

**ibec**  
For Irish Business

# HR Update Survey 2015

Issue  
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An Irish employers  
perspective on workplaces





# ibec HR Update 2015





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**I am delighted to present our HR Update Survey which reflects the views of over 340 HR leaders and business owners on a range of key areas critical to employers in Ireland.**

In this edition, we have been able to draw a picture of HR today as well as look ahead to the future workplace, while considering those challenges that need to be addressed. We asked employer members about current plans on pay rates, recruitment, strategic HR initiatives, workforce flexibility and developing and retaining talent. Throughout the report we highlight interesting sector differences.

The survey shows that the confidence level of employers has improved dramatically over the year with positive employment growth trends for 2016. The findings also suggest that HR leaders are embracing and investing in digital technologies with many using apps in the workplace, enabling flexible working and using analytics for better decision making.

Despite this confidence, however, many challenges exist. Most cited in the survey are skill shortages with the gap most acute in IT and engineering. In addition, broadband infrastructure, public transport, infrastructure, housing shortages and tax policy all impact greatly on employers' ability to recruit and retain talent.

Our findings will be of interest to you and help you to plan for 2016 and beyond on key issues of employment policy in your organisations.

Thank you to all of those who contributed to the report and for your ongoing support of Ibec. We will continue to keep you informed about employment practices and emerging trends in people management into 2016.

We would love to hear your thoughts and welcome your feedback – you can contact me at [maeve.mcelwee@ibec.ie](mailto:maeve.mcelwee@ibec.ie).

**Key observations**

**Trends**



Almost one third of respondents increased use of on-line functionality in their workplaces



Significant upwards trend in use of apps



Upwards trend in technology enabling flexible working



Data driven decision making

**Key observations**

# Challenges



**Housing**



**Skills**



**Broadband infrastructure**



**Public transport and infrastructure**



**Tax policy**

## About the survey

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The Ibec HR Update Survey is one of the leading employer surveys that seeks to establish the views of HR leaders and employers on topical and strategic people management issues affecting employers in Ireland.

It is conducted twice a year by the Ibec Research Unit and the questionnaire explores trends in pay, recruitment, employee performance, employee engagement, HR priorities, flexible working arrangements and the HR function.

The data for this report was collected in September 2015 and is based on 340 responses from Ibec member companies, all sizes, all industry sectors.

### Respondent profile

Around a third of respondent companies (36%) employed fewer than 50 employees, while just over one in five, (22%) employed over 250 employees.





## About the survey

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Around one in five respondents were engaged in the high-tech manufacturing sector which includes the manufacture of chemicals, electronics or medical devices. In total, just over one third of respondents (37%) were engaged in the manufacturing sector. Just over one in ten respondents were engaged in distribution either retail or wholesale while over half the respondents (51%) were engaged in some form of service activity.



## About the Ibec Research Unit

The Ibec research unit collects information from members and publishes a wide variety of reports on areas such as pay and conditions of employment, HR practices within companies, areas of policy interest and some reports for Ibec sector organisations. The range of topics on which the unit publishes material includes:

absence rates, employee turnover, conditions of employment including sick pay, leave provision, training and study provision and flexible work practices to name but a few. Feedback and queries can be directed to [research@ibec.ie](mailto:research@ibec.ie). Our reports can be accessed via our webpages on [www.ibec.ie/research](http://www.ibec.ie/research)

Data was collected in September 2015 in relation to changes to basic pay rates which have taken effect in 2015. Respondents were also asked to provide information in relation to expected changes to pay in 2016.

A total of 340 companies responded. The key findings in relation to pay are:

- Median pay increases to basic pay will remain the same in 2015, as in 2014, at +2%.
- Median pay increases to basic pay next year are expected to be at the same level of +2%
- Total pay bill, which includes both basic pay changes, and changes in numbers of employees, is set to increase in almost two-thirds (63%) of respondent companies in 2015.
- Total pay bill in 2016 is expected to increase in 64% of respondent companies
- Increases in basic pay and total pay bill are most likely in companies in the high-tech sector and in larger companies.

## Basic pay rates 2015

Our survey in relation to 2015 pay rates indicates that pay awards remain relatively modest with a median increase of 2% expected this year. The proportion of respondents that expect to increase pay in 2015 is slightly higher than the findings reported in early 2015, at 67%.

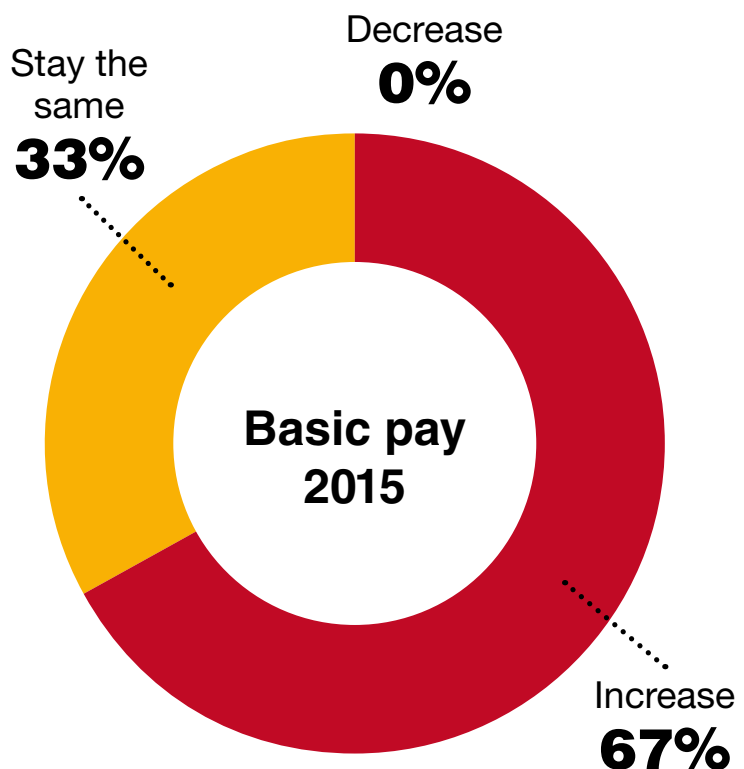


Figure 1. Basic pay changes 2015.

# Basic pay rates 2015

As usual, there is some variation across sectors in terms of the delivery of pay increases. The high-tech manufacturing sector is more likely to provide pay increases in 2015 than the traditional manufacturing sector. The services sector is the least likely sector to have provided pay increases in 2015, with fewer than half the respondents from this sector providing increases.

