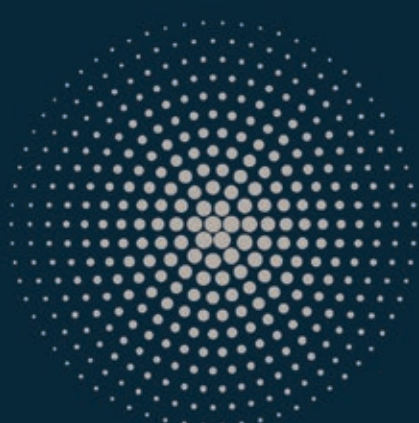
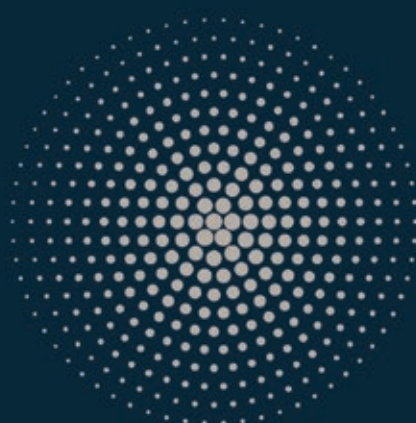
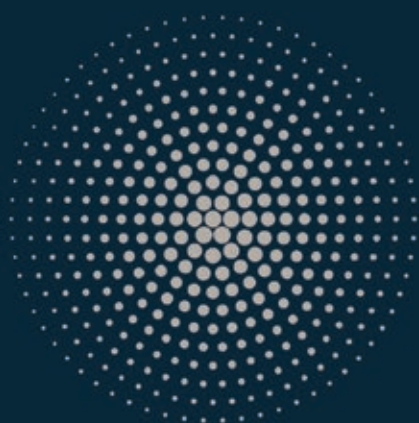


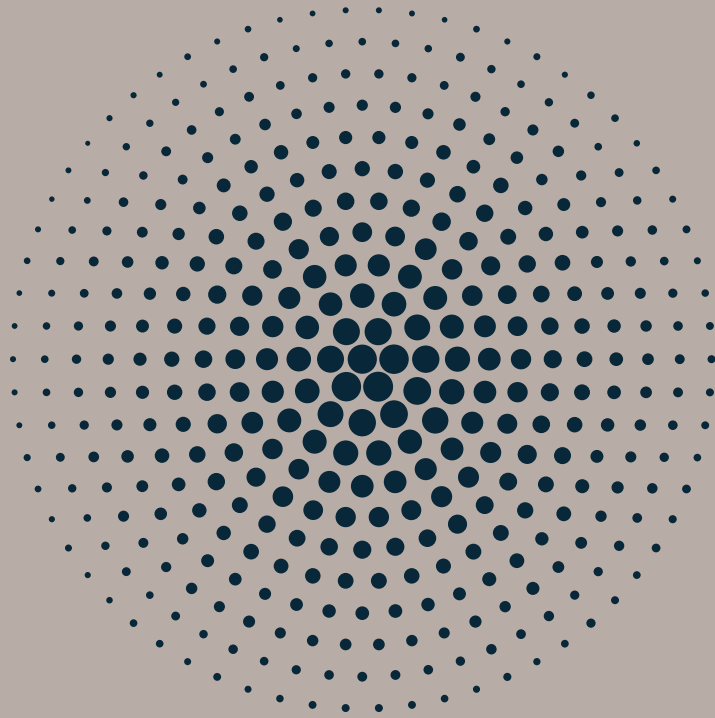
# Design Practice in Ireland Report

February 2021





The definition of design has evolved rapidly in recent years, as technological advances reshape our design capabilities.



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# Foreword...

The definition of design has evolved rapidly in recent years as technological advances impact our design capabilities, while societal shifts demand increasingly sophisticated, human-centred, and strategic design responses. Far from fearing these changes, we have an opportunity to embrace them, harnessing them to grow and progress for the betterment of our businesses and indeed, society as a whole.

The Government of Ireland's Expert Group for Future Skills Needs report, **Together for Design** published in mid-2020 identified just how pervasive design is in our society and our economy, and the steps needed if Ireland is to drive the change required to realise its potential and become a leading nation in design.

In the context of that, this report gives us a crucial and urgent view of the necessity to meet the opportunities available in the design sector, and the multi-faceted approach that will be needed to provide the right training, for the right people, at the right time.

In the immediate term - of the 37,500 designers identified as working in Ireland, as many as 25,000 will need upskilling and Continuing Professional Development to retrain in the emerging skills required by employers to remain employable. In the longer term - it is estimated that there will be a need for up to 70,000 designers by 2025, and with only 1,300 graduates a year we have a marked gap to fill.

Design, both as a process and as a profession, is increasingly recognised across the world as an essential activity in the evolution of enterprise and public service. Design tools and methodology are now applied in all areas of innovation and change. This report goes some way towards answering the conundrum of who is defined as a designer, and what constitutes design, against a backdrop of a volatile and uncertain world. What is clear is that change is needed, and fast.

In embracing change we must first understand where we are, and this report supports our understanding of the demography and make up of professional designers, as well as their preferred ways of working. What is vital now is that individuals within the design sector accept the challenge to address their own skills gaps in order to stay relevant for the future.

We are fortunate enough to work in one of the most creative and rewarding industries there is, and we have an opportunity now to shape the training and development that will push the standards and professionalism of Irish design forward. Along with the government's Expert Group for Future Skills Needs report **Together for Design**, we have a solid foundation of quality research and insight to shape the growth agenda for 2021 and beyond.



Charlotte Barker - CEO IDI  
January 2021



# Executive Summary

As one of 70+ Skillnet Business Networks in Ireland, Design Skillnet provides relevant and progressive professional development solutions for design professionals in Ireland. The unique challenge facing Design Skillnet is that design is a rapidly evolving discipline undergoing significant change; while little research has been undertaken to frame design as a profession. Therefore, understanding the emerging shape of design practice in Ireland, quantifying it and mapping Continuing Professional Development (CPD) solutions to this new reality, was not possible without first framing it.

This report is the culmination of an intensive, innovative, and robust research engagement commissioned by Design Skillnet. It provides a clear snapshot of design in Ireland and will inform a training and development map for the next three years. This work provides an insight into design practice in Ireland that has not been provided before. The maturation of design was both the starting point and an inherent challenge in undertaking this research. Core challenges included:

- How to accurately measure the design sector in Ireland today.
- How to understand how and where people are working and the challenges they face.
- How to prepare useful and relevant professional training across disciplines, given the diverse and ever-changing nature of the profession.
- How to create successful training that supports these professionals right through their careers.

While two thirds of designers work for organisations employing less than 50 people, this research has shown an emerging cohort of designers working in-house across a broad range of sectors and organisation size; from finance to food, health to pharmaceuticals, design permeates every industry and sector.

## A unique approach for a unique challenge

Given that this project needed to define and quantify a relatively under-researched sector, a three-pronged approach was taken to address this task:

- Discovery stage: understand how the design sector is developing across the globe.
- Collaborative approach: we worked with key stakeholders in the sector to establish the parameters of the research and inform the development of the quantitative survey.
- Quantitative stage: the hypotheses developed in the first two stages were tested with a quantitative survey.

## The shape of the sector

In exploring the shape of the sector today and looking to the future, what became apparent immediately is that the sector is continually evolving, and the view of stakeholders and sector leaders is that the pace of evolution is not universally aligned. From stage one, we had a very full "basket" of considerations to be potentially included as emerging design roles. Ultimately this report establishes 14 clear design categories that outline the evolving shape of design in Ireland and are the key areas for growth and development for the next three to five years.

**It is important to note that the evolutionary nature of the sector means that design types are not mutually exclusive and design roles are now multi-faceted, with most designers stretching across multiple functions as roles and needs change. The modern design practitioner draws from a variety of design disciplines, which frames the future training solutions and puts a spotlight on the range and pace of upskilling required.**

It was beyond the scope of the project to estimate the number of professional designers working in-house (as opposed to within a design agency) but we can see that nearly 25% of survey respondents work in environments where designers represent less than 10% of the workforce within their organisations. These designers are a prime example of how the practice of design is changing and how these designers need specialist business skills to promote their work and navigate their work environments.

# Discovery

This stage reviewed how the sector is developing across the globe.

# Collaboration

A collaboration approach where we worked with key stakeholders in the sector to establish the parameters of the research and inform the development of the quantitative survey.

# Hypothesis

Where design and how this sector is developing across the globe was reviewed.



Design is the process of purposeful and innovative solutions that embody functional and aesthetic demands based on the needs of the intended user. Design is applied in the development of goods, services, processes, messages and environments.



37,500

professionals  
working in design  
in Ireland

25% of designers  
who responded  
represent less than

10%

of the workforce  
where they work

Growth in design  
jobs is triple the  
national average\*

Jobs in the design  
sector have  
doubled in the last  
5 years\*

The role of  
design is moving  
beyond tangible  
outputs

## The anatomy of design practice

The evolution of the design sector has impacted the definition of 'design practice', with the role of design moving beyond tangible outputs. The working definition of design practice in Ireland that was developed for this work is as follows:

**"A process of developing purposeful and innovative solutions that embody functional and aesthetic demands based on the needs of the intended user. Design is applied in the development of goods, services, processes, messages and environments."**

Using this definition and unpacking the criteria that now defines design practice, we estimate that there are 37,500 professionals in Ireland working in roles that can be considered 'professional design practice.' These professional designers span traditional design verticals such as Graphic Design and Industrial Design as well as emerging verticals including disciplines such as Design Engineers, Service Designers and Design Strategists. In addition to capturing these emerging roles, the research demonstrated that individuals who are engaged in emerging areas of design practice may not identify as a designer today.

## The value of design practice

When design practice is considered within the above definition, the value of professional design and designers within almost every sector is significant. In a world where users' expectations for simpler and more elegant solutions are very high and the lines between hardware, software and services are blurring, design becomes a critical capability and strategic differentiator.

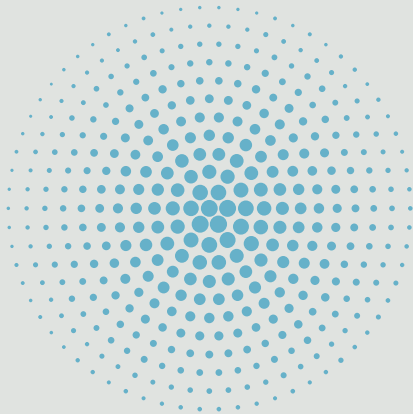
## Professional designer development

Given the extent and pace of change that designers are experiencing, it is not surprising that 68% of professional designers currently working in Ireland have skills gaps and unfulfilled training needs. Business and management skills are at the top of the list for designers who are now deeply immersed in solving complex business problems and looking to have influence as leaders. With this clear understanding of the shape and anatomy of design practice in Ireland, together with a real focus on design and adding value, this report details some of the crucial training challenges that will need to be met in order for Ireland to leverage and grow our burgeoning professional design sector.

\* EGFSN (2020) Together for Design

# Key Findings

The research findings demonstrate that there is an ongoing and urgent need to address gaps identified in several key areas including: **Leadership Skills, Learning and Development Culture, and the Digital Divide.** Below is a summary of the key findings:

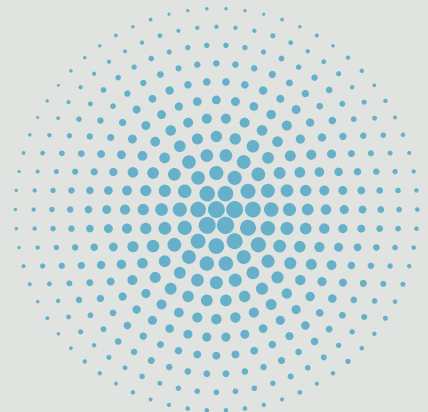


Classification of 'professional designers' is challenging; 1/3 of respondents do not consider their job as primarily design

Professional designers are often expected to span multiple disciplines and display a breadth of skills

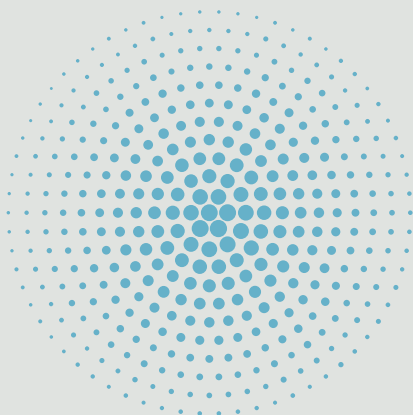
Investment in training has not kept pace with the rapid evolution of the sector and there is an urgent need to invest in upskilling to bridge identified gaps

A culture of continuous learning and development is needed in order for the sector to be at the forefront of emerging skills

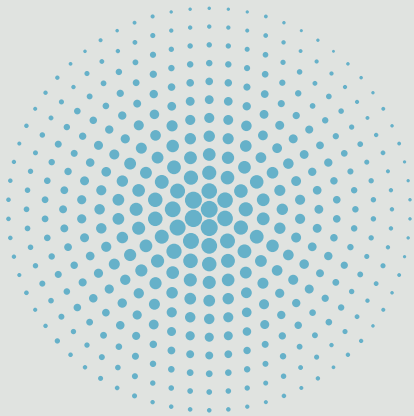


It is estimated that there are approximately 37,500 working in design in Ireland that could be described as professional design roles<sup>1</sup>

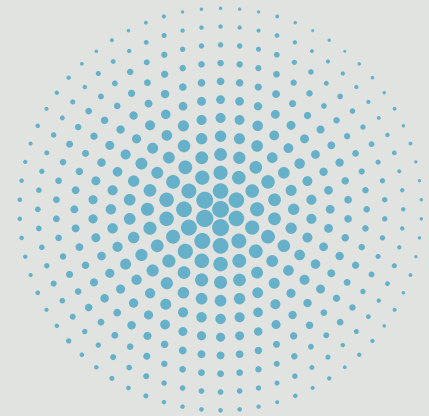
Core skills such as problem solving, creativity, ideation and research-driven design are crucial across sub-disciplines



<sup>1</sup>CSO Population Aged 15 Years and Over in the Labour Force 2011 to 2016 - Detailed Occupational Group, Census Year and County and City.



Most professional designers work full-time and are highly engaged in their roles

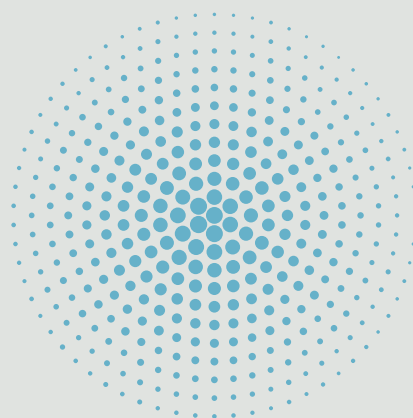


Survey responses indicated 84% of design teams consist of fewer than 10 people demonstrating the average size of design teams in organisations

Many professional designers are responding to the evolution of their roles by looking for ways to up-skill

Large organisations where design-specific training is not prioritised

Professional designers who had engaged in recent training still identified skills gaps and training needs for current and future roles



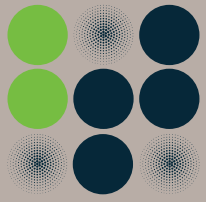
Key Gaps include Leadership Skills, Learning and Development Culture and the Digital Divide



Problem-solver, creative  
thinker, idea-generator,  
researcher, designer...







# Background



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## Introduction

Across Ireland today, design as a practice is a firmly-established core activity in the realisation of new products and services across a wide range of companies. The design profession has evolved rapidly in recent years, as demonstrated by the diverse spread of practitioners in agencies and in-house within large organisations. The opportunities for designers in Ireland have never been greater, but the fragmentation of design as a sector and the speed with which it is evolving have to date resulted in ad hoc career trajectories with a lack of investment. The lack of Continuing Professional Development in the workplace is holding back many skilled designers in their career progression.

