



REPORT RESEARCH

**FOCUS GROUP
- IRISH EMPLOYERS**



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KEY INSIGHTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS WITH EMPLOYERS IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE, EDUCATIONAL, AND ECONOMIC SECTORS.

Focus groups serve as a vital instrument in the development of education and training programs, providing comprehensive insights directly from stakeholders.

This methodology has demonstrated significant value in the formulation of targeted Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs.

The findings from the recent focus groups will significantly influence the design of the VET programme, which will emphasize the development of skills and competencies in the administrative, educational, and economic sectors.

The study concentrated on delineating industry requirements, skills, competencies, and employer expectations in the selection of new employees within the administrative, educational, and economic sectors.

This objective was accomplished through the facilitation of three focus groups, each comprising 10 participants who are employers from the aforementioned sectors.

The report will outline the findings and particular requirements of employers identified through their involvement in the focus groups.

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Methodology

Data from these focus groups addresses tangible challenges and opportunities, ultimately cultivating a more adept and adaptable workforce.

A focus group is a qualitative research methodology employed to collect comprehensive opinions and insights from a varied group of participants regarding a specific topic or issue. It generally comprises 6 to 12 participants, with the discussion facilitated by a moderator who guides the conversation based on a predetermined set of questions.

This approach was selected to foster creative thinking and brainstorming. Participants frequently build upon one another's ideas, potentially resulting in new concepts or solutions that may not have surfaced during individual interviews or surveys.

By assembling a cohort of participants with analogous characteristics or experiences, focus groups can facilitate the identification of trends, patterns, and common themes that may be overlooked in more quantitative research methodologies.

Participant Selection

As part of the research, we identified employers from various regions of Ireland and successfully recruited a total of 30 participants representing the administrative, educational, and commercial sectors.

This facilitated the establishment of three focus groups, each comprising ten participants, with a total session duration of four hours. Each participant was provided with an invitation and a set of questions.

Invitation to a Focus Group

Dear Participant, We are delighted to invite you to take part in our focus group, which aims to identify the essential skills required in the labor market across the administrative, educational, and economic sectors.

We seek the perspectives of employers regarding the skills, experience, and qualifications essential for effective performance in these sectors.

Our objective is to assemble a diverse cohort of employers from a range of companies and organizations within the administrative, educational, and economic sectors to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the necessary competencies and market trends.

During the focus group, we will invite you to share your experiences, opinions, and observations regarding the essential skills. The discussion will occur in a collegial atmosphere, and your insights and perspectives will be invaluable to our research.

Based on the study's findings, a report will be produced in three languages, which will be accessible to you. This report will serve as the foundation for developing a VET program for employees involved in the project.

Should you have any inquiries or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

Thank you for your interest in our study; we eagerly anticipate your participation in our focus group.

Questions for the Focus Group

Each focus group comprised the following questions:

1. Which technical skills do you believe are currently the most sought after in these industries?
2. Are there particular soft skills that you consider essential for employee success in these sectors? If so, what are they?
3. What work experience or educational background is preferred when hiring in these industries?
4. Are there any emerging trends or technologies that are influencing the necessary competencies in these sectors? If so, what are they?
5. Which interpersonal skills are especially significant in these industries?
6. Are there particular certifications or courses that are esteemed in these sectors? If so, what are they?
7. What time management and organizational skills are essential for professionals in these industries?
8. What analytical and problem-solving skills are essential in these sectors?

9. Are there specific communication skills that are essential for employees in these industries? If so, what are they?
10. Are there particular prerequisites regarding proficiency in computer programs or technological tools within these industries? If so, what are they?

Facilitating a Focus Group

An experienced moderator was designated for each session to adeptly facilitate the discussion, engage participants, and oversee group dynamics.

Each four-hour session commenced with a concise introduction that delineated the purpose, objectives, and structure of the discussion. The moderator recorded notes during the dialogue, which were subsequently utilized to formulate the key findings presented in this report.

Key Insights from the Question Set

Following focus groups with employers from the administrative, educational, and economic sectors, we have identified ten key findings that offer critical insights into the skills and qualifications necessary for effective employment in these fields.

Application 1

Technical skills: Among the most essential technical skills desired in these industries are proficiency in software applications, data analysis, project management, digital marketing, and financial modeling.