## Increases in basic pay 2015 by sector

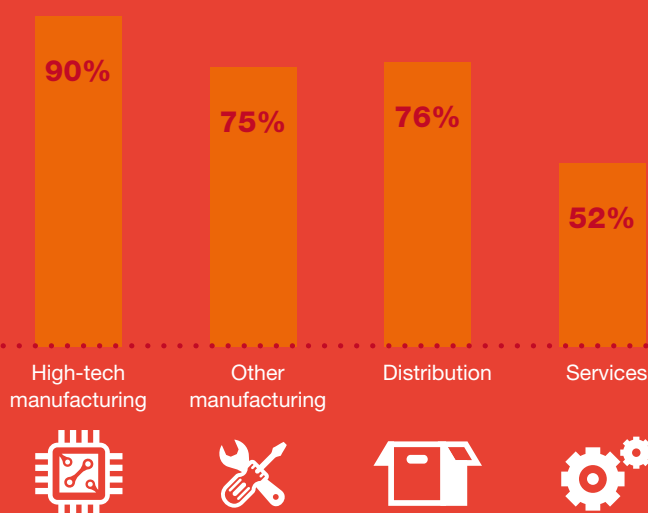


Figure 2. Basic pay increases 2015 – by sector.

Some variation in terms of pay increases across company size is also evident within the data. Companies with fewer than 50 employees were less likely to offer pay increases to staff. For larger companies, around three quarters of companies (72%) with over 100 employees were likely to provide increases in basic pay in 2015. Figure 3 sets out the full details.

## Increases in basic pay 2015 by size

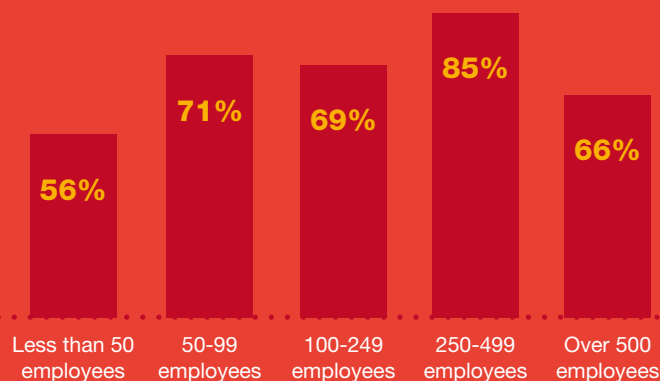


Figure 3. Basic pay increases 2015 – by size.

# Basic Pay Rates 2016

Seven out of ten respondents (71%) expect basic pay rates in their company to increase in 2016. The median increase of 2% recorded is the same as levels reported in 2014 and 2015. Some 29% of respondents expect basic pay rates to stay the same in 2016.

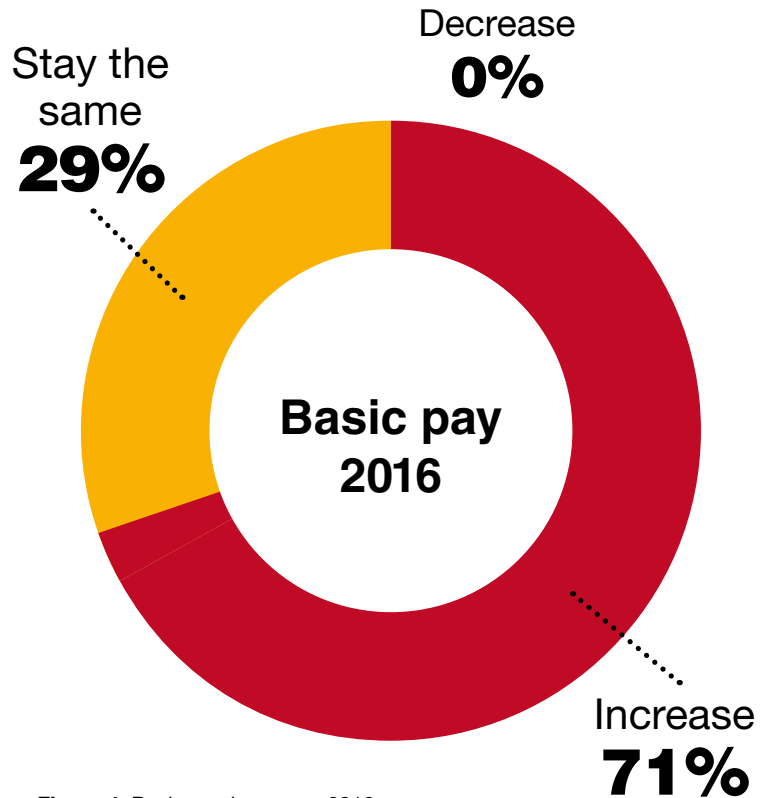
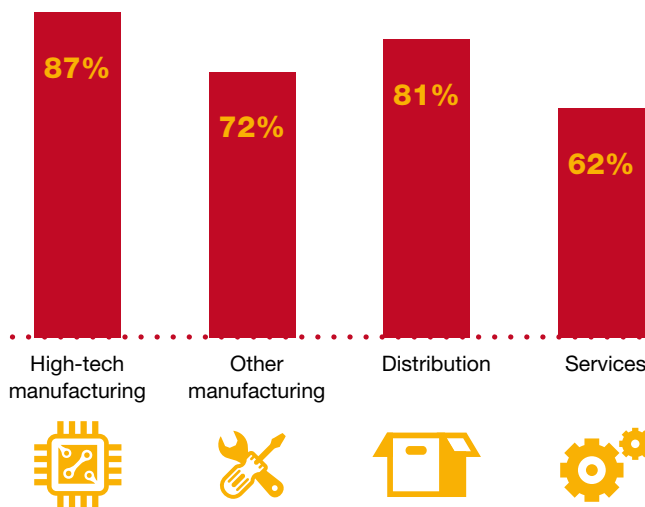


Figure 4. Basic pay increases 2016.

## Increases in basic pay 2016 by sector



There is also some variation across sectors in terms of the delivery of pay increases next year. The high-tech manufacturing sector is more likely to provide pay increases than the traditional manufacturing sector. Distribution companies and services companies are more likely to be giving increases in 2016 than in the current year. (See Figure 2) The following graph sets out the details for each sector.

Figure 5. Basic pay increases 2016 – by sector.

# Basic pay rates 2016 (continued)

Some variation in terms of pay increases across company size is also evident within the data.

Companies with fewer than 50 employees were less likely to offer pay increases to staff. For larger companies, over three quarters of companies (78%) with over 100 employees were likely to provide increases in basic pay next year. **Figure 6** sets out the full details.

Increases in basic pay 2016 by size

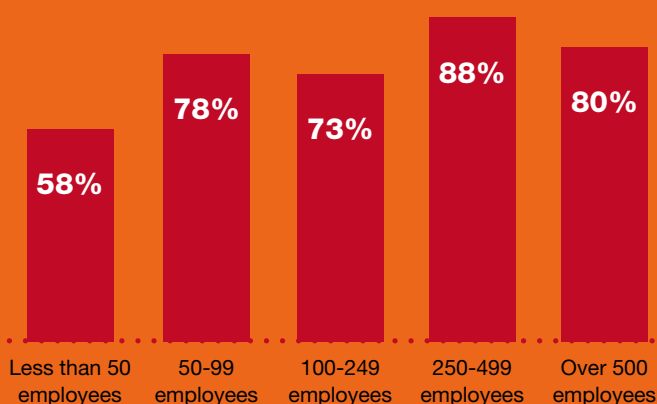


Figure 6. Basic pay increases 2016 – by size.