While the agency space is relatively well understood and easy to measure, the in-house enterprise sector is, by its nature, more fragmented and challenging to categorise. Many design professionals working in-house are engaged in highly creative design activities but may not have design as their primary qualification. Additionally, design teams are increasingly comprised of multidisciplinary specialists. They may be confident creative practitioners — product managers, engineers, software designers, design managers — but the boundaries between design and other disciplines are increasingly blurred and overlapping.

Design has matured significantly in recent years and is now widely recognised at a strategic level within larger enterprises, although not as well at small and medium enterprise (SME) level in Ireland. This is demonstrated by the increasing numbers of designers in leadership positions in Ireland and globally. In order for design in Ireland to reach its potential within enterprise and consultancy, design practitioners will require a more diverse and sophisticated set of skills, with rapid upskilling in digital and business skills.

## The Challenge

Past and current definitions of design are no longer fit for purpose. Where previously design was seen solely as the remit of graphic designers, fashion designers, product and industrial designers, and a few other clearly defined roles, there has been a steady evolution to include those who employ design processes, services, and systems. Design

thinking is now a preferred approach in business strategy, consultancy and research, while technological disruption has brought capabilities such as User Experience (UX) and User Interface (UI) design to the fore, becoming a core offering of multidisciplinary design practices.

Design graduates often leave third level education with little or no formal business management education and training. The nature of design education, however, focuses on problem solving and concept development skills. These foundational design skills are now considered critical across a variety of sectors, with many businesses seeking to apply design thinking methods. Determining how these skills can be transferred and apply design thinking methods within their organisations in a commercial setting represents a significant opportunity for those with design training.

This report outlines the findings of a project commissioned by Design Skillnet to provide a clear picture of design practice in Ireland and identify the professional development needs of the sector. The project set out to deliver three key outputs:

### 1. THE CURRENT COMPOSITION OF THE SECTOR

Identification of the size of the design industry in Ireland today – the number of people who identify as full-time professional designers, the type of organisation they work in, where they are based, and the work they carry out.

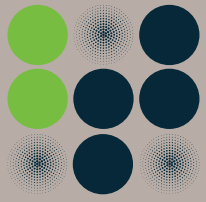
### 2. SUB-SECTOR DEFINITIONS AND CATEGORISATION

Breakdown of group by major disciplines with high role definitions.

### 3. SKILLS GAPS AND TRAINING NEEDS

Identify the skills gaps across and between different categories within the design industry.

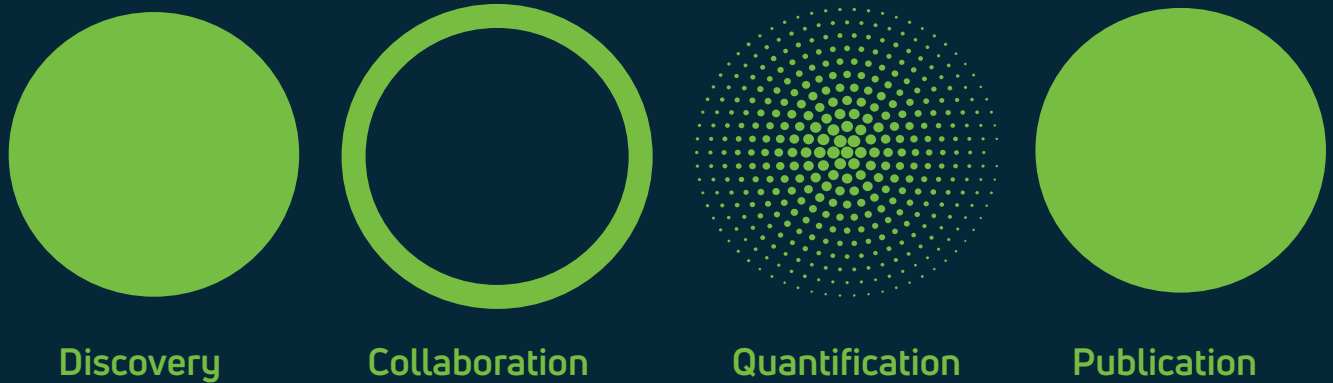
It is also important to note that this is a cross-disciplinary study, covering the major design categories.



# Research Methodology







The research methodology was designed to answer the following knowledge gaps:

1. Identify the size of the design industry in Ireland today, in terms of the number of people working in design practice, the types of sectors and organisations where they work, and the work they carry out.
2. Breakdown of group by major disciplines with high role definitions.
3. Identify the skills gaps across different categories within the design industry (what missing skills are most needed in each category).
4. Identify the skills gaps between different categories (e.g. what skills are required to transfer from agency to enterprise).
5. Establish a prioritised list of professional training and development needs for each category.

Given the objectives above, together with the changing nature of design and design practice, it was important that the approach taken was more than a standard quantitative research task. The research for the project therefore included three stages: Discovery, Collaboration, and a Quantitative Survey.

Figure 1 (above): Research Approach

The research approach was structured to ensure that key stakeholders' input was obtained upfront, and was achieved through two working sessions in the Collaboration stage. Using global and local work already done in this area, the identification of these stakeholders and the structure of the sessions were designed to build the frameworks and hypotheses to then test with quantitative research. This was used to set the parameters of the respondents to be included in the research. Industry representatives, our key stakeholders, were identified early in the process to help shape and guide the work, which was ultimately quantified by a robust quantitative survey.

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## STAGE 1: DISCOVERY

A comprehensive review of papers and reports covering the design sector was conducted to begin to frame how the sector has grown and evolved across the globe. The purpose of this work was to ensure that the collaborative work sessions, and ultimately the quantitative study, were firmly anchored in the core functions that defined this sector, and how the sector has been defined previously and internationally.

Secondary research included:

- Government publications, design-councils, industry papers were reviewed.
- CSO and Statbank databases explored for role definitions and sector quantification.
- Similar sector Irish studies were reviewed.

The discovery stage demonstrated that relatively little research existed that explored professional design practice in Ireland to date.

## STAGE 2: COLLABORATION

### Working sessions with stakeholders

Two working sessions were undertaken that represented a national footprint and provided the appropriate parameters from which the research questionnaire could be designed. Given the challenge that the Design Skillnet is facing in educating professionals working in an evolving sector, working sessions were developed with industry experts to ensure that the quantitative research would deliver maximum insight. The working sessions ensured a participative co-design of the study.

These working sessions facilitated the gathering of information from the stakeholders who knew the industry best and provided core output requirements for the study.

**1. Workshop purpose:** A process was created that provided for input from industry leads to align with the parameters of this new and evolving sector.

### 2. Workshop attendee representation:

Recruiting a wide range of professional design stakeholders for the working sessions was crucial to ensure diverse perspectives were captured. The research team and Design Skillnet collaborated to create a matrix of potential participants who would be representative of the varied and disparate types of design professional. This included diversity in terms of roles, primary type of design used, organisation type, and business sector.

Participants included stakeholders from the Design Skillnet steering group, representative bodies (such as Institute of Designers in Ireland, Institute of Creative Advertising and Design, Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland), industry groups, education institutes, recruiters and numerous industry sectors, including: medtech, tech, utilities, finance, consultancy and FMCG were invited to participate and help shape the project.

Participants spanned from SMEs to large corporations across multiple sectors. The breadth of the participant group was carefully curated across the working groups to include a wide range of individuals with differing perspectives on the sector, reducing the likelihood of 'groupthink' while enabling parameters to be placed on the project.

**3. Number and timing of workshops:** Two working sessions were held with 10 attendees per working session. Each working session was 2.5 hours long.

### 4. Workshop structure:

- Introduction and synopsis of project.
- Exercise 1: broad and extensive list of industry profiles to be included with no parameters – encourage expansion thinking.
- Exercise 2: develop/expand/refine criteria for design industry through Skillnet lens.
- Exercise 3: Mapping exercise to refine list developed in E1 against criteria developed in E2.
- Exercise 4: Categorise, cluster, and explore broad training needs.

These working sessions discussed the definition of design and the challenges faced within the sector. A framework of design in Ireland emerged from this stage which could be tested during the quantification stage.

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## STAGE 3: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

The quantification stage of this project was unusual in that the panel of respondents was to be instrumental in the survey design. Given that the main outcome from this work was to define the sector, identifying and weighting respondents was critical.

### The panel

From the discovery phase, the initial participant profile for the research was identified. Participants from existing databases affiliated with Design Skillnet and representative organisations were included, and a targeted paid social media campaign was used to broaden the participant pool to ensure representation of the greater design sector.

### Databases

The databases included Design Skillnet, the Institute of Designers in Ireland, the Institute of Creative Advertising and Design, and 100 Archive. Respondents who were both familiar and unfamiliar with Design Skillnet were asked to participate to provide optimal representation. Individuals were recruited based on skills, interests, job title/function, and location.

### LinkedIn recruitments

Due to the nature of the project, survey respondents unfamiliar and familiar with Design Skillnet were asked to participate. To access a wide range of professional designers, a paid social campaign on LinkedIn was used.

Specialist marketers were employed to activate and target the campaign. Advice from LinkedIn meant that a 'warm-up' campaign was run prior to advertising that linked directly to the survey. The warm-up campaign sent traffic to the Design Skillnet website which housed an article about the current changes and future evolution of the Design sector, and talked about the role of the research in shaping Design Skillnet's contribution to training designers.

The main campaign included over 30 creative assets<sup>2</sup>, to optimise results based on the incentives on offer, and target different types of design professionals. Target audiences were created for the different creative assets with different targeting across key design roles not covered by databases.

The targeting was carefully managed and adjusted daily by an expert team, to ensure an optimal panel representation. Text adverts were run throughout the campaign, which helped to drive 165 additional clicks to the survey.

<sup>2</sup> Creative assets are the elements e.g. artwork, copy, video, used to build creative marketing campaigns i.e. advertisements.



# The Survey Design

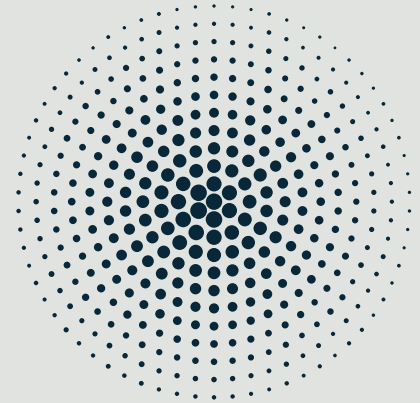
Design Skillnet and Dentsu Aegis Network created a detailed online survey. The survey was guided by findings from the collaboration and discovery stages of the research.



**Design Skillnet**



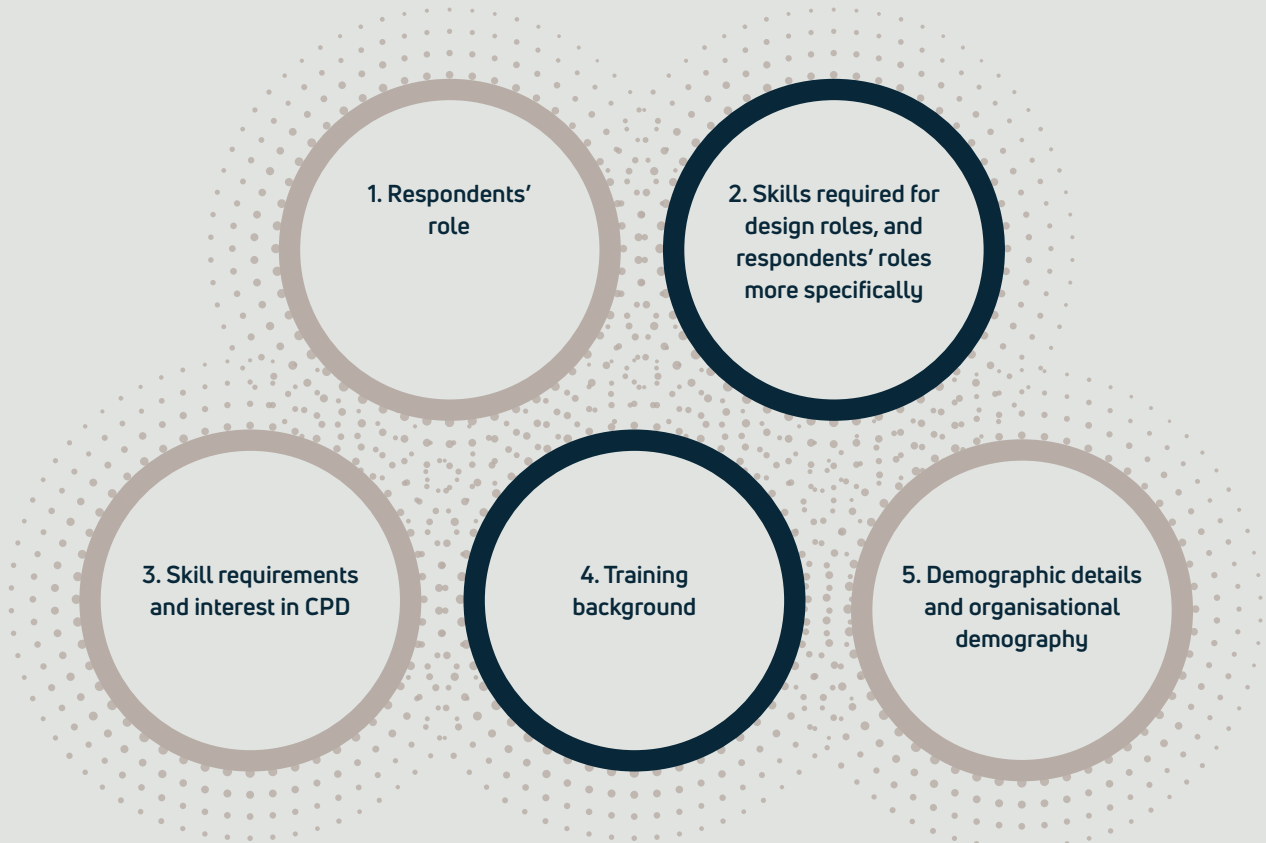
**Research Team**



**Design Skillnet  
Steering Committee**

## Design of survey

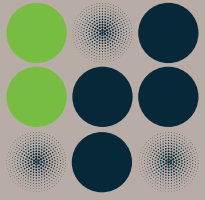
The survey comprised five key sections:





“Looking across the design landscape, it is apparent that the evolution of design means **that it is no longer just for products and services.**”





# Research Findings





Each stage of the research project delivered outcomes that helped shape the project and ultimately the research goals. The key findings have been reported below under each research stage but are by no means mutually exclusive.

## Discovery Learning

Looking across the design landscape, it is apparent that the evolution of design means that it is no longer just for products and services. Executives are using this approach to devise strategy, manage change, and drive business growth (Design Council, 2018). Realising that design can be a powerful conversion tool with the ability to turn strategy into tangible business results, companies in the healthcare, technology, finance, transportation, and entertainment sectors are leaning on and investing in optimised design strategies to support their evolution and growth. This shift means that design is now reaching beyond the aesthetic, it is about applying the principles of design to the way people work.

### No single definition or scope of the design sector

Design is not easily defined or categorised, an abundance of definitions exist while opinions differ regarding what it means to be a designer today in Ireland. This lack of a coherent definition of a sector presents a challenge to Design Skillnet in providing training. One of the key challenges for this project was to place parameters around what defines design practice in Ireland, and how that informs which roles are design roles. This definition is also one of the parameters used to quantify the design sector.

The landscape of design practice in Ireland is fragmented, given that the sector is relatively immature. There are relatively few design agencies (consultancies) and the majority are micro enterprises with less than 10 employees (IDI). Consistent with international trends, most designers are employed in-house and work in varying situations from being the only designer in an SME to working in small teams in large organisations and corporations, with many designers working as part of larger multidisciplinary teams (Park, 2019). A large cohort of designers work independently or on a contractor basis, by necessity rather than choice. Based on the qualitative research, insights can be grouped under the following headings:

- Education and Skills
- Digital Divide
- Management and Leadership
- Learning and Development Culture

While there are overlapping concerns between each of these topics, it is important to examine each of them separately.

