



Employers

# EMPLOYERS' OPINION ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION







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With the cooperation of



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# INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental missions of higher education is to improve the employment outcomes of graduates. Nonetheless, several studies point to a disconnect between university education and the real-world needs of the job market, whether due to a lack of specific skills among graduates or a shortage of graduates in certain fields <sup>1</sup>.

In a constantly changing economic and social landscape, universities need to evolve towards more flexible learning models that focus on developing transferable and applicable skills. To guarantee the relevance of their programmes, it's important they strengthen collaboration with employers to ensure their training content aligns with the actual requirements of the productive network<sup>2</sup>.

In this context, the European Commission, through the European Skills Agenda<sup>3</sup>, emphasises the need to improve skills intelligence, which is the capability to generate current knowledge about the skills required by the labour market. This information should then serve as a basis for universities to better tailor their educational offerings, thereby helping to bridge the gap between education and employment.

AQU Catalunya conducts its **Employers' Survey** to help gauge the degree to which university education aligns with the needs of the labour market. The study scrutinises employers' perceptions of the existing study programmes, identifies the key factors they consider most important and detects areas for improvement. This initiative responds to the mandate established by the AQU Catalunya Law,<sup>4</sup> which entrusts the Agency with delivering strategic information to foster excellence in the Catalan Higher Education System (SUC). The ultimate goal is to provide evidence that will help educational institutions tailor their study programmes to the needs of the productive network and enhance the employability of young professionals.

Specifically, the survey focuses on ascertaining **employers' opinion of the training of recent graduates, i.e. graduates who have completed their studies in the last two years and have little or no work experience**. The questionnaire is structured into the following sections:

- > Factors influencing the hiring of recent graduates.
- > Difficulties in finding suitable candidates and reasons for these difficulties
- > Skills to be improved in university education
- > Overall satisfaction with the skills of recent graduates.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2022). [Education and Training Monitor 2022](#).

<sup>2</sup> CEDEFOP (2023). [Skills forecast. European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training](#).

<sup>3</sup> European Commission. [European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience](#). European Commission, 1 July 2020.

<sup>4</sup> [Law 15/2015, of 21 July on the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency](#), 6919 § (s. d.).

In addition, this **fourth edition of the Employer Survey introduces new questions on the latest training initiatives**. Firstly, it asks about the **significance of short- and long-term complementary training** in the recruitment of recent graduates. Although lifelong learning has been an important concept for many years, its integration within the higher education system is still in its infancy. In this regard, the Council Recommendation on a European approach to **micro-credentials** for lifelong learning and employability (2022) establishes the need to recognise and integrate short, flexible and skills-oriented training within formal higher education systems. At the same time, Royal Decree 822/2021, which regulates the organisation of official university education in Spain, opens the door to the incorporation of these types of courses within the university framework, promoting the modularisation of studies and the creation of pathways that are better adapted to the changing needs of the labour market.

Secondly, the survey collects the opinion of employers as regards the improvement in the employability of graduates who have pursued more **innovative training programmes**, such as **dual degrees and those in which the final dissertation is carried out in collaboration with the company**, which have a more practical focus, and **double degrees and joint programmes with foreign universities**, which offer more academic pathways.

The feedback from the **1,411 organisations** that have hired recent graduates in the last three years indicates the following:

- > Employers **generally express a high level of satisfaction** with university education.
- > A **university degree** is the minimum requirement for hiring. A **strong command of English** is a requirement for half of organisations, though there are significant differences based on the specific educational fields of the candidates.
- > Additionally, **prior work experience or internships** are often one of the most sought-after attributes when hiring recent graduates.
- > When recruiting, they also value **short- and long-term complementary training**, as this facilitates **specialisation** in specific areas and cultivates **professional development** in a constantly changing work environment. Universities must, therefore, accept the challenge of offering **micro-credentials**.
- > Employers value innovative training proposals highly for their potential to improve employability, particularly those that involve direct contact with the real world, such as dual degrees or **final dissertations conducted in collaboration with companies (TFE)**.
- > Employers identify shortcomings among recent graduates in skills such as **problem-solving, practical training, and planning and organisation**. These skills could be enhanced by providing training that is more closely aligned with the world of work during university education.
- > Organisations report significant problems in finding suitable candidates in the fields of **Health, Engineering and Education**, primarily due to a **lack of graduates in these fields**.
- > Employers **do not perceive universities as relevant agents in the provision of lifelong learning**.