Application 2

Soft Skills: Employers emphasized the significance of particular soft skills, including communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, critical thinking, and leadership. These competencies greatly influence the overall success of employees within these industries.

Application 3

Work/Educational Experience: In the hiring process within these industries, employers preferred candidates possessing pertinent work experience and educational credentials, including degrees or certifications in management, education, economics, or a related discipline.

Motion 4

Trends and Technologies: Emerging trends and technologies influencing the necessary competencies in these sectors encompass artificial intelligence, data analytics, cloud computing, virtual collaboration tools, and online learning platforms.

Motion 5

Interpersonal skills: Employers have emphasized the significance of robust interpersonal skills, including effective communication, relationship development, empathy, and conflict resolution. These competencies are essential for collaboration with colleagues, clients, and stakeholders.

Motion 6

Certifications and courses: These fields highly prioritize certifications and training, including project management certifications (e.g., PMP), teaching certifications (e.g., TESOL), financial analysis courses (e.g., CFA), and digital marketing certifications (e.g., Google Ads).

Motion 7

Time management and organization: Employers underscored the significance of proficient time management and organizational skills. including the capacity to establish priorities, manage multiple tasks concurrently, adhere to deadlines, and maintain precision in task completion.

Motion 8

Analytical and problem-solving skills are essential, encompassing the ability to analyze data, engage in critical thinking, make informed decisions, and propose innovative solutions. in the presence of challenges.

Motion 9

Communication skills: Proficient written and oral communication abilities are deemed crucial for professionals in these sectors. This encompasses active listening, clear and concise writing, effective presentation skills, and the capacity to articulate complex information to diverse audiences.

Villages 10

Software and technological tools: Proficiency in computer programs is essential.
and technological tools. Proficiency in Microsoft Office, project management software, data visualization tools, CRM systems, and industry-specific software is essential.

Based on these findings, a Vocational Education and Training (VET) program will be established, aimed at enhancing the skills and competencies of employees in the administrative, educational, and economic sectors. We extend our gratitude to all employers who participated in the research and contributed to this invaluable study.

Focus groups comprising employers from the administrative, educational, and economic sectors yielded valuable insights into the essential skills and qualifications required in these industries.

Technical skills: Employers highlighted the necessity for expertise in areas including programming, database management, web development, digital marketing, financial analysis, and data visualization. They also underscored the importance of keeping up with emerging technologies to maintain a competitive edge.

Soft skills: Employers emphasized the significance of communication (both verbal and written), relationship-building, and the capacity to solve problems, think critically, adapt, and demonstrate creativity in addressing challenges and fostering innovation.

Professional experience and education: Employers favored candidates during the hiring process.

With pertinent professional experience and academic qualifications. In administration, skills in office management, project coordination, and customer service were highly regarded. In education, experience in teaching and program development was essential, while in the economic sector, expertise in financial analysis, market research, and business development was crucial.

Emerging trends and technologies: Employers emphasized several trends and technologies that are influencing the necessary skills in these sectors. Automation and artificial intelligence are transforming the execution of administrative tasks, and platforms E-learning and online collaboration tools are revolutionizing the education sector. The economy is increasingly emphasizing the significance of big data analytics, blockchain technology, and sustainable business practices. Employers have indicated that adaptability and continuous upskilling are essential for keeping pace with these developments.

Interpersonal Skills: Development

Maintaining relationships with customers, colleagues, and stakeholders is essential. Employers emphasized the significance of empathy, cultural sensitivity, negotiation skills, and conflict resolution abilities. Effective teamwork and collaboration were also identified as crucial for achieving organizational objectives. Employers specifically underscored the importance of robust interpersonal skills in these sectors.

Certifications and Courses: Employers placed a high value on particular certifications and courses within these industries.

In the realm of administration, certifications in project management, office administration, and customer service were esteemed. Within the education sector, teaching certifications such as TESOL and specialized certificates in specific fields held significant importance. In the field of economics, credentials such as the CFA (Chartered Financial Analyst) and courses in finance, marketing, and business management were regarded as highly valuable.

