely sharing knowledge about the organisation's business sector, context, propositions and cultural dimensions. These findings highlight how it is a critical element of graduate on-boarding.

7.5. Graduate On-Boarding: Tailored graduate on-boarding, front-loaded with a programme approach but sustained over time through supervisor/peer check-ins, coaching on specific skills/needs, and regular opportunities to build social networks through peer and broader team activities.

Only half of Ireland's graduates transitioning into the workplace receive an on-boarding experience. While resources may prohibit formal on-boarding programmes, there are many cost-effective ways to support graduates in their transition through mentoring, coaching and general social supports, all of which were highlighted as highly effective in the findings. In fact, the social support offered was deemed the most important. Thus, organisations need to be aware of the need for transition support and find innovative ways of delivering it, at the very least by creating awareness among other employees. Interestingly, many graduates who joined their organisation during the pandemic, perceived a better on-boarding experience compared to those who joined prior to the pandemic. Organisations should reflect on the successful elements of graduate on-boarding implemented during the pandemic and continue these into the future.

7.6. Graduate Social Capital: Reflect on Pandemic Learnings and Incorporate into the Future.

Many graduates struggled during the 100% WFH period of the pandemic. Despite feeling they received more support from their organisation than previous graduate cohorts, the hybrid/virtual workplace is one of the most significant challenges facing organisations

today. It requires careful attention to information flows, communication channels and decision-making processes at all levels. Ensuring graduates are specifically supported in these social processes, particularly the development of their networks, relationships and social capital is critical.

7.7. Graduate Work Intensification: Review Graduate Working Hours across the organisation and adjust accordingly.

Most businesses require employees to carry additional workloads from time to time. However, there are very worrying signs in these findings that the graduate workload is at unacceptable levels in many cases. The stereotype of the graduate 'earning their stripes' through long hours is not only counterproductive for the organisation (leading to increased burnout, demotivation and intention to leave in many cases) but is also in contravention of working time legislation. Organisations need to be very aware that many graduates may not feel in the position to raise these issues directly with their Line Managers and it is incumbent on HR to monitor hours worked and adjust accordingly, in the same way as they should for all employees who feel the need to work excessive hours on a regular basis.

7.8. Graduate Burnout: Explore Graduate Experiences within the Organisation and address well-being issues as a matter of urgency.

The outcomes of such heavy workloads is clear in the stark finding that many graduates report feeling burnt out from work. While the pandemic may have influence here, these figures are very concerning. Again, while the causes of burnout are not clear and require further investigation, there is a general consensus across the data that the pace of work, the number of hours in the day and the 'disconnect' many graduates feel in virtual working are a factor. The solution moving forward is to more closely manage working hours, establish boundaries and provide clear information, communication and social supports for those engaging in a hybrid work model.

7.9. Graduate Flexible Working Practices: Sustain advances towards Hybrid Working.

As we move towards a hybrid workplace graduates are no exception in their desire for more flexible working practices. Graduates are positive of their organisations willingness to offer them hybrid working and remote working (outside of Ireland) into the future. This indicates a very strong demand for the hybrid work model among graduates, even higher than most other employees. Thus it is a priority for graduates and should be addressed as organisations develop their hybrid models of work. Furthermore, around one third of all graduate entrants are residing in more remote and rural locations. Ensuring these graduates can remain in their rural communities (if desired) will rest on their organisations view of hybrid work.

7.10. Graduate Progression: Development of Graduate Progression Strategy for SMEs.

It is important to appreciate that some graduates progress quite quickly in their organisations, taking on team leader and even line manager roles within their first few years. Thus, their development needs are heightened. Organisations should explore why such graduates progress more quickly than others and if this is related to their on-boarding experience. It is important to prepare graduates for entry into smaller companies and the public sector as well as larger MNCs. Incorporating applied projects, case studies and academic material that draws from different sizes/ types of organisation in higher education would be beneficial here. Additionally, where co-operative/work placements exist, developing channels into SMEs and the Public Sector could develop these opportunities into the future.

7.11. Graduate Retention: Showcase potential career paths to ensure graduate awareness of future opportunities in the organisation as their experience and skills advance.

In looking at graduate experiences of work in a broad sense, findings are generally positive with a job satisfaction rating of 83%, comparable with most other respondents. Thus, people working in Ireland today generally feel satisfied in their work, feel supported by their supervisors and organisation, identify well with their work tasks and have a sense of purpose; all factors important for positive experiences of work. Graduates differ in only one regard, their freedom to decide how their work gets done, with two-thirds feeling they have no control over such decisions. Given their level within the organisation this is probably a factor of limited experience.

Nevertheless, work autonomy is an important factor for performance and motivation and organisations should consider how they can provide graduates with appropriate levels of autonomy and show how their career paths can evolve to attain increased autonomy over time. Many graduates see their future career as outside of their organisation, despite good levels of job and organisational satisfaction. Global competition and perceptions of job insecurity are key factors here. It is very important that organisations, large and particularly small, consider the factors which might be driving this sentiment, implement the necessary changes and increase efforts on career mapping and development for graduates. Graduate retention is a particularly important issue facing SMEs, where 100% of graduates see their future career 'outside' the organisation.

Section

8

Conclusion

The world of work has changed immeasurably during the Covid 19 pandemic. Its impact has been keenly felt by graduates who are experiencing the fast-paced, digitally transformed, hybrid nature of work while still only embarking on their career. The future of work has much to offer Ireland's graduates however their successful transition from college into the workplace is critical to the future success of both themselves and the organisations they choose. Thus, it is incumbent on higher education, policy-makers and organisations to better understand their needs and ensure leadership, management and HR practitioners respond appropriately. This study contributes significantly to our understanding of graduates as requiring specific support around business acumen, problem-solving and technological skills on entering organisations.

Importantly however, they also need many social supports to enable them engage in learning outside of the fast-pace of work caused by digital transformation. These 'safe-spaces' can be created through supervisor and peer check-ins, concentrated feedback, targeting coaching and manufactured opportunities to engage with their team, peers and broader social networks. Such spaces - previously enjoyed through standard and routine work tasks prior to digital transformation - will afford them the opportunity to build valuable personal and professional relationships but also gain 'safe' chances to observe, reflect and experiment.



Section 9

About the Authors

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Section 10

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