### Education and skills

Third level design education is viewed as being 'out of sync' with market demands, resulting in a lack of talent and a skills shortage in the marketplace, a cause for concern even for recent graduates. This point was reiterated by many employers, from consultancy principals to large Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) organisations, who cannot find the talent required from Irish graduates and need to hire internationally to fill digital and highly skilled industrial design roles.

As with education, the design skills available are not meeting the demand for digital and other growth and emerging areas, for example, service design. The dearth of design skills and employable design professionals was a recurring theme from both employers and designers in working sessions. In-house and design-specific recruiters for large organisations attest to the shortage of skills and often recruit internationally to fill the available roles, reporting a growing gap between skills and role requirements.

This gap between the skills of designers and the roles in the marketplace is attributed to a combination of the lack of investment in professional development for designers and the speed with which design is evolving. One multiple award-winning design agency owner, and senior lecturer described himself as 'unemployable,' saying "I don't believe I could apply for any role in the marketplace, I'm unemployable."

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## Digital divide

The digital divide is present across the sector with many traditional consultancies struggling with digital transformation. At an elementary skills level, all agencies and designers reported that keeping up with industry software to the required standards was a challenge, particularly from a resource perspective - specifically time and money. Many consultancies have identified their skills deficits as an impediment to both productivity and competitiveness. Digital upskilling is beyond the reach of most independent designers and those working on a contract basis due to the necessary time and financial resourcing that would have to occur out of pocket.

## Management and leadership

The IDI has recognised the need to develop leadership in the sector through initiatives such as creating the Design Skillnet and the annual Design Leaders Conference. However, there is a sense that the sector is underfunded and could benefit from Management and Leadership development to support career paths for early career design professionals.

## Learning and development culture

For the most part, there is no Learning and Development culture in design consultancies and among designers in Ireland. Consultancies appear unaware of their responsibility to develop their employees and career plans are rare and inconsistent, even within consultancies and teams. Changing culture and attitudes will require investment and strategic support from Design Skillnet, design consultancies, and organisations employing design professionals. It would also demand 'buy-in' from management within larger organisations where the specialist nature of the CPD for designers needs to be communicated.

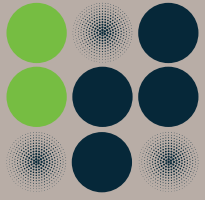
## The definition of the design sector is varied

In reviewing research papers and working practices within the sector, many descriptors of what determines design practice today were identified. As a result, defining the parameters of the sector for the report and the Skillnet, became an important focus for stages 2 and 3.

## Industry segmentation

We must acknowledge the differing segments – and therefore requirements - of design-led businesses and can classify these as follows:

|                                 | <b>Evolving</b>   | <b>Maturing</b>  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Design Agency</b>            | <p>Small design agencies of two or more people, typically these are either specialised and niche operators or very young agencies at an early stage of development. Even the biggest agencies in the world started from a small core of people with a shared vision. This cohort is an essential part of the profession. It is by its nature entrepreneurial and highly dynamic. Agencies come and go in this category.</p>   | <p>Design agencies big or small who have found their place in the market. These agencies have sufficient internal management experience and bandwidth to engage successfully with Design Skillnet. Leaders in this group fully understand the importance of CPD and the benefits of design agencies collaborating for mutual benefit.</p>  |
| <b>In-house Design Team</b>     | <p>Internal design teams who are pioneering the use of design within their parent organisations. Typically, these teams are developing their fit and purpose within the organisation and are often on a journey to demonstrate the full impact and value of design as central to corporate success. In some instances, and depending on the purpose of the parent organisation, this can be an ongoing process over a long time.</p>  | <p>Internal design teams who have already established the high added value of creativity and design within their organisations. These teams are recognised for their contribution in a multi-disciplinary world and move fluently through the parent organisation. These teams have a lot to offer to the broad conversation within the design community. Usually CPD and career development is already well established within the parent organisation so their requirements from Design Skillnet are specific and nuanced.</p> |
| <b>Non-Design Professionals</b> | <p>One of the primary benefits of Design Thinking has been to promote design methodology, creativity, and more intuitive ways of collaborating to a broader audience. A cohort of informed business professionals now understand the value of design but may not always know how to harness the methodology, language and potential of design as practised within a multi-disciplinary team. This group covers people who manage design teams or who are responsible for the output of bigger groups which include creative specialists. This is an ever expanding group and Design Skillnet has a vital role to play in informing and educating this group of leaders.</p> |  |



# Collaboration Learning



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## Emerging vs traditional design practice

A picture of design emerged through the discovery phase and working sessions which identified sub-disciplines and the types of jobs that would fit into each. The project demonstrated that there are two distinct ways in which designers now identify and work: traditional design roles, and emerging roles.

Depending on the individual's entry into their design role and their current specialisms, there were different perspectives of design sub-disciplines and future design needs. Traditional roles such as graphic design, for example, are stretching into new worlds of user-experience, research, and strategy, and so require adjunct training for designers to succeed in these new contexts.

At the same time however, emerging roles such as service design, systems design, and design strategy are becoming an essential part of the design toolkit as teams tackle increasingly complex business and technology challenges.

## Traditional design perspective

The passion and depth of expertise of stakeholders who are firmly positioned within more conventional roles meant that we saw some level of protectionist thinking. The degrees of separation between design sub-disciplines defined within this group tended to be significantly smaller and there was a requirement to create a more 'micro' approach to sub-disciplines.

Designers working in what are classified as traditional design roles are those who are firmly rooted in their design space, wedded to their title and what that entails. This can be a matter of pride in their occupation, a sense of ties to their community, and an acknowledgement that their training and expertise is domain-specific. For example, some interior designers may not see themselves within a cluster of 'built environment' designers and do not branch into similar design domains such as interior architecture. This is by no means specific to interior design, but is important in the context of segmenting disciplines.

## Emerging design perspective

Stakeholders who represent and work within some of the newer design sub-disciplines were more inclined to macro-segmentation. They were found to often group current design functions into broader categories and explore the edges of 'new' design in broader, less defined ways. Their criteria for category determination also tended more towards the use of design processes than output compared to 'traditional designers'.

The emerging design perspective is more fluid and evolving. This includes people and roles that span multiple disciplines and is common with in-house designers. One person's role might span multiple domains previously seen as multiple roles. For example, service designers who encompass skills ranging from strategic to research, visual design, and UX design skills.

## Diversity of design practice within a disparate sector

A broad array of positions which are considered professional design were identified by participants within the working sessions. In many cases, the positions identified fell into a number of design sub-disciplines, meaning roles are diverse, specialisms are not mutually exclusive, and huge diversity in activity exists. This adds a challenge since people with similar titles and skill sets within the sector can be working in sub-specialities which are seen as discrete and differentiated.

---

## Defining design practice

While defining design practice was not the primary aim of the research project, agreeing on a shared definition within the working sessions was important.

Sector representatives in the working sessions were presented with eight different definitions of what it means to be a designer (see Appendix 1). After discussion, each participant created their own definition using the ones provided, along with their own experience and sector knowledge. This resulted in an additional 17 user-generated definitions of design and the core components, processes, and actions which represent professional design practice (see Appendix 2).

Looking at the definitions in isolation demonstrated the difficulty that exists in defining, scoping, and enumerating the design sector. These were qualitatively analysed for their core themes, and the following top eight criteria emerged (Figure 2 opposite):

These eight criteria were chosen most often as the defining characteristics of designers working within the various sub sectors. Overall, criteria chosen by participants fitted into 22 different headings. These were further refined between the steering committee and the research team which resulted in a list of 15 'core skills' that people working in design might see as defining the way in which they design.

These were further tested in the quantitative survey; as evident (see figure 3), every item was seen as important by respondents. Interestingly, both overall and across nearly all sub-disciplines, problem-solving emerged as the skill that most respondents thought was core to defining design.

The eight criteria provided a sense-check for definitions and parameters to outline the project and what is meant as professional design. The following definition of professional design was adopted and led the rest of the project.

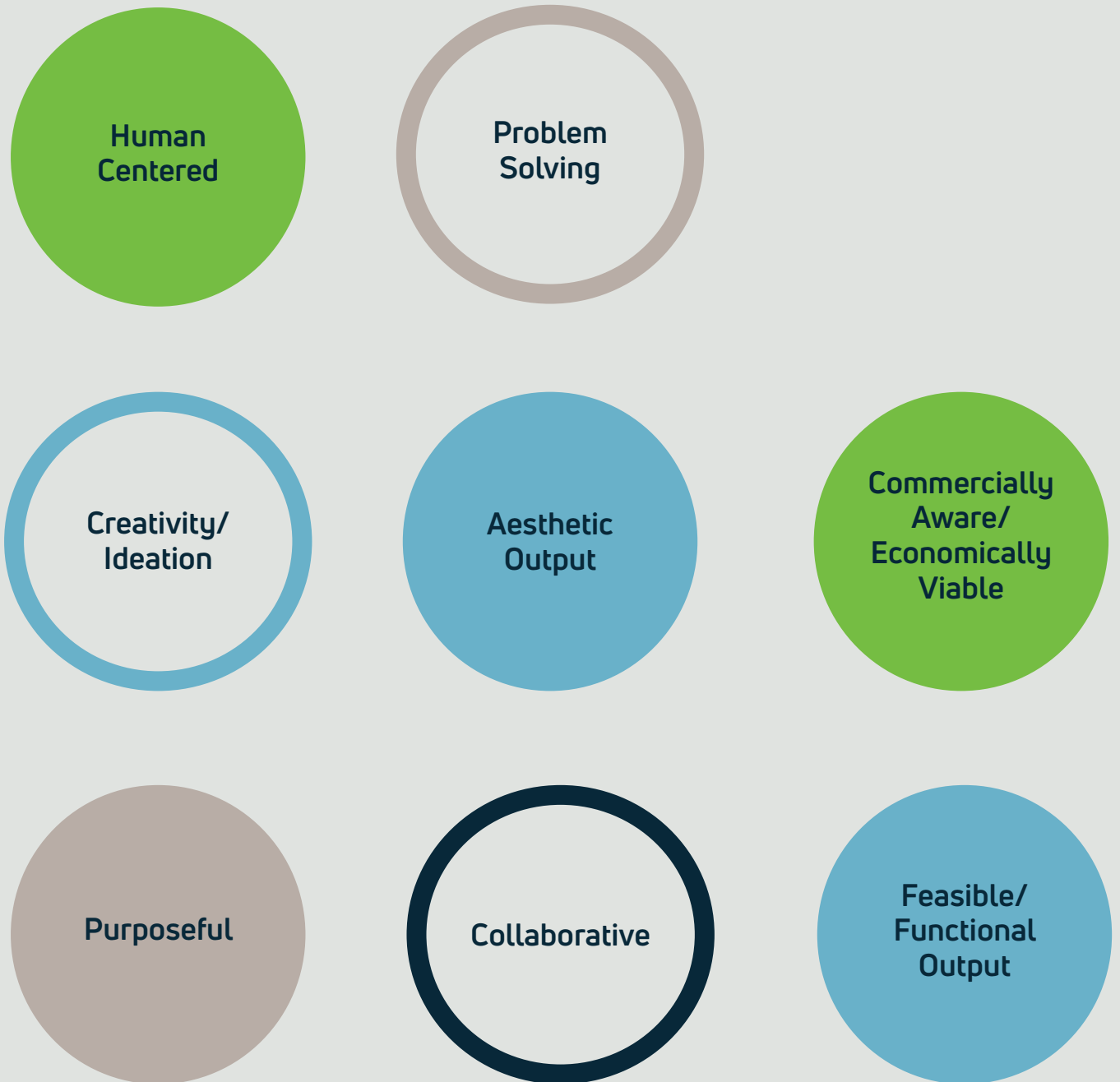


Figure 2: Eight Defining Criteria of Design

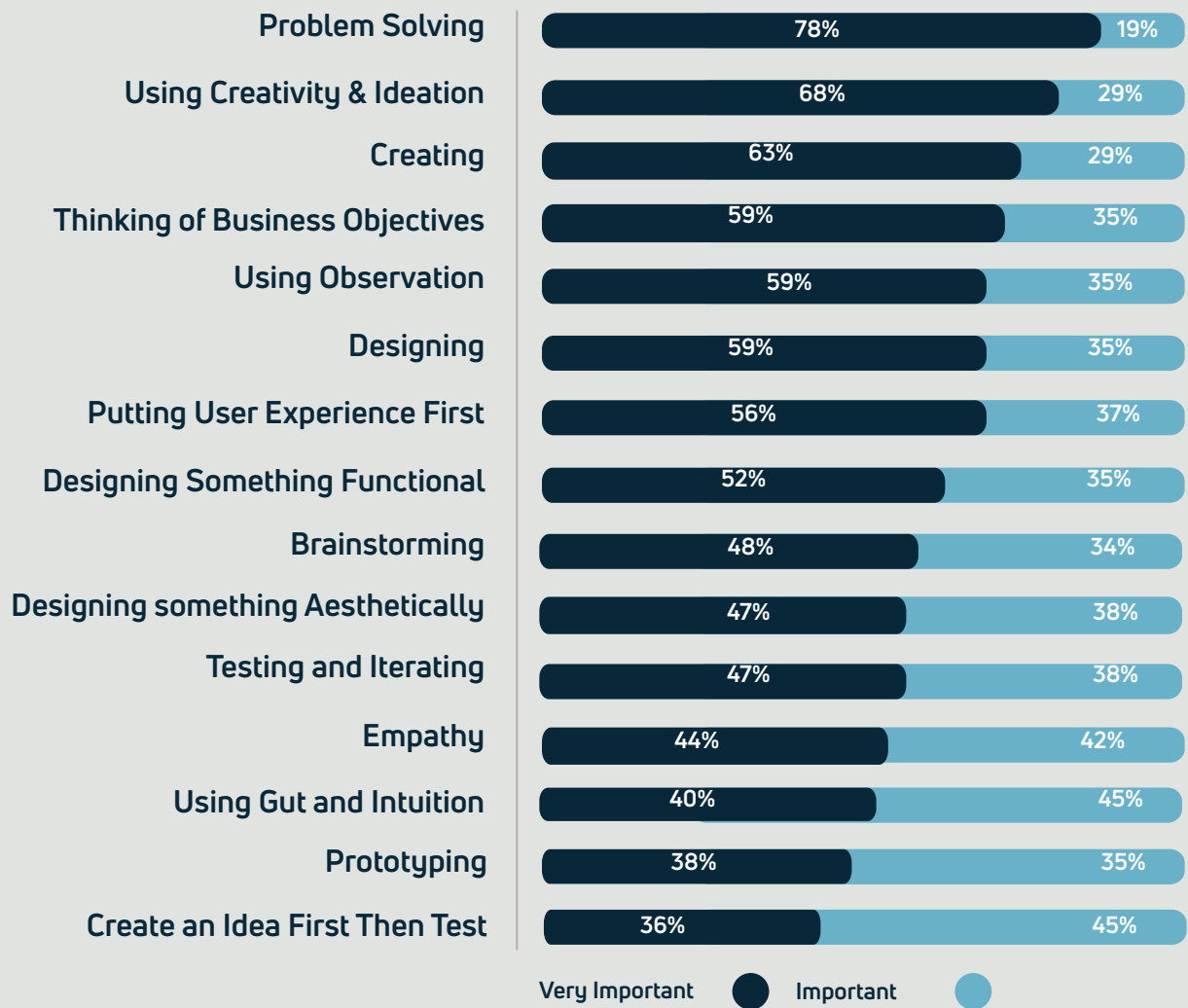


Figure 3: Importance of Design Criteria for Those Working in Design Practice





Figure 4: Design Titles (Working Session 2)

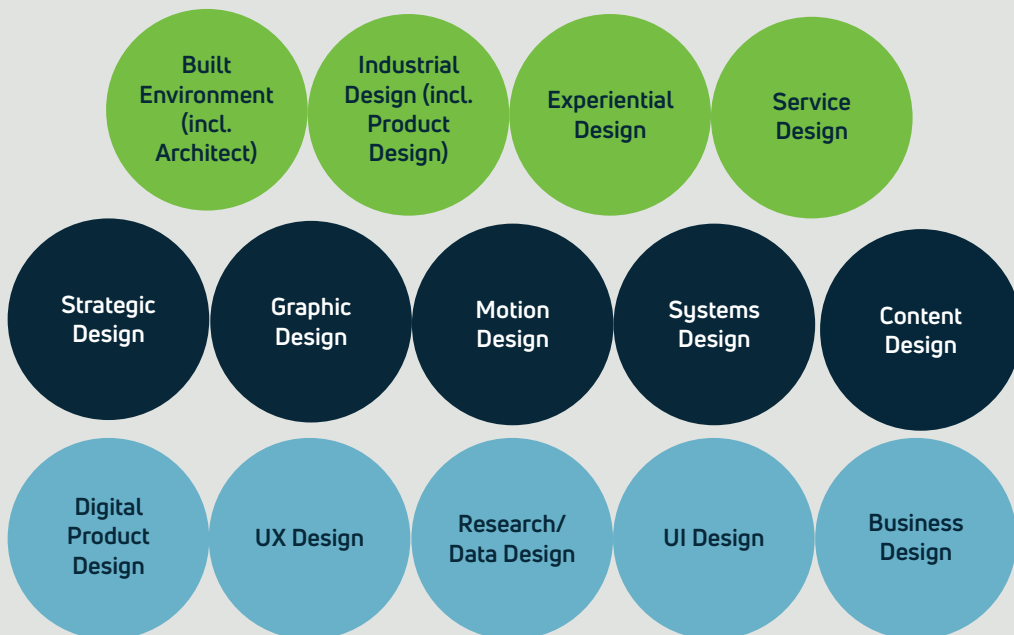


Figure 5: Sub-Disciplines of Design

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## Who is a designer?

