



# Skillful Futures: Strengthening Cork's Role as a Leading IFS Destination

Securing Cork's International Financial Services Future:  
Insights, Skills Assessments, and Actionable Strategies

JUNE 2024

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# Table of Contents

|                                                                              |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Foreword</b>                                                              | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Executive Summary</b>                                                     | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Key Findings</b>                                                          | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 1. Introduction</b>                                               | <b>7</b>  |
| 1.1 Methodology                                                              | 8         |
| 1.2 A Vision for the IFS Sector in Cork                                      | 10        |
| <b>Chapter 2. Overview of the IFS Sector in Cork</b>                         | <b>11</b> |
| 2.1 Definition of the IFS sector                                             | 12        |
| 2.2 Introduction of the IFS landscape in Ireland and in Cork                 | 12        |
| 2.3 Growth of the IFS sector                                                 | 14        |
| 2.4 Talent in the IFS Sector in Cork                                         | 16        |
| 2.4.1 - Description of current talent                                        | 16        |
| 2.4.2 - Talent to nurture: Young diaspora talent and transition talent       | 20        |
| 2.4.3 - IFS employers' talent challenges                                     | 22        |
| <b>Chapter 3. Overview of IFS Talent in Cork: Job and Skills Analysis</b>    | <b>24</b> |
| 3.1 Mapping of current skills with the IFS landscape                         | 25        |
| 3.2 In-demand skills                                                         | 26        |
| 3.3 Mapping of IFS positions                                                 | 29        |
| 3.3.1 Fintech                                                                | 29        |
| 3.3.2 Fund Administration                                                    | 30        |
| 3.3.3. Investment Banking                                                    | 31        |
| 3.3.4 Insurance                                                              | 32        |
| 3.3.5 Main findings from the IFS job mapping analysis                        | 32        |
| <b>Chapter 4. Training &amp; upskilling opportunities for the IFS talent</b> | <b>35</b> |
| 4.1 Importance of L&D                                                        | 36        |
| 4.2 Current L&D approach & practices                                         | 36        |
| 4.3 Upskilling & learning opportunities in the Cork area                     | 39        |
| <b>Chapter 5. Cork as a location for IFS</b>                                 | <b>41</b> |



|                                                                                    |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 5.1 Overview of Cork                                                               | 42        |
| 5.2 Cork’s perceived strengths & areas for improvement                             | 42        |
| 5.3 What makes Cork a location of choice for IFS Employers                         | 43        |
| 5.3.1. Cork’s geographical location and connectivity                               | 44        |
| 5.3.2. Regulatory environment                                                      | 44        |
| 5.3.3. Business ecosystem                                                          | 45        |
| 5.3.4. Higher education                                                            | 46        |
| 5.3.5. Cork Chamber Skillnet and other Skillnet Networks                           | 47        |
| <b>Chapter 6. Future outlook and growing trends within IFS</b>                     | <b>49</b> |
| 6.1 Artificial Intelligence                                                        | 51        |
| 6.2 Cybersecurity                                                                  | 52        |
| 6.3 Fintech and Digital Finance                                                    | 53        |
| 6.4 Sustainable Finance and ESG                                                    | 53        |
| <b>Chapter 7. Recommendations and Conclusion</b>                                   | <b>55</b> |
| 7.1. Recommendations                                                               | 56        |
| 7.1.1. Develop collaboration with Dublin to strategically grow Cork’s IFS industry | 56        |
| 7.1.2. Diversify IFS offering by identifying niche areas for investment            | 57        |
| 7.1.3. Attract emerging talent                                                     | 58        |
| 7.1.4. Retain international talent:                                                | 59        |
| 7.1.5. Attract transition talent                                                   | 60        |
| 7.1.6. Increase employer proactivity towards employee upskilling                   | 60        |
| 7.1.7. Fill the gaps identified in the type of course offering currently available | 61        |
| 7.2 Conclusion                                                                     | 62        |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>                                                            | <b>64</b> |
| <b>List of Figures</b>                                                             | <b>64</b> |
| <b>List of Tables</b>                                                              | <b>64</b> |
| <b>List of Abbreviations</b>                                                       | <b>65</b> |

# Foreword



On behalf of Cork Chamber Skillnet, I am pleased to present this pioneering research into the international financial services (IFS) sector in Cork and its current and future skills needs.

Ireland is a global hub for financial services and the Government is taking steps to consolidate that position into the future through the Ireland for Finance Action Plans and the recent Irish Funds 2030 consultation. A key element of Ireland's financial services offering internationally is a demonstrable 'all of Ireland industry' and that is why the Government have a focus on growing the IFS industry in the regions. This highlights the importance of Ireland having a strong centre for IFS in Cork.

Cork's financial services sector has grown at a rapid pace over the past 15 years with the arrival of global industry companies underpinned by a network of professional support services and indigenous firms. It is now the second largest financial services centre in Ireland and the potential to be a European hub for IFS activity. This research found that in the last three years, the 91% of IFS employers in the region that responded reported growth and 100% have predicted growth over next two to three years.

This remarkable expansion underscores Cork's strategic importance and its ability to attract, retain and develop talent. Cork is home to a highly educated workforce, bolstered by prestigious institutions like University College Cork and Munster Technological University. 60% of IFS professionals working in

IFS in Cork graduated from these Cork third-level institutions. This demonstrates the importance of the universities to the region and the preference of Cork people to live and work in the county if the opportunity presents. The availability of such talent is a key factor in making Cork an attractive destination for investment and growth.

This growth in the IFS sector has been supported by mature ICT and cyber clusters that host strong skills in AI (Artificial Intelligence), Cloud Computing, Cybersecurity, cloud, data ethics which can be utilised to complement new areas of FS growth. This is important as 78% of IFS employers in the region are currently prioritising technology skills when hiring.

Another cornerstone of Cork's IFS growth is the integration of talent and industry needs through robust partnerships between businesses, educational institutions, and state-bodies. The industry-led Cork Financial Services Forum work together to enhance a vibrant IFS ecosystem, promote Cork as a destination for investment and talent, and provide a supportive environment for existing businesses, potential new entrants, and their teams. This collaborative approach ensures that the region is in lockstep when considering the workforce development needs of the sector and enables Cork to stay ahead of the dynamic skills and talent demands.

Cork's position as a leading financial services centre is underpinned by the strength of our international financial services sector and the exceptional talent that drives it. We are proud of our achievements and remain dedicated to fostering an environment where businesses can thrive, and individuals can excel.

I want to thank Skillnet Ireland for their outstanding contribution in keeping Irish business competitive through their innovative and future focused talent development initiatives. Skillnet Ireland's Industry Insights research initiative is key to ensuring that Ireland Inc. remains competitive and at the leading edge of talent initiatives.

We look forward to the enduring of the IFS sector in Cork and our flourishing relationship with Skillnet Ireland.

**Conor Healy**

CEO, Cork Chamber of Commerce



# Executive Summary



This report was commissioned to provide an in-depth analysis of the International Financial Services (IFS) landscape in Cork, aiming to assess current talent needs, anticipate future requirements, and propose actionable recommendations to bridge existing gaps and ensure the sector's sustainability. The primary goal is to underscore the IFS sector's viability and secure its future through a consistent supply of skilled talent..

This report examines Cork's IFS landscape, highlighting its key trends, challenges, and opportunities. It delves into the current composition of the sector in terms of employers and sub-sectors, as well as the diverse talent pool fuelling its growth, including emerging, international, and transition talent. Moreover, it maps out the skills and positions prevalent in the Cork IFS workforce and evaluates existing Learning & Development initiatives.

Findings indicate a diverse sub-sector representation within Cork's IFS landscape, with Fund Administration being predominant. Employers' express optimism about continued growth in the sector over the next few years. The talent pool is notably diverse, encompassing local, emerging, and international professionals, although there's room for improvement in better leveraging the rich ICT local talent pool to the benefit of the IFS ecosystem and which is crucial for future advancements.

This is further explored through a detailed mapping of the skills, positions and functions represented among the IFS workforce in Cork today. To evidence the work being done to upskill, reskill and provide continuous learning opportunities for this workforce,

we detail current Learning & Development policies within IFS employers, as well as the courses and upskilling initiatives available to talent locally. Chapter 5 discusses the strengths and opportunities that Cork, as a location, provides to the IFS ecosystem. Chapter 6 delves into the outlook of IFS and the growing trends within the sector. Chapter 7 concludes with recommendations for stakeholders in Cork's IFS sector.

While IFS employers in Cork demonstrate commitment to workforce development, there is an opportunity to further refine Learning & Development policies and better align training with employees' career aspirations. The report emphasises the demand for both traditional finance competencies and technology-driven expertise, particularly in AI, data analytics, and blockchain.

Cork's IFS sector is undergoing significant transformation driven by technological advancements, Fintech innovation, and sustainable finance initiatives. The city's favourable cost and quality of life contribute to talent retention. Recommendations include strategic collaboration with Dublin and London, diversifying IFS offerings, further promoting IFS as a career sector, and enhancing educational offerings to meet emerging skill demands.

In summary, Cork's IFS sector is poised for growth and resilience, provided stakeholders take proactive measures to address current challenges and capitalise on future opportunities.

# Key Findings

## The research reveals several important findings outlined below:

1. The IFS landscape in Cork is characterised by a large diversity of sub sectors represented (Fund Administration & Asset Management, Fintech, Insurance, Investment Banking, Wealth Management) where Fund Administration, represents over half of the IFS local employment locally.
2. There is positivity amongst the IFS employer community in Cork which has been growing for the past number of years and employer sentiment as evidenced in surveys conducted reported an expectation that this growth to continue over the next 2 or 3 years.
3. The diversity of the IFS talent pool currently employed in Cork is noteworthy. In addition to local talent, the sector demonstrates a strong ability to integrate emerging talent, such as recent graduates, and attract international professionals and individuals transitioning from other industries. However, there is an opportunity for IFS employers to enhance their capacity to attract ICT talent, already abundantly present in Cork in other sectors, which will be crucial for the sector's future advancements.
4. IFS Employer Survey highlighted the critical skills required for professionals in Financial Services, including accounting, data analytics, risk assessment, regulatory compliance, and financial reporting. These IFS employers are prioritising a mix of traditional finance skills, business acumen, and analytical capabilities.
5. 78% of employers are prioritising technology skills in hiring. This showcases a growing emphasis on automation, AI, data analytics, and blockchain reshaping the industry.
6. IFS employers are dedicated to workforce development, positively impacting employee satisfaction. However, there's opportunity for improvement in tailoring learning and development (L&D) policies and ensuring employees engage in relevant training aligned with their roles and career aspirations. Additionally, there is an opportunity for employers to leverage local training networks and resources more effectively.
7. The IFS sector in Cork requires a blend of traditional finance skills and adaptable, technology-driven expertise, particularly in AI, data analytics, and blockchain. While there's strong educational support for AI skills, a need for specialised education tailored to IFS applications exists. The sector's transformation, fuelled by AI, Machine Learning, cybersecurity, and Fintech, is supported by initiatives like the International Security Accelerator and Cork Financial Services Forum, indicating Cork's readiness to adapt and grow.

### Summary of recommendations:

- Develop collaboration with Dublin and London to strategically grow Cork's IFS industry
- Diversify Cork's IFS offering by identifying niche areas for investment
- Promote IFS as a viable career sector to emerging talent
- Retain international talent through internships
- Attract transition talent through highlighting the opportunities within FS and removing barriers to entry
- Increase employer proactivity towards employee upskilling
- Ensure greater relevant in the third level course offering for IFS through addressing gaps in emerging skills required



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

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# Introduction

## 1.1 Methodology

This research, conducted by Morgan McKinley, was commissioned by Cork Chamber Skillnet, who supported and guided the project to completion.

Desk research, including an academic literature review and a mapping of the IFS ecosystem in Cork, was conducted in the initial stages of this research.

A survey questionnaire was developed for the project, referred to hereafter as the **IFS Employer Survey**. It was administered online to the IFS employers having a presence in Cork. The survey was taken by senior leadership from 13 IFS employers out of the 25 targeted local IFS employers. These responses collectively represented a workforce of over 1,500 employees.

Figure 1: Subsectors represented by IFS Employer Survey respondents

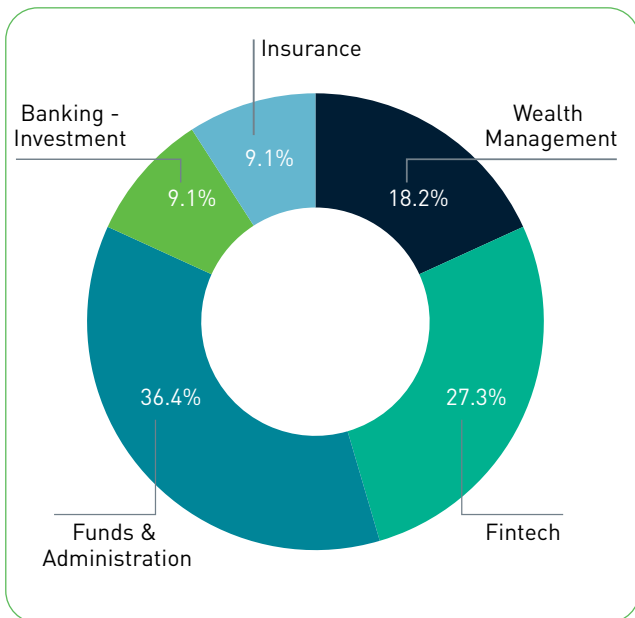


Figure 2: Size of IFS Employer Survey respondents

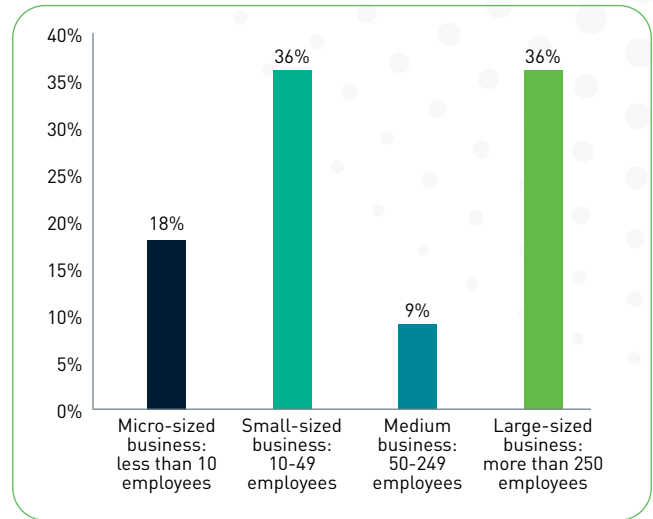


Figure 3: Nationality of IFS Employer Survey respondents





Additionally to this survey, another questionnaire was issued to IFS **Support Employers** in Cork. These employers are organisations providing a wide range of services that support the IFS community. The survey was taken by senior leadership of 15 Support Employers out of the 25 targeted employers. These responses collectively represented a workforce of over 2,800 employees.

Figure 4: Subsectors represented by Support Employer Survey respondents

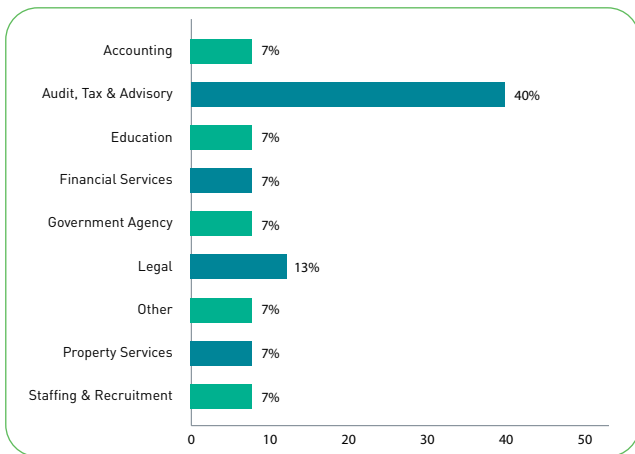
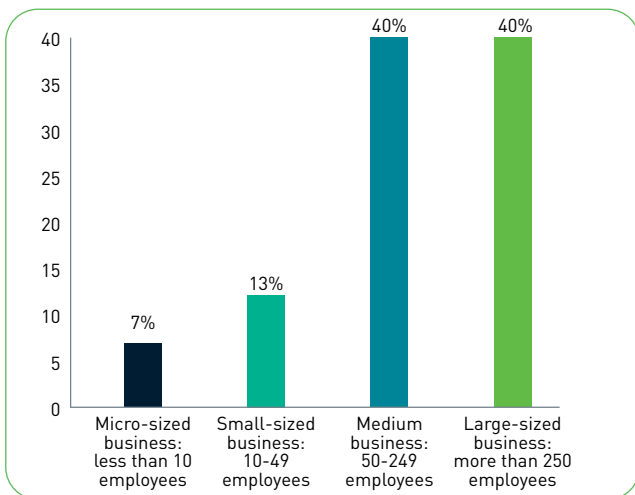


Figure 5: Size of Support Employer respondents



Two focus groups were held virtually, to complement the preliminary survey findings and seek insight into the IFS employee landscape in Cork. These focus groups were structured around two different audiences:

1. Local IFS employees in Cork
2. International IFS employees in Cork



The focus groups brought together 11 participants from IFS companies representing an employee base of over 1,170 including a student representative pursuing a Master's in Corporate Finance at UCC. The IFS employees covered diverse roles in 4 subsectors (Funds Administration & Asset Management, Insurance, Fintech, Investment Banking) and hailed from 7 different nationalities (Irish, Brazilian, Canadian, Polish, Croatian, Indian, and Italian). The group comprised professionals at various career stages, ranging from Associate Director to Officer, with a gender distribution of 64% women and 36% men.

A series of further semi-structured stakeholder interviews were additionally conducted to dig into more expert matters key to this research which included:

- Interview with a representative of the Irish Funds Industry Association (IFIA)
- Interview with a representative of the Funds Academy
- Interview with a representative of IDA Ireland

## 1.2 A Vision for the IFS Sector in Cork

Employers located in Ireland provide Financial Services to every major economy in the world and Cork is no exception. The IFS sector in Cork has witnessed a significant growth, in particular since the UK's decision to leave the European Union (EU) in 2016. This expansion is attributed to the city's strategic position within the EU single market, its highly skilled workforce, and its pro-business regulatory

environment. As multinational employers adjusted their operations following the UK's exit from the EU, Cork emerged as an attractive destination, offering a stable and compliant environment for IFS operations.

Today, employers are embarking into new areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), blockchain technology, and data analytics, positioning themselves at the forefront of innovation within the IFS landscape. This sophisticated approach has attracted a diverse mix of investors, both domestic and international, who recognize Cork's potential for continued growth and innovation in the IFS sector. Cork has a very strong technology talent pool which has evolved and grown since the arrival of big technology employers such as Apple in 1980, Trend Micro in 2003, VMware in 2005, Qualcomm in 2013, and more recently Cadence Design Systems in 2020 and NetApp in 2022. This highly skilled workforce should form the basis of an attractive proposition for IFS employers to establish operations in Cork and technology continues to be a very important component in the growth and transformation of the sector. Access to such in demand skills will be a significant factor in global organisations establishing operations in a location such as Cork.

Overall, Cork's strategic location, skilled workforce, supportive regulatory environment, and focus on innovation have attracted multinational employers, investors, and talent, solidifying Cork's position as a thriving IFS hub. As the IFS sector continues to evolve, Cork is prepared to remain at the forefront, shaping the future of financial services and driving economic growth for the region and beyond.





## Chapter 2

# Overview of the IFS Sector in Cork

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# Overview of the IFS Sector in Cork

## 2.1 Definition of the IFS sector

The IFS refer to a broad range of financial activities and transactions conducted across borders, involving multinational employers as well as, financial institutions, and investors. These services encompass various activities such as Banking, Insurance, Asset and Fund Management, Investment Banking, Capital Markets, Wealth Management Foreign Exchange, Payments, Financial Technology (Fintech) and other related financial services.

In Ireland, over two hundred foreign-owned multinational employers are actively engaged in the IFS sector, collectively contributing to 75% of its total employment.

The IFS community is also supported by a wide range of other businesses, which we will refer to as “support organisations.” These support organisations are accountancy, tax, legal and advisory services providers, education providers, public organisations as well as Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) employers.

The international component of IFS indicates that we will be focusing this study on foreign employers except when an Irish headquartered employer has a significant presence outside of Ireland. We however acknowledge the importance of the Indigenous Financial Services employers and the support services employers in the wider sector dynamics (including talent) and growth.

## 2.2 Introduction of the IFS landscape in Ireland and in Cork

As of Q3 2023, there were a total of 135,700 persons employed in Financial Services<sup>1</sup> (FS) activities throughout Ireland. Cork and the broader Southwest region employ 8.3% of the total number of professionals employed in FS in Ireland<sup>2</sup>.

Within FS, the specific IFS landscape in Ireland has grown exponentially in the past 50 years. The IFS

sector today employs around 56,000 people country-wide<sup>3</sup>. This represents an increase of 3,000 from 2021. Ireland has established itself as a worldwide hub for IFS.

Within recent years, Ireland has been home to twenty out of the world’s top 25 financial services employers, 17 of the top global banks and 11 of the world’s top 15 insurance employers<sup>4</sup>. Ireland is also the third largest location for fund investments worldwide and second largest in Europe (after Luxembourg). In 2022, the country had 6.0% of the market share of worldwide investment fund assets, ahead of China (4.8%), Germany (4.1%), Australia (3.7%), France (3.3%) and the UK (3.1%)<sup>5</sup>.

The importance of IFS to the Irish economy is undisputed and the Irish government is currently pushing for its further development through its International Financial Services Strategy 2025 (extended to 2026).

Despite Dublin being the historical centre of IFS in Ireland, the regions have been welcoming a growing number of financial services business opportunities in recent years. Over one third of financial services employers in the country are now located outside of Dublin<sup>6</sup>. Cork is currently the second biggest hub of IFS in Ireland and the findings from this research show an intent from the existing IFS employer community to grow further.

There is a population of 2,500 professionals working in IFS IDA supported employment for the Southwest Region. Specifically, Cork is home to 25 IFS employers employing almost 2,000 professionals<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, 6,700 persons are employed in finance-related roles in Indigenous financial services employers with transferable skills. An additional pool of nearly 3,900 professionals is currently employed in accounting, bookkeeping, auditing, and tax consultancy activities<sup>8</sup> in Cork and a further 2,100 professionals are

<sup>1</sup> The number of persons employed in Financial Services activities include people employed in real estate activities as per the NACE Rev.2 classification of economic sectors used by the CSO in the Labour Force surveys

<sup>2</sup> Central Statistics Office (2024) Labour Force Survey, Q4 2023

<sup>3</sup> Government of Ireland (2022) Update to Ireland for Finance - The strategy for the development of Ireland’s international financial services sector, extended to 2026

<sup>4</sup> Government of Ireland (2019) Ireland for Finance - The strategy for the development of Ireland’s international financial services sector to 2025

<sup>5</sup> European Fund and Asset Management Association (2022), International Quarterly Statistics

<sup>6</sup> Financial Services Ireland -Ibec, Ireland’s financial services sector at a glance,

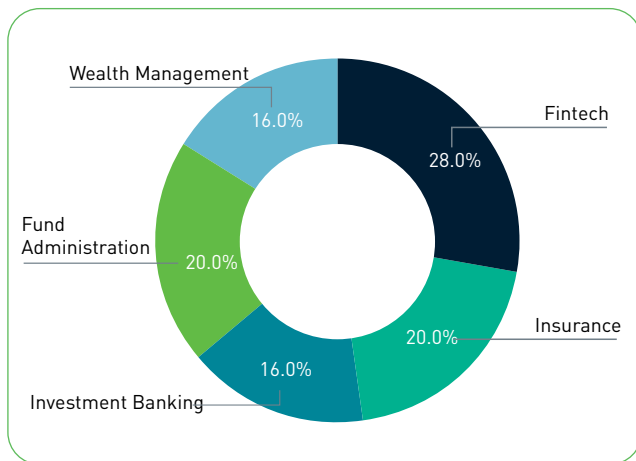
<sup>7</sup> Morgan McKinley (2023) <sup>7</sup> Morgan McKinley (2023)

<sup>8</sup> Central Statistics Office (2023) Census 2022, number of persons (15 years and over) engaged in accounting, bookkeeping and auditing activities and tax consultancy activities

employed in management consultancy<sup>9</sup> activities. Both cohorts constitute a talent reservoir of interest for IFS employers. There are also over 10,700 professionals in Cork employed in ICT activities<sup>10</sup> which constitute a key talent pool on which the IFS sector can rely for its successful technological transformation.