## DATA QUALITY

Before interpreting the results of the 4th edition of the Employers' Survey, the data must be assessed to determine whether it is representative of the target population.

In terms of methodology, there are a number of aspects to be taken into account when conducting employer surveys.

First of all, it is difficult to access this population pool. In particular, it is difficult to obtain a well-defined universe of employers with associated contact details. Indeed, it is common in the literature to find that university employer databases are used as a sampling frame of graduate employers<sup>5</sup>. All the Catalan universities collaborated with the Employers Survey by providing the contact details (email addresses) of organisations that have or once had links with their careers departments, resulting in a total population of 26,631 organisations. Furthermore, since the purpose of the survey is to enable organisations to evaluate current university education, it only gathers the opinions of those that have employed graduates within the last three years.

Secondly, employer surveys –and online surveys in general– tend to have a low response rate (<sup>6</sup>BYRNE, 2022; MANFREDA et al., 2008). In this regard, the Employers Survey obtained 1,411 responses, which, despite the difficulties inherent in this type of study, is an unusually high sample size.

To analyse the representativeness of the results, we compare two key characteristics of the organisations in the sample: the size of each organization and the educational field (and sub-field) of the recent graduates they have hired, as referenced in the system.

Specifically, we first compare the distribution of participating organisations by size, utilising official data from the Statistical Institute of Catalonia (Idescat). This analysis allows us to assess whether the sample obtained is representative of the Catalan business ecosystem.

Secondly, we examine the distribution of the educational fields and sub-fields of the recent graduates hired by the organisations that participated in the survey and compare it with the distribution of the educational fields and sub-fields of all recent graduates according to the 2023 Employment Outcomes Survey (a survey that is representative of the Catalan Higher Education System as a whole).

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<sup>5</sup> BYRNE, C. "What determines perceived graduate employability? Exploring the effects of personal characteristics, academic achievements and graduate skills in a survey experiment". *Studies in Higher Education*, 47, 1 (2022), p. 159-176.

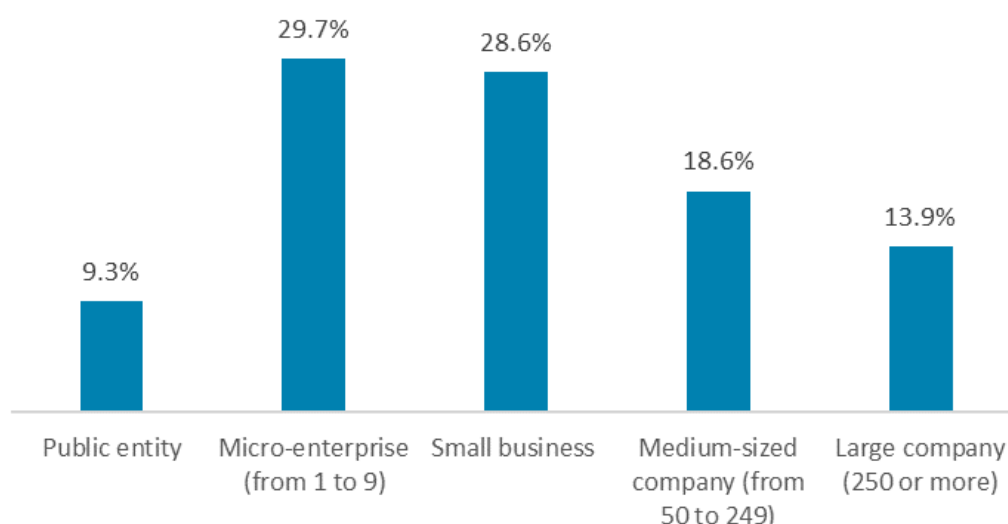
<sup>6</sup> K. L. MANFREDA; M. BOSNJAK; J. BERZELAK; I. HAAS; V. VEHOVAR "Web Surveys versus other Survey Modes: A Meta-Analysis Comparing Response Rates". *International Journal of Market Research*, 50, 1 (2008), p. 79-104.