Time management and organizational skills: Employers highlighted the significance of proficient time management and work organization. The capacity to establish priorities, adhere to deadlines, and manage multiple projects concurrently was essential. Precision, attention to detail, and the ability to perform under pressure were also underscored. Effective work organization mitigates unnecessary stress and enhances productivity. Employees possessing these skills are more adept at handling demanding tasks and achieving goals with greater speed and efficiency.

Analytical and problem-solving abilities: Capacity to evaluate data Problem-solving skills were highly esteemed by employers. The capacity to gather information, identify patterns, make informed decisions, and provide effective solutions was crucial. Employers also appreciated critical thinking, creativity, and initiative in addressing challenges. It is not only essential to recognize problems but also to adopt a proactive approach in seeking alternatives and innovative solutions.

Communication skills: The capacity to communicate effectively is deemed essential for employees in these sectors. Employers emphasized the significance of clear and concise communication in all interactions.

in both written and verbal forms. Active listening, the capacity to distill complex information, and presentation skills are crucial, particularly when engaging with clients, colleagues, and stakeholders.

Computer programs and technological tools:

Proficiency in computer programs and technological tools is regarded as essential in these sectors. Employers prioritize expertise in specialized industry software, customer relationship management systems, data visualization tools, and project management software. and the Microsoft Office suite as essential components that enhance work efficiency.

Based on the findings from the focus group research, employers in the administrative, educational, and economic sectors have pinpointed particular technical skills that are highly esteemed.

The results were categorized into distinct sectors:

Economic Sector:

- Experience utilizing economic forecasting software, including EViews and Gretl, to analyze market trends and facilitate informed business decisions.
- Familiarity with specialized trading platforms such as MetaTrader or Bloomberg Terminal, as well as risk management systems.
- Expertise in data analysis utilizing statistical software such as Excel, Stata, or SAS for financial assessment and market research.
- Proficiency in utilizing econometric software, such as EViews or Stata, for modeling and simulation.
- Proficiency in financial modeling tools, including Excel and Matlab.
- Proficiency in utilizing data visualization tools such as Tableau, Power BI, or QlikView to effectively present complex data.

Education Sector:

- Proficiency in utilizing educational content creation software, such as Canva, to produce engaging materials for students.
- Experience in utilizing software for lesson design and curriculum development that fosters effective teaching.
- Familiarity with systems utilized for delivering online courses and managing educational content.
- Familiarity with student information systems that facilitate the management of student data and the monitoring of academic performance.
- Comprehend educational data analytics tools that enable the evaluation of student performance and the identification of areas for enhancement.
- Familiarity with technological tools that enhance education, including interactive whiteboards, video conferencing software, and online collaboration platforms.

Administrative division:

- The capacity to input data and administer databases in a manner that facilitates efficient searching and analysis.
- Proficiency in accounting software for overseeing corporate finances, managing budgets, maintaining financial records, and generating financial reports.
- Awareness of cybersecurity practices is essential for safeguarding sensitive data, implementing secure access principles to systems, and preventing threats associated with cyberattacks, thereby ensuring the confidentiality of information.
- Proficient in utilizing CRM systems to oversee customer relationships and facilitate sales processes.
- Familiarity with project management tools that facilitate task coordination, monitor project progress, and enhance team management, thereby ensuring activities remain organized and timely.
- Proficiency in office software, including Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint), as well as document management systems.

These particular technical skills are highly regarded by employers in numerous industries.

It is important to note that requirements may differ based on the particularities of the company, industry, and specific role. Consequently, job seekers should continually enhance their knowledge and stay abreast of the latest technologies in their field to maintain a competitive edge in the job market.

Employers also emphasized the significance of soft skills, which are essential in the administrative, educational, and economic sectors.

The findings revealed ten essential soft skills:

1. **Flexibility:** In fast-evolving sectors such as marketing, healthcare, and technology, employees must demonstrate a readiness to adapt to emerging technologies, trends, and market dynamics. A willingness to acquire new skills and embrace change is greatly esteemed.
2. **Emotional Intelligence:** Empathy, self-awareness, and the capacity to regulate emotions are essential in sectors such as healthcare and marketing, where interactions with customers and patients demand sensitivity and comprehension.

3. Creativity: In the realms of marketing and technology, creativity serves a pivotal function. in developing original campaigns, crafting engaging user experiences, and discovering innovative solutions. Creative thinking enables employees to distinguish themselves and introduce fresh ideas into their work.