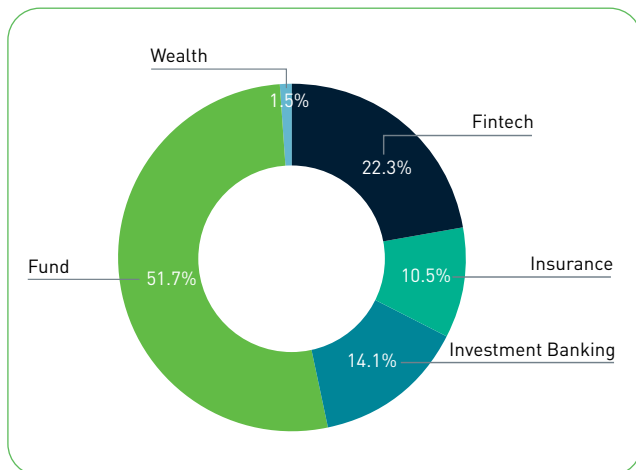
The local IFS range of offerings is diverse.

Figure 6: Proportion of Cork-based IFS employers per subsector<sup>11</sup>



The main IFS sub-sectors represented in Cork are Fund Administration & Asset Management, Fintech, Investment Banking, Insurance and Wealth Management.

Figure 7: Proportion of employees per subsector in the IFS sector in Cork



Based on our analysis of 25 IFS employers operating in Cork, it was discovered that 28.0% of these employers are in the Fintech subsector. However, despite this, the Fintech sub-sector only comprises 22.3% of the overall IFS employee workforce. This variation can be explained by the fact that over 70% of these employers have fewer than twenty employees in Cork. In contrast, the distribution of the Fund Administration sub-sector differs, where 1 in 5 IFS employers in Cork are Fund Administration employers. Despite their smaller numerical representation, Fund Administration companies employ over half of the local IFS workforce. This speaks to the increasing number of funds and sub-funds being serviced in Ireland. As of 2023, there was a total of 11,377 funds serviced in the country which represents a 3.0% increase from 2022<sup>12</sup>.

With that being said and acknowledging the diverse range of IFS subsectors in Cork, the city's notable emphasis on Fund Administration presents an advantageous opportunity to leverage. It is crucial for secondary cities like Cork to comprehend how they can flourish alongside the capital. Collaboration and complementarity may indeed be the most effective strategies to pursue in achieving this goal. There is evidence from the outputs of focus groups held and interviews conducted that there is a specific opportunity to foster collaboration between Dublin and Cork while boosting Cork's representation in fund administration, through considering initiatives such as joint promotional campaigns highlighting Cork's unique advantages, establishing cross-city training programs to enhance talent mobility, and creating incentives for fund administrators to establish dual-location operations, thereby complementing Dublin's status as a leading global top 3 funds domicile while at the same time strengthening Cork's position in the sector through greater capacity. This would enable the sector to capitalise on the strong leadership talent that exists in Cork and capture a very strong emerging local talent pool through the universities, thus enabling further skills growth and retention in the region.

<sup>9</sup> Central Statistics Office (2023) Census 2022, number of persons (15 years and over) engaged in head offices and management consultancy activities

<sup>10</sup> Central Statistics Office (2023) Census 2022, number of persons (15 years and over) engaged in computer programming, consultancy and information service activities

<sup>11</sup> Please note that this classification has been made based on the company's main subsector and that some companies offer more than one type of services within their Cork offices

<sup>12</sup> Monterey Insight (2023) Ireland Fund Report

The success for continued growth of the IFS sector in Cork will be achieved by balancing the evident strengths of the wider Irish IFS market while capitalising on its unique assets, which are mainly related to its talent, its lesser cost of living, its attractiveness as a location to enable a potentially better quality of life and its size.

### 2.3 Growth of the IFS sector

Based on the findings of the IFS Employer Survey conducted by Morgan McKinley among, the sector has consistently expanded over the past three years. Of the employers surveyed, 90.9% reported growth during this period. Additionally, half of these employers indicated that their growth exceeded 10.0%. Growth was observed across employers of all sizes and was distributed among various subsectors including Investment Banking, Wealth Management, Funds Administration & Asset Management, Fintech, and Insurance.

When asked about the reasons for this growth, the senior leadership of the IFS employers surveyed

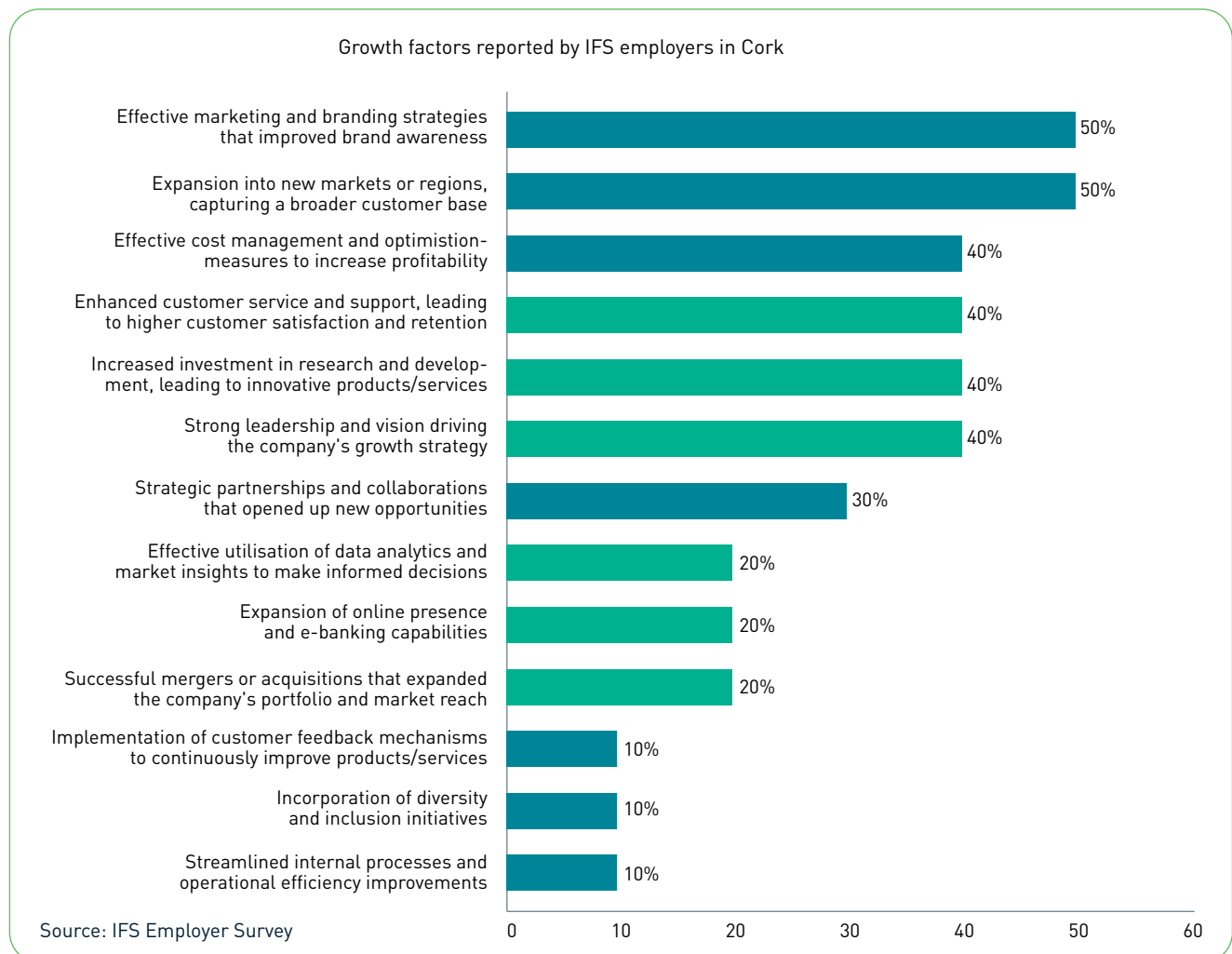
identified two primary contributing factors: (1) effective marketing and branding strategies and (2) expansion into new markets.

When prompted to consider their future growth prospects, all surveyed employers expressed optimism, despite the presence of volatile global geopolitical factors. Regardless of the varying degrees—be it limited, rapid, or moderate—all respondents anticipated some form of growth within the next 2-3 years.

Over half of the employers reported that they expected to expand significantly in the near future, with the potential to enter new markets and increase market share. This positive sentiment did not correspond to the size, sub-sector, or origin of the company. Nevertheless, the most optimistic outlook came from the Fintech and the Wealth Management sub-sectors.

Sixty-four percent of employers believed that this growth would positively influence the development of the existing talent pool. Furthermore, more than half

Figure 8: Factors that contributed to recent growth among IFS employers in Cork





of the respondents (55%) indicated that another likely consequence of this growth would be an increase in hiring.

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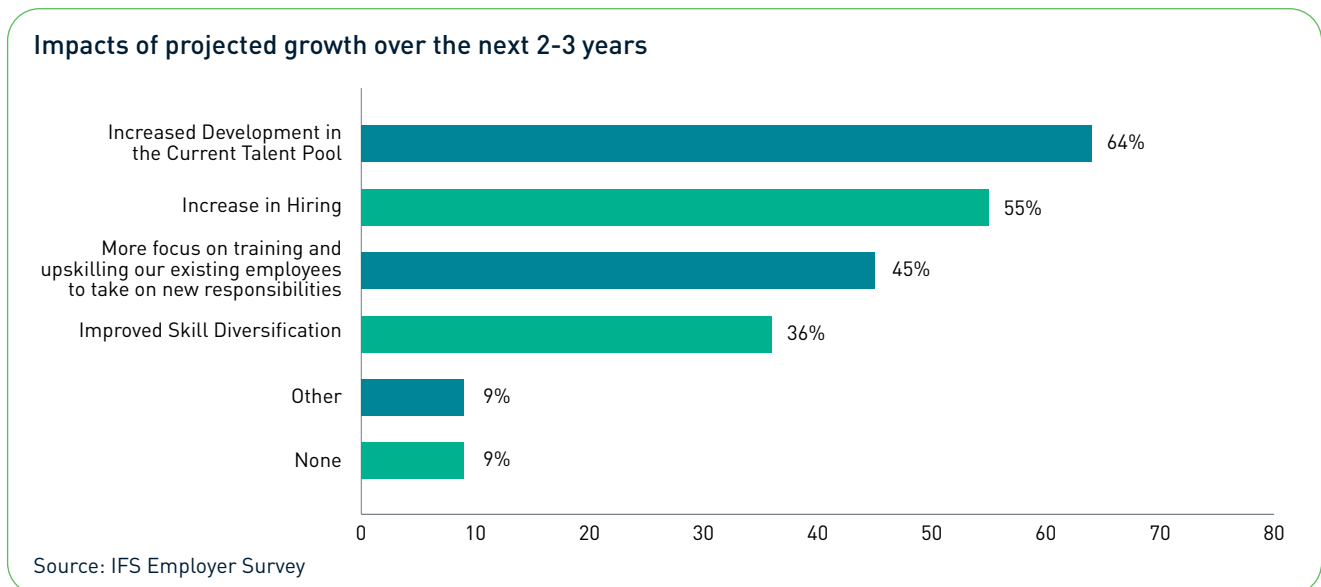
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**“We recently expanded our team in order to maintain the level of business coming into the region”**

Fund Administration employer

Figure 9: Impact of future growth within IFS employers over the next 2-3 years



When specifically asked which financial services functions would experience the most growth, employers provided a variety of answers, indicating that internal growth would not only focus on and affect core functions, but also impact support functions within the employer. It was evident from the survey findings that upskilling and reskilling of the existing workforce was seen as critical to supporting growth plans for the sector. This ambition is endorsed by strong government supports and investments in these activities through IDA Ireland educational grant support, as well as greater investment in Springboard and Skillnet initiatives.

**“We have made significant investment over the last number of years with the expectation of further investment to come”**

Insurance employer

## 2.4 Talent in the IFS Sector in Cork

Morgan McKinley’s research reveals that one of Ireland and Cork’s primary competitive advantages in the global and European IFS market is their talent pool. This includes not only the current workforce but also the prospective graduate talent pipeline expected to enter the market in the coming years, the returning international diaspora talent, as well as skilled professionals arriving in the Irish market from abroad.

### 2.4.1 - Description of current talent

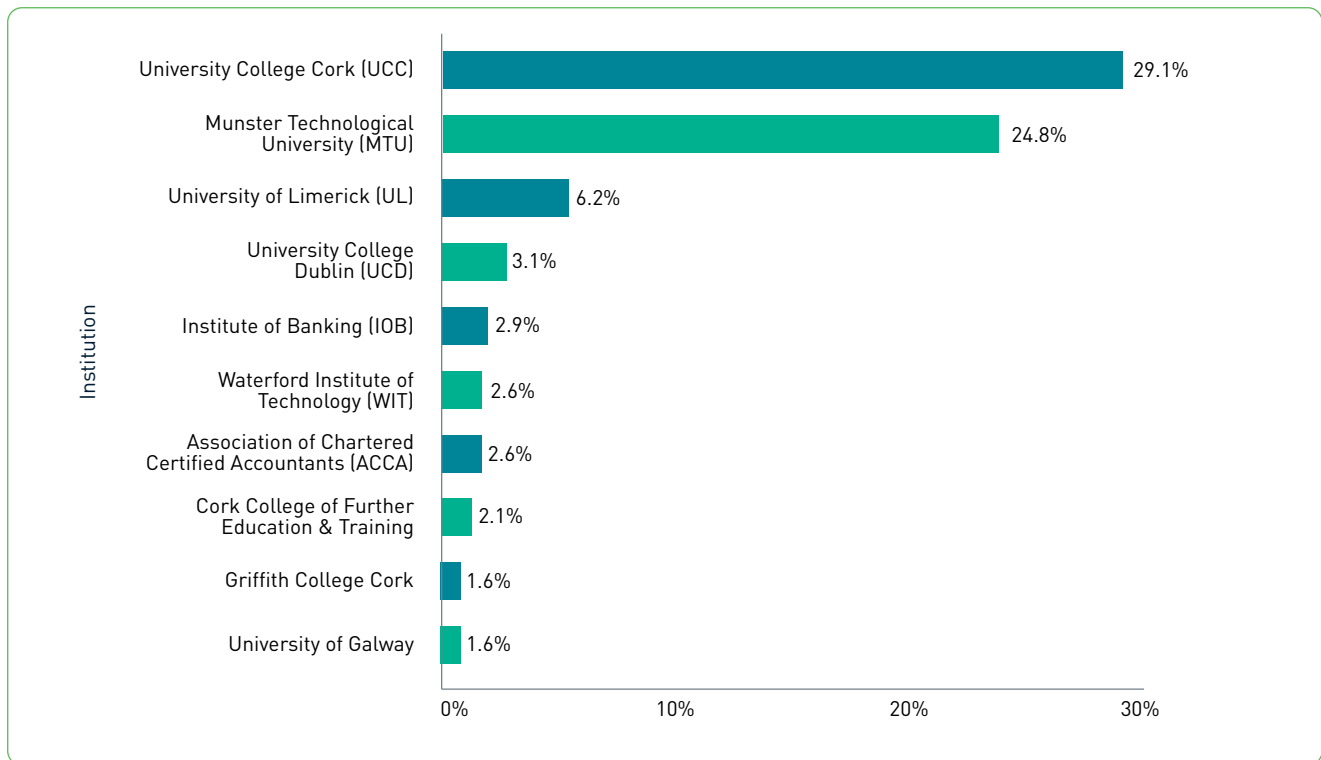
The talent supporting the IFS sector in Cork is diverse and educated.

Ireland has one of the most educated workforces in the EU. In 2022, Ireland ranked first in the EU for the

highest proportion of individuals aged 25-34 with a third level qualification<sup>13</sup>. Additionally, to being highly educated, Cork’s IFS workforce is also mostly locally educated. Close to 60% of the professionals working in IFS in Cork<sup>14</sup> have graduated from a Cork-based third-level institution implying that Cork is strong on retaining graduate talent or in attracting back experienced talent to the region.

The figure below presents the third-level or professional institutions in which IFS professionals in Cork have studied. Please note that some professionals might have studied in more than one institution (i.e. done an undergraduate degree in UCC and then obtained an accreditation from the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)).

Figure 10: Third level education institutions attended by IFS talent in Cork



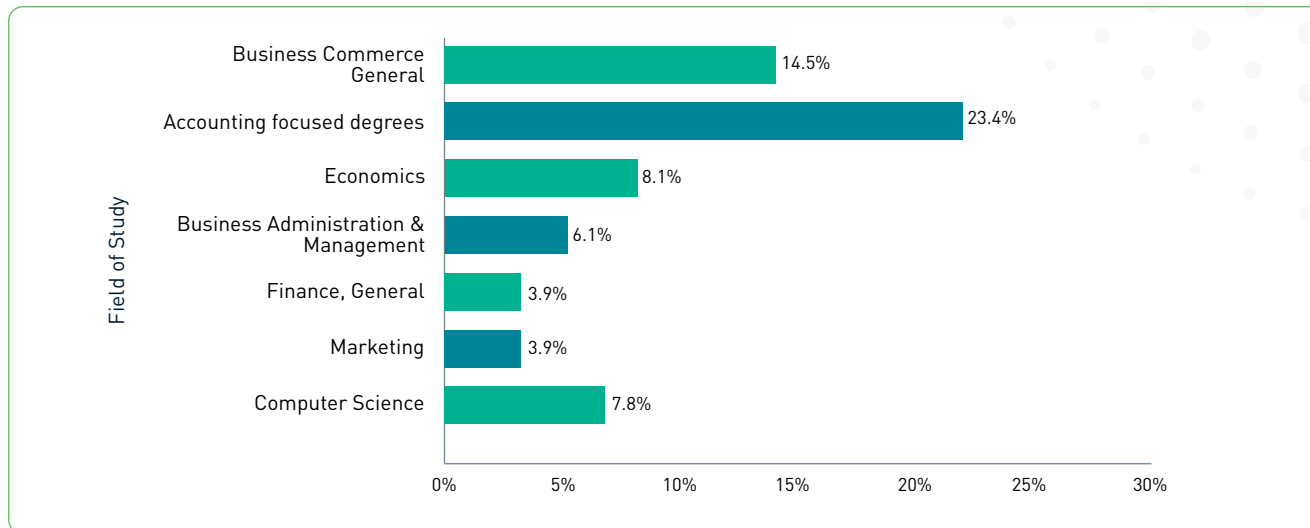
<sup>13</sup> Eurostat (2023) Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%) – main indicators (edat\_lfse\_03)

<sup>14</sup> From a study based on a sample of over 1,700 professionals working in IFS in Cork

In terms of specialisations, the most frequent degrees studied by professionals working for IFS employers in Cork are Business, Accounting, Finance, Economics, Marketing and IT.

18.5% increase over a 5-year period. 30.2% were postgraduates and 69.8% were undergraduates. Overall, Cork produced 15.4% of the total graduate population of Ireland for the year 2022.

Figure 11: Fields of study of IFS workforce in Cork



The IFS employee landscape in Cork is a mix of recent graduates and experienced industry professionals. Based on a study conducted by Morgan McKinley, almost a quarter of current IFS employees in Cork graduated in or after 2021. Over half of these recent graduates are employed within the Funds Administration subsector. Despite there being most of the local talent, the IFS talent pool is welcoming a continued flow of international talent.

### Emerging talent

The availability of a highly skilled workforce in Ireland plays a key role in drawing IFS investments - among others - into the country. In Ireland, 62.3% of the population aged 25-34 years old had completed tertiary studies in the country, which represents a 13.9% increase from 2017. This compares to a proportion of 50.4% in France, 37.1% in Germany, and to an EU 27 average of 42.0%<sup>15</sup>.

This highly educated emerging talent pool is spread throughout the country and as such, Cork is well equipped with a highly educated workforce and emerging talent pool that serves the local employment market.

The main third-level institutions in Cork are UCC and MTU. In 2022, both institutions combined produced a total of 13,200 graduates, which represents an

18.5% increase over a 5-year period. 30.2% were postgraduates and 69.8% were undergraduates. Overall, Cork produced 15.4% of the total graduate population of Ireland for the year 2022. Among the total number of graduates in Cork in 2022, 3,115 (24%) graduated in Business, Administration and Law (BAL) related degrees (56.0% undergraduates and 44.0% postgraduates) and 800 (6%) in ICT-related degrees (44.4% undergraduates and 55.6% postgraduates). The number of students graduating with a postgraduate degree in Cork in either BAL or ICT increased by 25.6% over the past 5 years. There were 53.4% more postgraduates in ICT-related courses in Cork between 2017 and 2022 and 18.6% more postgraduates in BAL-related courses.

For the year 2022/2023, a total of 37,950 students enrolled in MTU and UCC. Among these students, 7,295 enrolled in BAL-related courses (78.2% undergraduates and 21.8% postgraduates) and 2,415 in ICT-related courses (73.9% undergraduates and 25.9% postgraduates).

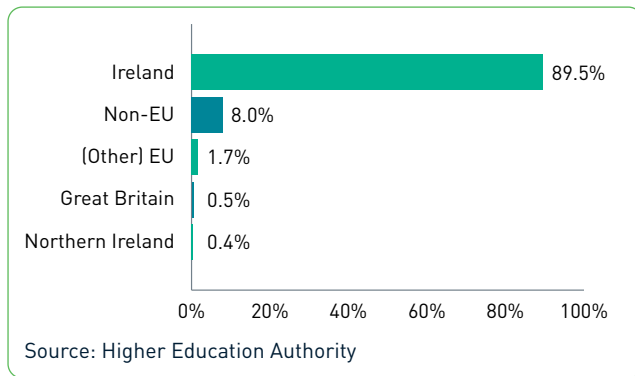
Cork-based third-level institutions attract students from all over Ireland as well as international students. In the year 2022/2023, 10.5% of the student population in MTU and UCC consisted of international students, this represents a 16.9% increase in international students since 2017/2018. Among the international students, 76.0% were from non-EU countries.

Most international students that come from non-EU countries are Indian, Chinese, Canadian, Nigerian and United States of America (USA) nationals.

<sup>15</sup> Eurostat (2023) Population by educational attainment level, sex and age [%] – main indicators [edat\_lfse\_03]



Figure 12: Place of origin<sup>16</sup> of MTU and UCC students for the year 2022/2023



Among the young Irish studying in MTU or UCC, 38.9% came from counties other than Cork. The most common counties of origin are Kerry, Dublin, Tipperary, Waterford, Limerick, and Kilkenny.

The third-level education sector in Cork is characterised by its deep collaboration with the business community, which ensures that the content delivered is aligned with current and future business needs.