### The complexity of labelling the role

The remit of the Design Skillnet is the Continuing Professional Development of professional designers. Along with defining design practice, working sessions were tasked with defining the roles that could be considered professional design practice. Participants in both working sessions came up with exhaustive lists of any job, occupation, or position within the design sector with which they were familiar.

The stakeholder group identified more than 200 different roles that carry out a design process and could identify with design as a profession. This included a wide array of jobs whose primary purpose is design e.g. engineers and architects, but who may not primarily identify as a designer.

Each working session group was then asked to cluster these jobs, occupations, and titles into groupings which could be considered design specialties or sub-disciplines of design. Both working session groups arrived at lists of 20+ groupings. In many cases, positions were identified which fell into several groupings, meaning the groupings identified were not mutually exclusive. This presented a challenge since people with similar titles and skill sets within the sector can be working in sub-disciplines which are discrete and differentiated. This expansive list was then clustered into 14 sub-disciplines and quantitatively tested within the survey.

### Skills needs are transforming rapidly

Due to the pace of expansion happening within the sector, the range of skills gaps is evolving at a rapid pace. The skills required to effectively deliver design practice often expand beyond any one area of formal training. As a result, designers who have had no formal design training, along with formally trained designers, have had to upskill rapidly and constantly due to technology changes. Additionally, as design thinking continues to make headway into senior and strategic roles within organisations, business and strategic skills need to be added to the designers' skillset in order to bring design practice to the fore.

### Stakeholder collaboration learnings

**DUE TO SECTOR EXPANSION SKILLS NEEDS ARE TRANSFORMING RAPIDLY:** Depending on the individual's entry into their design role and current specialisms within design, there were different perspectives on design sub-disciplines and future design needs.

**DESIGN ROLES SPAN A SPECTRUM AND SKILL GAPS DIFFER ACCORDINGLY:** As the sector evolves and develops, those who have been trained in the traditional design space and those who have entered the design space via alternative education routes will have very different CPD requirements.

**22 CRITERIA WERE IDENTIFIED AS DETERMINING THE CONCEPT OF DESIGN PRACTICE:** The collaboration phase provided some level of abridgement, but the 22 criteria demonstrate the broad and unaligned points of view across stakeholder groups.

**CONTINUOUS EVOLUTION TRAINING:** Given the pace of change and the ever-changing roles within the design sector, the training needs must be built in an agile way to ensure that training is adapting at the same pace as the sector.

**DESIGN CATEGORIES ARE COMPLEX AND NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE:** Individuals with similar titles and skill sets can be working in sub-specialities which are discrete and differentiated.



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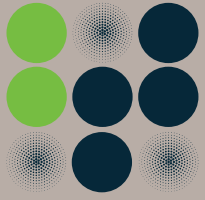
“Due to the pace of expansion happening within the sector, the range of skills gaps is evolving at a rapid pace.

**The skills required to effectively deliver design practice often expand beyond any one area of formal training.”**



“Regardless of their design discipline, the designers who provided input into this project came from a wide range of industries ranging from **graphic and visual communications, to advertising, tech, finance, and utilities.**”





# Quantitative Learnings



## Design Demography

A final sample of 334 professional designers responded to the survey. The qualified respondents represented a range of ages, job titles, company sizes, and locations across Ireland. These respondents were built and aligned against the criteria identified with the stakeholder groups. Looking across the design landscape, our inputs are based on a spectrum of working ages with just over half identifying as male (53%), 46% female, and 1% other. Looking across the age range, women working in design are younger than men.

People from a range of job levels responded to the survey, from junior specialists to CEOs and business owners. The majority of respondents were based in Dublin and were from small organisations broadly reflective of organisational demography in the country. This provides faith that a range of perspectives are captured in the results.

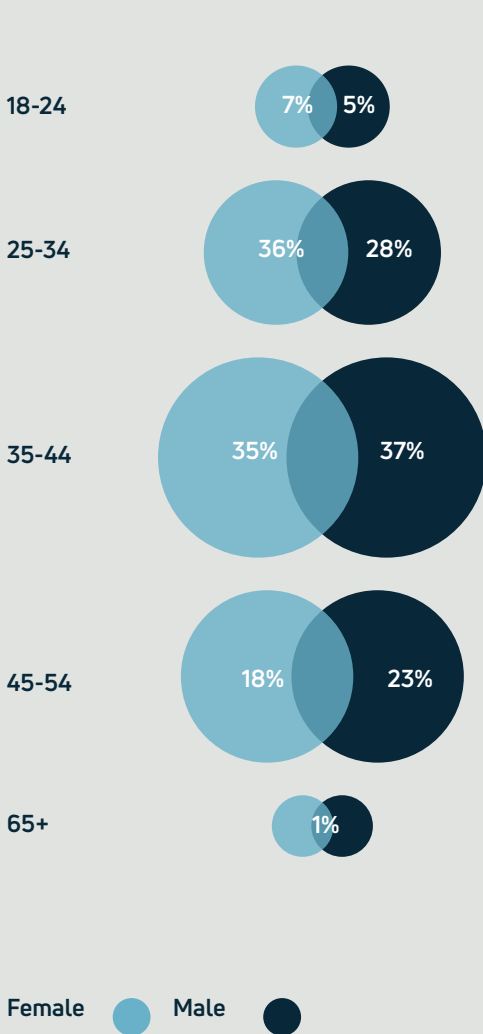


Figure 6: Gender Breakdown by Age of Respondents

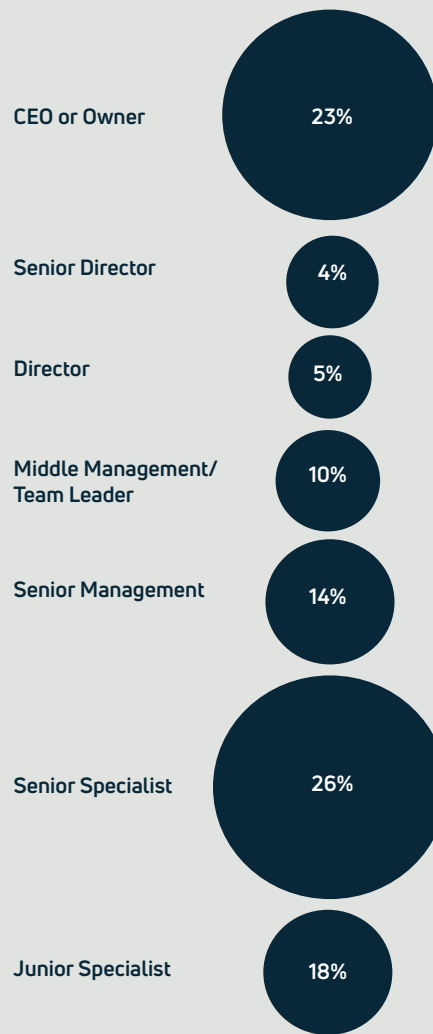


Figure 7: Job Level of Respondents

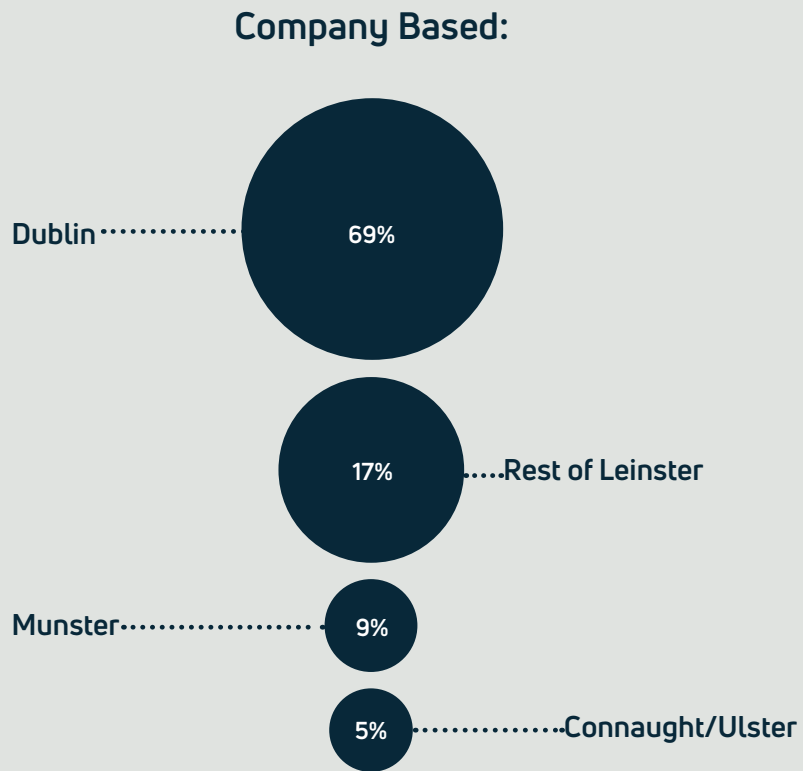


Figure 8: Location of Respondents' Organisations

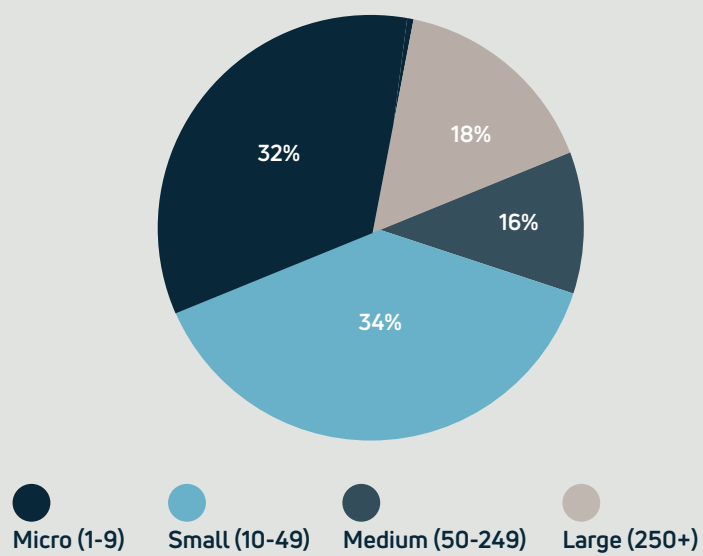


Figure 9: Respondent's Organisation Split by Organisation Size



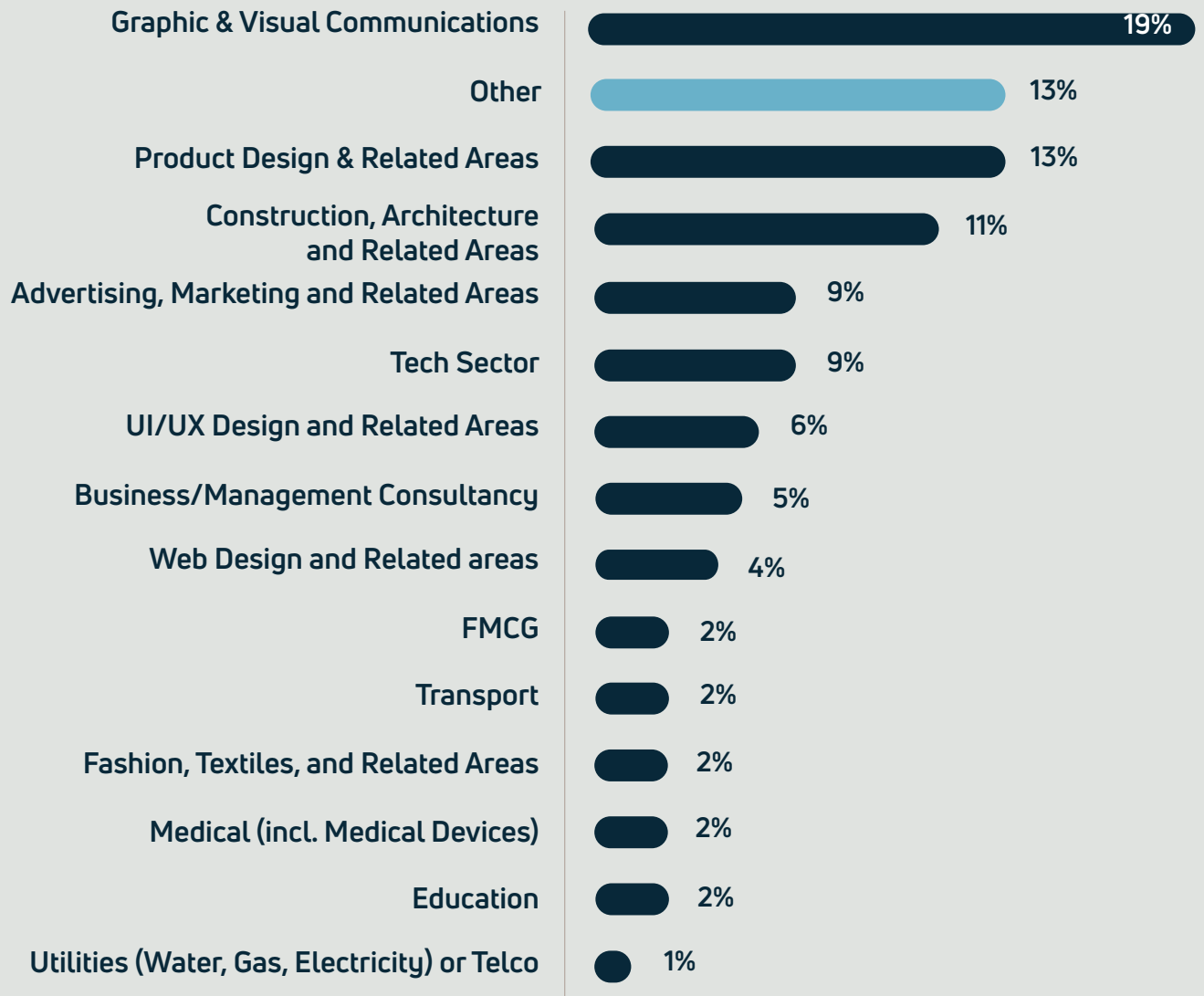


Figure 10: Sector Type of Respondents' Organisation

### Survey summary:

- 334 professional designers responded to the survey.
- 46% identified as female, 53% as male, 1% as other.
- Professionals across all levels of design practice responded – from junior specialists to company owners and CEOs.
- Two thirds of respondents (67%) work in micro or small enterprises, with the median number of designers in organisations being 8.