4. Resilience: The capacity to swiftly rebound from setbacks, manage stress, and uphold a positive outlook. In challenging circumstances, resilience is greatly esteemed. Employees who can withstand stress demonstrate the ability to adapt to adversity while sustaining a high level of performance.

5. Customer Focus: In marketing and healthcare, comprehending and addressing the needs of customers or patients is essential. Employers appreciate employees who prioritize customer satisfaction and endeavor to deliver outstanding service.

6. Leadership: Although not every employee seeks a leadership role, employers highly regard individuals who exhibit leadership qualities. Attributes such as initiative, the capacity to inspire others, and a robust work ethic are essential.

7. Problem-solving: Employers seek individuals who can proficiently identify and resolve a diverse array of challenges. The capacity for critical thinking, situational analysis, and the formulation of innovative solutions is essential across all sectors.

8. Effective communication: The capacity to convey information clearly, engage in active listening, and collaborate effectively within a team is vital across all industries. Proficient communication skills enable employees to establish strong relationships with customers, colleagues, and stakeholders.

9. Collaboration: Teamwork is prevalent across all sectors, and employers are increasingly highlighting the significance of effective collaboration. Employees who excel in working with others, contributing ideas, and supporting team objectives are particularly esteemed.

10. Time Management: The capacity to establish priorities, adhere to deadlines, and utilize time efficiently is crucial in fast-paced industries. Employers appreciate individuals who can handle multiple projects concurrently while consistently delivering high-quality outcomes punctually.

Recommendations

Drawing on comprehensive findings from focus groups with employers in the administrative, educational, and economic sectors, we offer ten recommendations for the development of Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs:

Integration of trends and emerging technologies:

Ensuring that the program encompasses new and relevant trends and technologies.

in these sectors, including artificial intelligence, data analytics, and online learning platforms. Courses should be available that offer practical experience with these tools.

Informed by professional and educational

expertise: Developing program components that correspond with professional experience.

and educational experience favored by employers.

Practical projects, internships, and case studies should be incorporated to bridge the divide between theory and practice.

Offering industry-specific certifications: Implement training pathways that equip participants for industry-recognized certifications and courses esteemed within the sector, such as Project Management Professional (PMP), Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) certifications. Collaborating with certification organizations can facilitate the attainment of these qualifications.

Promoting analytical and problem-solving skills:

Integrate problem-solving exercises and analytical challenges into the program. Participants should undergo training in data analysis, critical thinking, and decision-making processes pertinent to the sectors.

Emphasis on soft skills: Design vocational education and training curriculum components that cultivate essential soft skills, including communication, adaptability, creativity, problem-solving, and time management. Incorporate interactive workshops, simulations, and collaborative projects to facilitate the enhancement of these skills.

Incorporate essential technical competencies:

Develop training modules that emphasize critical technical skills recognized within these sectors. Ensure proficiency in software applications (e.g., Microsoft Office), project management platforms (e.g., Trello, Asana), and industry-specific tools (e.g., CRM systems, financial modeling software). Regularly update these modules to align with the latest industry standards.

Enhancing communication skills: Provide training that emphasizes written and oral communication, active listening, and presentation abilities. Participants should be afforded the opportunity to practice and receive constructive feedback on their communication methods.

Strengthening Interpersonal Skills: Create training modules that emphasize the enhancement of interpersonal skills, including empathy, relationship building, and conflict resolution. Incorporate case studies and group discussions to replicate real-world scenarios. where these competencies are indispensable.

Ensure proficiency in technological tools:

Incorporate training in fundamental computer programs and technological tools, such as data visualization software (e.g., Tableau), project management applications, and industry-specific instruments. Participants should develop competence in utilizing these tools, thereby enhancing their efficiency and effectiveness.

Addressing time management and organizational skills: Implement training sessions that impart effective strategies for time management and work organization. The curriculum should encompass techniques and tools for prioritizing tasks, adhering to deadlines, and managing multiple responsibilities.

By adhering to these guidelines, the VET programme will effectively address the distinct needs of employers in the administrative, educational, and economic sectors, thereby enhancing the skills and competencies of both current and future employees.



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