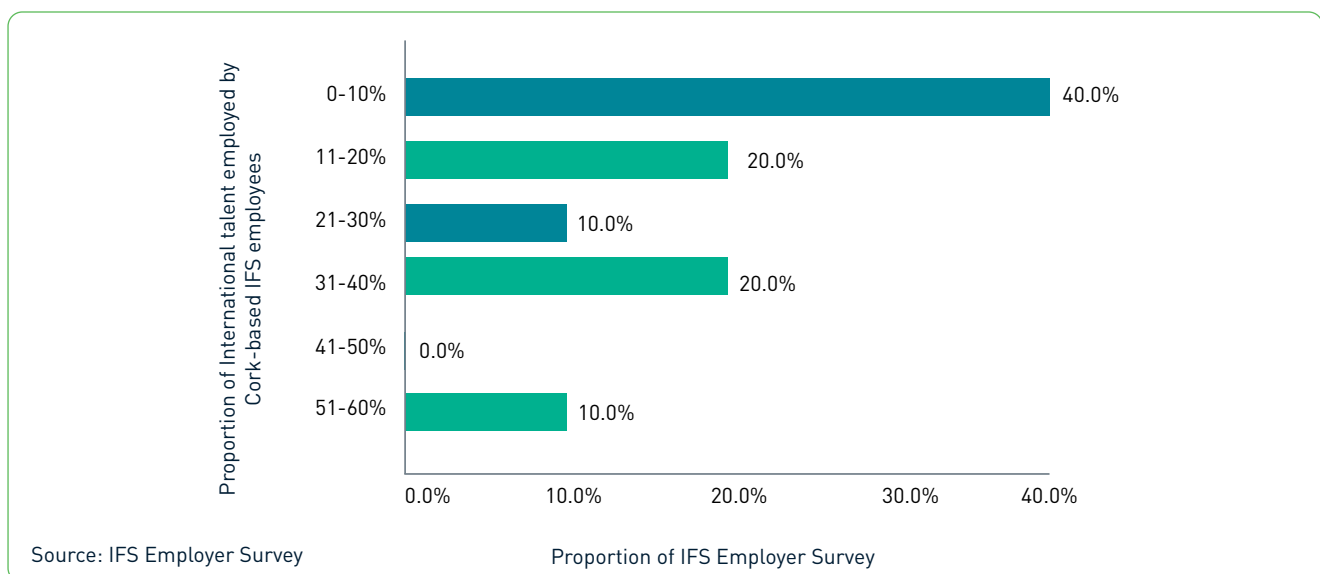
## International Talent

In the year to April 2023, 141,600 immigrants came to Ireland, which is a 16-year high<sup>17</sup>, proving that Ireland is a very attractive location for foreign talent, and Cork is in no way an exception for this. This represents a 47.5% increase over the past 5 years and a 31.4% increase from the previous year. Among these immigrants, 26,100 (18.4%) were EU citizens<sup>18</sup>, 4,800 (3.4%) were UK citizens, 81,100 (57.3%) were nationals from countries outside of the EU (other than the UK) and the remaining 29,600 (20.9%) immigrants were Irish nationals returning home. Independent interviews with Irish overseas diaspora were conducted by Morgan McKinley across their international office networks including London, Bristol, Singapore, Sydney, Toronto, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Shanghai. The findings from these informal interviews revealed that Cork diaspora was the most boomerang diaspora pool, intent on returning to their home county to live and work if a viable career opportunity presented itself.

We have evidenced throughout extensive primary interviews how attractive Cork is to international IFS talent who have chosen to make Cork their home. It is noteworthy to mention that their attachment to Cork itself has grown strong over the years to the point that for many of them, staying in Cork had become their number one priority.

This international attractiveness of Cork is reflected in the proportion of non-Irish employees currently working in IFS in Cork.

Figure 13: International talent employed in Cork's IFS employers



<sup>16</sup> As a percentage of the total student population of UCC & MTU for the year 2022/2023

<sup>17</sup> Central Statistics Office (2023) Population and Migration Estimates, April 2023

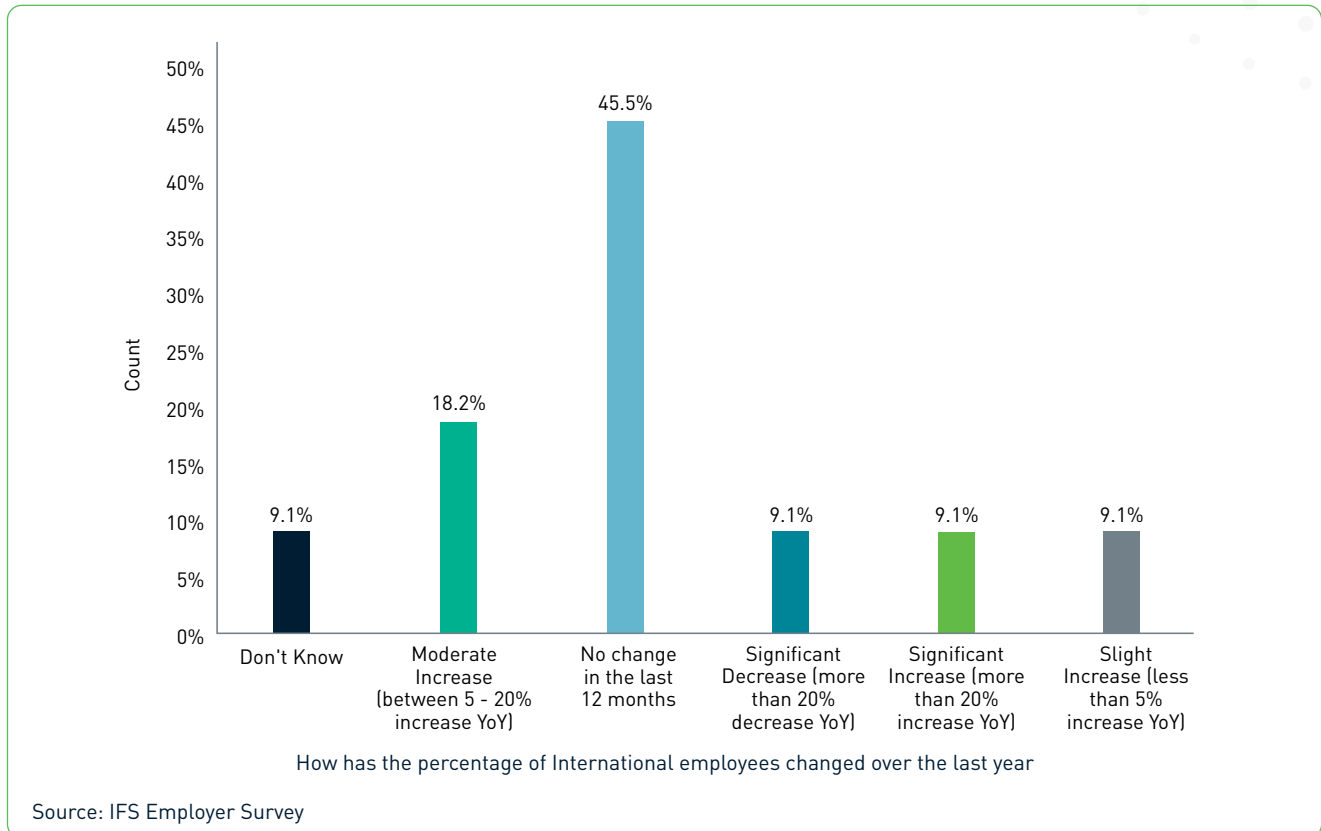
<sup>18</sup> Excluding Irish citizens

Our research findings show that 60% of IFS employers in Cork employ over 10% of international employees.

The number of international talents employed within IFS employers is not directly correlated to the size, subsector, or headquarters location of the employers. Among the 60% of IFS employers reporting to

employ less than 20% of international talent, we find organisations of all sizes (large, medium, small and micro businesses), belonging to different IFS subsectors (Investment banking, wealth management, funds and fintech) and headquartered in a variety of countries (Ireland, United States, Luxembourg, UK and Canada).

Figure 14: Change in international employees over the last year





## 2.4.2 - Talent to nurture: Young diaspora talent and transition talent

### Young diaspora talent

From our research, we noticed that a sizeable proportion of young talent, potentially relevant to fuel the IFS employment market in Cork, is emigrating after their studies.

We conducted a study on a sample of 50 IFS professionals who studied in MTU and UCC (either full-time, part-time or during an exchange programme) and graduated between 2017 and 2022 and noted that 30.4% had emigrated and were currently working abroad.

Among the cohort of young Irish professionals who left the country to work in IFS abroad, we observed a prevailing trend towards select destinations, notably the UK, Australia, the USA, and Canada. These countries have traditionally served as popular emigration destinations for the young Irish demographic. According to the latest migration data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) of Ireland, the UK attracted 22.8% of Irish emigrants in 2023, while Canada, the USA, and Australia accounted for 8.3%, 7.7%, and 7.3% of outbound migration, respectively. Additionally, other sought-after destinations among the youthful Irish diaspora talent include France, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The most popular employers employing this talent are Tier 1 investment banks in the UK and the USA.

A list of sample jobs currently worked by this young diaspora talent includes:

- Corporate Banking Analyst
- Equity Research Analyst
- Reconciliation Analyst
- Corporate Advisory Analyst
- Private Wealth Management Analyst
- Business Analyst
- Stock Plan Administrator
- Senior Fund Accountant
- Custody Associate
- Fraud Analyst
- Assistant Broker

Over 1 in 3 IFS employers having taken the survey (36.4%) indicated that the number of international talents employed in their organisations increased over the last 12 months, by a significant (9.1%), moderate (18.2%) or slight (9.1%) increase.

The employers reporting an increase in international talent over the last year are varied in terms of their profile. This increase has affected employers from the Fintech, Fund Administration, Investment Banking, and Insurance sectors, headquartered in a variety of geographies (including USA, Luxembourg and Australia) from all types of sizes (micro, small, medium and large).

This increase of international talent in the IFS sector in Cork contrasts with the decrease in employment permits issued nationally for the Financial Services sector over the past year. In 2023, there were a total of 2,373 employment permits issued within the Financial Services and insurance activities, which represents 7.7% of the total employment permits issued for the same period. Overall, it represents a 29.2% decrease from the previous year<sup>19, 20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> In 2022, there were 3,351 employment permits issued nationwide for Financial Services & Insurance activities between January and December.

<sup>20</sup> Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2023) Employment permit statistics, 2022 & 2023

Over half of this diaspora talent went overseas straight after their graduation, the other half had their first job in Ireland prior to their departure. In some instances, having worked a summer job or an internship abroad seems to have been the trigger for their emigration.

**“We need to be able to hold on to younger staff who are looking at Dublin/London/Canada/Australia etc. Cork offers younger people a better chance to get on to the property ladder as well as access to schools/colleges.”**

Wealth Management Employer

### Transition talent

Transition talent refers to professionals that started their career in a specific industry sector and then transitioned to another industry sector. For this study, the transition talent referred to hereafter is transition talent that “transitioned” to Financial Services later in their career.

Our research findings showed that a sizeable portion of the IFS professionals currently employed in IFS in Cork stated that they had “fallen” into the industry. That, originally, their studies and careers started in another industry sector and that they got into Financial Services by chance. In most cases, based on our focus group findings, it was related to the ease of securing a position or internship in this industry locally that allowed them to step in.

This creates a pool of talent, knowledgeable in what they do, in how to do it, but who, in some instances, lack financial knowledge in general, and a deeper understanding of how their work relates to the wider IFS market.

In one way, this phenomenon must be praised as it shows that IFS is more accessible to non-FS professionals, mainly through jobs related to customer service or even within the core business at associate level.

Our research has shown that a significant portion of professionals interviewed showed the willingness to change industry sectors for the right opportunity. This lack of attachment to the industry itself could be addressed by increasing the commitment of the employees to their employer, work, and sector through more tailored upskilling opportunities and through clear career path progressions. Several research studies have proven the existence of a link between investing in the development of employees and an employer’s overall employee retention. A recent UK survey conducted by High-Speed Training, a UK training provider, revealed that 63% of UK workers polled agreed that training and learning initiatives within their employers helped them stay connected to their employer. Training programs demonstrate that the employer is invested in its employees’ success and well-being. Engaged employees who feel valued and supported are more likely to develop strong bonds with their employer and remain committed to its goals and objectives.

This is particularly important in the case of employees who, in addition to being able to grow, need to be provided with basic industry specific knowledge as they transition to not only a new employer but also a new industry sector.





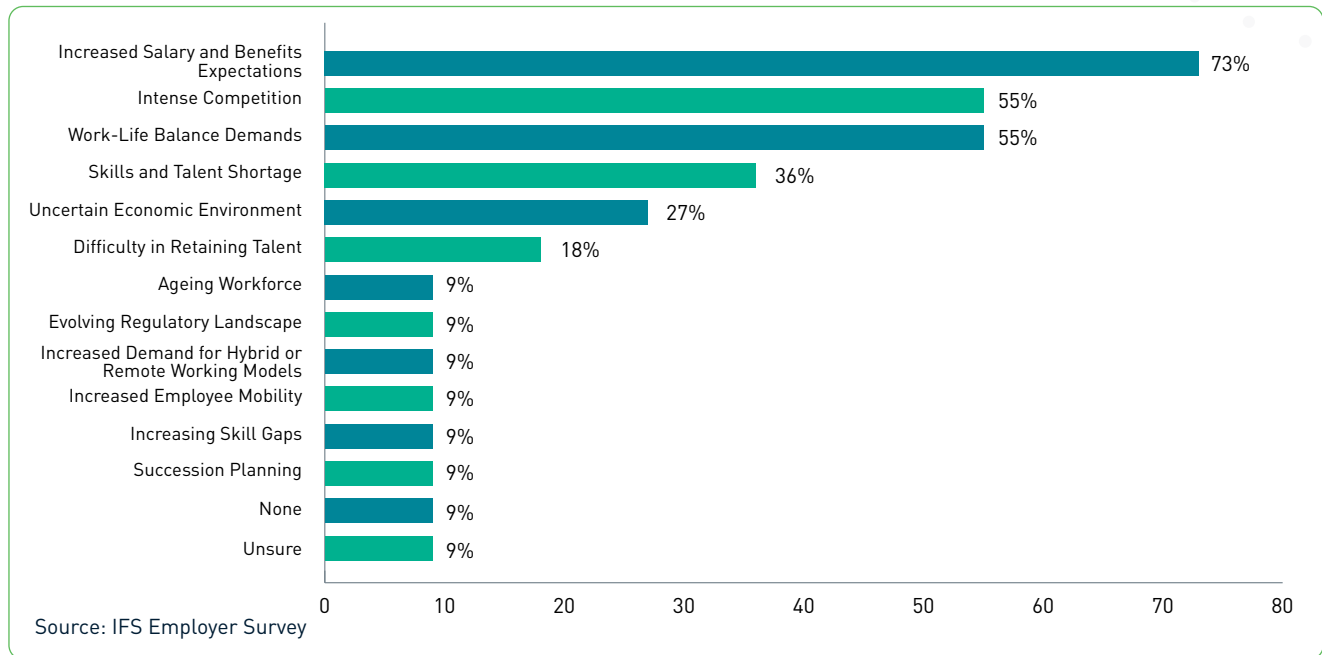
### 2.4.3 - IFS employers' talent challenges

A skilled and diverse workforce is essential to serve the future growth of the IFS sector in Cork. The ability of employers to attract and retain this talent is equally crucial for the development of the sector.

feeling like they cannot stretch their salary/benefits offering anymore without risking putting themselves in difficulty.

Due to its size, the Cork IFS market has been experiencing a harmonisation of salaries within the sector, which has led some to rise to other local competitor's levels. The IFS talent pool in Cork is also characterised by great mobility within the different employers in the sector. It is common for professionals

Figure 15: Change in talent attraction and employee retention



The main challenge experienced by the IFS employers in Cork is managing the salary and benefit expectations of the talent pool. Even though this affects all employers, it is particularly challenging for smaller employers. All survey respondents from small and micro-sized businesses reported this to be a major challenge. Whereas only one in two large-sized businesses reported this to be an issue for their talent attraction and retention. This trend is not unique to Cork and has been experienced by employers from different industry sectors throughout the country. Employers have been feeling pressure in this area,

in Cork to accumulate work experience in different IFS employers and this contributes to the convergence of salaries. Contrary to Dublin, the salary ranges for IFS associated positions remain capped. If the lower end of the salary ranges has gone up due to the above-mentioned trend, the higher end of the salary range will remain stable and is not foreseen to reach peaks observed within Dublin-based IFS employers. We anticipate this trend to lessen in the coming year.

The increased competition for talent is another challenge that IFS employers reported to experience. From a macro perspective, competition for talent indicates that Cork has reached a desirable density in terms of IFS employers. To leverage the impact of the competition for talent, Cork employers have showcased their ability to do this, through:

- Maintaining a broad approach to recruitment, especially for entry-level positions, and remaining open to considering professionals from other industry sectors. During the qualitative process, the research uncovered several professionals currently employed in the IFS sector who entered it due to

**“Office has grown considerably. However, it is increasingly difficult to get an extra budget to match wage expectations.”**

Investment bank

opportunities provided, despite qualifications and prior work experiences that might not typically lead to this career path.

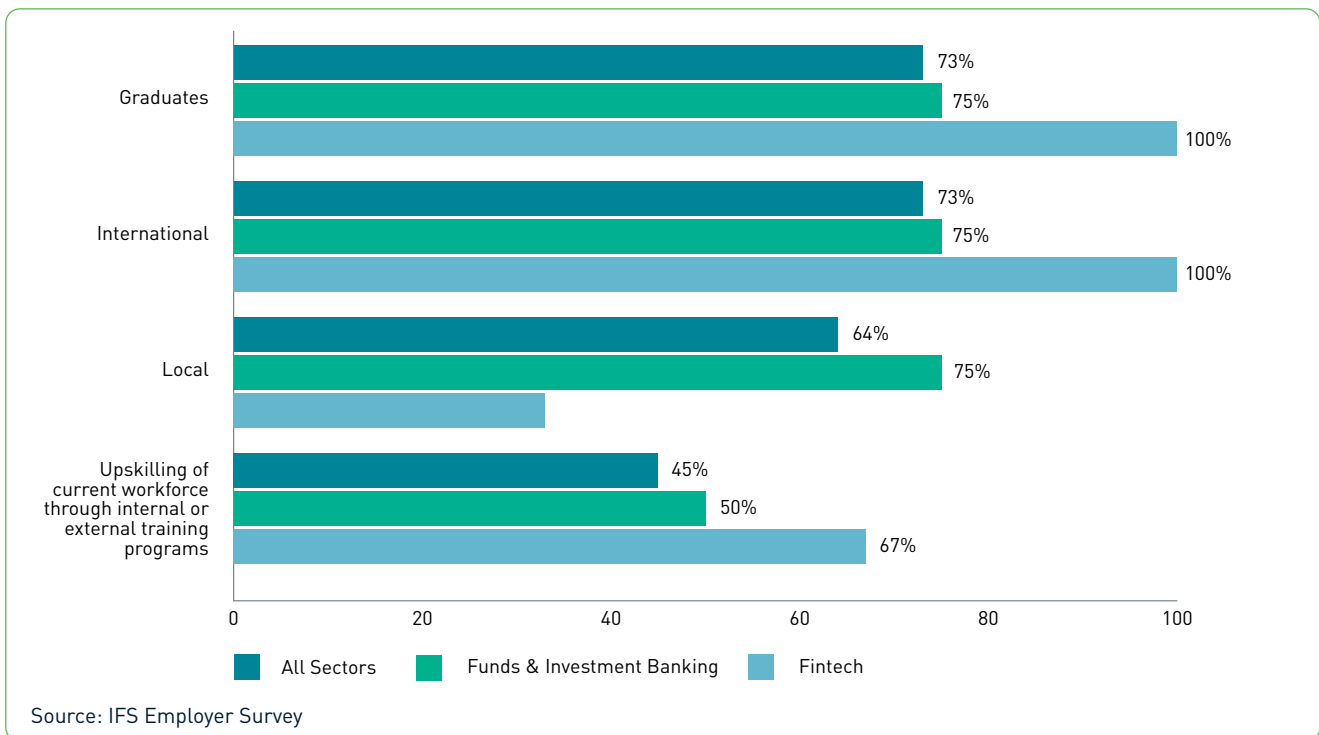
- Reaching out to professionals outside the local catchment employment market by capitalising on remote or hybrid working arrangements.
- Working hard on retaining their talent by investing in their development and offering clear career paths.

While two-thirds of surveyed employers reported minimal difficulty in hiring, one in three IFS employers indicated experiencing challenges in recruiting due to talent shortages. This issue is not uniformly felt across employers of varying sizes and sectors. Fund employers appear less affected by these shortages compared to Fintech firms. This discrepancy may stem from the funds services sector's three-decade development in Cork, which has effectively cultivated a skilled professional base. Moreover, this expert talent benefits from ongoing learning and development opportunities offered within their organisations, as well as through initiatives like the Funds Academy at MTU and programs like IFS Skillnet.

This perception of a talent shortage, specifically within the Fintech subsector, is further confirmed by the various levels of confidence that employers have in finding the right people among the local talent pool.

When questioned about their plans for expanding their employee base, employers demonstrated a strong

Figure 16: How do IFS employers envisage the growth of their talent in Cork?



emphasis on targeting graduates and international talent. Some industry sectors, such as Funds and Investment Banking, expressed a high level of confidence in finding suitable talent among the local professional pool. However, only one in three fintech employers reported expecting to grow their employee population through Cork-based talent. Indeed, Ireland and Cork are still in the process of developing a pipeline of fintech experts to support the sector's digitalization. While this challenge is not unique to Ireland or Cork, it underscores the need for special efforts to encourage the creation of this essential talent pool.

Despite the innovative aspect of digitalization in IFS, our research findings suggest that the necessary skills exist within the Irish talent pool. The advancement of the Fintech sub sector in Cork, Ireland, and the enhancement of fintech capabilities across other IFS sub sectors will hinge on effectively attracting technology talent from the ICT sector which is vibrant and well populated in Cork and upskilling the current IFS workforce.

Overall, Cork's IFS ecosystem is characterised by a variety of sub sectors even though it is particularly strong in the Fund Administration area. The IFS industry has been experiencing growth over the past years and employers are anticipating that this growth trend will continue. The industry is supported by a diverse and skilled workforce that has become one of Cork's main assets. The next Chapter will dive into what skills and jobs are presently available in the sector.

# Chapter 3

## Overview of IFS Talent in Cork: Job and Skills Analysis





# Overview of IFS Talent in Cork: Job and Skills Analysis

## 3.1 - Mapping of current skills with the IFS landscape

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the talent sustaining the IFS sector is comprised of three main groups: (1) “Emerging Talent” or recent graduates, (2) “International Talent” including skilled newcomers to Ireland and international students, and (3) “Transition Talent” which comprises professionals who are transitioning from other sectors to financial services.

The Emerging Talent cohort is particularly important because it is composed of a subset of graduates who possess the skills that are most important to the sector’s digital future which may not be as abundant in a more experienced talent pool. Historically our research has found that undergraduate degrees in Business Studies, Commerce, Economics etc were the most recorded entry routes to a career in IFS. More recently, certain graduates are particularly attractive to IFS organisations looking to fill roles in emerging fields of AI, Data Analytics etc. Graduates in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) are of particular interest to employers because they possess technical skills needed in an IFS sector transforming through new technological advancements. Today there is a growing need for numerical analysis, computer science, digital and data literacy and sharply increasing AI skills.

The International Talent group plays a crucial role in fostering a globally competitive environment. It comprises skilled professionals who have either recently relocated to Ireland or are international students or are returning diaspora from international locations (e.g. UK, Continental Europe, Australia, US, Canada, and Asia). Their global expertise is key in navigating international markets and understanding their regulatory frameworks. Furthermore, our research shows immigrant professionals are highly educated with more than 50% holding a third-level qualification. Transition talent in the context of this report refers to professionals who were educated and/or worked in an unrelated field of employment but have ‘transitioned’ into a career in IFS. Our research shows that this talent group in Cork already possess transferable skills gained from previous roles and/or have actively engaged in reskilling efforts to align with the evolving needs of the sector. Their adaptability and varied perspectives contribute to a flexible and resilient workforce. As Cork establishes itself as a hub for innovation and expansion in financial services, the importance of transition talent to ensure the optimum supply of a work ready workforce is

evident. Their capacity to connect diverse domains and actively embrace continuous learning highlights their significant role in influencing the sector’s future development in the region. Additionally, it demonstrates the adaptability and flexibility of the local labour force, which may be appealing to international companies considering establishing operations in the area.

### Overview of current skills in the IFS sector in Cork

The IFS sector in Cork is rich in skills related to traditional finance functions, such as financial analysis, risk management, business analysis, financial reporting, or accounting.

Senior leadership from 42% of employers surveyed highlighted having a workforce equipped with strong analytical skills. This emphasises the sector’s reliance on data analysis for strategic decision-making, reflecting a data-driven approach to operations.