# Factors influencing pay trends

For companies expecting to increase pay in 2015 or 2016 (a total of 266 companies), almost two thirds (66%) indicated that they had experienced increased demand for pay increases from employees.

Where companies had experienced increased demand for pay increases from employees, they were asked to provide information on the reasons for this. A total of 173 companies provided details. One of the main reasons for demands around pay increases, identified in almost half these companies (47%), was around the perception by employees of an increased general cost of living. In almost a quarter (24%), increased pay pressure was as a result of higher pay rates in competitor companies. In 7% of cases, pressure existed to reverse an earlier pay cut.

The remaining respondents indicate that the pressure to increase pay came from other sources including: the length of time since the last increase; higher taxes; employees feeling an increase is 'due' as the economy is recovering; media speculation about pay increases fuelling demands; cost of housing; cost of childcare; reward for individual service or performance, and reward for improved company performance.

## Total pay changes 2015

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**A total of 66% of respondents indicated an increase in total pay bill in 2015. A change in total pay bill indicates not just potential changes in basic pay rates, but additionally any increases or decreases in staff numbers.**

Total pay bill, therefore includes recruitment of new staff and/or company downsizing as part of the metric. The following section will deal with changes in relation to resourcing and staff levels across respondent companies, however in relation to total pay bill, the average increase was 6.56% and the median increase was 3%. These figures are higher than in previous reports, and show an underlying economic recovery encompassing recruitment of new staff and therefore the creation of new jobs.

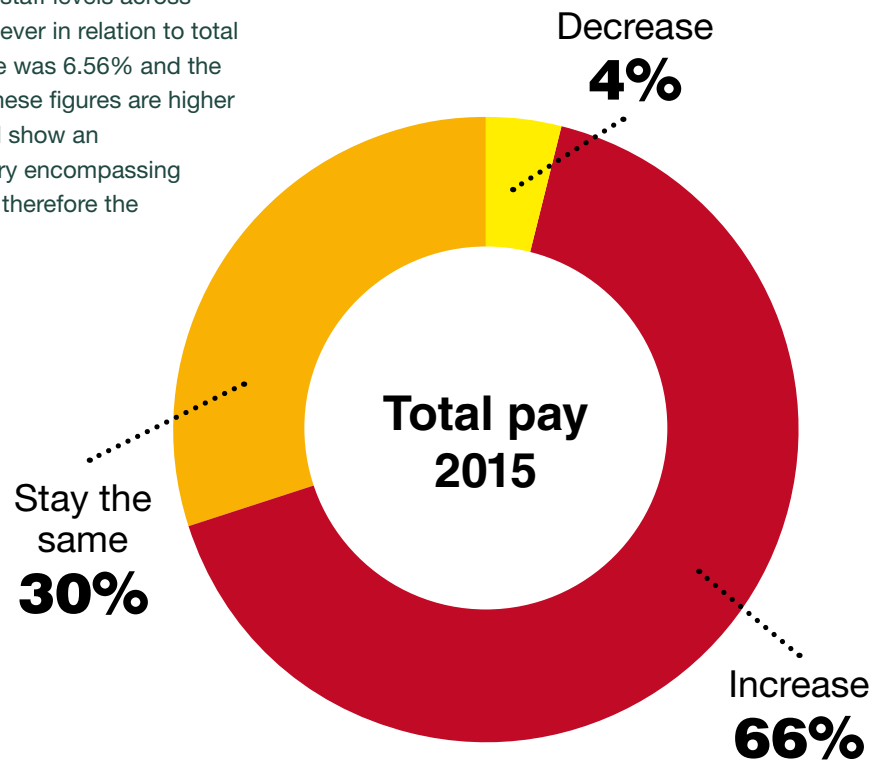


Figure 7. Total pay bill.

# Total pay changes 2015 (continued)

There was some sector variation across total pay bill increases by sector. The high-tech manufacturing sector was most likely to have increased pay this year, with the services sector least likely. There was little variation between traditional manufacturing and distribution findings.

Total pay bill 2015 by sector

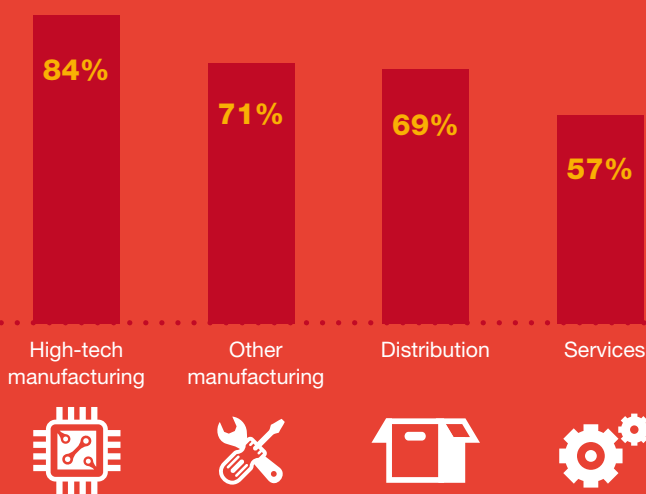


Figure 8. Total pay bill by sector.

There was a small amount of variation by sector in total pay bill, however while we noted in 2015 that smaller companies were less likely to provide basic pay increases, when we factor in recruitment and new employees, this variation lessens. Figure 9 below sets out the details.

Total pay bill 2015 by size

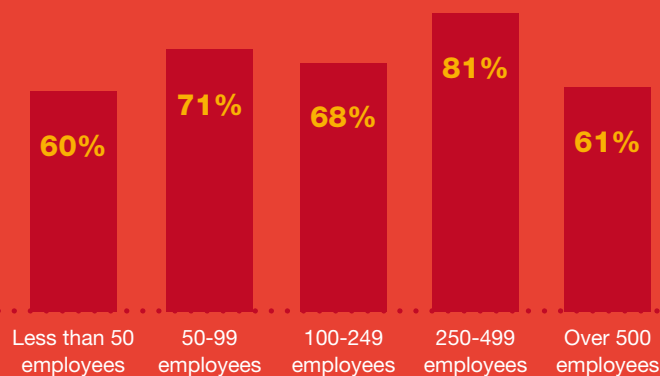


Figure 9. Total pay bill by company size.

## Total pay changes 2016

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A total of 67% of respondents indicated an increase in total pay bill in 2016. Similar levels of increases were expected in 2016 to those of 2015, with an average increase in total pay bills of 6.3% and a median increase of 3%.

While we can see from earlier data in relation to basic pay that a relatively modest level of increase is expected both in 2015 and 2016 the higher averages reported on total pay bill reflect increased recruitment over the next year.

The subsequent section of this report on resourcing provides more detail around recruitment expectations of companies in 2016.