Regardless of their design discipline, the designers who provided input into this project came from a wide range of industries ranging from graphic and visual communications, to advertising, tech, finance, and utilities. On average, the largest companies employing designers (>250 employees) were Pharmaceuticals, FMCG<sup>3</sup>, Utilities (water, gas, electricity), or Telcos<sup>4</sup>. These were industries where designers tended to be in-house, with the average number of designers making up a very small proportion of the overall company size. In contrast, the majority of companies in graphic and visual communications were micro enterprises (1-9 employees) which tended to be design consultancies; in other words, the majority of their employees were working in design. Organisations categorised as 'Other' included those in finance, hospitality, interior design, retail, and professional services.

Each respondent was asked how many professional design roles were in their organisation based on the definition of design practice. Based on analysis of the findings, the average number across the organisations was 31.7 designers. However, as this average is skewed by large organisations comprised solely of those working as professional designers, the median<sup>5</sup> figure is a more accurate picture of the number of professional designers in represented organisations.

|         | Total | Micro<br>(1-9) | Small<br>(10-49) | Medium<br>(50-249) | Large<br>(250+) |
|---------|-------|----------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Median  | 8     | 2              | 12               | 11                 | 50              |
| Average | 31.7  | 6.4            | 17.0             | 34.3               | 103.8           |

**Table 1: Number of Design Roles in Respondent Organisations**

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## Who and where are the professional designers?

One of the challenges for Design Skillnet is establishing the job titles of professional designers. As such, participants of the survey were asked their job titles. However, little consistency emerged from the working sessions, so the 14 sub-disciplines of design were used to typify respondents.

Respondents were asked which of the design sub-disciplines were used within their current roles. Since the sub-disciplines identified by key stakeholders were not mutually exclusive, it was expected that there would be a crossover between the sub-disciplines used by respondents.

## Designers no Longer Work Exclusively within Design Teams

Respondents demonstrated that rather than design types being mutually exclusive, many roles are multi-faceted, working across a variety of sub-disciplines. Despite existing in specialised areas of professional design, many designers have skills which encompass numerous sub-disciplines. Graphic design remains the largest skillset (41%), followed by strategic design (31%). However, newer sub-disciplines such as UX design (30%) and UI design (25%) are also being used by a significant number of respondents.

Looking at the intersection between the types of design, the most common interactions between design sub-disciplines are depicted in Figure 12. Graphic design is at an intersection between traditional design roles (motion design, content) as well as UX/UI, and experiential, service, and strategic design. The sub-group “industrial design” was the most distinct of all the clusters with “graphic designers” more likely to expand their design skills into other areas. However, no type of design was seen as mutually exclusive, with modern designers drawing from a variety of design sub-disciplines.

## Building the panel

As mentioned in the methodology section, the research approach included a fluid and agile LinkedIn element given the inherent difficulty in identifying designers. Working with one of the top programmatic firms, iProspect, and LinkedIn directly, the role identification and broad remit of design meant that the results of this element of the research were telling. The campaign included clear communications regarding the roles considered as design, with over 1.6 million impressions delivered from the campaign, translating into 205,101 video views, and 2,525 click throughs. However, only a fraction then passed the design role parameters outlined for this project by the expert collaborators.

The growth and change in professional design means that designers need to be proficient across multiple skill sets, and respondents appear to be already addressing those needs. However, across all titles and design sub-disciplines, a similar skill set was seen to be important – with problem solving, creativity and ideation, and research driven design core across sub-disciplines of design.

<sup>3</sup> Fast-moving consumer goods

<sup>4</sup> Telecommunications company

<sup>5</sup> Median = ‘middle’ value; the one separating the higher half from the lower half

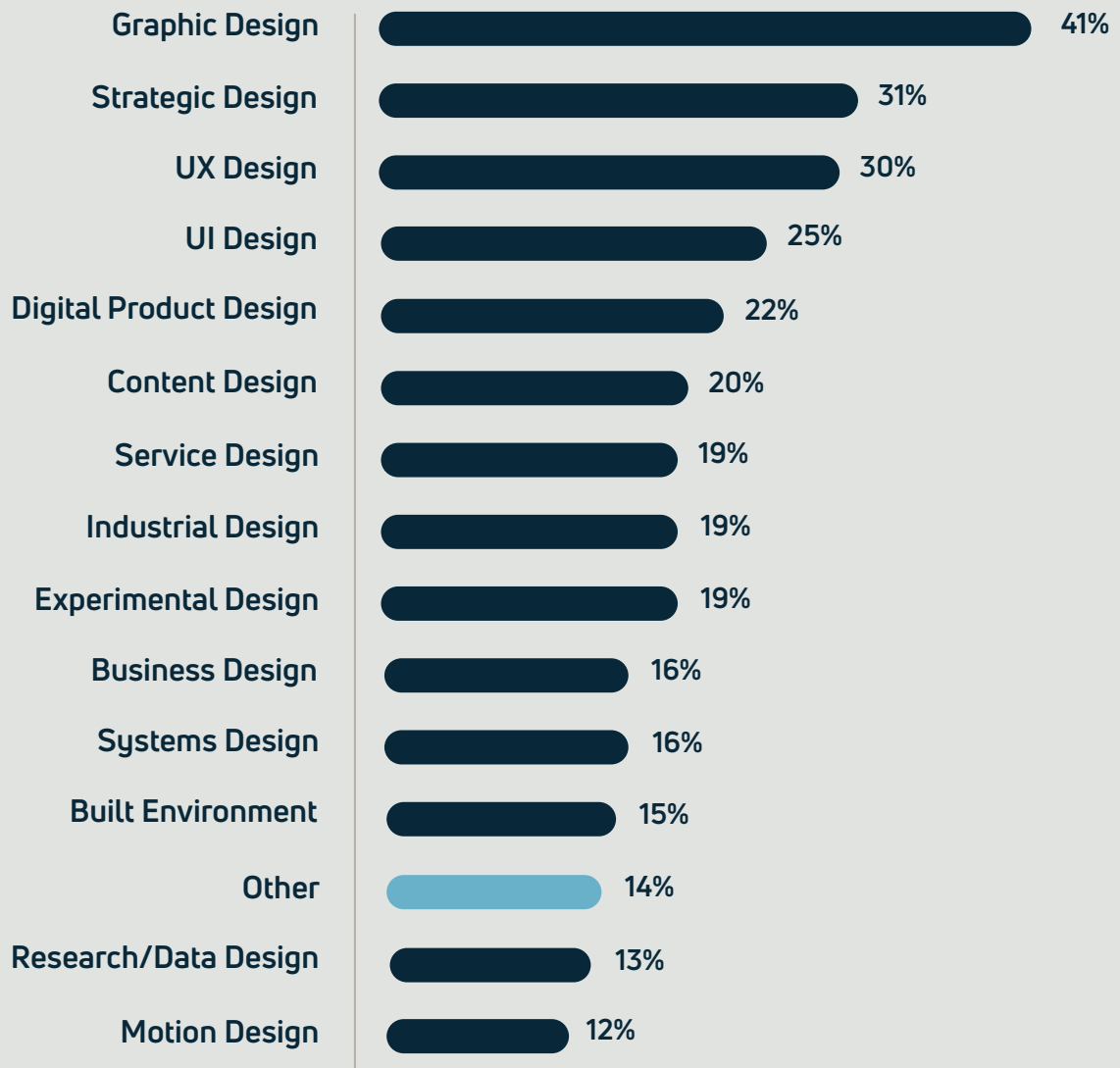
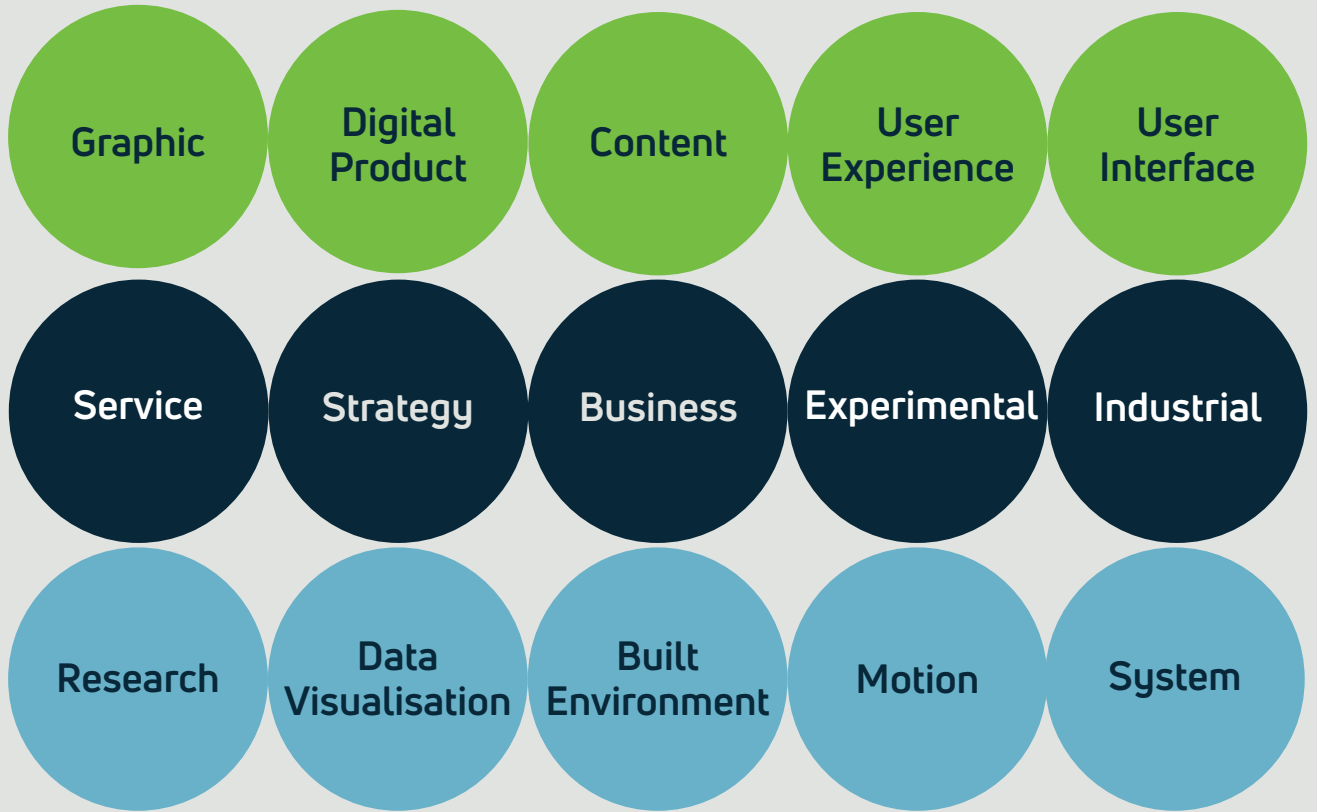


Figure 11: Which of the Following Types of Design Best Describes Your Role? (Tick All That Apply).



● Most frequent    
 ● Less frequent    
 ● Least frequent

Figure 12: Most Frequent Combinations of Design Best Describing Respondents' Roles

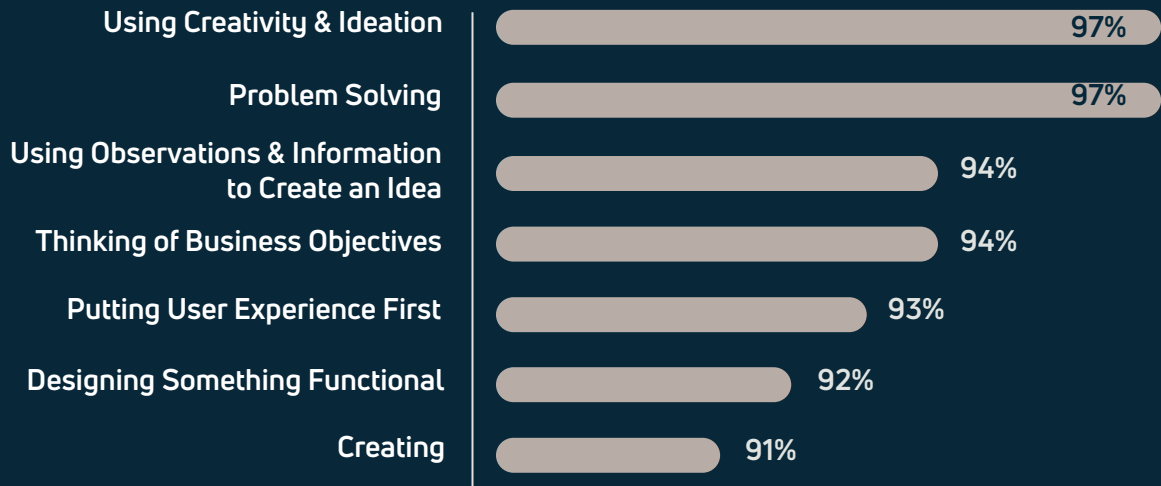


Figure 13: Top Skills Regarded as Important or Very Important to Respondents' Jobs (More Than One Answer Possible).

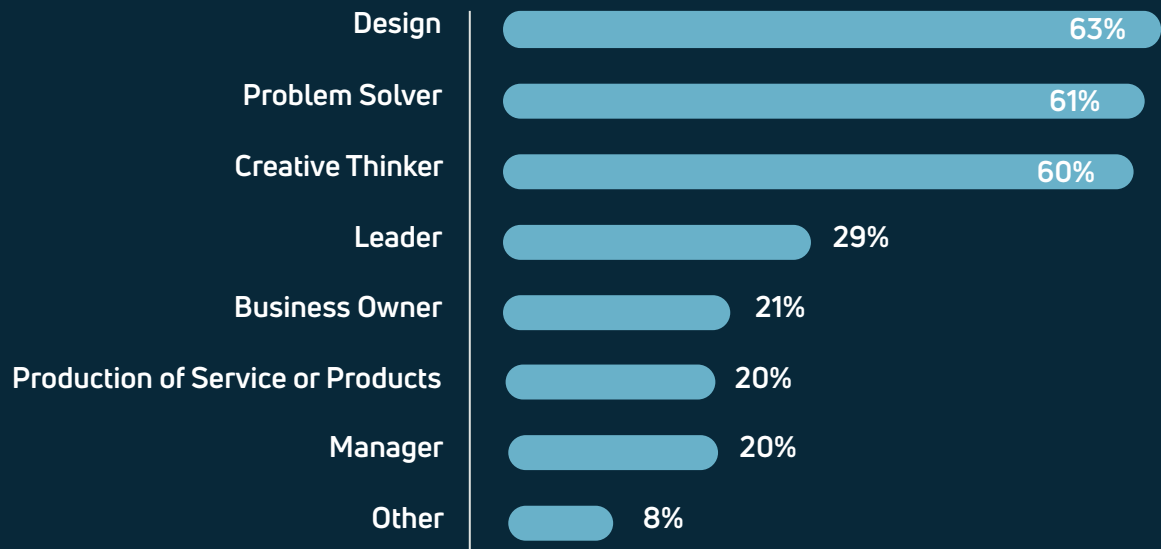


Figure 14: Regardless of Your Title, Which of the Following Descriptors Do You Most Identify With as Describing What You Do? (Tick All That Apply).

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## How do Designers Professionally Identify?

The complexity of framing design practice was demonstrated by the cross-over of roles and sub-disciplines that comprise design. Beyond the challenge of which roles are included in professional design is the associated yet distinct challenge of those whose roles are not primarily design-centered.