There is a real opportunity for Cork IFS employers to leverage a skilled market of 10,000 technology professionals that work across artificial intelligence, cloud computing, cybersecurity, data analytics, data ethics and responsibility, extended reality, quantum computing, robotics, and sustainability. A significant aspect of the IFS landscape in Cork is the integration of technology-related skills. Nearly half of employers surveyed incorporate at least one software-related skill, showcasing a commitment to technological innovation and efficiency.





### 3.2 - In-demand skills

Results of our IFS Employer Survey show that the skills considered most essential today for professionals working in the IFS sector in Cork are Accounting and Auditing, Data Analytics, Risk Assessment, Regulatory Compliance and Financial Reporting.

The level and profile of skills in demand for IFS employers is significant. Employers are in need of both traditional skills and transversal skills that allow employers to adapt to technological changes and global developments. There are 3 primary categories under which we classify the IFS skills landscape in Cork:

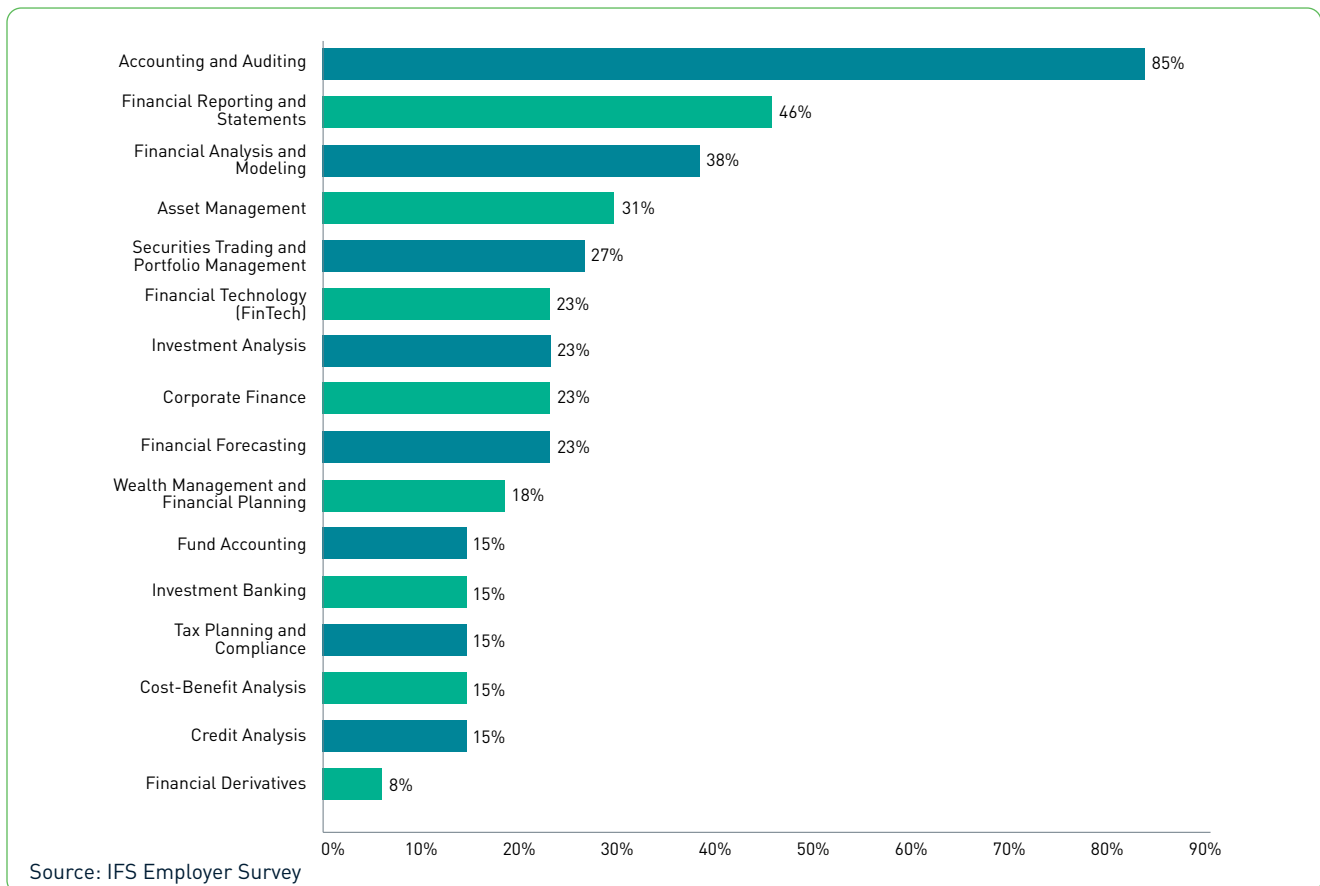
- 1 Finance - in demand skills directly related to traditional finance functions
- 2 Business -in demand skills linked to organisational strategy
- 3 Analytical - in demand skills involving technical analysis

#### Finance skills

Finance skills require adeptness at managing financial assets, analysing investments, ensuring regulatory

compliance, conducting accounting and auditing, and utilising financial tools and software for various financial activities across all subsectors of IFS. The role of technology skills in the IFS sector is becoming increasingly crucial. As the industry continues to evolve, advancements in technology are reshaping traditional practices and driving innovation. From automation and artificial intelligence to data analytics and blockchain, technology is revolutionising how financial services are delivered and managed. Consequently, professionals with expertise in technology are in increasingly high demand within the IFS sector globally and Cork has a real opportunity to capitalise on this trend given the density of its skilled technology talent in the region. These skills not only enhance operational efficiency but also enable firms to stay competitive in a rapidly changing landscape. Emphasising technology skills is essential for organisations looking to adapt and thrive in the digital era of financial services. Results from our IFS Employer Survey show that Senior leadership within local IFS employers intend to introduce automated processes, products, or services over the next two years. In this sense, 78% of them anticipated technology skills to be a priority for hiring in the next two years.

Figure 17: Finance Skills in IFS employers in Cork

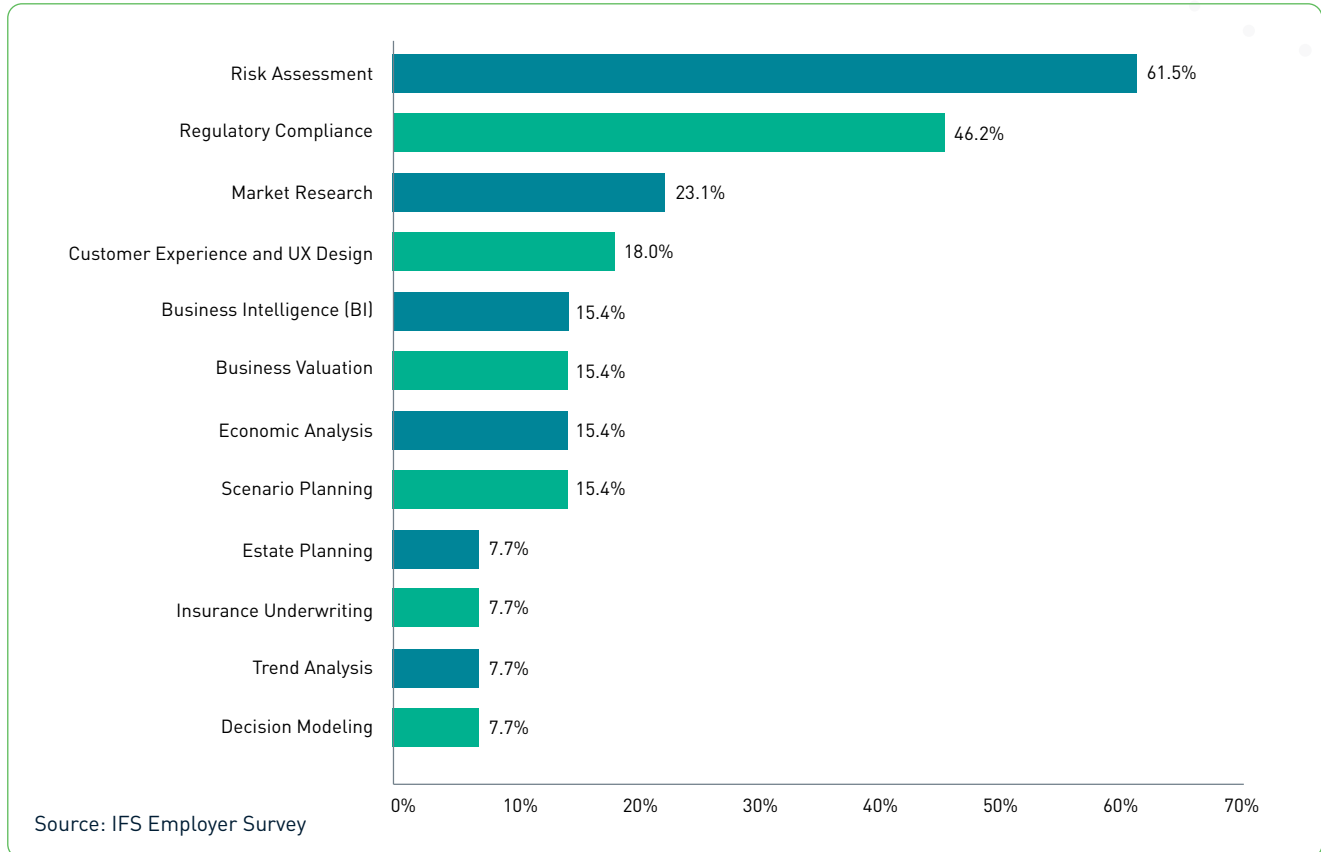


## Business skills

Business skills facilitate special focus on the broader aspects of organisational strategy and planning. Professionals with these skills are well-versed in business intelligence, economic analysis, and business valuation. They also understand the importance of factors like customer experience, compliance and

regulatory affairs. These types of skills are essential for making informed business decisions and ensuring that financial strategies align with overall organisational goals. Complementary to the requirements of a thriving IFS sector, it is encouraging to see that Risk Assessment and Regulatory Compliance skills are the most available business skills in the local IFS sector.

Figure 18: Business skills in IFS employers in Cork

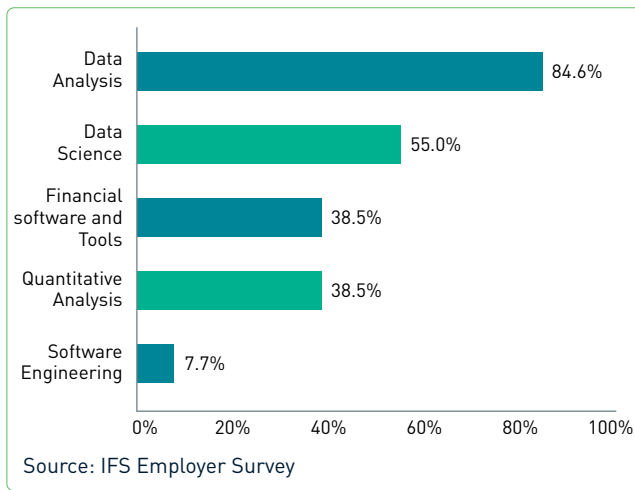


## Analytical skills

Analytical skills are very important in the IFS sector due to its dynamic and complex nature for analysing and mitigating financial risks, extracting meaningful insights, making data-driven decisions, and contributing to strategic planning and problem-solving within the financial sector. Senior leadership from 85% of surveyed employers reported the presence of data analytics skills within their workforce.

This proves even more important as we recognise that as the IFS industry integrates advanced technologies, employers will need professionals who can leverage the potential of data analytic tools and AI. Our research shows that Cork is well positioned in this regard.

Figure 19: Analytical skills in IFS employers in Cork



## Emerging skills

Emerging skills include competencies related to the rapidly evolving fields of cybersecurity, AI, machine learning, blockchain and cryptocurrency. More than half of the respondents of the IFS Employer Survey reported that the following emerging trends will shape the future of the sector in Cork:

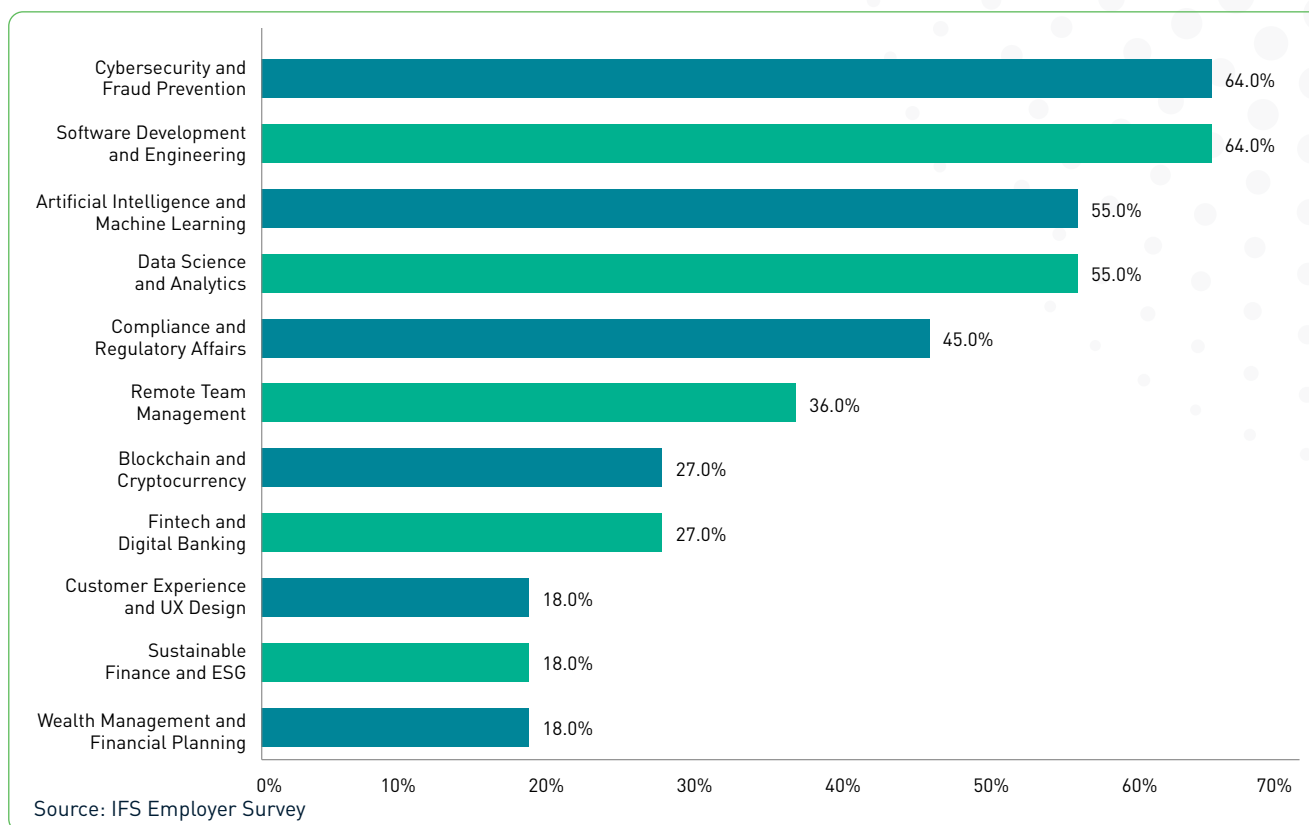
1. Adoption of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (64%)
2. Further Adoption of Remote and Hybrid Workforce Models (64%)
3. Advancements in Cybersecurity and Data Privacy Solutions (55%)
4. Rise of Fintech Startups and Collaborations (55%)

Around 43% of respondents from the IFS employer survey reported their organisations to be currently utilising AI tools within their organisations. Examples of these AI tools include OCR (Optical Character Recognition) and chatbots, self-learning applications, and customer service support tools. AI is also being used by some employers in their in-house development.

The survey also found that these new trends are impacting talent requirements generating an increased demand for specialised technology talent and increased focus on hiring employees with strong interpersonal skills such as communication, problem solving and emotional intelligence



Figure 20: Analytical skills in IFS employers in Cork



The IFS employers survey findings indicated that future projected sector growth in IFS was highest in Fund Administration, Wealth Management, Asset Management and Debt Capital Markets. Employers within the Fintech sector reported that they expect functions relating to Managed Data Services, Product Engineering, Payments, and e-commerce to grow the most. The survey also found that small-sized employers expect specific growth in their Marketing, Sales and Customer Success functions.

The evolving landscape of the IFS sector in Cork demands a recalibration in the blend of skills required to ensure future resilience. Finance, business, analytical and emerging technology skills will carry varying degrees of importance compared to the present scenario. Each subset of skills holds critical significance in distinct facets of the financial services sector and its trajectory.

### 3.3 Mapping of IFS positions

The IFS sector stands as a dynamic and thriving industry in Cork, offering a wide range of career opportunities across various domains. With around 1,800 positions, the sector is a vital part of Cork's economy.

This section will provide a detailed mapping of IFS-associated positions and an overview of the distribution of job functions within each subsector and highlighting the most widespread job titles.

For the purpose of this mapping exercise, we have analysed a sample of 1,626 positions within the IFS sector in Cork: 360 positions within Fintech, 865 positions within the Funds Administration, 223 positions within Investment Banking and 165 positions within Insurance. The sample used to analyse Wealth Management associated positions was too small to be representative and is not included in the below analysis.

#### 3.3.1 Fintech

As mentioned in Chapter 2, employers in the fintech subsector represent 32.0% of the total IFS employers in Cork and they are responsible for 21.9% of the total employment in the local IFS sector.

The below tables present the distribution of functions within the sector and the most common job titles. The Information Technology (IT) function represents as much as 21.4% of the active positions, highlighting its critical role in driving innovation.

The highly regulated nature of the financial industry is reflected in the large number of positions dedicated to Risk & Compliance (22.5%). Within this function, various roles emphasise the sector's focus on fraud prevention and data security. Compliance Analyst is the most common position followed by Fraud Squat Investigator and AML/KYC Analyst. In addition, other



notable roles include Risk Investigator, Compliance Specialist and Risk Analyst. These roles collectively contribute to the sector's emphasis on fraud prevention, efficient implementation, secure payment processes, strategic product ownership, and risk management.

Roles within the Operations function and the Client Services function account, respectively, for 12.8% and 7.2% of the total employment in the sector.

Table 1: Distribution of functions within Fintech employers

| Function                               | Share |
|----------------------------------------|-------|
| Risk & Compliance                      | 22.5% |
| IT                                     | 21.4% |
| Operations <sup>21</sup>               | 12.8% |
| Support Function                       | 12.5% |
| Executive                              | 10.0% |
| Client Services                        | 7.2%  |
| Core Finance                           | 5.6%  |
| PM/BA/Change                           | 3.9%  |
| Middle Management NFD                  | 1.9%  |
| Data, Analysis & Business Intelligence | 1.1%  |
| Fund Operations: Other                 | 1.1%  |

Table 1: Top job titles within IFS Fintech employers

| #  | Current Title                  |
|----|--------------------------------|
| 1  | Equity Plan Management Analyst |
| 2  | Compliance Analyst             |
| 3  | Customer Protection Associate  |
| 4  | Software Engineer              |
| 5  | Fraud Squad Investigator       |
| 6  | AML/KYC Analyst                |
| 7  | Product Owner                  |
| 8  | Implementation Analyst         |
| 9  | Senior Software Engineer       |
| 10 | Risk Investigator              |

### 3.3.2 Fund Administration

Employers in the Fund Administration subsector represent 20.0% of the total IFS employers in Cork and they are responsible for over 50.0% of the total employment in the local IFS sector.

The majority of roles within Funds Administration employers in Cork are back-office positions, primarily focused on internal operations and support functions.

Among these functions, Client Services and Fund Accounting are the most numerous. Client Services positions, mainly comprising Client Associate and Account Manager roles, represent 15.4% of the total workforce. Fund Accounting positions make up an equal 14.9% share. Within the workforce, Custody Associates play a crucial role, representing 3.8% of the total positions. They are responsible for ensuring the safekeeping and efficient management of client assets, supported by other professionals such as Depository Officers or other Custody positions.

In alignment with Fintech dynamics, IT plays a pivotal role in ensuring a smooth technology integration, with about 10.4% active positions within this function. Software Developers and Software Engineers are the most numerous, followed by Quality Assurance professionals.

Notably, Risk and Compliance account for 2.5% of the total employment, while Support Functions account for 4.7% of it. Support Functions provide essential assistance, contributing to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of fund administration processes. Compliance-related positions such as Risk & Compliance Analysts or Anti Money Laundering officers are key to ensure adherence to regulatory standards and mitigating risks and safeguarding the integrity of financial operations.



<sup>21</sup> The Operations function includes analyst positions that are related to the core business, such as Equity Plan Analysts.

Table 3: Distribution of functions within IFS Fund Administration employers

| Function                               | Share |
|----------------------------------------|-------|
| Fund Operations: Client Services       | 15.4% |
| Fund Operations: Fund Accounting       | 14.9% |
| Fund Operations: Other                 | 14.9% |
| IT                                     | 10.4% |
| Executive                              | 10.3% |
| Core Finance                           | 8.2%  |
| Fund Operations: Custody & Depositary  | 5.9%  |
| Support Function                       | 4.7%  |
| Middle Management NFD                  | 4.4%  |
| PM/BA/Change                           | 3.1%  |
| Risk & Compliance                      | 2.5%  |
| Data, Analysis & Business Intelligence | 2.0%  |
| Investor Services                      | 2.0%  |
| Fund Operations: Trading               | 0.8%  |
| Fund Operations: Transfer Agency       | 0.5%  |

Table 4: Top job titles within IFS Fund Administration employers

| #  | Current Title           |
|----|-------------------------|
| 1  | Fund Accountant         |
| 2  | Client Associate        |
| 3  | Senior Fund Accountant  |
| 4  | Custody Associate       |
| 5  | Senior Client Associate |
| 6  | Account Manager         |
| 7  | Vice President          |
| 8  | Supervisor              |
| 9  | Fund Services Manager   |
| 10 | Head of Unit            |

### 3.3.3. Investment Banking

Investment Banking employers represent 16.0% of the total IFS employers in Cork and they are responsible for the same proportion (16.0%) of the total employment in the local IFS sector.

Fund Operations are a key aspect in the local Investment Banking sector. Fund Accounting positions represent 22.9% of the overall positions in the sector. Fund Accountants, Fund Accounting Managers, and Fund Accounting Supervisors ensure meticulous management of financial records, contributing to the financial health of investment funds. Their responsibilities include financial reporting, compliance, and overall fund administration.



Investment Banking also relies heavily on technology, as can be deduced by the large number of IT positions identified, which equal 12.1% of the subsector's overall employment. The most common technology related positions within this sub sector are Software Engineers, Data Analysts and SAP Specialists.

Among the 5.8% of positions in Core Finance, the majority are focused on financial reporting roles. In addition to Fund Operations, Investment Banks rely on a large number of investment Operations roles. These roles, which account for 9.4% of the total positions, include jobs such as Investment Analysts and Equity Plan Management Analysts. Support functions, representing 5.4% of positions, encompass various roles from HR, Administration, and Facilities Management.

Table 5: Distribution of functions within IFS Investment Banking employers

| Function                               | Share |
|----------------------------------------|-------|
| Fund Operations: Fund Accounting       | 22.9% |
| Executive                              | 16.1% |
| IT                                     | 12.1% |
| Operations                             | 9.4%  |
| Core Finance                           | 5.8%  |
| Support Function                       | 5.4%  |
| Fund Operations: Other                 | 4.5%  |
| Middle Management NFD                  | 4.5%  |
| Client Services                        | 3.6%  |
| PM/BA/Change                           | 3.6%  |
| Fund Operations: Trading               | 3.1%  |
| Fund Operations: Trustee               | 3.1%  |
| Risk & Compliance                      | 3.1%  |
| Data, Analysis & Business Intelligence | 0.9%  |
| Fund Operations: Custody & Depositary  | 0.9%  |
| Fund Operations: Transfer Agency       | 0.9%  |

Table 6: Top job titles within IFS Investment Banking employers

| #  | Current Title              |
|----|----------------------------|
| 1  | Fund Accountant            |
| 2  | Senior Analyst             |
| 3  | Lead Analyst               |
| 4  | Fund Accounting Manager    |
| 5  | Fund Accounting Supervisor |
| 6  | Assistant Manager          |
| 7  | Supervisor                 |
| 8  | Senior ETF Analyst         |
| 9  | Manager                    |
| 10 | Fund Administrator         |

### 3.3.4 Insurance

Insurance employers represent 20.0% of the total IFS employers in Cork and they are responsible for 10.3% of the total employment in the local IFS sector.