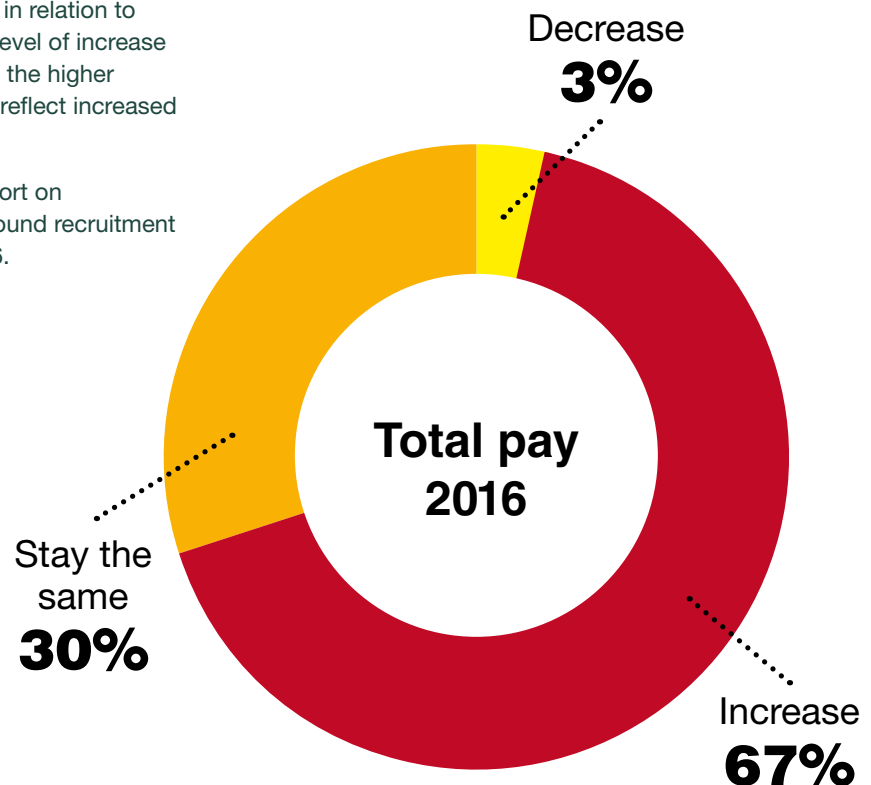


Figure 10. Total pay bill.



# Total pay changes 2016 (continued)

Again, some slight variation across sectors and by company size exists in relation to changes in total pay bill in 2016. The following graphs set out the details.

## Total pay bill 2016 by sector

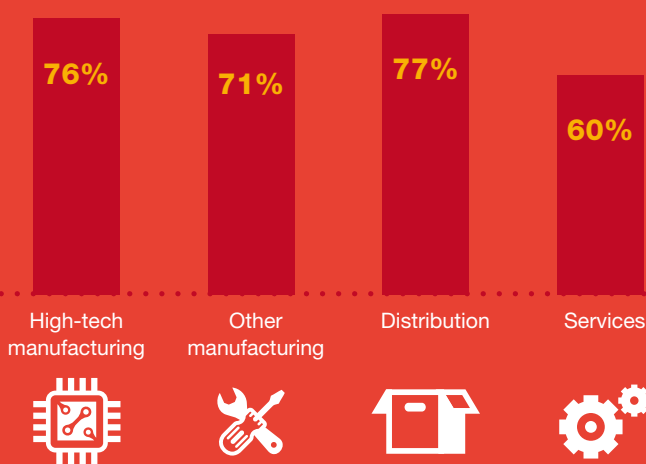


Figure 11. Total pay bill by sector.

On **Figure 12** we can see that similar to the 2015 findings, when we add in recruitment, the variation by company size is less than that of basic pay – see **Figure 6** – for 2016. Across all company sizes over three out of five respondents expected total pay bill to increase next year.

## Total pay bill 2016 by size

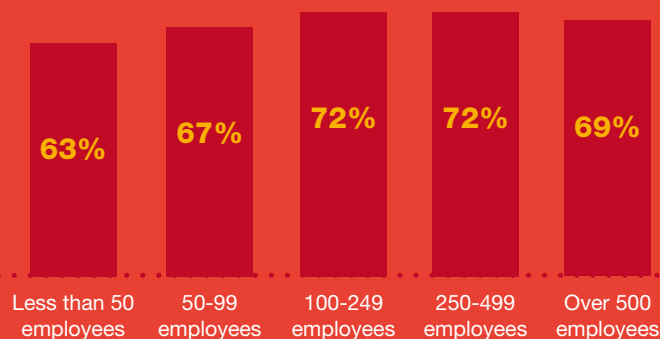


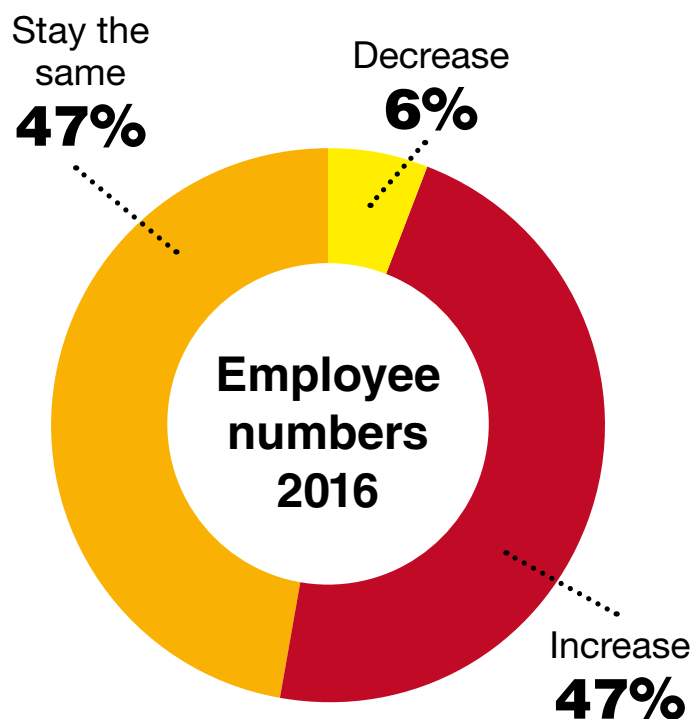
Figure 12. Total pay bill by company size.

# Resourcing

**Closely aligned to total pay bill is recruitment of new staff, or reductions in staff numbers, which also impact on the total cost of pay.**

Given the proportion of companies expecting an increased total pay bill in 2016, it is unsurprising that almost half of respondent (47%) are expecting to increase staff numbers in 2016.

**Figure 13** sets out the details.



**Figure 13.** Changes to employee numbers in 2016.

There was no significant variation by sector, however, the services sector at 50% was the most likely to increase employee numbers next year. By company size, larger companies were more likely to see increasing employee numbers, with 65% of companies with over 500 employees expecting to increase their employee numbers, compared to 43% of companies with fewer than 50 employees.

Where an increase in employee numbers was expected, the average increase was 12.19% with a median of 7.75%. Decreases were expected in around one in twenty (6%) respondent companies. Companies in this category expect to reduce their workforce by around 10%.

In terms of expectations around staff recruitment for 2016, over half the respondent companies (56%)

expect to increase recruitment of permanent staff, while 48% expect to increase recruitment for temporary roles. Around one in six respondent companies (17%) expect to increase their usage of agency staff in 2016.