While all respondents fell within the above-mentioned design practice description, only two thirds primarily identified as a designer. Additionally, most of those who identified as designers also described themselves as creative thinkers, problem solvers, leaders, business owners, service/product producers, and managers.

Over one third of respondents to the survey did not identify their role as a designer. These respondents are the tip of what could be seen as a design 'iceberg' with the challenge being to connect with those hidden from the support Design Skillnet can offer. Although the survey had extensive reach, and was promoted by partner organisations, it did not translate into engagement.

## Quantifying the Sector

All of the above challenges (defining design practice, sub-disciplines of design, and the roles that can be considered professional design) contribute to issues in quantifying the number of professional designers working within Ireland. Due to the evolution of design as a discipline, as well as the ever-increasing importance of design within diverse businesses and organisations, quantifying the sector is challenging. There are many working within the design sector whose primary role is no longer design. While at the same time there are now traditionally trained designers, doing traditional design roles, within organisations that span from technology to utilities to finance. Looking across respondents and the sector, it is estimated that there are close to 37,500 professionals in Ireland working in roles that could be considered

professional design. This is approximate since there are many professionals whose core roles are design-centred but do not consider their role to be "Design." These may include design agency owners, design managers and account roles among others.

(To get an approximate figure of the number of designers working both in design departments within non-design businesses and those working in design consultancies, we had to triangulate our data with other data sources – methodology included in Appendix 3).



There are close to  
**37,500**  
professionals  
in Ireland working in  
roles of professional  
design.

## Stage 3 Findings

- Professional designers are not an easily classified group, in fact, job titles are less of an indicator of role than what the job entails – while a third of respondents would not have described their job as primarily design.
- The 14 sub-disciplines of design are the best way to classify professional designers despite there being cross-over in the skills between the disciplines.
- Professional designers are now often expected to span multiple disciplines with graphic design a catch-all job title which can include any or all design skills.
- Core skills such as problem solving, creativity and ideation, and research-driven design are crucial across sub-disciplines.
- Using a combination of working session outputs and CSO data, there are approximately 37,500 professionals in Ireland working in roles that could be considered professional design.

## Ways of working

Most professional designers are working full time (92%), with approximately one in six (17%) working in organisations that offer flexitime for full-time positions, with the balance working a standard full-time role.

Those who are engaged in middle management are most likely to work a standard full-time role. Just over half (55%) of respondents manage or lead a team, but team sizes tend to be small. Many people working in design are social, open to both working in teams as well as alone. Just under a quarter would always like to work in a team (23%) while an additional 70% do not mind working in a team or alone. This may reflect the realities of the modern workplace and the evolution of the role of design within organisations. However, 21% of the general population prefer to work alone rather

than as part of a team<sup>6</sup>, indicating that designers are embracing these multi-disciplinary teams and roles more than the average employee. The most valued environments for those working within design were 'highly collaborative and agile' (34%) followed by those environments exhibiting 'trust and transparency' (17%).



**92%**  
of professional designers  
work full time

<sup>6</sup> Kantar TGI 2019 data



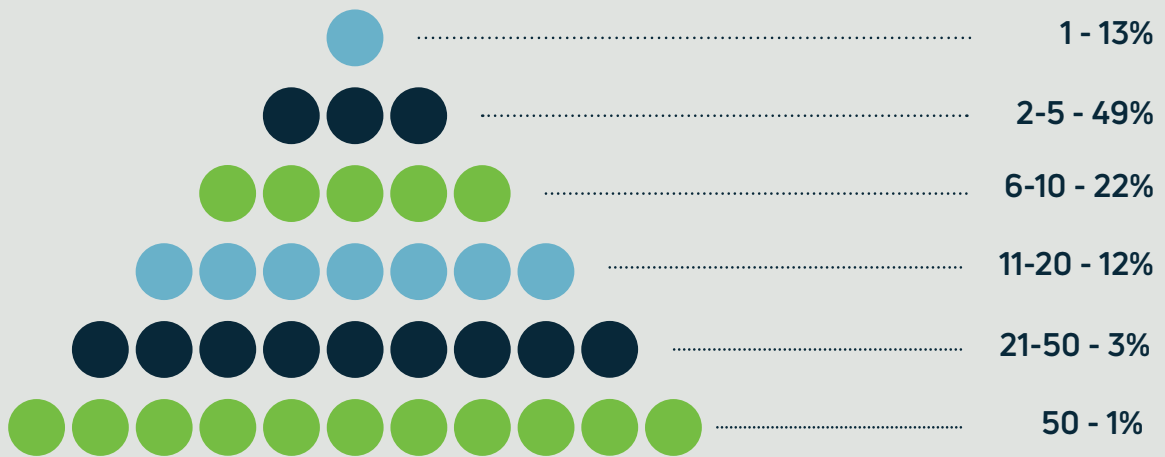


Figure 15: Breakdown of Size of Teams Managed/Led by Designers

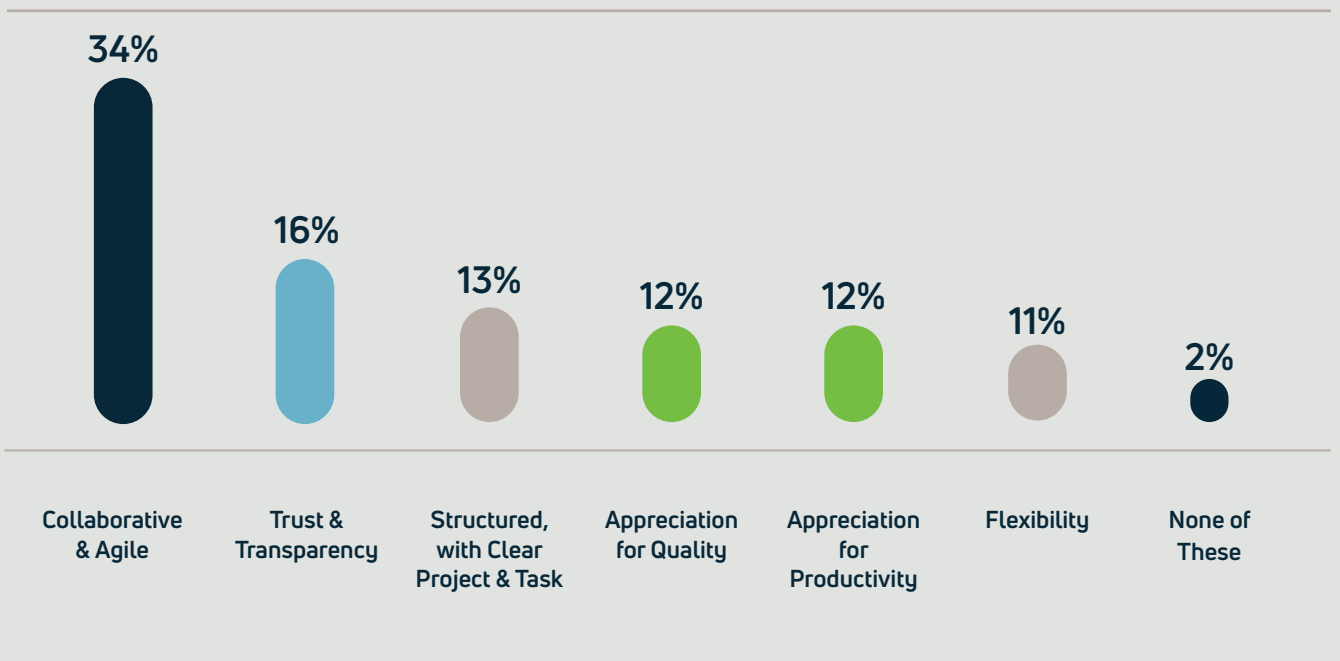


Figure 16: Which of the Following Statements Best Describes the Work Environment or Culture in Which you are Most Productive and Happy?

## Working in Design

- Most professional designers work full time, with less than one in five having roles in organisations which offer flexible working options.
- Reflecting the range of job levels surveyed, approximately half of respondents manage teams. The majority of these teams are small (84% of teams have fewer than 10 people), reflective of the median numbers of designers in surveyed organisations.
- Professional designers enjoy collaborative environments, with most respondents highly engaged in their roles.

## Highly engaged

89% of those working in design roles are highly engaged in their work. There is a passion for work and design beyond working for a salary. The majority said that they would continue to do many (73%) or all (16%) aspects of their current role for pleasure, even if they were not paid. This contrasts with workers in general, with 27% of people saying that they only go to work for the money, and only 26% disagreeing with the statement<sup>7</sup>. This engagement of design professionals is seen through the level of motivation displayed by frequent upskilling, the desire to be future skills ready, and the interest in a range of training.

<sup>7</sup> Kantar TGI 2019 data

## Pathways into design

There are two discrete entry points into Design Practice:

1. **Traditionally trained designers**
2. **People who are in design roles, or as managers of designers, who have trained in alternative disciplines**

Currently, a wide range of university courses exist for people to enter design careers across the spectrum of design roles. However, as with many university courses, not all those who qualify in design enter it as a profession, while many others arrive to design-centric disciplines or companies through other pathways. This was reflected in the wide range of formal education pathways taken by respondents into design; from graphic design and visual communication, to engineering, architecture, advertising, business, and social science. Very few had not completed formal tertiary education.

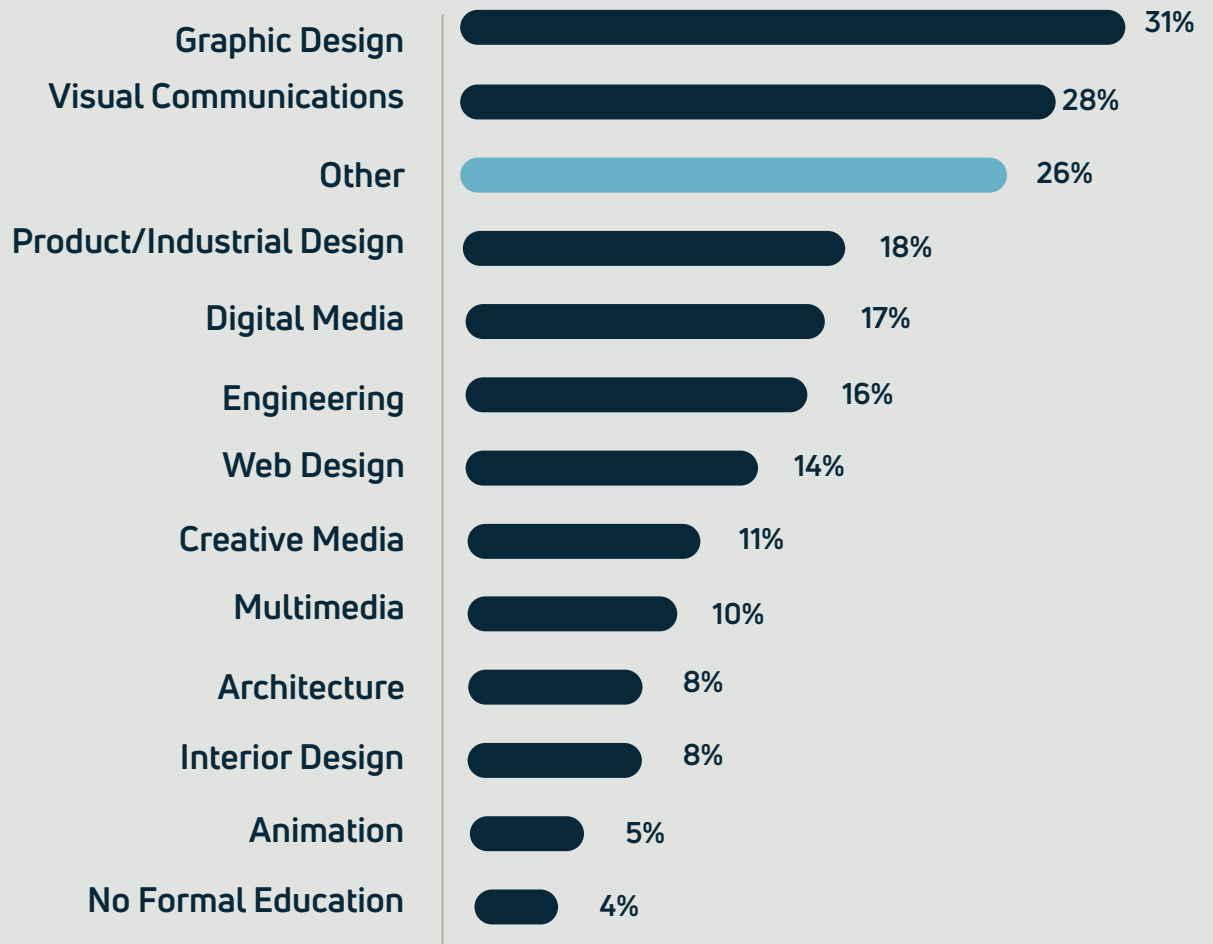


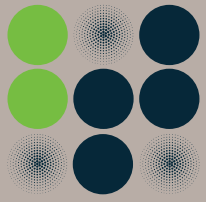
Figure 17: Education and Skills Background (More Than One Answer Possible).



“The reach of design and design methods places **an impetus on designers to continuously upskill.**”







# Skill Gaps, Training Needs and CPD



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## Current Provision of Training

The reach of design and design methods places an impetus on designers to continuously upskill; while the placement of designers in more traditional workspaces means that the interest in training is often centred around upskilling in management, leadership, and other key business skills.

Skillnet Ireland has acknowledged these CPD challenges by setting up Skillnet Business Networks across the country to ensure skills needs are met for working professionals in a rapidly shifting and evolving economy. Design Skillnet is in a period of rapid growth to meet the needs of designers in practice, and currently offers numerous links and training initiatives for professional designers – from management and business development, to leadership and talent development in teams, as well as digital upskilling.

## Upskilling as a Constant

By its nature, design involves curiosity and creativity and this was reflected by the respondents. The desire to solve problems and use creativity and ideation ties in with the need to understand new methods and technologies, and constantly upskill. Regardless of career stage, role, or size of company, those working within the design sector were regularly involved in training and upskilling; yet the desire for training was not limited by the level of training recently completed.

Almost all respondents had the opportunity (85%) or desire (99%) to complete paid-for training. Across company sizes and industries, the vast majority of those working in design have completed both in-person and online training in the last five years. What is most noticeable is that nearly three quarters (70%)

have asked for training in the last year, while half (49%) have completed training in the last year.

Over two thirds are actively seeking training, with only a quarter 'sometimes' or 'never' being given the training they ask for. Those in medium or large enterprises are more likely to have asked for training – but slightly less likely to always receive it when they ask.

In addition to the formal work-funded training, 85% of the respondents said that they are 'always' upskilling informally, while 82% said that they feel they have gaps in the skills they need to progress in their career.