About half of the roles analysed in Insurance are directly related to the core functions of the company: Insurance Operations. Commercial Underwriters, representing 7.3% of the workforce, play a pivotal role in assessing and pricing insurance risks for commercial clients, ensuring profitability while mitigating potential losses. Pension Administrators account for 6.1% of the roles. They are key to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements while providing efficient and accurate administration services to plan participants. Claims Advisors are also essential to assist clients in navigating complex situations and facilitating the resolution of claims. Insurance Brokers comprise a notable portion of the workforce and act as intermediaries between insurance employers and clients, offering expert advice on coverage options and negotiating terms on behalf of their clients.

Client Services positions account for 7.3% of the roles. They encompass positions such as Client Service Advisors and Client Service Managers. These professionals serve as primary points of contact for clients, ensuring satisfaction, addressing inquiries, and fostering long-term relationships. Support Functions, representing 9.7% of the total roles mainly comprise roles within Sales, HR and Marketing.

The diverse roles within insurance employers in Cork's IFS sector collectively contribute to the sector's resilience, innovation, and customer-centricity. From underwriting and claims management to executive

leadership and support functions, each role plays a unique yet interconnected part in driving the industry forward and safeguarding the financial well-being of individuals and businesses alike.

Table 7: Distribution of functions within IFS Insurance employers

| Function                               | Share |
|----------------------------------------|-------|
| Insurance Operations                   | 49.7% |
| Executive                              | 12.1% |
| Core Finance                           | 10.3% |
| Support Function                       | 9.7%  |
| Client Services                        | 7.3%  |
| PM/BA/Change                           | 2.4%  |
| Middle Management NFD                  | 2.4%  |
| Data, Analysis & Business Intelligence | 2.4%  |
| Risk & Compliance                      | 1.2%  |
| IT                                     | 1.2%  |
| Fund Operations: Fund Accounting       | 1.2%  |

Table 8: Top job titles within IFS insurance employers

| #  | Current Title                |
|----|------------------------------|
| 1  | Commercial Underwriter       |
| 2  | Pension Administrator        |
| 3  | Client Service Executive     |
| 4  | Claims Handler               |
| 5  | Claims Advisor               |
| 6  | Retirement Consultant        |
| 7  | Client Service Advisor       |
| 8  | Key Account Manager          |
| 9  | Senior Retirement Consultant |
| 10 | Senior Pension Administrator |

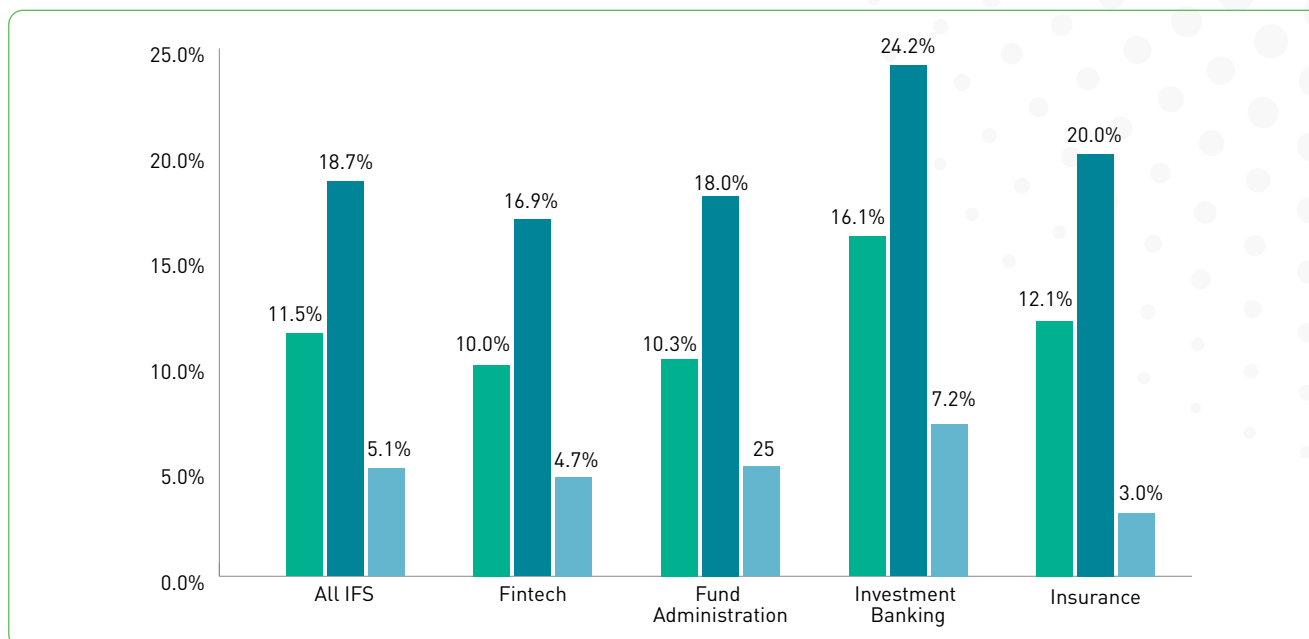
### 3.3.5 Main findings from the IFS job mapping analysis

Our study has revealed that the IFS sector in Cork is characterised by a very experienced workforce.

This research has also found that over 50.0% of IFS professionals currently employed in the sector have over 10 years of experience. A further 30.3% have between 5 to 10 years of professional experience.

We have also noted high levels of positions at management and executive level within the list of IFS jobs analysed.

Figure 21: AProportion of executive<sup>22</sup>, managerial<sup>23</sup> and other leadership positions in IFS employers in Cork



Executive roles, comprising Director-level positions and above, constitute 11.5% of the total IFS workforce analysed in Cork. Additionally, Managers and Heads of roles contribute a further 18.7%. This robust presence underscores Cork’s IFS sector as a bastion of proficient professionals steering organisational strategy and operations. It also speaks to the decision of some IFS employers (mainly in the Fund Administration subsector) to concentrate management and oversight functions (such as reporting and analysis) in their Cork offices while outsourcing other functions to lower-cost countries<sup>24</sup>. This follows a national trend observed by the Central Bank of Ireland that an increasing number of regulated financial services employers in Ireland are using Outsourced Service Providers<sup>25</sup>.

The concentration of such senior talent positions Cork as an attractive destination for prospective investors and businesses seeking to establish or expand their foothold. The presence of a high-calibre executive cohort serves as a powerful magnet for employers and investors, signalling a conducive environment for business development, investment inflows, and growth opportunities.

Among this cohort of experienced talent, Cork relies on professionals currently or formerly holding Pre-Approval Controlled Functions (PCFs). Pre-Approval

Controlled Functions (PCF) were introduced in Ireland as part of the Central Bank Reform Act 2010. The introduction of PCF roles was a response to the need for enhanced governance and oversight within financial institutions. These roles are designated positions within regulated entities that require prior approval from the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI). A specific study<sup>26</sup> on Cork’s leadership IFS talent shows that at least 14 Pre-approval Controlled Functions (PCFs) are represented locally<sup>27</sup>. These functions include:

Table 9: List of PCFs currently or previously held by professionals in Cork

|        |                                                                                      |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PCF-1  | Executive Director                                                                   |
| PCF-8  | Chief Executive                                                                      |
| PCF-11 | Head of Finance                                                                      |
| PCF-12 | Head of Compliance                                                                   |
| PCF-14 | Chief Risk Officer                                                                   |
| PCF-42 | Chief Operating Officer                                                              |
| PCF-52 | Head of Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Terrorist Financing Legislation Compliance |
| PCF-45 | Head of Client Asset Oversight                                                       |
| PCF-36 | Head of Custody Services                                                             |

<sup>22</sup> Executive positions include Directors, Vice-Presidents and Chiefs

<sup>23</sup> Please note that Project Managers, Program Managers and Account Managers have not been included in the calculation of the total number of managerial positions, as their focus is on managing accounts, projects or programmes. Note that this classification is not aimed at disregarding any people management responsibilities that these positions might entail.

<sup>24</sup> This trend was identified through the focus groups and related to a large Fund Administration company in Cork

<sup>25</sup> Central Bank of Ireland (2018) Discussion Paper 8: Outsourcing - Findings and Issues for Discussion

<sup>26</sup> This study is based on self-reported data and includes professionals who have publicly reported to be approved by the CBI in one or more PCFs.

<sup>27</sup> Please note that PCF-15 (Head of Compliance with responsibility for Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Terrorist Financing Legislation) was also represented locally but has not been included in the list of PCFs as it has been amended by the CBI and the function has been replaced by PCFs 12 and 52.

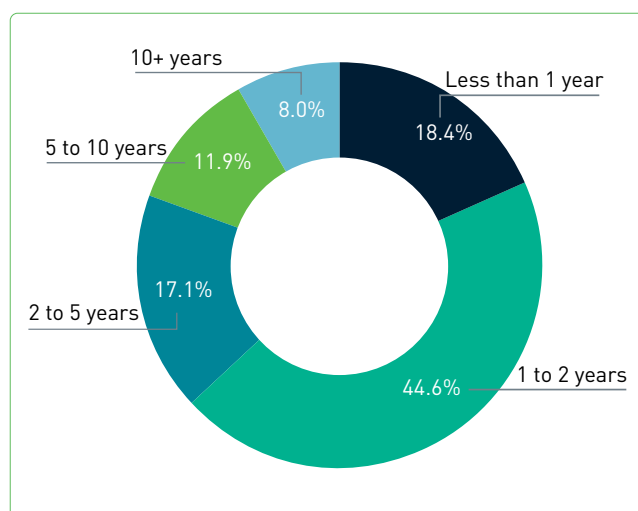


|         |                                                                            |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PCF-39A | Designated Person with responsibility for Capital and Financial Management |
| PCF-39B | Designated Person with responsibility for Operational Risk Management      |
| PCF-39C | Designated Person with responsibility for Fund Risk Management             |
| PCF-39D | Designated Person with responsibility for Investment Management            |
| PCF-39F | Designated Person with responsibility for Regulatory Compliance            |

Cork’s reservoir of experienced leadership not only bolsters the success trajectory of current IFS entities but also stands as a compelling asset in attracting future IFS investment in the region and nurturing sectoral expansion.

-A very mobile workforce: Another trend that has been observed through this research is the high mobility of the IFS workforce.

Figure 22: Years that IFS employees have been in their current position



It is a common factor for IFS employees in Cork to move and evolve rapidly, either by internal promotion or by changing employers. As can be seen from the above table, over half of the IFS employee population in Cork has been in their current position for less than 2 years.

**This mobility speaks to two phenomena.**

1. On one hand, it speaks to the rapid career progression of some employees within selected IFS employers. This was mainly evident for junior talent having joined the operations functions in Fund Administration employers or the compliance function in Fintech employers at associate level. This reflects the capacity of some employers to

attract junior talent and allow them to evolve. It speaks positively about the company’s culture. This demonstrates the adaptability of these employers to capitalise on the talent available to them. They show agility in their talent attraction strategies by widely opening their doors to junior talent and investing in their growth. This investment in junior talent is also a testimony of the health of the sector, not only of its current health but also of its growth expectations.

2. On the other hand, it speaks to the transfer of employees from one employer to another. This inter-company mobility serves several purposes, it is a means for professionals to acquire new experience as well to advance in their career. The top 10 current employers of IFS talent in Cork employ nearly 90.0% of the total IFS workforce. 7 out of these 10 employers are also the main past employers of the IFS workforce. This means that over 40.0% of the current IFS employees have experience working for - at least- another IFS employer.

Fund Operations focus: As discussed in Chapter 2 of this report, although Cork boasts a variety of IFS subsectors, the city has cultivated a particular expertise in Fund Administration-related operations. Out of the 1,626 jobs identified across all IFS employers, one in three is associated with Fund Operations. While these positions are predominantly found within Fund Administration employers, professionals skilled in Fund Operations are also present in Investment Banking employers and in some Fintech employers, albeit to a lesser extent. The most prevalent job title within the IFS workforce is Fund Accountant. Fund Accountants, Senior Fund Accountants and Fund Supervisors account for 7.9% of the total IFS jobs.

Low share of local AI/ML professionals employed in IFS: Upon examining the list of jobs and associated skill sets present in the IFS sector, it’s apparent that there is a limited presence of individuals well-versed in AI. Specifically, only around 1.5% of Cork’s AI/ML skilled workforce is employed within the IFS sector. Despite Cork boasting over 2,600 professionals proficient in AI/ML, the majority are employed within the Technology sector or within major multinational corporations from other sectors like Life Sciences. Additionally, a significant portion of these professionals are engaged in third-level education and research, with approximately 7.1% employed by local universities or the Tyndall National Institute. Therefore, while Cork possesses the necessary talent pool, the IFS sector must intensify its efforts to attract and integrate these skilled individuals.

## Chapter 4

# Training & upskilling opportunities for the IFS talent

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# Training & upskilling opportunities for the IFS talent

## 4.1 Importance of L&D

Continuous learning has a key role in fostering innovation, adapting to global trends, and cultivating a skilled workforce that improves Cork's financial services sector.

In an era characterised by technological advancements and continuously changing market dynamics, innovation is endemic in the IFS sector. The ability to adapt to emerging trends and integrate cutting-edge technologies is imperative for employers to stay competitive. From mastering blockchain technology to understanding and being able to make the best use of AI, continuous learning empowers professionals to survive, thrive and drive technological innovation within IFS.

Cork's International Financial Services sector operates in a highly competitive global environment. To attract and retain talent that is well prepared to work in an international environment, employers must invest in L&D programs that go beyond traditional skill-building. The focus should be on leadership development, cultural intelligence, keeping pace with, effectively adapting to and integrating new technologies and navigating global business amongst others. By offering the appropriate training, Cork can position itself as a hub for international financial talent, drawing professionals who are looking for growth and advancement in their careers.

Additionally, in an industry governed by stringent regulations, staying well informed of policy changes and ensuring compliance is non-negotiable. Learning and Development initiatives are essential for cultivating a relevant workforce with the right knowledge of regulatory requirements and risk management practices. By investing in ongoing education of this kind, financial institutions in Cork can mitigate risks, enhance transparency, and maintain the integrity of

the sector. Moreover, a workforce that understands and embraces compliance standards is an asset in building trust with international partners and clients.

The success of the IFS sector is overall dependent on the expertise, knowledge, and proficiency of its workforce. L&D programs are crucial for closing skill gaps and ensuring that professionals are equipped with the knowledge needed to excel in their roles. At the same time, this can enhance employee satisfaction, reduce turnover, and contribute to the overall resilience of the financial services sector in Cork. As the industry evolves, a workforce committed to lifelong learning is better positioned to adapt to new challenges and contribute meaningfully to organisational success.

## 4.2 Current L&D approach & practices

It has been previously referenced in this report that Ireland benefits from a highly educated workforce which underpins the success establishment and expansion of international Financial Services operations here. In 2022, Ireland ranked first in the EU for the highest proportion of individuals aged 25-34 with a third level qualification. 62.3% of the population aged 25-34 years old had completed tertiary studies in the country, which represents a 13.9% increase from 2017<sup>28</sup>. Cork's IFS highly educated workforce is, in line with the national trend. A study carried out on the IFS workforce in Cork indicates that nearly one in three IFS employees holds a master's degree and over 60.0% of employees have attained an undergraduate degree as a minimum.

According to findings of the IFS employer survey, a vast majority of the IFS employers in Cork (90.0%), prioritise internal training programs to equip their workforce with the necessary skills and knowledge. In addition, employers implement various other initiatives to address the training and development needs of their employees. About 15.4% of respondent's self-



<sup>28</sup> Eurostat (2023) Population by educational attainment level, sex and age [%] – main indicators [edat\_lfse\_03]



**“They do advertise training (...), but I wouldn’t say that they actively promote it and that it is something that’s really strongly encouraged. It’s very much the case that you build your own career, and (they) would support you if you want to.”**

Fund Administration employee.

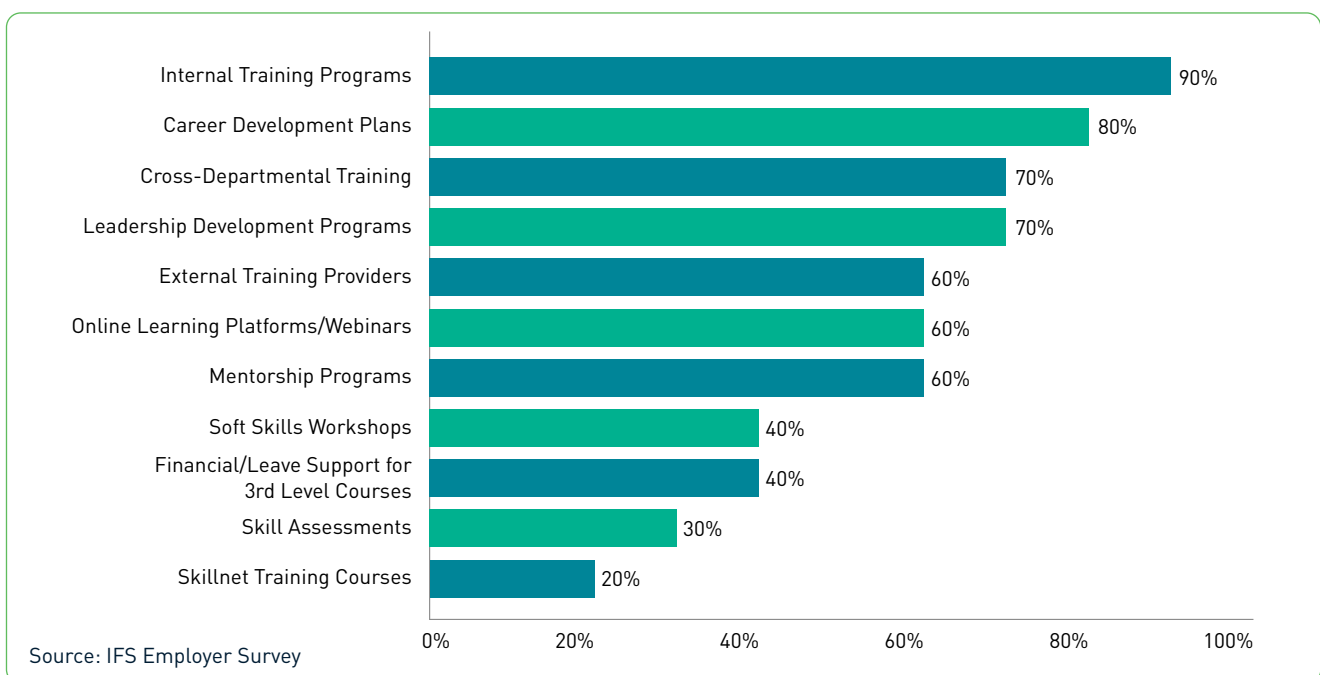
declared in our employers survey their organisation availed of Skillnet supports and the percentage goes up to 30.8% for those employers that collaborated with Springboard. Career Development Plans feature prominently, with 80.0% of surveyed employers incorporating structured plans to facilitate the growth and progression of their staff. In our focus groups, only one participant explicitly stated that their organisation currently follows the practice of establishing personal development goals for employees. The remaining participants commended a robust L&D system but characterised their employer’s strategy as more of a “supportive” approach, primarily centred on general courses accessible to employees rather than an active and individualised approach.

Cross-departmental training, aimed at fostering a well-rounded skill set among employees, is also a common practice, adopted by 70.0% of the employers surveyed. Recognising the importance of effective leadership, a significant 70.0% of employers in the IFS sector in Cork have implemented Leadership Development Programs.

The survey further revealed a noteworthy utilisation of external resources to complement internal initiatives. Approximately 60.0% of employers leverage external training providers to enhance employee development initiatives. These external training providers/supports are mainly universities (76.9%) but also Skillnet (30.8%) and Springboard (15.4%). Online learning platforms and webinars also contribute significantly, with 60.0% of employers using these digital resources to provide accessible and flexible learning opportunities.

While some strategies are less prevalent, they are still frequently employed by a significant portion of employers. Soft Skills Workshops, recognized for their role in enhancing interpersonal and communication skills, are conducted by 40.0% of employers. Furthermore, 40.0% of employers provided extended financial or leave support to employees pursuing third-level courses, demonstrating a commitment to supporting advanced education. This finding contrasts with the outcome of the IFS employees’ focus groups, during which the large majority of participants reported their employer to offer financial support and

Figure 23: Training and development initiatives offered by IFS employers in Cork





allow study/exam leave to the individuals who chose to pursue an external course, relevant to their function. This discrepancy could be explained by the fact that the sample group of employers represented in the IFS Employer Survey and the sample group of employees interviewed during the focus groups did not overlap to a great extent.

For more targeted skill development, 30.0% of employers utilise skill assessments to identify specific areas for improvement among their workforces. Finally, Skillnet Training Courses, which offer industry-specific training, are employed by 20.0% of employers, contributing to a comprehensive and tailored approach to employee skill enhancement. Skillnet is a specialist network in the Government of Ireland’s industry support agency.

A significant majority, 81.8%, of IFS employers in Cork collaborate with educational institutions or training providers to meet talent development needs. Universities (66.7%) and Technological Universities (33.3%) are the most common collaborators, demonstrating a supportive partnership between industry and academia. About 22% of the employers collaborate as well with Springboard, Skillet Ireland and other institutions such as IOB or Insurance Institute Ireland.

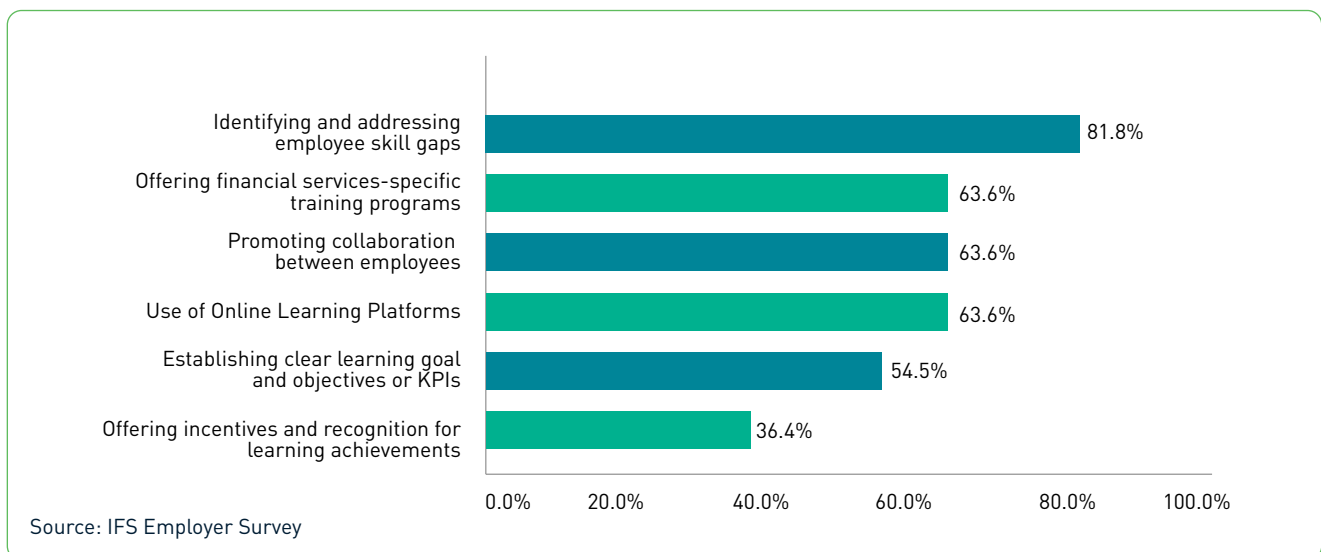
From our research it’s evident that employers in Cork recognise the importance of attracting and retaining top talent, our IFS employers survey found that 64.0% have initiatives or programs in place for this purpose. These include employee referral programs, employee share schemes, flexible working arrangements, and

robust career and professional development support. A few organisations have received the recognition of Great Place to Work which further exemplifies their commitment to employee satisfaction.