**Table 1** sets out the details.

# Resourcing (continued)

	Yes	No	Under consideration	Don't know	Total
Recruitment permanent staff	56%	22%	14%	8%	301
Recruitment temporary staff	48%	29%	12%	11%	288
Increased usage of agency staff	17%	60%	10%	13%	262

**Table 1.** Recruitment.

An examination of the manufacturing sector would indicate that recruitment of permanent staff is more likely in high-tech manufacturing companies with over half (53%) of these companies indicating that they are expecting to increase permanent staff in the next six months compared with 48%

of traditional manufacturing companies. Some 58% of distribution companies and 60% of services companies were also expecting to recruit permanent staff in the next six months.

The proportion of companies by sector expecting to increase temporary staff closely mirrors that

of permanent staff in most sectors. The high-tech manufacturing sector is looking to increase temporary staff in over half (56%) of companies. Distribution (47%) and services (47%) were proportionally higher in terms of temporary recruitment than traditional manufacturing (42%).

# Ireland as a location for staff

**Companies were asked to rate Ireland as a location for staff relocating to work here from another country. Almost a third of respondents (29%) indicated that they had no opinion or that this situation was unlikely to be applicable to them.**

For the remainder, Ireland was seen a desirable location by 56% of respondents. **Table 2** sets out the details.

8%	48%	15%	29%	319
Highly desirable	Desirable	Not desirable	Don't know/ Not applicable	Total

**Table 2.** Desirability of Ireland as a location for staff from another country.

# Skill shortages

The largest skills gaps identified by respondents were in the area of IT software specialists (18%), engineering (18%), sales and marketing specialists (10%) and technicians (9%).

There was some variation by sector in terms of potential skills gaps. It is worth noting that a large proportion of software shortages are predicted not just in the high-tech sector, but in the services sector as well. Similarly engineering and technician shortages are expected not just in manufacturing but in services companies as well.

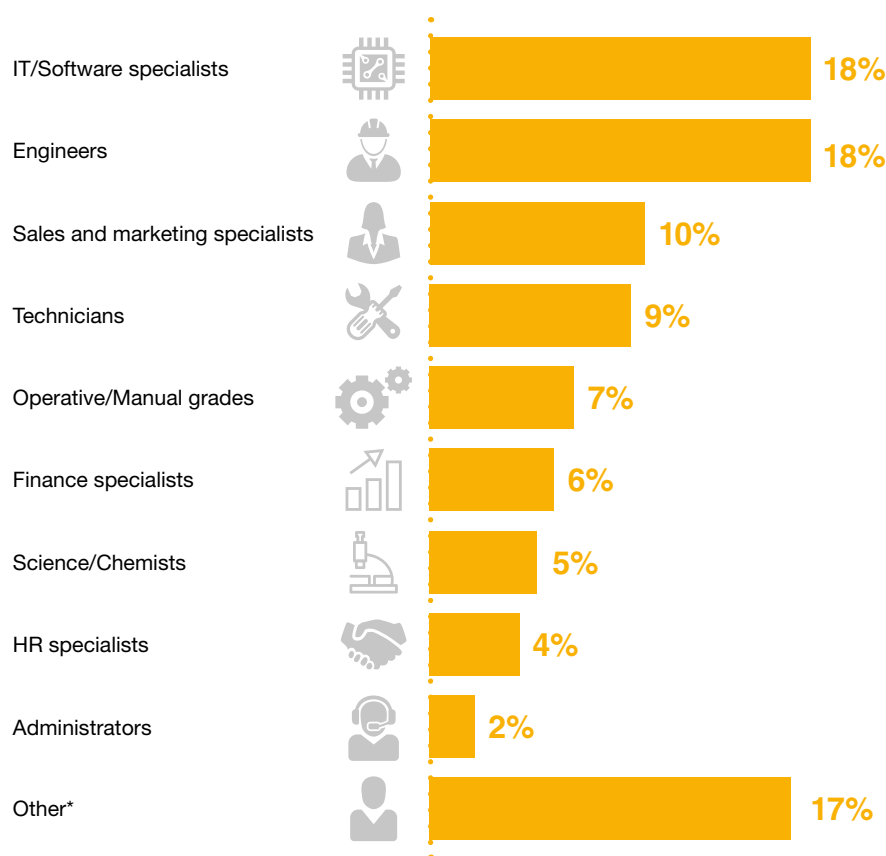


Figure 3. Skill shortages.

\*Other includes: chefs, language specialists, nurses, technicians, team leads, drivers, financial specialists and senior management, among others.

## JobBridge

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**JobBridge was designed to keep unemployed people close to the labour market by providing them with the opportunity to gain quality work experience and increase their employability.**

The scheme has evolved in terms of eligibility and length of internships. Currently people who receive qualifying social welfare income supports for at least three months within the previous six month period qualify for the scheme which includes a €50 top-up payment.

Just under half (49%) of the respondent companies had utilised JobBridge in the past. Over three quarters (77%) of the companies that had used JobBridge rated it either 'effective' or 'very effective' for their organisation. The remaining 23% of companies rated it either 'ineffective' or 'very ineffective'.

Regardless of whether or not the company had used JobBridge, they were asked how important access to JobBridge, or a similar scheme would be for them in the next three years.

Around one third of all companies (32%) believed that access to a similar scheme to JobBridge would be either 'important' or 'very important' for their company. Half of all companies (50%) did not see this as important at all. Around one in five (18%) either did not know or did not offer an opinion.

Companies that had previously been involved in a JobBridge scheme were significantly more likely to rate access to JobBridge or a similar scheme as 'very important' or 'important' (53%) compared to 12% of the companies that had not engaged in JobBridge in the past.

Half of the respondents to this survey indicated that they had a strategy for HR in place in their organisations. In the vast majority of cases (97%) this strategy was linked to the business objectives for the organisation. As expected larger companies were significantly more likely to have a formal written HR strategy in place, 77% of companies with over 500 employees had a HR strategy in place, compared with 40% of companies with fewer than 50 employees.

In terms of the coverage of the particular areas below, company size also plays a role, as larger companies were more likely to have each item on the list below than smaller companies. Larger companies were additionally more likely to have multiple items below within their strategy, than smaller companies.