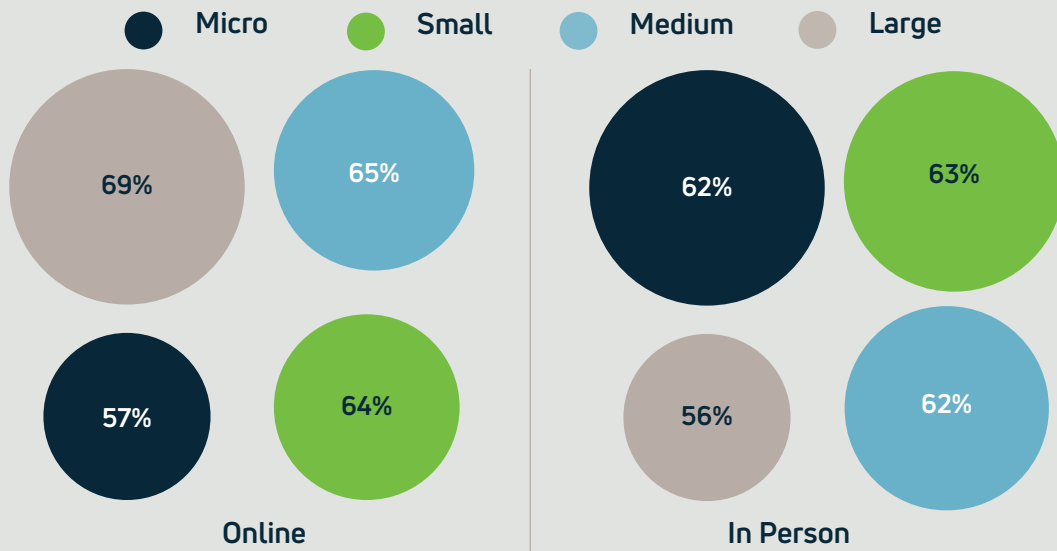


Figure 18: Completed Work Funded Training in the Last Two Years

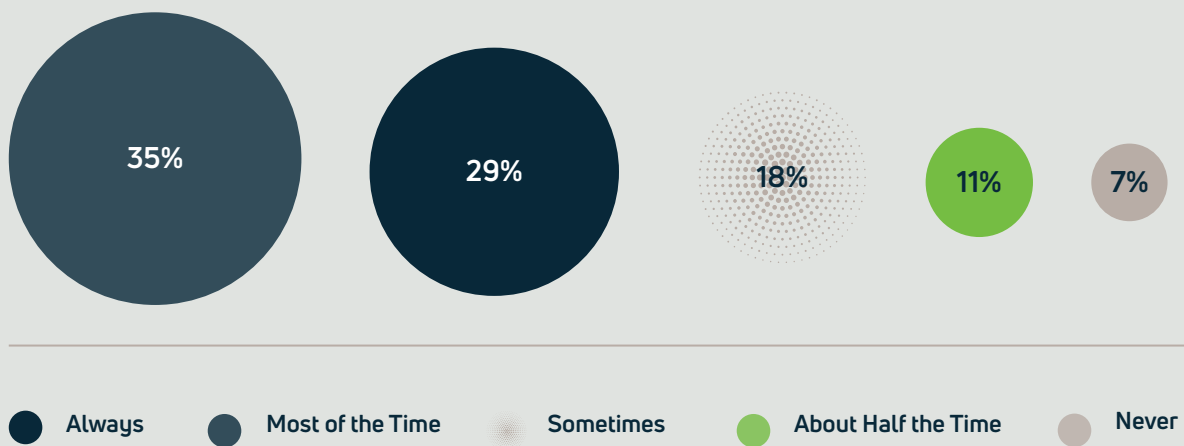


Figure 19: Given Training When Asked



Feel adequately resourced to carry out current role

61%

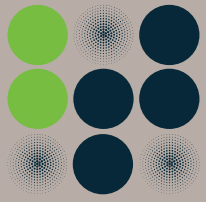
Have skill gaps to progress career

82%

Always upskilling informally

85%

Figure 20 Current Skills Gaps and Training Needs



# Future CPD Needs



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Across the two working sessions, the stakeholders were asked to identify their own training needs, their employees' training needs and general skills gaps within the sector. A group of nine thematic areas were identified across two career levels and the sector more broadly, while an extensive list of skills training was also created. These training needs were further tested during the quantification stage and a clear need for leadership and business development training was evident.

Thinking longer term, careers within all sectors will need to shift, due to changes in technology and the evolution of working life based on longer life expectancies and later retirements.

For design, the interest in specific skills reflects the current shift in technology and new skills gaps within the sector. One third of respondents were interested in designing for Artificial Intelligence (AI), and over one quarter in design for Virtual Reality/Alternative Reality/Extended Reality. Long-term interest in specific design specialities is likely to shift and evolve as new skills gaps and 'hot topics' emerge within the design space.

### **Three main types of CPD have been identified as follows:**

- 1. Current skills gaps and training needs** - an immediate need for upskilling and/or training to meet the needs in a current role.
- 2. Skills gaps and/or training needs required for career progression** - a need for training and/or upskilling in the near future to enable someone to move forward in their career and progress along a successful career trajectory.
- 3. Skills gaps and/or training needs required to respond to changes in the design sector** - these are often less concrete and may emerge due to technological disruption, innovation, or changes in best practice. Often these are less hard to predict but are the most

important to ensure that people can remain in the workforce throughout the full trajectory of their career. Current changes to the design profession include the use of 3D, digital design, and the increased influence of AI and machine-learning in the world of work. The different ways in which professional designers enter their careers frames the pathways they take, and the types of training they desire.

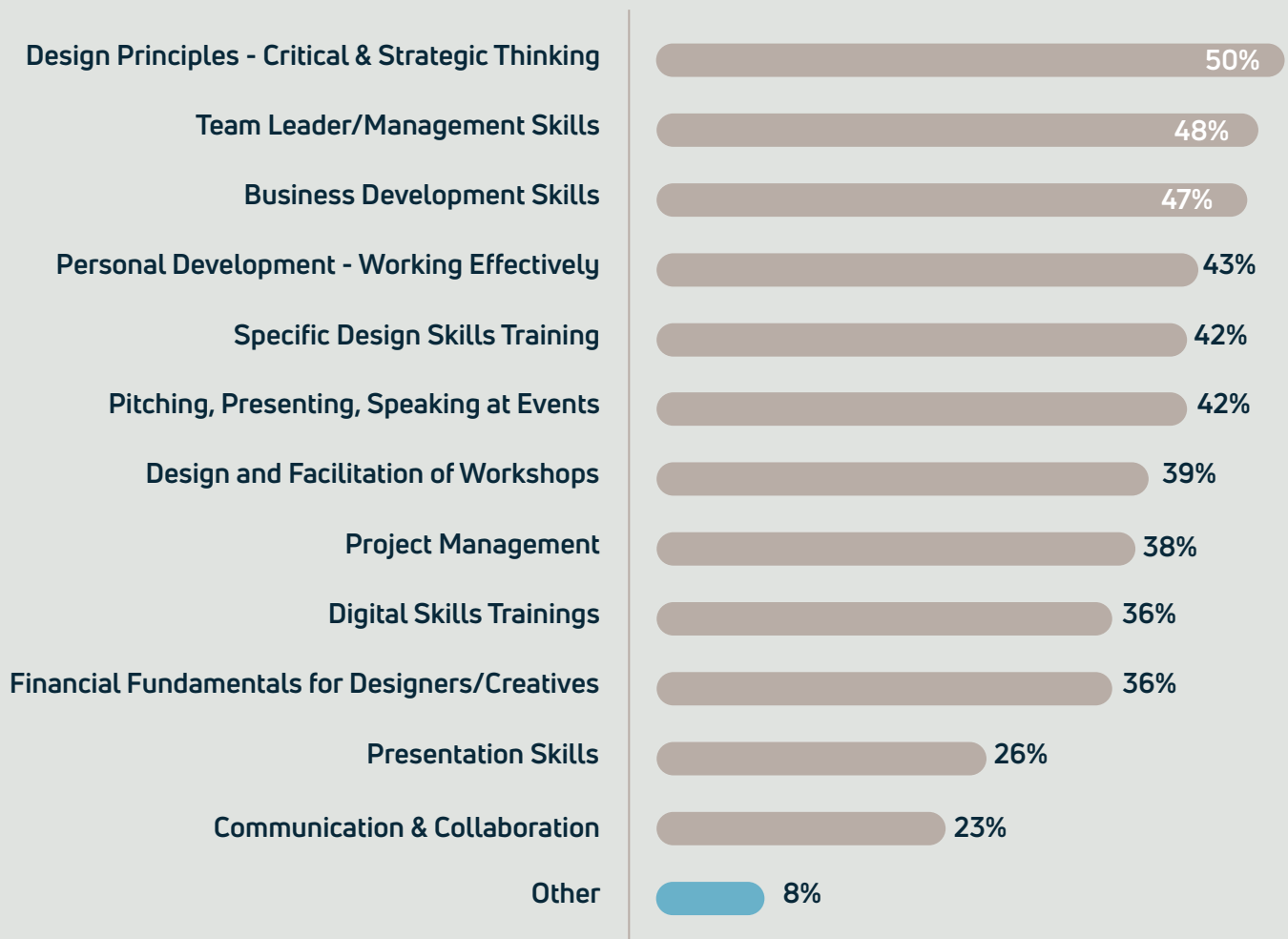
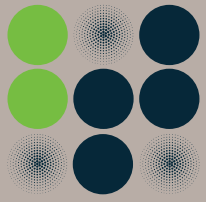


Figure 21: Ranking of Desired Training (More Than One Answer Possible).

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## Upskilling and CPD

- Many professional designers are responding to their evolving roles and the development of the design sector in an engaged future-focused way by continuously looking for both formal and informal ways to upskill.
- Despite many of the professional designers surveyed having engaged in training in the last two years, they identify personal skills gaps and training needs both for their current roles and the way they see their sector evolving into the future.
- The level of engagement in and need for training demonstrates the crucial role that Design Skillnet has in equipping design professionals for the future.



# Conclusions



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Design and professional design practice has rapidly evolved and continues to change shape. This report goes some way towards understanding the demography of professional designers as well as their new ways of working.

The evolution of design roles from consultancies to broader spectrums of design within larger organisations provides challenges for training, but also opportunities for the sector. It is clear that design is a constantly changing space, and developing the right training is imperative for the development of the sector. It is a complex and expansive practice area, but one that is crucial to the success of almost every business sector.

It is estimated that of the 37,500 designers working in Ireland as many as 25,000 will need upskilling and CPD to support their careers so they can upskill and retrain in emerging skills required by employers. Upskilling is a constant for designers and they report that they engage with training throughout their careers. Design is a complex and expansive practice area, but one that can be crucial to the success of almost any business.

## Emerging Design Practice

The picture of design practice (identified through the discovery phase) illustrated the meshing of traditional and emerging verticals, making it clear that the emerging perspective is more fluid and evolving, and includes people and roles that can span multiple design disciplines.

From a workforce development and future skills needs perspective, there is a challenge as traditional roles are stretching into new worlds of commerce, operations, and strategy, requiring adjunct training for designers to succeed in these new contexts. In the same way, other parallel disciplines increasingly related to design such as services, experience design, and research are embracing design methodology and principles. In doing so, they are evolving for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

## Complexity of Need

As the sector evolves and develops, a clear split emerges between those who have been trained in the traditional design space and those who have entered the design space via alternative education routes. These distinct groups will have very different CPD requirements.

The differing pathways into design means that the role of Design Skillnet is complex. It caters both for those in the design profession who require upskilling in new technologies and skill sets, and for those without a core design background leading design teams or working in design organisations who require upskilling in basic design principles.

In addition, some of those in design practice need training outside of their discipline, in business skills and for leadership and management roles.

The evolution of design roles from consultancies to broader spectrums of design within larger organisations provides challenges for training, but also opportunities for the design sector. It is clear from this project that business skills, strategic thinking, and management are very much within the role and remit of professional designers - a CPD space that Design Skillnet are working towards filling.

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## Demand for designers and design skills

As Design Practice evolves at a pace, it is clear that there are considerable design skills gaps in Ireland at all levels from junior designers to leadership roles. The situation is compounded by the lack of career support, and a CPD framework for design professionals is necessary for them to keep pace with employment and economic demands.

As the number of people employed in the design sector (both in-house and agency) grows at three times the pace of the national average job generation, it is becoming clear that designers don't have the necessary skills to take up the increased demand for leadership positions.

Design roles have doubled in the past five years, from around 23,000 in 2014 to 44,000 in 2019. By 2025 this number is expected increase to within in the region of 65,000 to 70,000. With only around 1,300 graduates a year, Ireland is heading for a significant shortage of designers.

While Design Skillnet has gone some way towards identifying CPD requirements and delivering them, it has also served to demonstrate the level of demand. There is a long way to go to narrow the gap resulting from the compounded effect of the combination of lack of investment historically and the pace of evolution of design.

The research confirmed that Design Skillnet is meeting the needs of design professionals whose roles are overtly design focused. It does however also raise questions that need further consideration: How can the broader group who also use design be accessed and their CPD needs addressed? How can a new generation of highly aware professionals who have (sometimes unconsciously)

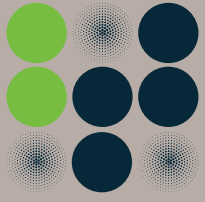
picked up design tools and methodology, and who are successfully using design as a practical effective process in their everyday work, be supported? It is important that we establish our relevance to this group – our present and future colleagues and clients. It is also vital that the Design Skillnet plays its role in helping this evolving sector to continue to add value to the Irish economy, by ensuring that all those who practice design have access to useful and growth-oriented skills.





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“With only 1,300 graduates a year, Ireland is heading for a significant shortage of designers.”



# Recommendations and Closing the Gap



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It is estimated that of the 37,500 designers working in Ireland, as many as 25,000 will need upskilling and CPD to support their careers so they can retrain in emerging skills required by employers and remain employable.

There is a clear need from industry and an appetite from designers for relevant training that addresses the skills gaps identified in this report. This gap is a significant limiting factor in career progression for designers and recruitment options for organisations, who often need to look abroad to address their needs. We believe that Design Skillnet, supported by the IDI and the Skillnet Ireland parent organisation, are well positioned to address these needs and capitalise on this opportunity.

Doing so is not without its challenges. One of those identified that runs throughout this report is that the sector is inherently fragmented by nature. This reflects the development and growth across enterprises and organisations of all types. In order to create relevant offerings across the industry, Design Skillnet proposes to address distinct segments of the profession (market) according to their different needs. These segments are:

- Evolving design agencies – often small, early-stage agencies that need support to grow their team and organisation.
- Maturing design agencies – established agencies that need support to stay competitive.
- Evolving in-house design teams – often small teams within organisations who need support in demonstrating the value and potential impact that design can offer.

- Maturing in-house design teams – established teams within organisations that often have sophisticated internal CPD capabilities but require support in specialised areas.
- Non designer professionals - Typically practitioners of design methodologies from other professions, they often work closely with designers and are willing adopters of design training.

The recommendations on the next page form the start of a framework that will inform the Design Skillnet strategy and roadmap of activity for the next 12-18 months.

# Recommendations

| Finding   | Recommendation  | Action   |
|---|---|--|
| <p>The sector is inherently fragmented, which poses a communication challenge and has resulted in low engagement of designers with professional design bodies.</p>  | <p>Create targeted engagement strategies for each of the identified industry segments.</p>  | <p>IDI, as the professional representative body of designers in Ireland, to lead and develop an action and engagement strategy for each segment.</p>   |
| <p>In several segments, career development is not fully understood or facilitated. There is a need for clear career pathways and structures for individuals, for evolving design teams, employers, HR, and recruiters.</p>                                | <p>Communicate the benefits of active career development for both employers and designers.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engage employers in the relevant segments on career pathways and structures.</li> <li>2. Educate and empower individuals to take control of their career.</li> </ol> | <p>As per the <b>Together for Design</b> recommendations, Design Skillnet to research and develop a career pathways and competency framework, recognising the cross-discipline movement of designers. Design Skillnet to lead in developing a communications strategy targeted at individual learners.</p> |
| <p>Relative to other professions, there is a low Learning &amp; Development culture among designers – which is currently somewhat unstructured and ad-hoc.</p>  | <p>Design an education drive to establish an L&amp;D Culture supported by a CPD framework.</p>  | <p>IDI to coordinate with partner organisations and education providers to promote an L&amp;D culture.</p>   |
| <p>Design has a proven ability to create impact and generate value in business. The sector has been poor at communicating this — internally and externally. The design profession needs to communicate the value of design within a business context.</p> | <p>This is a critical point for design professionals, and a two-pronged approach is recommended to communicate the full business value of design.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Educate the profession.</li> <li>2. Educate the clients.</li> </ol>   | <p>IDI to work with Design Skillnet, supported by Skillnet Ireland, to develop a targeted plan that communicates the full business value of design.</p>  |
| <p>Some evolving design agencies are struggling to stay relevant and competitive in the face of rapid change across the industry.</p>   | <p>Develop an initiative to invest in the management development of evolving agency owners. Ensure relevancy of training for all design sector talent.</p>  | <p>IDI and industry partners via Design Skillnet to identify rapid upskilling opportunities and bite-sized learning mechanisms to enable the right training, for the right people, at the right time.</p>  |
| <p>The lack of CPD investment to date means that designers in Ireland are not always ready to meet the technology and innovation requirements of industry.</p>  | <p>To address this issue, we recommend the following approach:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. IDI to coordinate with industry partners and education providers.</li> <li>2. Up and coming professionals need an awareness of the need for CPD.</li> </ol>                                      | <p>IDI to work with partners and Design Skillnet to develop and deliver.</p> <p>Design Skillnet to promote the benefits of Lifelong learning.</p>  |
| <p>The rapid pace of change and growth that the design industry is experiencing leaves a significant shortfall in the number of designers required.</p>   | <p>Encourage employers to adapt hiring practices to attract greater diversity of talent from equivalent standard sectors to enrich the sector.</p>  | <p>Consider cross-sectoral upskilling opportunities. Identify and develop conversion programmes, rapid upskilling and re-skilling.</p>   |

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## Closing Thoughts

Upskilling is a constant for designers as they engage with training throughout their careers, but the ad-hoc and fragmented nature of the upskilling and engagement is now a challenge for the sector overall. On the basis of design roles in the future, this poses an economic challenge if it is not addressed. There is an urgent and immediate need to bridge the gap from a lack of provision of suitably tailored training in the past and the speed with which the sector has evolved, specifically in digital, business, and management development.