The IFS sector in Cork demonstrates a commitment to fostering and ensuring a culture of continuous learning and development. For this purpose, employers employ various strategies listed in the figure below:



Figure 24: Initiatives implemented to foster a culture of continuous learning and development



IFS employers in Cork are strategically investing in upskilling their workforce, collaborating with educational institutions, and implementing diverse L&D initiatives to ensure they remain at the forefront of talent development in the dynamic landscape of the international financial services industry. These findings align with the results from the focus groups and individual qualitative interviews conducted. A majority of participants emphasised that their employers currently provide an extensive range of internal (primarily) and external courses. However, these courses appear to be more oriented towards the employer's systems and procedures rather than offering specific industry knowledge. Some IFS employees interviewed said that the available training and upskilling resources lacked individual customisation and that they placed the responsibility on the employee to decide whether or not to enrol in a particular course. This raises the question of whether the impetus for active personal development should come from the employee or the employer.

### 4.3 Upskilling & learning opportunities in the Cork area

As the industry continues to transform, the demand for skilled professionals has become more pronounced. We report here on the upskilling and learning opportunities available in the Cork area to meet the growing needs of the IFS sector.

The third-level education system in Cork, recognized by its excellence, is furthermore characterised by its close relationship with the wider business community.



Through several partnerships and initiatives, MTU & UCC have made it their own mission to deliver a curriculum that aligns with the needs of businesses locally, which results in the production of a graduate pipeline perfectly equipped to enter the employment market and add value instantly.

UCC and MTU offer programs tailored to meet the needs of the international Financial Services employer community in Cork. Their dynamic curriculum covers a range of essential skills, including Data Analytics for strategic decision-making, FinTech for navigating finance and technology intersections, Asset Management and Investment Analysis for wealth optimization, and Regulatory Compliance for understanding financial regulations. Additional emphasis on Business Intelligence, Financial Analysis, Modelling, Economic Analysis, Tax Planning, and Compliance ensures graduates are equipped with a comprehensive skill set perfectly aligned with the dynamic demands of the IFS sector.

UCC offers programs that closely match the skill sets required in the market, particularly in the international financial services sector of Cork. The bachelor's degree in finance demonstrates this alignment, featuring modules like "Multinational Finance" and "International Finance" to address the global nature of the industry. Moreover, modules such as "Governance, Regulation and Control of Financial Organizations" emphasise the crucial understanding of regulatory compliance and risk management—a vital aspect given the sector's strict standards.

Similarly, the bachelor's degree in business and financial economics enhances students' comprehension of international business and economics, a valuable asset in the financial services sector. Collaborations with Chinese universities enrich the program, providing students with an international perspective. The curriculum emphasises financial economics, addressing the sector's needs by covering economic principles, financial markets, and trends, alongside innovative theories and environmental sustainability considerations.

These bachelor's degrees are complemented by several master's programs, notably the MSc in Corporate Finance and MSc in Finance (Banking and Risk Management) at UCC. The MSc in Corporate Finance offers a comprehensive curriculum developed in collaboration with industry experts, covering skills like Fund Accounting, Investment Planning, Risk Assessment, and Financial Modelling—essential areas not explicitly addressed in other programs.

On the other hand, the MSc in Finance (Banking and Risk Management) stands out for its specialised focus on quantitative finance and data analysis, including the use of software like R. or Python. Recognized by the Global Association of Risk Practitioners (GARP), this program emphasises regulation, compliance, international finance, and a global perspective, making it highly relevant to the IFS sector in Cork.

The Funds Academy is an initiative of the third-level education system in Cork established in 2021 with the aim to promote executive education & development within the investment fund industry, established with funding support from the Human Capital Initiative (Pillar 3) and is a joint and balanced initiative between the third-level education sector (MTU, SETU) and the business sector. The Academy currently runs two programmes: a Masters in Investment Fund Administration and a Level 8 Certificate in Regulated Investment Funds.

The Certificate targets new entrants to the Funds industry, be it recent graduates or professionals employed in another sector willing to transition into the Funds Sector. The Master's was developed following a period of deep engagement with the International Funds industry in Cork and the wider region to understand their needs and as a result is directed at professionals already working within the Funds sector who wish to take their career to the next level, with an emphasis on fund governance and regulation, asset management techniques, data analysis and management and leadership.

Although university programs may not fully address all specific skills in demand, alternative courses strive to bridge this gap. Both online and in-person courses provided by organisations like Skillnet, Pitman Training Centre, or universities across Ireland outside Cork offer a diverse array of specialised and detailed skills. These courses serve as valuable resources for experienced professionals seeking to broaden their skill sets.

Skillnet Ireland is a national business support agency of the Government of Ireland dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of workforce learning in Ireland and puts resources together to advance the competitiveness, productivity and innovation of businesses operating in Ireland. Cork Chamber Skillnet is one of over 70 distinct networks nationwide and is funded by Skillnet Ireland and member employers. It provides a wide range of discounted QQI accredited training courses, personal and professional development programmes, seminars, and workshops. Skillnet offers support and learning networks and platforms for the international



financial services industry such as IFS Skillnet, Sustainable Finance Skillnet. It also provides support tools for business particularly for the fintech sub sector within IFS. These include Technology Ireland ICT Skillnet, Technology Ireland Digital Skillnet, ITAG Skillnet and IT@Cork Skillnet. Skillnet has a wide platform of training courses such as the Higher Diploma in Fintech, the MSc in Fintech Innovation, the Certificate in Emerging Digital Technologies. Those are complemented with multiple courses in the emerging areas of AI, Blockchain, cybersecurity, software development, cloud computing and data analysis.

Apprenticeships are also an alternative path for individuals to learn new IFS skills and provide additional talent to IFS employers in Cork. Given the degree of involvement from employers in the development of apprenticeships, they are highly industry driven and are a privileged way to equip apprentices with skills and experience in line with the business needs. Currently, there are 65 apprenticeships available across a variety of sectors. The apprenticeships most relevant to the IFS sector are the IFS Associate apprenticeship (Level 6) and the IFS Specialist apprenticeship (Level 8), both of a 2-year duration. Additional relevant apprenticeships include the Accounting Technician apprenticeship (Level 6) and the Insurance Practitioner apprenticeship (Level 8). Some ICT apprenticeships are also relevant to the IFS sector, such as the Software Developer Associate one (Level 6) and the Cybersecurity one (Level 6). Cork College of Further Education and Training (FET) plays a key role in the coordination of such apprenticeships locally and currently offers opportunities within Finance and ICT.



# Chapter 5

## Cork as a location for IFS

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# Cork as a location for IFS

## 5.1 Overview of Cork

Cork City is the second largest city in Ireland, with a population of 222,337 in 2022. According to the latest census, Cork County has a population of 584,156, which represents a 7.6% increase since 2016. The National Planning Framework 2040 envisages that Cork City will be the fastest-growing city region in the country with a projected 50% to 60% increase in its population by 2040. It is estimated that the population of Cork City and Suburbs will reach at least 315,000<sup>29</sup>.

Results from the latest census from 2022 show that 18,107 people in Cork County have dual Irish citizenship, which represents a 73.4% increase of dual Irish citizenships since 2016. In addition to this 3.1% possessing dual Irish citizenship, 12% of Cork's population is non-Irish.

In terms of employment, there were 264,423 people (aged 15 and over) at work in Cork, an increase of 15% in the workforce between 2016 and 2022. According to the 2022 census findings, Cork County was the county with the lowest unemployment rate nationwide, with a rate of 6.1%. The average employment rate for both Cork County and city stood at 6.8%, the second lowest rate nationwide, down from 10.6% in 2016.

According to the latest fDi's European Cities and Regions of the Future 2024 ranking, Cork ranks:

- 1st as Small European City of the future in terms of FDI strategy
- 2nd as Small European City of the future in terms of Economic Potential
- 3rd as Small European City of the future in terms of Business Friendliness
- 4th as Small European City of the future - overall

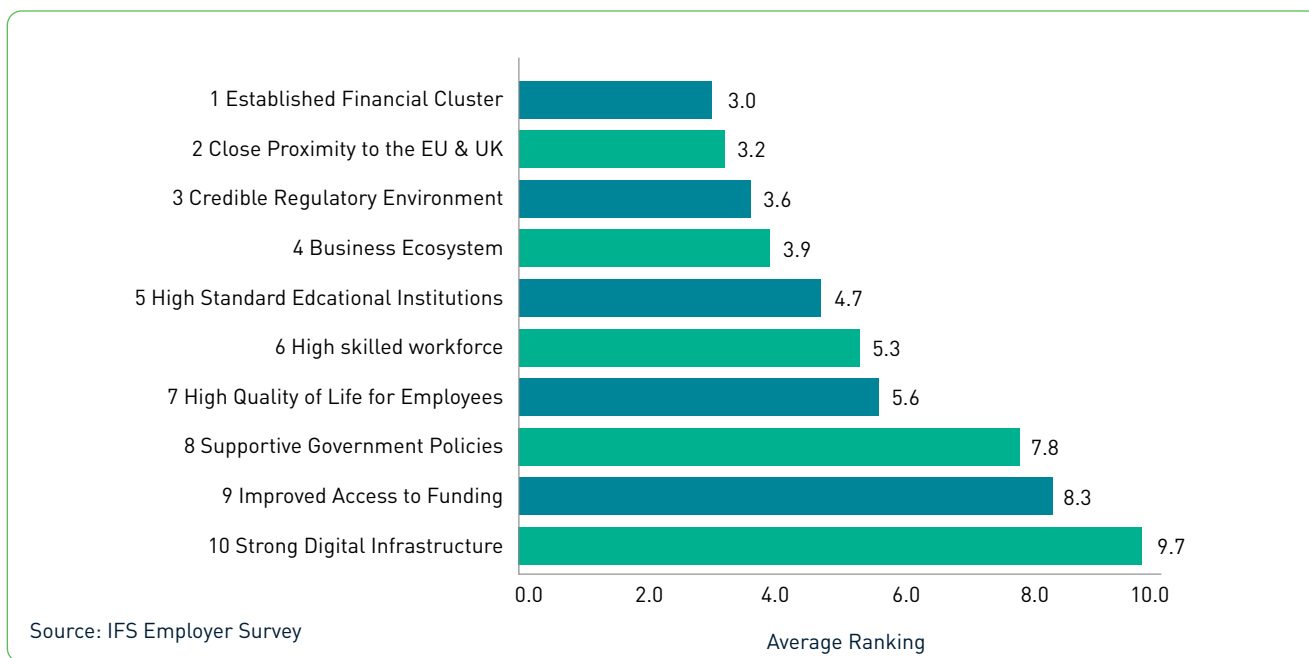
## 5.2 Cork's perceived strengths & areas for improvement

In the quantitative research phase of this report, IFS Employers were asked to reflect on Cork's main strengths and areas for improvement as a location to have operations in.

In the IFS Employer Survey, Senior leaders representing IFS employers were asked to rank Cork's main strengths on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the most significant advantage) as well as Cork's challenges on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the most significant challenge experienced).

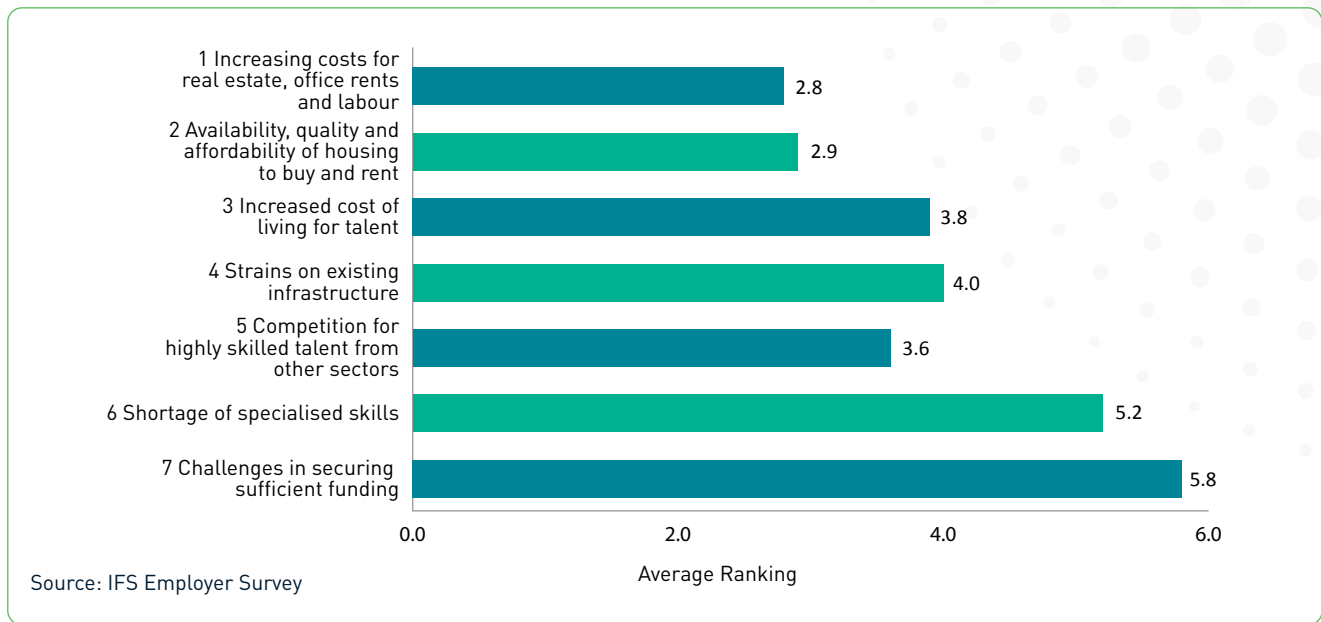
As can be seen from the results of these rankings below, skills-related factors were not considered by employers as the location's top advantages nor top disadvantages.

Figure 25: Cork's main strengths as a location for an IFS employer



<sup>29</sup> Government of Ireland (2018) Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework 2040. Table 2.1. “The NPF at a Glance: Targeted Pattern of Growth, 2040”

Figure 26: Cork's main opportunities for improvement for an IFS employer



IFS Employers, through their senior leadership having taken the survey, seem to agree that Cork's main draw for companies is its established financial cluster which, as this report intends to depict, is dense, varied and thriving. 67% of IFS Employers having taken the survey ranked this factor among the top 3 strengths of Cork.

The availability of a highly skilled workforce ranked 6th overall, with 22% of IFS Employer Survey respondents ranking it among the top 3 strengths of Cork. Despite Cork's IFS cluster relying on a strong talent pool, this ranking highlights some challenges related to skills & talent availability already discussed above in the report (section 2.4.3) and mainly consisting of specific skills' shortages experienced mostly by Fintech employers.

Similarly, competition for talent and skills shortages are not prominent challenges raised by senior leaders from IFS employers. Less than one in four employers considered shortages of specialised skills to be among the top three challenges associated with Cork. In contrast, over three in four employers identified the increased cost of real estate and labour as the most challenging aspects of operating in this location. Overall, the main challenges felt by Employers based locally are related to the cost of housing and the cost of living.

### 5.3 What makes Cork a location of choice for IFS Employers

As we have seen in the previous chapters of this research, Cork has successfully established itself as an IFS hub. It relies on a growing community of thriving IFS companies as well as on a strong pool of emerging and professional IFS talent. If Cork is excelling at producing talent, it is equally crucial for the city to be capable of attracting new talent and keeping this talent. Our research has evidenced that Cork, as a city, has developed a strong capacity to retain talent. The city is well connected internationally, offers a highly valued quality of life that professionals working locally have grown to value, sometimes, above all other considerations.

In this section we will dig deeper into what are perceived as Cork's main advantages by IFS Employers.

**Cork's strengths:**  
**"EU governance, English language skills, physical proximity to UK and EU and good air links"**

Medium-sized Irish Fintech company

### 5.3.1. Cork's geographical location and connectivity

77.7% of employers surveyed considered that Cork's geographical location was among the top three strengths of the city.

Cork's location is privileged as it is in the EU and in close proximity to the UK. It currently takes less time to fly to London from Cork (average of 1 hour 15 mins - 1 hour 20 mins) than from Dublin (1h25 - 1h35). Ireland is also the only country within the EU with English as an official language (besides Malta), which makes the location particularly attractive for investments coming from other English-speaking countries. Employers in Ireland have - virtually - access to a labour force of over 200 million people<sup>30</sup>.

Cork's airport is one of the three State Airports in the Republic of Ireland, along with Dublin and Shannon Airports. The airport is only 15 minutes away from Cork city centre, by car. Cork's airport currently provides flights to 38 cities in 13 countries. Air connectivity between Cork and the UK, as well as between Cork and the USA are important factors in the development of the IFS industry. Ireland is becoming an increasingly attractive destination for UK and US Fund Managers looking to access the EU market. Out of the 1,053 fund managers having assets administered in Ireland, 35.5% (374) are fund managers from the UK and 28.8% (303) are fund managers from North America<sup>31</sup>.

Cork's accessibility to countries where major IFS companies are headquartered (such as the UK, US, and Luxembourg) facilitates corporate travel between headquarters and international branches. This plays a crucial role in drawing new international IFS opportunities to the city and supporting the growth of multinational corporations already present in Cork.

Ireland's relatively small size presents a real advantage in terms of road and railway connectivity. Cork is connected to the capital city of Dublin by a large number of daily trains and the motorway and bus networks allow easy access from Cork to other regional locations in Ireland.

### 5.3.2. Regulatory environment

55.5% of employers surveyed considered that Cork's credible regulatory environment was among the top three strengths of the city.

For Financial Services employers considering Ireland to establish operations in, the strength and credibility of its financial regulatory environment is key.

The CBI was the first regulatory authority in Europe to authorise an Alternative Investment Fund Manager (AIFM) following its early implementation of the Alternative Investment Fund Managers Directive (AIFMD)<sup>32</sup>.

The CBI provides effective regulation and supervision of the financial services sector in the country and is fully embedded in the European System of Financial Supervision and the Single Supervisory Mechanism (for banks). "The Central Bank of Ireland discharges its statutory mandate through a high-quality regulatory framework, effective gatekeeping and assertive supervision, underpinned by robust enforcement systems. It is committed to providing high-quality, timely and transparent processes in authorisation, supervision, and policy development."<sup>33</sup>

The Central Bank also fosters innovation within the sector and in April 2018 it launched its Innovation Hub. The purpose of this Innovation Hub is (1) to facilitate engagement on innovation and to (2) provide the CB with early intelligence on innovations that might develop outside the current regulatory framework<sup>34</sup>. Since its creation, the Innovation Hub has met with 319 stakeholders such as innovators, fintechs, innovation facilitators, regulated entities, and thought leaders. 40% of enquiries that the Innovation Hub received in 2022 were from entities considering an authorisation or registration from the CB. 64% of the enquiries directed to the Hub were made by employers belonging to either the Payment or the Blockchain/Crypto sector.



<sup>30</sup> Eurostat (2023). Labour Force in the EU 27 in 2022 was 205,694,000

<sup>31</sup> Monterey Insight (2023) Ireland Fund Report 2022

<sup>32</sup> McCann Fitzgerald, A Guide to Investment Funds in Ireland

<sup>33</sup> government of Ireland (2019) Ireland for Finance - IFS Strategy 2025 The strategy for the development of Ireland's international financial services sector to 2025

### 5.3.3. Business ecosystem

44.4% of employers surveyed in this research considered that Cork's business ecosystem was among the top three strengths of the city.

Cork benefits from Ireland's thriving economy and its pro-business environment.

According to the 2023 IMD World Competitiveness ranking, Ireland secured the top position as the most competitive country in the euro area and the second-most competitive economy globally out of 64 countries, marking a significant improvement from its 11th position in the previous year.

The country is a location of choice for many multinational employers. Over 1,800 multinational employers have set up operations in the country. Ireland is currently home to 8 of the top 10 Financial Services employers and home to the top 5 global Software employers<sup>35</sup>.

In 2022, Ireland was the third country in Europe in terms of foreign capital investment. The country attracted capital investments worth an estimated 25.2bn, which provides the country with 7.4% of the European foreign capital investment market share<sup>36</sup>.

In 2022, Ireland was the 7th most popular destination in Europe for FDI projects<sup>37</sup>. In 2023, Ireland won 248 FDI investment projects through its Foreign Direct Investment Agency (IDA), this represents a 2.5% increase year-on-year.

The employment created by multinational employers in Ireland is continuing to grow. The total number of permanent full-time employment among foreign-owned employers in the country amounted to 294,072 in 2022, which represents an 8.4% increase in jobs (+22,684) from the previous year and a 77.3% increase

in jobs (+128,233) since 2013. 2022 marked the eleventh successive year of growth of jobs created by multinationals in the country. More specifically, the growth of full-time employment in Financial Services multinationals has grown by 6.8% between 2021 and 2022, with the creation of 2,053 new jobs in the sector all over the country.

The number of full-time permanent jobs within foreign-owned companies in the South-West went from 27,365 in 2013 to 49,303 in 2022, representing an increase of 80.2%. Between 2021 and 2022, the multinational sector added a further 3,492 jobs across all industry sectors in the South-West region, which represents a 7.6% increase<sup>38</sup>.

Ireland is not only a location for multinational employers to come, but also a location for multinational employers to stay and grow. Half of all multinationals are in the country for over 10 years and one out of three multinational employers are in Ireland over 20 years<sup>39</sup>.

Employers choosing Cork as their new home, also benefit from the country's favourable business taxation regime. Ireland's corporate tax is one of the lowest in Europe. Currently, employers in Ireland have to pay a corporate tax of 12.5% on trading income<sup>40</sup>. Ireland signed up to the OECD Two Pillar agreement in October 2021, including the agreement of a global minimum effective rate of 15%, on a jurisdictional basis, for in-scope entities. Ireland will continue to apply the 12.5% corporation tax rate, which has been in effect since 2003, for businesses out of scope of the agreement, which is businesses with revenues less than €750 million. This means that over 99% of employers operating in Ireland are outside of the scope of the global minimum effective tax rate of 15%.



<sup>34</sup> Central Bank of Ireland (2022) Innovation Hub 2022 Update

<sup>35</sup> IDA Ireland

<sup>36</sup> fDi Insights (2023) The fDi Report 2023 - Global greenfield investment trends, Financial Times

<sup>37</sup> fDi Insights (2023) The fDi Report 2023 - Global greenfield investment, Financial Times

<sup>38</sup> Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2023), Annual Employment Survey 2022. This employment survey is focused on employment levels within F under the remit of the IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta.

<sup>39</sup> IDA Ireland

<sup>40</sup> Revenue.ie. There is another Corporate Tax rate of 25% for non-trading income and for income from an excepted trade.



Moreover, Ireland stands as the only EU member state with a common law judicial system that operates exclusively in English. Common law legal systems are deemed more business-friendly, effective and fair than civil law legal systems. It ensures transparency and reliability as it is based on well-established business practices followed in the global financial centres.

The main advantage that these systems bring is their flexibility and their capacity to deal with innovation. This is particularly relevant for businesses that operate in an innovative sector such as Financial Services or Technology. Common law systems provide a well-established and predictable legal framework based on judicial precedent and case law. This clarity enhances legal certainty for US multinationals operating in Ireland, reducing the risk of legal disputes and uncertainties. The focus on legislative interpretation in civil law systems presents a higher risk of leading to inconsistencies between different judges<sup>41</sup>. Parties in commercial contracts are allowed to choose the law and jurisdiction that will apply. If this choice might be evident when both parties are based in the same jurisdiction, it is not in the case of international contracts. English common law stands out as the most widely preferred governing law for cross-border contracts, with the UK holding its position as the primary global centre for international dispute resolution. The UK is currently the largest legal services market in Europe<sup>42</sup>. However, Brexit has represented an opportunity for Ireland, also English-speaking and based on common law, to become a jurisdiction of choice to govern commercial contracts and become a location of choice for international litigation and arbitration. Furthermore, Irish Courts and legal practitioners have successfully managed to adjust from only physical to also virtual courtrooms. This makes Irish Courts even more attractive to international dispute resolution and is also an asset for parties that would be based in Cork<sup>43</sup>.