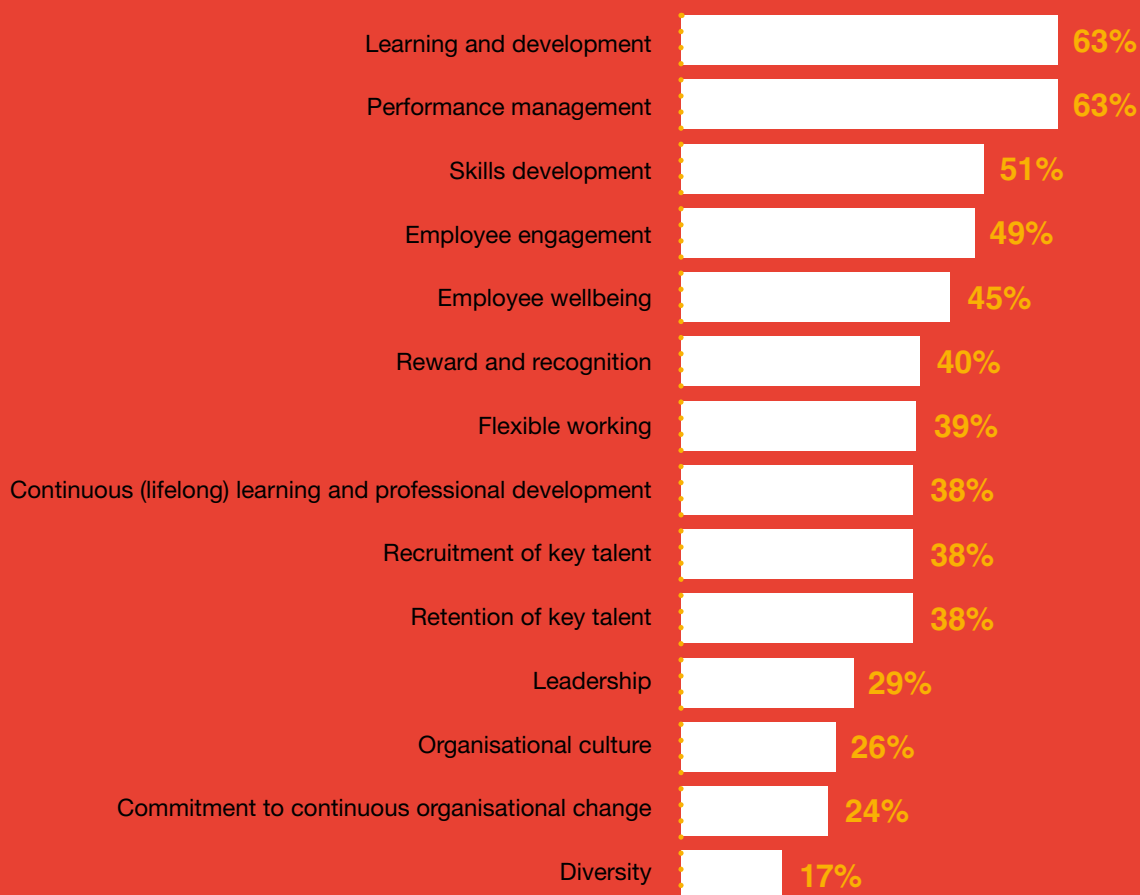
Figure 4. HR strategy.

\*Other includes: All, business ethics, corporate responsibility, inclusion, equal opportunity, graduate recruiting/mentoring, having fun, values.

## HR Strategy (continued)

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Where the organisation did not have a strategy in place, a total of 144 companies, respondents were asked to identify if a stated or implied approach to each area existed within their organisation.



**Figure 5.** Companies without a HR strategy in place.

Both of these tables are combined on **Figure 14** overleaf. It is evident that for each heading, it is more likely that companies with a formal written strategy would reference each item, than companies' without a HR strategy have a stated or implied approach to

the various items. This is particularly important in the context of items such as recruitment and retention of key talent, leadership and skills development, which are critical in ensuring that companies have the skills and talents they need to evolve their business into the future.

# HR Strategy (continued)

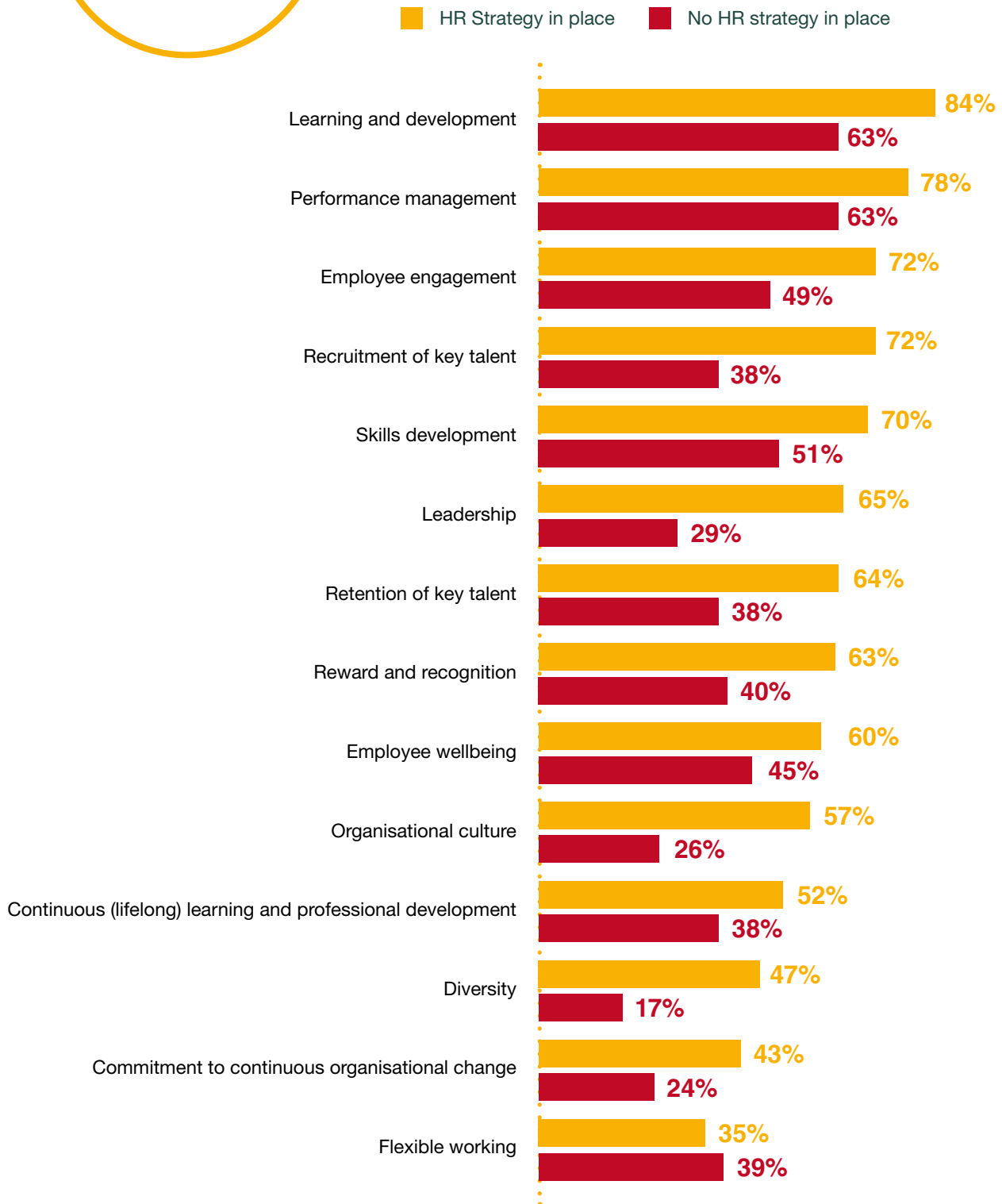


Figure 14. Strategic items by existence of HR strategy.



# Organisational Investment

Companies were asked to identify if their organisation had invested in a number of areas in the past 12 months.