An education initiative to develop and enable CPD and lifelong learning is required to develop a culture of learning and development in the sector. This would be achieved by formalising training and career pathways to meet future skills needs and sustain viable, productive careers. The development of a competency framework is recommended for specific sectors within the overall design profession to support career pathways as design evolves in maturity.

Bridging the gap in management and leadership skills required by designers in agencies and in-house in large organisations is of critical importance, specifically developing team expertise and business management. This will enable them to deliver work to international standards, compete internationally, and meet the needs of FDI organisations.

Designers have a multitude of skills and, as a rapidly evolving discipline, investment is necessary in planning and resourcing to bridge gaps in evolving design skills needs and keep pace with industry requirements.



“There is a clear need from industry and an appetite from designers for relevant training that addresses the skills gaps identified in this report.”





# Acknowledgments

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Research of this kind could not happen without the support of the many individuals and organisations involved, and Design Skillnet would like to thank the stakeholders who engaged with us to complete this important work, the first of its kind in Ireland.

Design Skillnet acknowledges the formal and informal support provided by many stakeholders and partners. This research would not have been possible without the vision and work of Skillnet Ireland at the forefront of business support and skills development in Ireland.

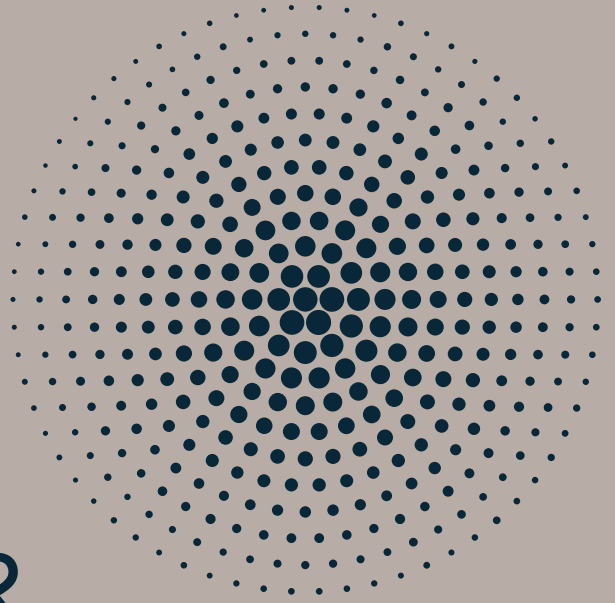
Sincere gratitude is due to the members of Design Skillnet Steering Group who led this project, namely Brian Stephens, Design Partners, Brian Herron, Each & Other, and John Moriarty, Fjord supported by Dr Jennifer Haydu at Design Skillnet for their commitment to the rigor of the research.

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And finally, our research partners, Dentsu Ireland led by Dael Wood and Claire O'Rourke.





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# Appendices

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## APPENDIX 1: Example Definitions of Design Provided During Working Sessions as Prompts

"A process of developing purposeful and innovative solutions that embody functional and aesthetic demands based on the needs of the intended user. Design is applied in the development of goods, services, processes, messages and environments".

"A plan or drawing produced to show the look and function of a building, garment or other object before it is made."

"The art or action of conceiving of and producing a plan or drawing of something before it is made."

"Do or plan (something) with a specific purpose in mind."

"Devise or execute designs, especially one who creates forms, structures and patterns, as for works of art or machines."

"Outline, sketch or plan, the form and structure of a work of art, an edifice or a machine to be executed or constructed."

"The work processes used to apply human – centred methods to solve problems, improve products and services, create and innovate."

"If you work in an iterative way, focusing on insights, asking numerous members of your team to contribute their ideas and feedback on better ways of doing things, and challenging the status quo, then you're already somewhat of a design thinker."

## APPENDIX 2: Definitions Of Design Created By Working Sessions Percipients

### Working Sessions 1

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <b>WS101</b> | You apply a conscious or unconscious method to create or improve something - either physical or intangible - with a specific purpose or user in mind - must involve understanding the goal of what is to be achieved and measure 'success' against it. |
| <b>WS102</b> | You create a product, solution or approach that answers a problem/ need in an effective, impactful and aesthetically sensitive way.  |
| <b>WS103</b> | Problem solver - you work on something that helps the end user achieve something that they value or need.  |
| <b>WS104</b> | You create human-centric solutions to create/innovate/improve life's problems incorporating functional and aesthetic.  |
| <b>WS105</b> | You create something (a product, system, piece of communication etc) in response to a specific problem or to serve a specific purpose.   |
| <b>WS106</b> | You communicate with a specific purpose in mind. You think with an intent and a focus on the end user and improve a problem in the area of a product or service.   |
| <b>WS107</b> | You work within parameters to solve problem/create solutions to create, improve and innovate products, services and miscellaneous output.  |
| <b>WS108</b> | You create something with intent that uniquely addresses function, aesthetic, brand and business needs.  |

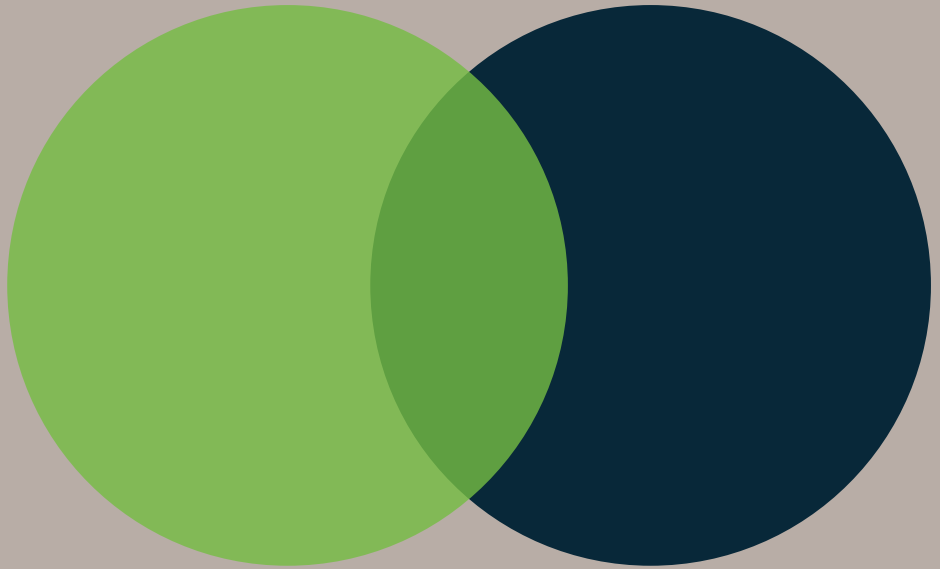
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## Working Sessions 2

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|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <b>WS201</b> | You employ original thinking to add value (i.e. creativity) to problem solving.*<br>Original thinking may involve the use or combination of existing ideas.  |
| <b>WS202</b> | The objective of a designer is to apply their lateral thinking processes to create tangible solutions that fill the need of the end user. "Design is applied creativity".  |
| <b>WS203</b> | You engage in user centred, collaborative, empathetic problem solving for a circular economy, producing a fluency of ideas.  |
| <b>WS204</b> | You follow an intentional process to create something that addresses a need, achieves a goal or elicits a feeling. (You create something with specific intent).  |
| <b>WS205</b> | You solve problems for yourself, a customer, or organisation, using a mix of right-brain and left-brain activities and methods. The output may be tacit and intangible or digital or physical or experiential or a mix of those qualities. It should be learning focused and iterative in nature based on research or experiments. |
| <b>WS206</b> | You use not only deductive thinking but inductive and abductive thinking to solve a problem or to meet a user need that is finally shaped into a concept.  |
| <b>WS207</b> | You solve problems creatively; create elegant solutions that enhance a user's experience; put people first and try to make the world a better place.   |
| <b>WS208</b> | You go through a creative process to produce something purposeful that people can experience in physical or virtual form. This applies to industrial, spatial, personal, aesthetic or environmental needs.   |
| <b>WS209</b> | You can have an idea and create/deliver an experience, process or product.   |

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## APPENDIX 3: Quantifying the Sector

To get an approximate figure of the number of designers working both in design departments within non-design businesses and those working in design consultancies we had to triangulate our data. Taking the following 3 resources, we used a proxy methodology.

1. **The median number of designers given by respondents**
2. **Activity sectors from respondents**
3. **Organisational demography from CSO Stat bank Business Demography (2017)**

Based on the sectors given by respondents and research within the area, the nine activities used for this equation based on CSO Stat bank Business Demography Activities are:

- **Food products, beverages and tobacco (10 to 12);**
- **Computer, electronic, optical and electrical equipment (26,27);**

- **Picture, video and television programmes, sound recording and music publishing activities (59);**
- **Management consultancy activities (702);**
- **Architectural and engineering activities and related technical consultancy (711);**
- **Advertising (731);**
- **Specialised design activities (741)<sup>8</sup> ;**
- **Photographic activities (742); and**
- **Landscape service activities (813).**

All employees engaged in specialised design activities, while an equation was applied using the number of organisations, breakdown of organisation sizes and median number of designers.

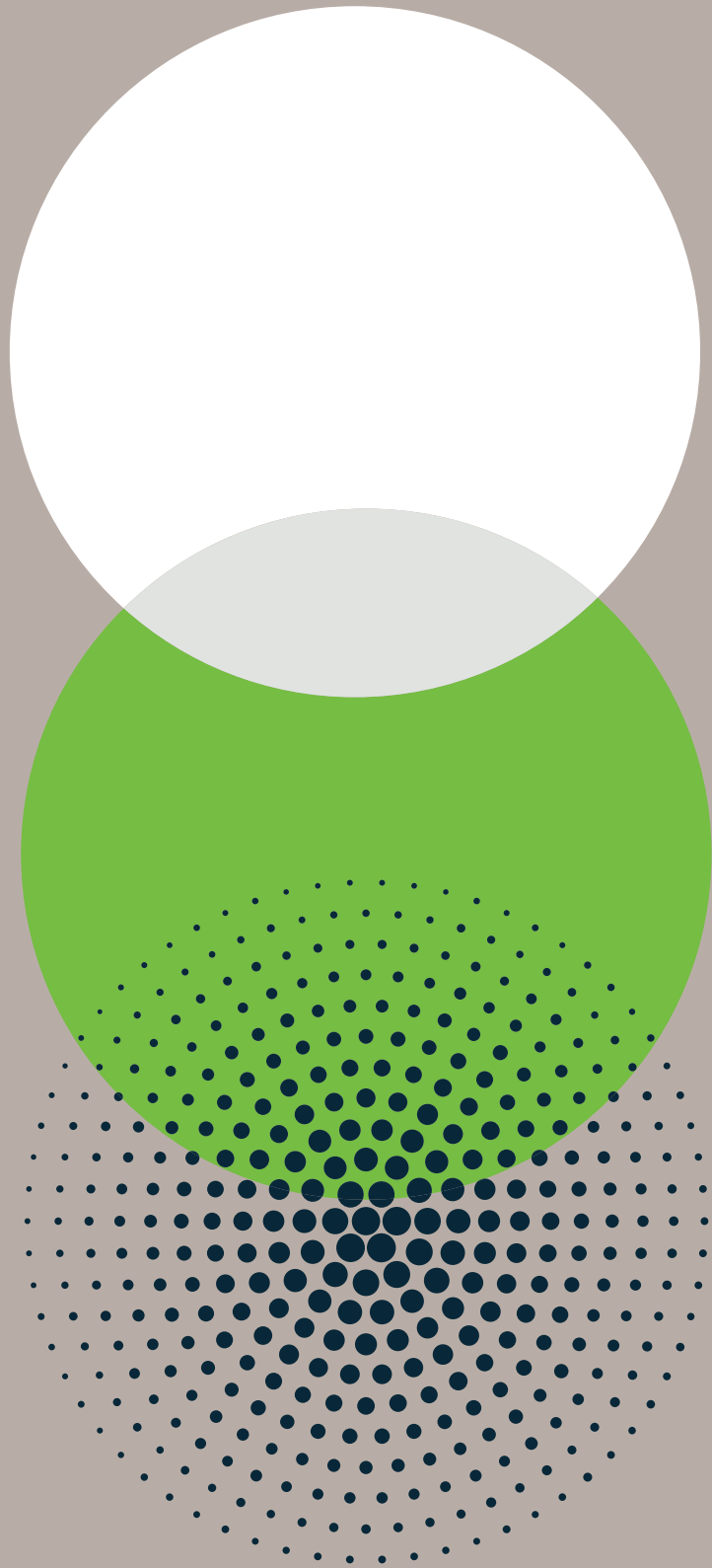
<sup>8</sup> NACE Rev 2 Code 7410 Specialised design activities include:

Architectural engineering design, Boot and shoe designing, Calico printers' designer, Costume designing, Design consultant (so described), Designing for calico printing, Designing for textile or wallpaper printing, Dress designer, Fashion artist, Fashion designing, Graphic artist, Graphic design, Household goods design, Industrial design consultant, Industrial design service, Interior decoration design, Interior decorator activities, Jewellery designing, Lace designing, Textile or wallpaper printing designing, Clothes design, Furniture design, Interior design.

|  | Total | Formula Applied   |
|--|-------|---|
| Food products, beverages and tobacco (10 to 12)  | 1512  | (# active enterprises >50)<br>* (median # designers)  |
| Computer, electronic, optical and electrical equipment (26,27)                                 | 702   | (# active enterprises >20 employees) *<br>(median # designers)  |
| Picture, video and television programmes, sound recording and music publishing activities (59) | 5502  | (# active enterprises) *<br>(median # designers in micro-enterprises)   |
| Management consultancy activities (702)  | 1344  | (# active enterprises 20-249)<br>* (median # designers)   |
| Architectural and engineering activities and related technical consultancy (711)               | 19650 | (# active enterprises <10) *<br>(median # designers in micro-enterprises) + (# active enterprises >10) * (median # designers) |
| Advertising (731)  | 3070  | (# active enterprises) * (median # designers in micro-enterprises)  |
| Specialised design activities (741)  | 2953  | ALL   |
| Photographic activities (742)  | 1062  | (# active enterprises) * .5   |
| Landscape service activities (813)   | 1742  | (# active enterprises) * .5   |

37539

Table 2: Quantification of Professional Designers in Ireland





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An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,  
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta  
Department of Further and Higher Education,  
Research, Innovation and Science