Another attractive feature of Ireland's business ecosystem, which also benefits Cork, are the support mechanisms that IDA Ireland provides to employers having decided to set operations in the county. They currently have a €100m annual grant programme from which employers can benefit from in order to support their investment projects. They also provide additional

grant support to employers depending on their size and the projected impact of their investment. Research and Innovation makes up the largest proportion of IDA's grant funding programmes. The agency offers a large array of supports to client employers which include 25% tax credit on eligible R&D activity. Multinational employers working with IDA Ireland can also benefit from IDA Energy Supports in line with the Government's strategy to help businesses in Ireland mitigate the increased cost of energy prices.

### 5.3.4. Higher education

Cork's higher education system's performance was among the city's top 5 strengths mentioned by IFS employers in Cork.

As we mentioned in Chapter 2, Cork is home to reputable higher education institutions, the main ones being University College Cork (UCC) and Munster Technological University (MTU). These institutions are known for their academic excellence and high-quality education. In 2022, both institutions combined counted 37,950 students and produced a total of 13,200 graduates.

UCC ranked in the top 20% of 1500 universities in the 2024 QS Top university ranking and ranked in the top 16-18% out of 1,906 in the 2024 Times Higher Education ranking. This would place the university among the top 2% universities globally<sup>44</sup>.

UCC and MTU attract a diverse and international student population. In the year 2022/2023, 10.5% of the student population in MTU and UCC consisted of international students, this represents a 16.9% increase in international students since 2017/2018. Overall, international students play a vital role in Cork's education system, economy, cultural diversity, innovation, and global engagement, making significant contributions to society while enriching their own educational experiences. The IFS employer community also benefits from this talent cohort.

MTU and UCC produce graduates well equipped for the workforce. The institutions' strong industry connections and the wide array of internships and practical training opportunities offered contribute to the high employability of their graduates.

As can be seen from the table below, 87.3% of Research

<sup>41</sup> Nigel Stone (, 2021), "Why common law legal systems are better for businesses", Boodle Hatfield

<sup>42</sup> CityUK (2023), "Legal excellence, internationally renowned - UK Legal services 2023"

<sup>43</sup> Elaine White (2021), "Four reasons why Ireland should be top of the jurisdiction shopping list of international business.", Ogier, 2021

<sup>44</sup> According to the World Higher Education Database (WHED), there are 21,000 Higher Education Institutions in the world that meet the WHED criteria, a total that we have used to calculate UCC's global ranking.

Masters' graduates and 89.9% of Taught Masters' graduates from UCC were employed 9 months after graduation. Similarly, 95.7% of Research Masters' graduates and 89.8% of Taught Masters' graduates from MTU were working within 9 months of their graduation<sup>45</sup>.

### 5.3.5. Cork Chamber Skillnet and other Skillnet Networks

Cork Chamber Skillnet is ideally placed to provide targeted training and development programs to meet the evolving skill needs of the IFS sector in Cork. As part of the Skillnet Ireland network, it collaborates with local enterprises, industry experts, and educational institutions to offer high-quality, tailored training solutions, helping businesses to enhance their competitiveness, drive innovation, and foster talent development within the Cork region. Cork Chamber Skillnet has the opportunity to collaborate with local

educational institutions and industry associations to leverage their expertise and resources in developing microcredentials that would:

Provide for flexibility in allowing individuals to acquire specific skills or knowledge quickly

Deliver relevant and up to date learning in the face of rapidly evolving changes driven by regulation and technology in the wider IFS ecosystem

Be accessible to working professionals who may not have the time or resources to pursue traditional education but have a need for it

Allow for stackability i.e. microcredentials can be stacked or combined to build towards larger qualifications or certifications and provide learners with a pathway for continuous skills development and career advancement

Table 10: MTU & UCC graduate employability.<sup>46</sup>

| Institution | Degree                        | Working (full-time) | Working (part-time) | Due to start a job in the next 3 months | Further studies/training (full-time) | Further studies/training (part-time) | Other activity | Unemployed and looking for work |
|-------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| UCC         | Postgraduate Research Masters | 83.20%              | 4.10%               | 0.00%                                   | 7.80%                                | 0.00%                                | 2.00%          | 3.00%                           |
|             | Postgraduate Taught Masters   | 86.00%              | 3.10%               | 0.80%                                   | 4.40%                                | 0.60%                                | 0.90%          | 4.20%                           |
|             | Undergraduate Honours Degree  | 61.80%              | 4.20%               | 1.00%                                   | 27.60%                               | 1.70%                                | 1.30%          | 2.40%                           |
| MTU         | Postgraduate Research Masters | 91.20%              | 4.50%               | 0.00%                                   | 0.00%                                | 0.00%                                | 4.20%          | 0.00%                           |
|             | Postgraduate Taught Masters   | 78.10%              | 11.70%              | 1.50%                                   | 1.90%                                | 0.40%                                | 1.90%          | 4.60%                           |
|             | Undergraduate Honours Degree  | 75.80%              | 6.00%               | 2.20%                                   | 8.40%                                | 0.80%                                | 2.90%          | 3.80%                           |

Source: Higher Education Authority

<sup>45</sup>Higher Education Authority (2022), Graduate Outcomes, class of 2021. Please be advised that because of modifications in the presentation of the Graduate Outcome Survey data, we are unable to incorporate the most recent statistics (pertaining to the class of 2022) in our report.

<sup>46</sup>Higher Education Authority (2022), Graduate Outcomes, class of 2021

Ensure tangible recognition for a participating workforce of their skills and achievements

Enhance employability and competitiveness in the local IFS talent market, demonstrating commitment to lifelong learning and professional development

Cork Chamber Skillnet is ideally situated to forge a strategic collaboration with Tech Industry Alliance Skillnet (formerly it@cork Skillnet), a leading learning network for tech businesses in the region to enable more integration of tech skills within IFS and through greater cross pollination of tech talent between both sectors, ensure more opportunity for the wider Technology talent pool in Cork while enabling growth of the IFS sector.







## Chapter 6

# Future outlook and growing trends within IFS

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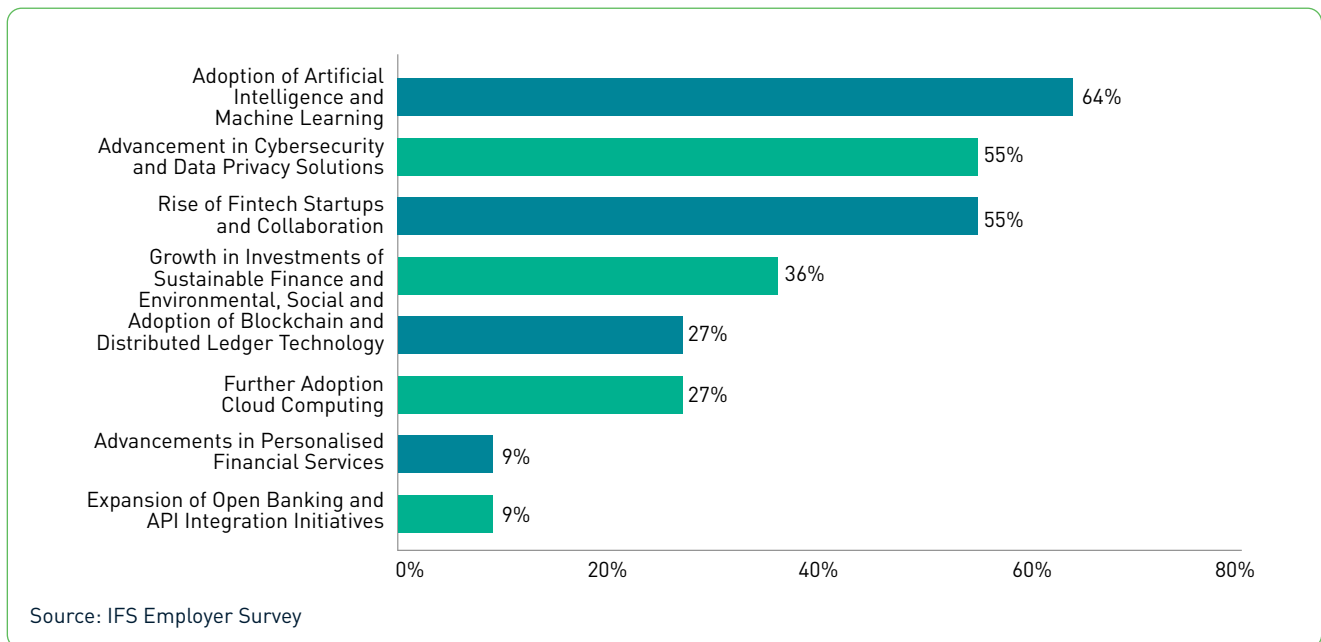
# Future outlook and growing trends within IFS

The IFS sector is undergoing a period of significant transformation globally, driven by a number of key trends and new technologies that are constantly evolving. Those include the adoption of AI and ML, advancements in Cybersecurity, the rise of Fintech, Sustainable Finance and ESG, and other new systems like Blockchain, Open Banking or Application Programming Interface (API) integration initiatives.

In our IFS Employer Survey, we collected inputs about the emerging trends that are shaping the future of IFS in Cork. As figure 14 shows, the most important trends are Adoption of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, and Advancements in Cybersecurity and Data Privacy Solutions.



Figure 27: Cork’s main strengths as a location for an IFS employer



Cork, as a pioneering region, is playing a crucial role in these developments. Cork is home to the International Security Accelerator, which invests in start-ups in the areas of Cybersecurity, Internet of Things (IOT), Blockchain, AI, Health & Bioinformatics, Defence, Critical Infrastructure, Financial Services & Logistics. Startups supported by the accelerator contribute to the region’s reputation as a hub for cutting edge technologies, especially in Financial Services.

The Cork Financial Services Forum, led by the Cork Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to increasing collaboration between businesses, educational institutions and government organisations. Both

the International Security Accelerator and the Cork Financial Services Forum are pivotal to the future of the IFS sector in Cork and are robust assets that will play a crucial role in its advancement.

Furthermore, Cork’s educational landscape, as described in chapter 4, is not only rich but also strategically aligned with the transformative trends in the IFS sector. This ensures that graduates are well-prepared to navigate the evolving landscape of financial services, contributing to innovation and growth in the region. Both UCC and MTU, leading universities in Cork are part of the Cork Financial Services Forum.

## 6.1 Artificial Intelligence

AI is catalysing substantial transformation within the financial services industry at a pace surpassing that of many other sectors. As per a 2018 Citti report, the financial services sector ranks as the largest investor in AI services, trailing only behind the technology sector. The report further indicates that hedge funds and High-Frequency Trading (HFT) firms were the primary adopters of AI in finance at the time, though its integration has since proliferated to encompass a broad spectrum of entities including banks, regulators, fintech employers, and insurance firms.<sup>47</sup>

The IFS sector relies heavily on data and communications, rendering it both advantageous and susceptible to the impacts of AI. AI-driven tools have streamlined operations, elevated customer service, and bolstered investment decision-making, among other benefits. Moreover, machine learning algorithms enable real-time analysis of datasets, furnishing deeper and faster insights into market trends, risk assessment, and customer behaviour. However, the AI transformation also introduces various risks such as data breaches, information misuse, technical glitches, and cyberattacks. These associated risks underscore the necessity for robust regulation and cybersecurity measures.

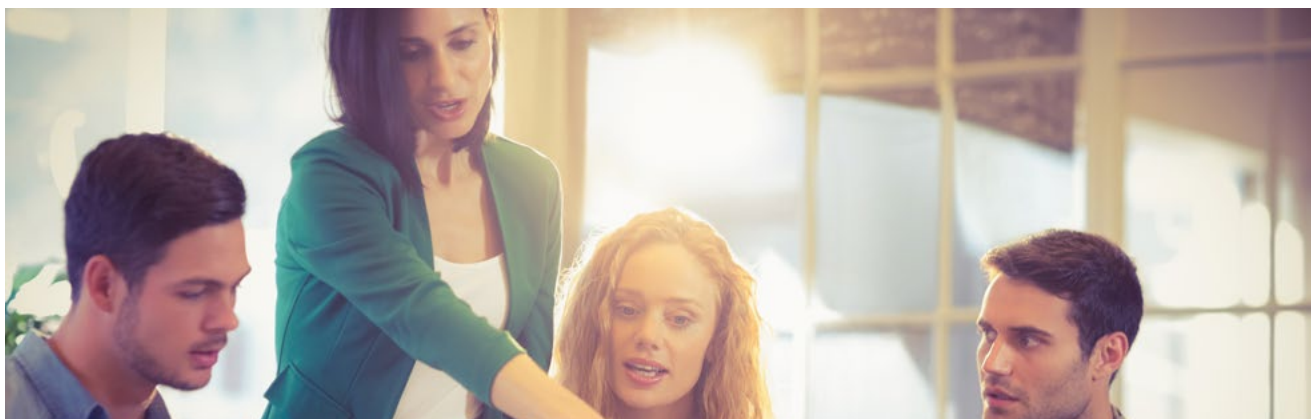
Despite the current slow general adoption of AI in business processes, the Irish IFS landscape seems to be adapting well in comparison with other industries. About 6.7% of employers in the country are currently using at least one AI technology, well above the EU mean (5.5%) and above the Euro Area region (6.4%)<sup>48</sup>. Furthermore, the migration flows of professionals with AI skills is quite positive for Ireland. The OECD.AI

policy observatory gave Ireland a migration flow rate of LinkedIn members with AI skills of 1.58<sup>49</sup> in 2022, taking the 7th position over all G20 countries in terms of AI talent gains.<sup>50</sup>

Generative AI is particularly useful for the IFS sector because it has the ability to create new data and insights based on patterns that it has learned from existing data. In this sense, it has been stated that the most impacted sectors by generative AI are Financials and Fintech. Currently, the most common use of generative AI in these sectors tend to focus on improving customer service models or optimising costs. However, Generative AI has potential to help democratise investing and markets, improve algorithmic trading, enable robust data use and allow for better analysis and pricing of insurance risk.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the challenges that it encompasses, the future of AI and ML in the IFS sector in Cork is bright. Cork is particularly well equipped to face this continuous change with a robust educational landscape containing programs such as the MSc in AI at MTU that will provide professionals skilled in the latest AI and machine learning trends. Other examples of AI education courses are the MSc in Fintech Innovation, the Certificate in Emerging Digital Technologies and the Certificate in foundations of AI offered by Skillnet.

Furthermore, the RDI Hub located within 90 minutes of Cork City, a non-profit partnership between MTU, Kerry County Council and Fexco, provides support and connections and access to multiple training programs. The RDI Hub world-class centre is dedicated to digital innovation, focusing on research and innovation within the digital, AI, data, and related technology sectors.



<sup>47</sup> Higher Education Authority (2022), Graduate Outcomes, class of 2021

<sup>48</sup> Eurostat(2023) Artificial intelligence by NACE Rev.2 activity and NUTS 2 regions

<sup>49</sup> The rate value of 1.58 indicates the ratio between the number of AI-skilled professionals entering Ireland and the number leaving it from 2019 to 2022.

<sup>50</sup> OECD.AI policy observatory

<sup>51</sup> Citti GPS (2023) UNLEASHING AI

In addition, there are currently 2,500 professionals with AI and Machine learning skills located in Cork. The talent pool also has long tenure in the field; more than 1,600 of the professionals have more than 5 years of experience and about 925 hold more than 10 years of employment history.<sup>52</sup>

## 6.2 Cybersecurity

As the IFS sector becomes more digitalised, the need for cybersecurity and data privacy increases. IFS institutions need to protect their customers' data from cyberattacks and ensure that they comply with data privacy regulations. This is leading to increased investment in cybersecurity and data privacy solutions. The global cybersecurity market is growing at an annual rate of 12%.<sup>53</sup>

Another potential thread is that large-scale quantum computers could potentially break the current encryption methods used in the IFS industry. Some Financial Institutions are implementing new cryptography methods such as crypto-agility or post-quantum cryptography to secure various aspects like infrastructure, financial assets, intellectual property, and customer information.

In 2018, the rapid growth of cybersecurity operations in Cork led to the creation of Cyber Ireland, a national cybersecurity cluster organisation, an industry-led body supported by academia and government that aims to address the needs of Ireland's cybersecurity ecosystem.

UCC is also one of four universities that has formed the Insight SFI Research Centre for Data Analytics, a collaborative research organisation which is one of the largest data analytics centres in Europe. It employs more than 400 researchers who work at several locations across Ireland. Companies can work directly with Insight researchers to gain insights and develop new solutions for the cybersecurity industry.

Cork is one of four locations with notable cyber security activity which also includes Dublin, Galway and Limerick. Together, these locations are home to 73% of all security offices in the country. Cork has the highest number of firms per capita than any other region and the biggest concentration of cyber security multinationals.<sup>43</sup>

Cork not only offers good AI training opportunities but also provides comprehensive Cybersecurity



training. The MSc in Fintech Innovation incorporates a specialised Cybersecurity module. Similarly, the Certificate in Emerging Digital Technologies features a dedicated course addressing Cybersecurity, Privacy, and Trust. This course delves into fundamental security concepts, principles of penetration testing, IT law and ethics, and cryptography.<sup>54</sup>

There is a rich talent pool of candidates with Cybersecurity skills in Cork. There are approximately 10,000 professionals that reported to possess at least one of the following skills:

1. Cybersecurity
2. Cyber Defence
3. Programming
4. Python
5. Scripting
6. Operating Systems
7. Cryptography
8. Security Architecture
9. Security Information and Event Management
10. Cloud Computing Security
11. Contained Security

Within this talent pool, 3,700 candidates have reported that they are looking for new employment opportunities.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Morgan McKinley (2024) study on professionals with AI & Machine Learning skills in Cork

<sup>53</sup> Cyber Ireland (2022) Position Paper: Achieving our Cyber potential 2030

<sup>54</sup> Skillnet

<sup>55</sup> Morgan McKinley (2024) study on cybersecurity professionals in Cork



## 6.3 Fintech and Digital Finance

In September of 2020, the European Commission launched the Digital Finance Strategy, aiming to promote increased competitiveness and innovation within the European financial sector. As a component of this initiative, the EU Digital Finance Platform seeks to bolster financial innovation and establish an authentic single market for digital financial services. This platform incorporates the innovative Data Hub, cross-border services, a fintech mapping, a comprehensive overview of the latest policy news, calls to action, and events. According to its fintech mapping tool, Ireland has a total of 168 fintech firms.

At a national level, the Irish government has launched a national digital strategy, "Harnessing Digital – The Digital Ireland Framework," to propel the country's digital transformation. Focused on building on pandemic-induced digital changes, the strategy aims to leverage Ireland's economic strengths and tech hub status. Prioritising inclusiveness, security, and governance, the strategy outlines initiatives for global connectivity, digital skills, public services, small business support, and cybersecurity. Aligned with EU priorities and national recovery plans, the strategy also puts emphasis on the interconnection between digital and green goals.



The Department of Finance will concentrate on enhancing institutional infrastructure, while Enterprise Ireland and the IDA will persist in aiding companies to embrace technology and optimise their presence in global markets. Simultaneously, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission will prioritise assisting the public in adapting to the increasing influence of fintech in retail activities.<sup>56</sup>

Additionally, the Bank of Ireland Innovation Hub serves to foster communication and collaboration with entities involved in fintech and innovation. It serves as a powerful tool to stay current with advancements in the financial sector while creating an environment that encourages collaboration between traditional financial institutions and innovative players.

In November 2020, MTU initiated the delivery of an MSc in Fintech Innovation, developed in partnership with industry through ICT Skillnet. Additionally, the Higher Diploma in Fintech offered by ICT Skillnet, featuring a comprehensive curriculum covering fintech industry intricacies, blockchain, and software engineering, aligns very well with the evolving influence of fintech in the sector.

As of January 2024, there are 7,600 professionals that reported working in Fintech or that have a profile that makes them eligible to work in the sector and that currently live in the Cork area. Out of those, 2,200 have reported to be looking for new employment opportunities.

## 6.4 Sustainable Finance and ESG

The Irish government is actively engaged in implementing measures to address climate change. This is reflected in the Update to Ireland for Finance strategy (extended to 2026)<sup>57</sup>, that puts the focus on transforming the economy into one that is greener and more sustainable within other actions for a better future in finance. The approach presented incorporates environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria into financial decision-making processes.

Employers are recognising that sustainable practices are not only beneficial for the environment but also present significant opportunities for innovation and economic development. Investors, businesses and financial institutions are increasingly acknowledging the importance of aligning financial strategies with broader environmental and social goals.

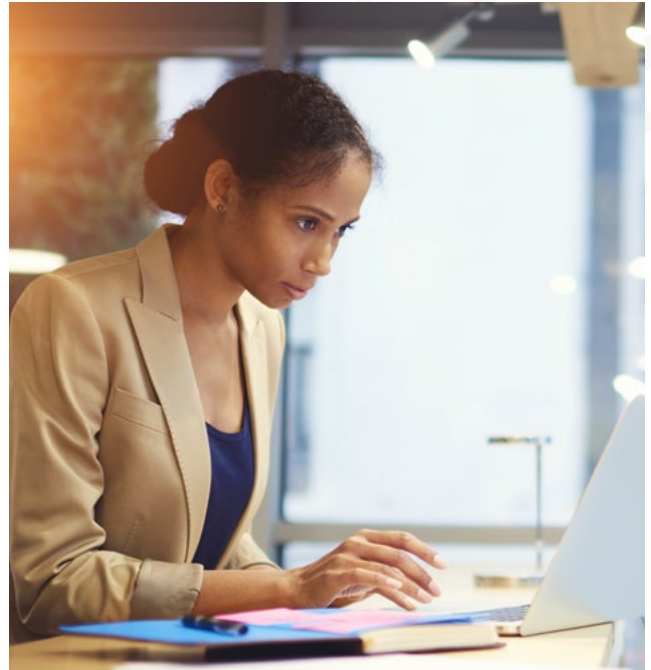
<sup>56</sup> Government of Ireland (2023) Update to Ireland for Finance - The strategy for the development of Ireland's international financial services sector, extended to 2026 - Action Plan 2023.

<sup>57</sup> Government of Ireland (2023) Update to Ireland for Finance - The strategy for the development of Ireland's international financial services sector, extended to 2026



In October 2022, the International Sustainable Finance Centre of Excellence was successfully launched in Ireland. It was developed by Sustainable Finance Ireland in partnership with Skillnet Ireland, and in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department of Finance and international partners. The centre focuses on conducting research, fostering talent development and engaging in leadership initiatives and will be key in shaping the future of Sustainable Finance.<sup>58</sup>

The educational environment in Cork is swiftly adjusting to meet the changing demands for sustainability skills. For example, the BA (Hons) Business and Financial Economics, places a strong emphasis on sustainability, and states that their objective is to create the leaders that will shape a sustainable future. Currently, 655 professionals are working in sustainable finance functions in Cork, reflecting the region's commitment to a greener and more sustainable economy.



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<sup>58</sup> International Sustainable Finance Centre of Excellence website (isfcoe.org) (2022) International Sustainable Finance Centre of Excellence officially launched in Ireland

# Chapter 7

## Recommendations and Conclusion

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# Recommendations and Conclusion

## 7.1. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are proposed to address the identified issues and enhance future outcomes.

### 7.1.1. Develop collaboration with Dublin to strategically grow Cork's IFS industry

A World Bank report from 2017 stated “In many countries, the capital city acts as the economic and political centre, drawing a disproportionate share of investment, attention, and resources. This concentration often leads to neglect of other regions and cities, exacerbating spatial inequalities and hindering overall economic development.”

Dublin holds a central position in terms of economic activity, population and employment volumes, infrastructure investments and international connectivity. The capital also concentrates most of the government institutions and key functions, including the Central Bank of Ireland.