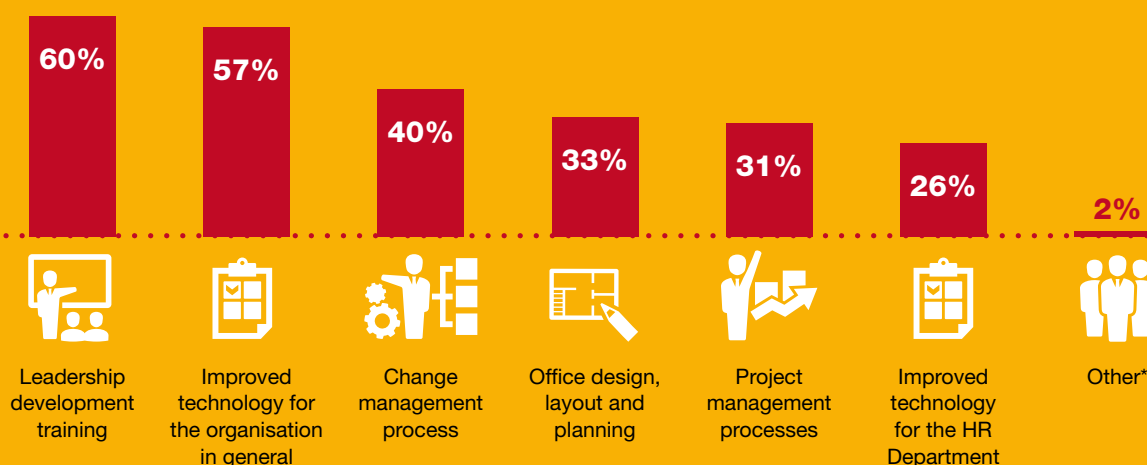


Table 6. Investment in the last twelve months.

\*Other includes: continuous improvement; free events held for staff/initiatives introduced; merger to improve client services; team development; training in health and safety and HR topics.

**The importance of technology is evident from the proportion of respondents (57%) that have invested in improved technology for their organisation in the past 12 months.**

Two out of five companies invested in change management processes and a third of respondents invested in office design, layout and planning, all features of workplace change and modernisation. Surprisingly, just over a quarter (26%) of respondents had invested in improved technology for the HR department in the same period. It is interesting to note from subsequent tables that almost 30% of respondents increased their employee self-service in relation

to HR activities and 14% have outsourced particular HR functions in the past five years. This may impact on the function of the HR department and therefore on the need for improved technology to support this function.

## Future Workplaces - An Overview

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**The following section of this report provides a look at possible changes to work environments in the future. Technology in particular has improved at such a pace that employers are performing many more functions online.**

Almost two-thirds of respondents to this survey had increased the number (64%) or the type (61%) of functions performed online in the last five years. Online recording of breaks (36%) and working hours (27%) have also increased. The use of apps for work has increased in around a third of respondent companies. This trend looks set to continue over the next three years, with even more respondents expecting to increase their activity under each of these headings. Almost half of the respondent companies (48%) expect to see an increased use of apps for work in the next three years, for example, with more than half (51%) expecting to increase employee self-service in relation to HR activities or employee benefits. Online project management and online training are also expected to increase in same period.

Technology is also enabling a flexible approach to work location, with 44% of respondents expecting to increase use of e-working over the next three years, and around a third (33%) expecting to increase the use of hot-desking in their

organisations. Combined with the stated investment by one in three companies in improved office design, layout and planning in the past 12 months, it is clear that the transformation of work is not just virtual but physical.

This transformation while dramatic, takes place in the context of the Irish and global economies. Given the importance of the online/virtual environment it is troubling that two-thirds of respondents (67%) see inadequate broadband coverage as a difficulty for their company in the next three years. It is critical that the policy environment and infrastructure support business. Seven out of ten respondents to this survey are concerned about levels of income taxation in Ireland, six out of ten are concerned about public transport infrastructure and eight out of ten are concerned with the availability of specific skills for their businesses. It is clear therefore that while significant opportunities exist to leverage technological advancements across organisations, there are still policy constraints to contend with.

# Workplace changes in the last five years

**Respondents were asked to indicate if their usage of a number of working practices had increased, stayed the same or decreased in the last five years.**

The increased use of technology for organisational functions is obvious from the data. Over three out of five respondents increased either the number or type of organisational functions completed online in the last five years. Further, around a third of respondents increased the recording of attendance, leave and breaks online, the use of e-working and use of apps for work, and around one in five increased the use of online project management.

Work structures were also seen to change in the last five years. The use of e-working has been mentioned above. Hot-desking has increased in just over one in five respondent companies. In addition, around a third of respondents saw the increased use of third party providers, independent contractors and flexible work contracts in the same period.

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Don't know	Total
The number of organisational functions completed online	64%	30%	—	6%	300
The type of organisational functions completed online	61%	31%	—	8%	291
The use of metrics for decision making	48%	36%	1%	15%	295
Recording of attendance, leave and breaks online	36%	59%	1%	4%	302
Use of e-working – location flexibility for work	33%	54%	2%	11%	286
Use of third party providers	33%	54%	4%	9%	286

Table 7. Workplace changes in the last five years.

# Workplace changes in the last five years (continued)

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Don't know	Total
Use of independent contractors	32%	55%	6%	7%	289
Use of flexible work contracts	32%	59%	2%	7%	286
Use of apps for work	30%	50%	1%	19%	287
Employee self-service in relation to HR activities/Employee benefits	29%	63%	1%	7%	291
Recording of working hours online	27%	68%	1%	4%	293
Deployment of organisation-specific online or blended learning courses	25%	60%	1%	14%	275
Hot-desking	22%	54%	2%	22%	280
Investment in HR shared services	18%	70%	3%	9%	288
Online project management	18%	66%	1%	16%	281
Outsourcing of non-HR activity	17%	68%	3%	12%	276
Outsourcing of particular HR functions	14%	75%	4%	7%	286

Table 7. Workplace changes in the last five years.

# Workplace changes in the next three years

Looking at the same list of possible changes over the next three years, further progress is expected in terms of the number and type of organisational functions completed online.

More companies are expecting to increase their use of metrics for decision making over the next three years, and employee self-service in relation to HR activities and employee benefits is expected to increase in just over half of the respondent companies. A similar proportion of respondents expect to increase use of third party providers,

independent contractors and flexible work contracts in the next five years as have increased over the past five years, indicating steady progress in these areas over time.

More companies are expecting to increase hot-desking over the next three years and nearly half expect the use of apps for work to increase.

	Increase	Stay the same	Decrease	Don't know	Total
The number of organisational functions completed online	68%	22%	1%	9%	293
The type of organisational functions completed online	63%	26%	1%	9%	289
The use of metrics for decision making	59%	28%	1%	12%	286
Employee self-service in relation to HR activities/Employee benefits	51%	40%	1%	8%	281
Use of apps for work	48%	32%	1%	19%	280
Use of e-working – location flexibility for work	44%	40%	1%	14%	277
Recording of attendance, leave and breaks online	43%	51%	1%	5%	287

Table 8. Workplace changes in the next three years.