Nonetheless, there has been a recognition of the need for more balanced regional development. The National Planning Framework (NPF) 2040, a long-term strategic planning document outlining the government's vision for Ireland's future development, places strong emphasis on promoting balanced regional development. Since the early 2000's, IDA Ireland, Ireland's government agency responsible for attracting Foreign Direct Investment into Ireland, have aimed to decentralise investment beyond Dublin, the capital city, by focusing on regional development. This strategy involves promoting investment in other cities and regions across Ireland to foster balanced economic growth and reduce regional disparities. It includes initiatives such as developing infrastructure, supporting local industries, and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to areas outside of Dublin. In 2023, 132 of the total 248 investments won by IDA Ireland were located outside of Dublin, representing 54% of total investments going regionally. Cork has benefited from this strategy and in the same year, the Southwest region (which encompasses Cork and Kerry) had the highest number of new foreign-direct investments.

with a net gain of 1,060 new jobs amounting to 2.3% FDI employment growth, the highest of any IDA region. As well as expansions in the dominant IFS sub sector employers in Cork of funds servicing/administration, there was also the welcome announcement that a fintech employer in Cork, Blink Parametric, had plans to double its headcount. This fintech employer is evidence of the local ecosystem fostering and supporting growth of a high potential Insurtech start-up which was founded in Cork in 2016. As the main second city in Ireland, with a population of 222,337<sup>59</sup> Cork is expected to grow by between 50%- 60% by 2040<sup>60</sup>. In some of the stakeholder interviews it was referenced that there was a real opportunity for Cork to partner, rather than compete with the capital city for IFS investment. Cork should think about a development strategy part “in association with Dublin”. This means trying to invest in activities which complement those performed in the capital or which aim at taking the “extra” IFS work that can't be handled or serviced in the capital. An example of this approach would be the ongoing growth of the Fund Administration activities based in Cork. The volume of activity in this area would justify a collaboration between Dublin and Cork and allow both locations to become primary locations in Europe for Fund & Asset Management. Cork could leverage its position as a lower cost location with a highly skilled and complimentary workforce to the IFS business currently conducted in Dublin.

The potential working of the relationship between Cork and Dublin could be compared to that of London and Edinburgh as service locations for the banking sector. The working relationship between London and Edinburgh in the banking sector has been characterised by a symbiotic dynamic where Edinburgh has capitalised on opportunities arising from the overflow of business that London either cannot or chooses not to service, often due to cost considerations or capacity constraints. Edinburgh, as a major financial centre in its own right, has positioned itself as a complementary hub, particularly in areas such as asset management, insurance, and certain banking operations. London's dominance in global finance means that it often handles a significant

<sup>59</sup> Central Statistics Office (2023) Census 2022

<sup>60</sup> Government of Ireland (2018) Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework

volume of business, but certain types of transactions or services may be more efficiently managed or competitively priced in Edinburgh. This has led to a mutually beneficial relationship where Edinburgh benefits from the overflow of business from London, while London maintains its position as a leading financial hub with diverse capabilities. Cork should seek to strategically develop a similar relationship with Dublin to mutual benefit.

### 7.1.2. Diversify IFS offering by identifying niche areas for investment

Equally, Cork should also prioritise identifying niche areas for investment that would distinguish it as a notable International Financial Services (IFS) location in its own right. For instance, Shannon has successfully positioned itself as an international hub for aircraft leasing, with over 100 aviation employers currently operating in the area. The transfer of aircraft between owners generates an estimated €35 million annually for businesses in the region. Based on the findings from this research and several interviews with key stakeholders, Cork could aim to establish a similar prominent role in emerging sectors such as maritime finance. Cork's privileged location along the coastline provides it with a strategic maritime position and makes the city a viable location to develop maritime finance.

Maritime finance refers to financial services and activities that are specific to the maritime industry which include shipping, trade and other maritime-related businesses. It encompasses a range of financial products, services and transactions that support the operations and development of the maritime sector, such as: ship financing (ship loans, leasing), trade finance, investment & capital markets, insurance services and port & infrastructure financing.

Ireland, including Cork, has a rich maritime tradition. By leveraging this historical connection, the city can build on existing expertise, networks, and knowledge in maritime affairs. Cork's port has more than 200 years of history and it currently operates through

four different locations in Cork's natural deepwater harbour<sup>61</sup>. The Port of Cork has been experiencing growth in terms of its trading activities: between 2016 and 2021, there was a 11.6% increase in the total weight of cargo handled by the port (from 9.5m tonnes in 2016 to 10.6 tonnes in 2021) and a 34.3% increase in the number of twenty-foot containers handled at the port<sup>62</sup> (from 210,000 in 2016 to 282,000 in 2021).

There is a real opportunity for Cork to leverage its maritime strengths to become a strategic location specialising in maritime lease financing, akin to Shannon's success in aviation leasing and finance.

Furthermore, Cork is home to the National Maritime College of Ireland (NMCI) located in Ringaskiddy, Cork, Ireland's designated national centre for maritime education and training. In addition, the Irish Naval Service Headquarters - a branch of the Irish Defence Forces responsible for maritime security and defence - is located in Haulbowline Island, near Cork. Moreover, the region's maritime heritage and existing expertise in shipping and logistics provide a solid foundation for the development of specialised financial services tailored to the maritime industry.

As well as the recently enacted Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, another significant piece of legislation related to maritime affairs in Ireland is the Merchant Shipping Acts, which provide the legal framework for regulating merchant shipping, seafarers' rights, vessel registration, safety standards, and maritime security.

Additionally, Ireland complies with international maritime conventions and regulations established by organisations such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the EU, and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Building on these strengths, Cork could establish itself as a hub for maritime lease financing by:

- Developing the necessary financial infrastructure, including legal and regulatory frameworks, to support maritime lease financing activities. There are many professional services firms in legal, tax and advisory that specialise in maritime services in Cork.

<sup>61</sup> Port of Cork

<sup>62</sup> The number of twenty-foot containers handled in a port (Lo-Lo TEU) is a common unit for measuring containerized cargo volume.





- Attracting Investment from financial institutions, leasing employers, and maritime businesses interested in establishing operations in the region. This could involve targeted incentives and promotional efforts to highlight Cork’s potential as a maritime finance hub.
- Fostering industry collaboration with maritime industry stakeholders, including shipping employers, shipbuilders, and maritime technology firms, can foster innovation and drive demand for maritime lease financing services in Cork.
- Investing in talent development initiatives, such as specialised training programs and academic partnerships, can ensure a skilled workforce capable of meeting the needs of the maritime finance sector. There is already a sizable talent pool of professionals with transferable skills in the wider Cork region that are suitably qualified to service such an industry sector as maritime finance.

By capitalising on its maritime assets and creating a supportive business environment, Cork has the opportunity to establish itself as a strategic location specialising in maritime lease financing, contributing to the region’s economic growth and prosperity.

Developing maritime finance in Cork would likely involve collaboration between the public and private sectors, as well as a proactive approach to creating an ecosystem that supports financial services related to maritime activities. However, the city already possesses many assets that could be used for this

new industry sector: a strategic location, a robust port infrastructure, access to global financial markets, a strong financial services ecosystem, an excellent high-level education system and skilled talent. Cork has proven its capability as an international location for financial shared service centres with the successful establishment and build out of US multinationals such as Itron, Gilead, Eli Lilly, Pepsi, Avery Dennison, FMC, Janssen, Apple, Amazon etc.

In the main, Cork is well positioned to compete with other major hubs for maritime finance like: London, Hamburg, Athens and Oslo in Europe, as well as Singapore and Hong Kong globally.

### 7.1.3. Attract emerging talent

Competition for graduates entering the employment market is strong. Cork’s third-level education sector is known for its excellence and its graduates are in-demand nationally and internationally. UCC ranked in the top 20% of 1,500 universities in the 2024 QS Top university ranking and between 16 - 18% out of 1,906 in the 2024 Times Higher Education ranking. This would place the university among the top 2% universities globally<sup>63</sup>. Cork based third level institutions also produce graduates very prepared to enter the workforce. For example, 87.3% of Research Masters’ graduates and 89.9% of Taught Masters’ graduates from UCC were employed 9 months after graduation. Similarly, 95.7% of Research Masters’ graduates and 89.8% of Taught Masters’ graduates from MTU were working within 9 months of their graduation<sup>64</sup>.

The research findings highlight the significant impact of a student’s initial internship or job on shaping their career path. While some individuals may have a clear vision of their future career, including specific industries and roles, others may pursue more general fields of study and remain open to various opportunities even after graduation. Therefore, it is crucial for IFS employers to develop robust strategies for attracting early talent.

- This implies developing a strong partnership approach with the local universities (through job fairs for example), to not only educate students on what they do but also to promote themselves as an employer of choice. During the qualitative phase of this research, it was observed that current IFS

<sup>63</sup> According to the World Higher Education Database (WHED), there are 21,000 Higher Education Institutions in the world that meet the WHED criteria, a total that we have used to calculate UCC’s global ranking.

<sup>64</sup> HEA, Graduate Outcomes, class of 2021

graduate employees in Cork applied for positions with their employer after encountering them at a university event. Additionally, a young IFS employee in Cork joined an IFS employer because she was acquainted with fellow graduates who had positive experiences working there after graduating.

- Internship programs should aim to engage students from diverse academic backgrounds, encompassing disciplines such as business, finance, economics, and accounting. Moreover, employers should seek to broaden the scope of these programs to include graduates possessing cross-disciplinary skills that align with their business needs. Cork as a location is well placed to anticipate the talent requirements accompanying the digital transition and the importance in adopting fintech for IFS employers. As such, Cork IFS employers have a dedicated focus on attracting ICT graduates. IFS employers in Cork face competition from technology firms for this talent pool but it is this same technology ecosystem that is responsible for the significant growth of the tech talent pool in Cork over the last five years. There is a real opportunity for Cork to market the fintech sector as a dynamic industry at the forefront of technological advancements with compelling challenges to attract emerging ICT and IFS talent. Furthermore, Cork should ensure it is leveraging this very established and successful local technology talent pool when pitching for fintech employers to set up locally.
- These awareness campaigns should also target younger cohorts in secondary schools, through work placements for transition year students.

### 7.1.4. Retain international talent

Cork's third-level education institutions are attractive to international students. 4,455 international students enrolled either in MTU or UCC in the year 2022/2023<sup>65</sup>, which represents more than 10% of the total enrolments. Some of these international enrolments encompass students from a foreign third-level education enrolling for an exchange semester or year abroad. These exchanges have a positive impact on the quality of the local education system. Both institutions are part of the European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus)<sup>66</sup> programme, in

addition to having bilateral partnerships with non-EU universities. UCC partners with over 300 universities worldwide and has representative offices in India, the USA and China<sup>67</sup>. MTU is currently widening its network of partner universities outside of the EU in countries such as Canada, the USA, India and Singapore. In our research, we have found several young professionals who, after studying for a semester or a year abroad at a university in Cork, are now working in international financial services abroad, often in their home countries. This pattern was especially noticeable among students from the USA (particularly those from Loyola University Maryland, which has a partnership with UCC), France, and Canada.

IFS employers can play a bigger role in retaining international students studying in Cork. As part of broader awareness campaigns and internship programs offered to students, there could be a focus on targeting international students. Offering the prospect of a traineeship in Cork upon graduation could serve as an incentive for those who only spent a year or a semester abroad to return to Ireland, or for those who completed their entire degree at UCC or MTU to remain in Cork.

### 7.1.5. Attract transition talent

Transition talent, referring to individuals transitioning from one career to another, is essential to Cork's financial services workforce. During the qualitative interview research conducted by Morgan McKinley, we interacted with professionals who unexpectedly entered the financial services sector, showcasing the readiness of local employers to welcome diverse educational backgrounds.



<sup>65</sup> HEA database

<sup>66</sup> Erasmus is an EU initiative established in 1987, that supports international mobility and cooperation in the field of education, training, and youth and plays a significant role in promoting internationalisation, cross-cultural understanding, and the development of a European identity. It is open to participants from EU member states as well as partner countries, providing a broad range of opportunities for students, educators, and organisations to engage in collaborative and enriching experiences.

<sup>67</sup> UCC International Office

The research findings uncovered perceptions of the IFS sector as being serious, formal, and complex. This perspective needs adjustment to increase the sector's appeal to talent. Efforts should focus on demystifying the sector and highlighting its relevance to and impact on everyday life. Simultaneously, targeted campaigns should position it as a technology and innovation-focused domain, attracting professionals from ICT backgrounds.

Promoting specific positions, particularly those that require less extensive finance expertise, can be beneficial. Customer Service and Compliance roles, for example, offer opportunities for younger transition talent to gain exposure to the core business without needing extensive industry experience.

Working on attracting technology talent from other industry sectors is a key element for the successful development of the IFS sector in Cork. As seen further up in this report, key technology skills such as AI/ML and cybersecurity are present in Cork's workforce. They need to be attracted to the IFS sector in order to allow the sector to evolve and transition to a more technology centric industry. For this attraction to be successful, it is important to emphasise that technology roles within financial services go beyond mere "support" positions. Showcasing the exciting fintech innovations and transformations occurring in the sector can help attract talented individuals to these roles. The findings of this report have shown that addressing concerns about work/life balance is also noteworthy, given the industry's typical long hours. Prioritising flexible working arrangements, especially considering that 33% of Cork professionals were already working from home at least one day a week in 2022, can better accommodate changing employee preferences.

As the sector appeals to a wider range of professionals beyond finance, it's important for employers to adopt an inclusive approach to hiring. Broadening recruitment criteria is essential to avoid creating unnecessary barriers. Employers should value candidates from diverse sectors who demonstrate a willingness to learn and develop relevant skills.

Recommendations from the "Financial Services in Ireland - Skills of the Future" report advocate for promoting international qualifications, acknowledging non-traditional learning experiences, and appreciating global exposure. These measures can help attract a diverse pool of talent to the sector.

Recruitment partners have a role to play in this endeavour as well. They should actively promote the sector to job seekers from various industries and present candidate profiles that highlight relevant skills and experiences, even if they come from non-financial backgrounds.

### **7.1.6. Increase employer proactivity towards employee upskilling**

Employers should take a more proactive approach in upskilling their workforce. To attract and retain talent ready to excel in an international setting, employers need to invest in L&D programs that extend beyond conventional skill development. Employers are investing in employee educational support, but it is crucial that there is continuation and improvement of the quality and variety of the training offered. We have detected that there might be a greater opportunity for awareness of the support offered by Skillnet Ireland and Springboard, which were only mentioned by 15.4% and 30.8% respectively of the employers surveyed.





In addition, to boost employee engagement, management should take a more proactive approach in promoting training, courses, and initiatives to their employees. This can be achieved by offering incentives like bonuses, promotions, or internal recognition for their learning achievements.

Identifying and addressing employee skill gaps is crucial for maintaining a competitive edge in today's dynamic business environment. Variations in skill demands within a company in contrast to the wider talent pool make it imperative for organisations to understand the specific skills lacking in their workforce to remain competitive. Through regular skills assessments, employers can identify any existing skill gaps and subsequently provide external training opportunities or create tailored training programs. These assessments also pave the way for highly personalised training initiatives, taking into consideration individual employee profiles and career aspirations. These personalised approaches not only contribute to the overall effectiveness of skill development efforts but also increase employee engagement and motivation.

Different groups of talent have different training needs. We've observed a need for prioritising upskilling and reskilling efforts specifically aimed at transition talent. They should aim at making sure that this talent pool new to the industry is equipped with a comprehensive understanding of the organisation's core business and its alignment with their specific roles. While professionals may know how to perform their jobs, a lack of knowledge about their employer's business or the financial services industry can be a challenge.

Overall, development, upskilling and reskilling efforts are highly encouraged, contributing to higher engagement rates within employers. This strategic approach will not only attract but also retain talent, fostering a dynamic and innovative IFS sector in Cork.

### 7.1.7. Fill the gaps identified in the type of course offering currently available

Cork offers a rich educational landscape, offering a multitude of opportunities for professional development. This includes traditional university degrees from UCC and MTU, providing comprehensive education in areas such as finance, banking, and risk management. Additionally, the city offers a diverse array of courses available in multiple formats. Talent and diversity are critical for success in the IFS sector and there is a need for ongoing upskilling and reskilling efforts to meet the industry's demands. Initiatives like Springboard+ and the Human Capital Initiative offer opportunities for free or subsidised training in areas of identified skills needed. Collaboration between Skillnet Ireland and industry partners ensures tailored talent development programs, while initiatives like the Fintech Corridor and the CFA Society promote diversity and address specific skill shortages. The Central Bank's legislation supports positive behaviours within employers, complemented by training from institutions like the Institute of Bankers. Diversity initiatives, such as those by the 30% Club Ireland and 100 Women in Finance, further enhance the industry's inclusivity. These efforts collectively contribute to a skilled and diverse workforce, essential for navigating the sector's digital future and driving continued growth.

Certain emerging skills like cybersecurity, fraud prevention, and AI and machine learning, crucial in today's market, are not fully covered in Cork's educational landscape. Ongoing training in emerging technologies is essential for staying current, and companies should align with the national digital strategy, "Harnessing Digital – The Digital Ireland Framework," to promote digital transformation. This involves facilitating connectivity, enhancing digital skills, and supporting small businesses in adopting digital technologies.





## 7.2 Conclusion

Ireland is administering more and more foreign-based funds. In 2022, 1,053 fund managers from 54 countries have assets administered in Ireland<sup>68</sup>. Our qualitative interviews have evidenced a need to provide training on the fund regulations present in other jurisdictions.

One approach to expanding the range of digital training available is to collaborate with international universities or institutions that provide specialised courses or training sessions aligned with the latest market developments. Employers can use platforms such as MIT Courseware, Coursera, Udemy, LinkedIn Learning, Khan Academy, and Udacity to enrich their training and development offer. These platforms also allow employers to offer flexible learning options that adapt to their employees' needs and schedules, ultimately strengthening their skill sets and contributing to the company's overall success.

Findings from the focus groups discussions also have shown that employees would be attracted to relevant courses being offered in a condensed format. They would allow professionals to access more targeted knowledge on one or two topics of interest without having to commit to a longer course that might also include content not fully relevant to them. The topic and content of these "micro-courses" could be identified through employee surveys or following a consultation between the IFS business community and training providers (such as third-level education, Skillnet Ireland, Springboard or other private providers).

Cork's IFS ecosystem is, as evidenced by this research, thriving and in a good position to grow nationally and internationally. It relies on national strengths, such as Ireland's strategic location as an English-speaking member of the EU market, on the country's favourable business climate and it also benefits from Ireland's strong regulatory system. The sector also counts on Cork-specific assets, such as an educated, experienced and diverse workforce and a network of academic and research institutions, known for their excellence, that closely collaborates with the business sector. The city also offers a quality of life that not only attracts globally but is capable of retaining key talent.

Key recommendations to foster Cork's position as a national and international IFS hub include the pursuit of the good work already in progress, a better self-promotion and initiatives that will increase the city's role and visibility nationally and internationally. It also entails a reflection on potential areas of development that could bring further investment and expertise to the city.

The sustained success of the industry - which has been prolonged now for well over 30 years - has been built on service chains, processing, skills and distribution mechanisms that are all going to fundamentally change in the course of the next few years due to the technological revolution ahead of the sector. Cork's capacity to anticipate and be ready for this technology centric model of delivering financial services will be key and needs to be prepared now.



<sup>68</sup> Monterey Ireland Fund Report 2022







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## List of Figures

Figure 1: Subsectors represented by IFS Employer Survey respondents

Figure 2: Size of IFS Employer Survey respondents

Figure 3: Nationality of IFS Employer Survey respondents

Figure 4: Subsectors represented by Support Employer Survey respondents

Figure 5: Size of Support Employer respondents

Figure 6: Proportion of Cork-based IFS employers per subsector

Figure 7: Proportion of employees per subsector in the IFS sector in Cork

Figure 8: Factors that contributed to recent growth among IFS employers in Cork

Figure 9: Impact of future growth within IFS employers over the next 2-3 years

Figure 10: Third-level institutions attended by IFS talent in Cork

Figure 11: Fields of study of IFS workforce in Cork

Figure 12: Place of origin of MTU and UCC students for the year 2022/2023

Figure 13: International talent employed in Cork's IFS employers

Figure 14: Change in international employees over the last year

Figure 15: Change in talent attraction and employee retention

Figure 16: How do IFS employers envisage the growth of their talent in Cork?

Figure 17: Finance Skills in IFS employers in Cork

Figure 18: Business skills in IFS employers in Cork

Figure 19: Analytical skills in IFS employers in Cork

Figure 20: Emerging skills in IFS employers in Cork

Figure 21: Proportion of executive, managerial and other leadership positions in IFS employers in Cork

Figure 22: Years that IFS employees have been in their current position

Figure 23: Training and development initiatives offered by IFS employers in Cork. IFS employers survey.

Figure 24: Initiatives implemented to foster a culture of continuous learning and development. IFS Employers Survey

Figure 25: Cork's main strengths as a location for an IFS employer

Figure 26: Cork's main opportunities for improvement for an IFS employer

Figure 27: Emerging trends or technologies that will shape the future of the IFS sector in Cork

## List of Tables

Table 1: Distribution of functions within Fintech employers

Table 2: Top job titles within IFS Fintech employers

Table 3: Distribution of functions within IFS Fund Administration employers

Table 4: Top job titles within IFS Fund Administration employers

Table 5: Distribution of functions within IFS Investment Banking employers

Table 6: Top job titles within IFS Investment Banking employers

Table 7: Distribution of functions within IFS Insurance employers

Table 8: Top job titles within IFS insurance employers

Table 9: List of PCFs currently or previously held by professionals in Cork

Table 10: MTU & UCC graduate employability.

## List of Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Description                                                    |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| ACCA         | Association of Chartered Certified Accountants                 |
| AIFM         | Alternative Investment Fund Manager                            |
| AIFMD        | Alternative Investment Fund Manager                            |
| AI           | Artificial Intelligence                                        |
| API          | Application Programming Interface                              |
| BAL          | Business, Administration & Law                                 |
| BPO          | Business Process Outsourcing                                   |
| CMATS        | Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy                      |
| CRM          | Customer Relationship Management                               |
| DTA          | Double Taxation Treaty                                         |
| EFAMA        | European Fund and Asset Management Association                 |
| EGFSN        | Expert Group on Future Skills Needs                            |
| ERASMUS      | European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students |
| ESE          | Edinburgh and South-East Scotland                              |
| ESG          | Environmental, Social & Corporate Governance                   |
| EU           | European Union                                                 |
| FDI          | Foreign Direct Investment                                      |
| FET          | Further Education & Training                                   |
| Fintech      | Financial Technology                                           |

|           |                                                                       |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FS        | Financial Services                                                    |
| HFT       | High-Frequency Trading                                                |
| ICT       | Information & Communication Technology                                |
| IDA       | Industrial Development Agency                                         |
| IFS       | International Financial Services                                      |
| Insurtech | Insurance Technology                                                  |
| IOB       | Institute of Banking                                                  |
| IOT       | Internet of Things                                                    |
| L&D       | Learning & Development                                                |
| LGX       | Luxembourg Green Exchange                                             |
| LSFI      | Luxembourg Sustainable Finance Initiative                             |
| ML        | Machine Learning                                                      |
| MTU       | Munster Technological University                                      |
| NFD       | Not Further Defined                                                   |
| NFP       | National Planning Framework                                           |
| NTA       | National Transport Authority                                          |
| OCR       | Optical Character Recognition                                         |
| OECD      | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development                |
| PCF       | Pre-Approval Controlled Function                                      |
| RAIF      | Reserved Alternative Investment Fund                                  |
| RDI       | Research, Development, and Innovation                                 |
| Regtech   | Regulatory Technology                                                 |
| SAS       | Statistical Analysis System                                           |
| SICAR     | Investment Company in Risk Capital                                    |
| SIF       | Specialised Investment Fund                                           |
| TII       | Transport Infrastructure Ireland                                      |
| UAE       | United Arab Emirates                                                  |
| UCC       | University College Cork                                               |
| UCD       | University College Dublin                                             |
| UCITS     | Undertakings for the Collective Investment in Transferable Securities |
| UL        | University of Limerick                                                |
| USA       | United States of America                                              |
| WIT       | Waterford Institute of Technology                                     |





Fitzgerald House,  
Summerhill North,  
Cork, T23 TD90

T: (021) 4509044

E: [training@corkchamber.ie](mailto:training@corkchamber.ie)

W: [www.corkchamber.ie/training/](http://www.corkchamber.ie/training/)

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