# Workplace changes in the next three years (continued)

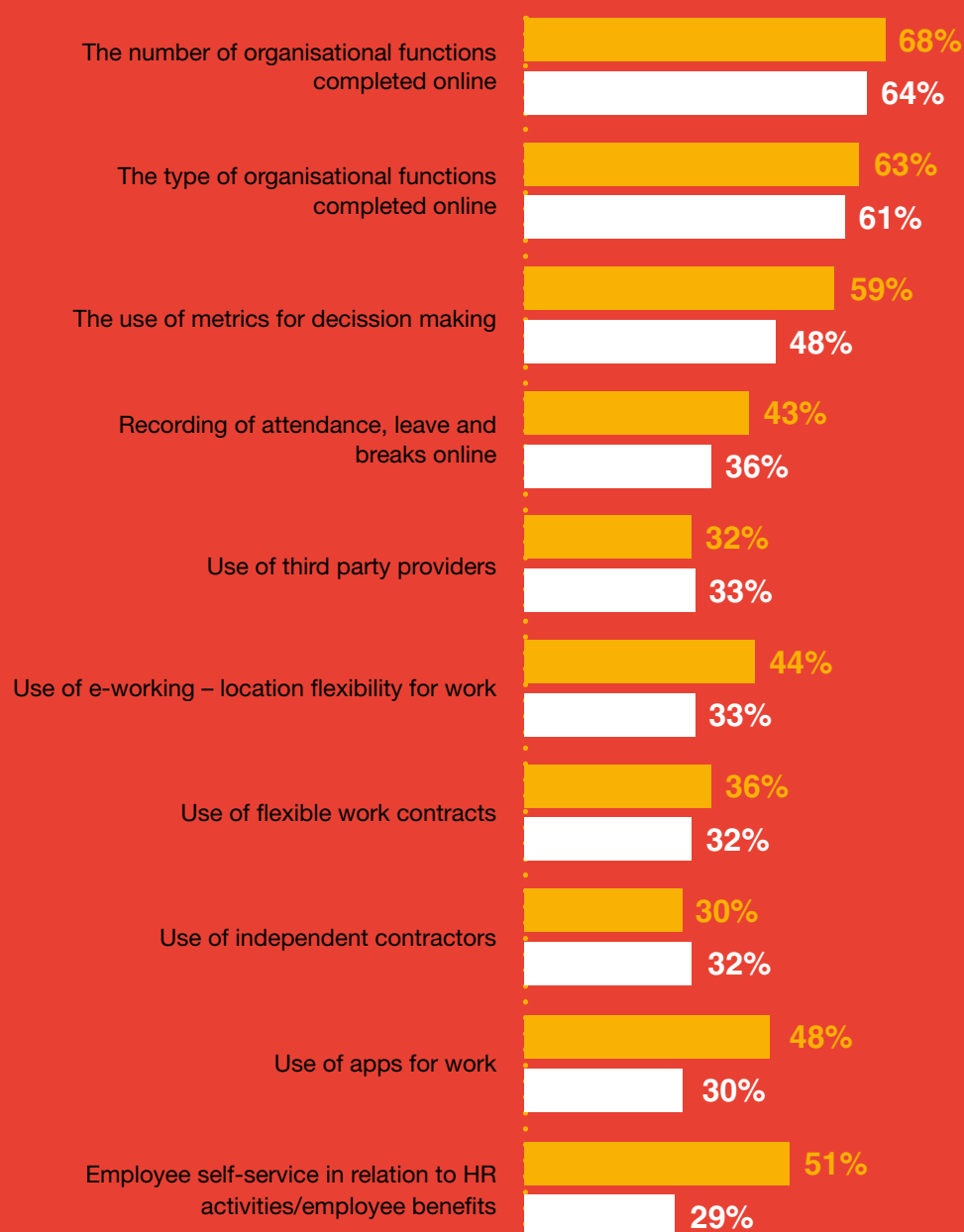
	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Don't know	Total
Recording of working hours online	42%	52%	1%	5%	282
Deployment of organisation-specific online or blended learning courses	42%	42%	1%	15%	276
Use of flexible work contracts	36%	51%	2%	11%	279
Hot-desking	33%	42%	1%	24%	275
Online project management	32%	49%	2%	17%	275
Use of third party providers	32%	53%	3%	12%	276
Use of independent contractors	30%	55%	4%	12%	278
Investment in HR shared services	29%	55%	1%	15%	281
Outsourcing of non-HR activity	26%	54%	2%	18%	272
Outsourcing of particular HR functions	22%	64%	1%	13%	277

Table 8. Workplace changes in the next three years.

# Workplace changes

The following graph provides a view of each item, illustrating the percentage of companies that expect to adopt new workplace practices in the next three years, compared directly against the proportion of respondents that have increased each in the last five years.

■ Increase in next three years  
■ Increase in last five years



**Figure 15.** Comparison of workplace changes, past and planned.

## Workplace changes (continued)

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**Figure 15.** Comparison of workplace changes, past and planned.



## Difficulties/ Challenges in the next three years

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**Companies were asked to identify if any of a pre-set list of issues is likely to cause difficulties for their company over the next three years.**

Pressure from employees to increase salaries was seen as the most likely item to create a difficulty for respondents in the next three years with almost nine out of ten respondents (87%) citing this as either a major or minor difficulty. A corollary of this is the cost therefore of employee salaries and benefits which is also expected to cause difficulty in over four out of five respondent companies.

The availability of specific skills is also likely to be an issue in four out of five respondent companies. Levels of income taxation in Ireland, inadequate broadband coverage and inadequate public transport infrastructure are also worthy of note in this context.

	Major difficulty	Minor difficulty	No difficulty	Don't know	Total
Cost of salaries/employee benefits	30%	52%	14%	4%	304
Pressure from employees to increase salaries	43%	44%	9%	4%	306
Corporate taxation environment in Ireland	13%	30%	36%	21%	295
Levels of income taxation in Ireland	32%	38%	18%	12%	294
Inadequate public transport infrastructure e.g. roads, public bus and rail transport	21%	37%	35%	7%	298
Inadequate broadband coverage	33%	34%	27%	6%	299
Compliance with environmental legislation	12%	34%	41%	13%	297

Table 9. Workplace challenges in the next three years.

# Difficulties/ Challenges in the next three years (continued)

	Major difficulty	Minor difficulty	No difficulty	Don't know	Total
Compliance with employment legislation	10%	43%	42%	5%	295
Availability of specific skills	38%	42%	15%	5%	299
Quality of graduates	16%	39%	35%	10%	293
Availability of credit/business finance	5%	26%	46%	23%	290

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### IR/HR

For HR queries Ibec members can contact their IR/HR advisor or knowledge centre  
 Tel: 01-6051542  
 Email: [knowledgecentre@ibec.ie](mailto:knowledgecentre@ibec.ie)

### Research

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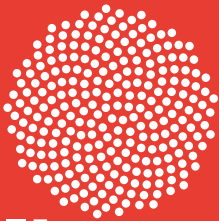
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