## SIZE OF THE ORGANISATIONS

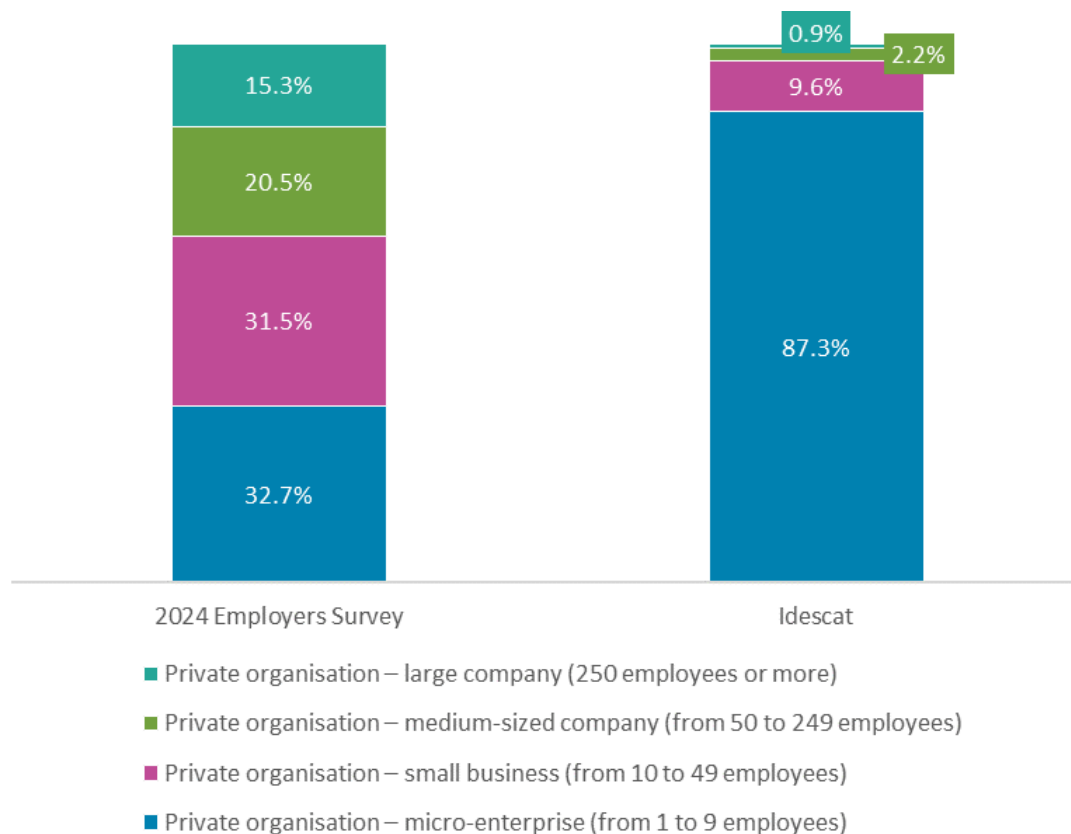
### The results of the Employers Survey are not representative of the Catalan business ecosystem

- According to data from Idescat, nine out of ten companies in Catalonia are micro-enterprises. However, only 30% of the organisations participating in the Employers Survey are micro-enterprises. This suggests that medium and large organisations are more likely to hire recent graduates than smaller companies.
- In fact, this finding is consistent with the results of the 2021 [Idescat Business Climate Survey](#). According to this survey, almost half of companies with more than 50 employees had hired at least one recent graduate in the last three years, while only two out of ten companies with fewer than ten employees had done so.

*Figure 1. Size and nature of the organisations that participated in the 2024 Employers Survey and, therefore, hired recent graduates*



*Figure 2. Distribution of the sizes of the organisations: data from the 2024 Employers Survey as compared to the data for the Catalan business ecosystem as a whole*



*Note: The data on the composition of the business ecosystem in Catalonia comes from the Statistical Institute of Catalonia (Idescat). We only compare the size of the privately owned organisations that participate in the survey, as Idescat does not provide data on the number of publicly owned establishments in Catalonia.*

## Field of study of the graduates hired

At AQU Catalunya, we organise all the degrees offered by the Catalan Higher Education System (SUC) into a hierarchical framework that ranges from general to specific levels<sup>7</sup>. In the Employers Survey, organisations are asked about the education of the graduates they have hired. This information is provided at the most disaggregated level of the classification.

However, to ensure a sufficient sample for a representative analysis of the results, the data is then grouped into the two highest levels of aggregation: **educational fields and sub-fields**.

Specifically, the educational fields and sub-fields used by AQU Catalunya are as follows:

<sup>7</sup> You can consult AQU Catalunya's catalogue of degrees at [here](#).

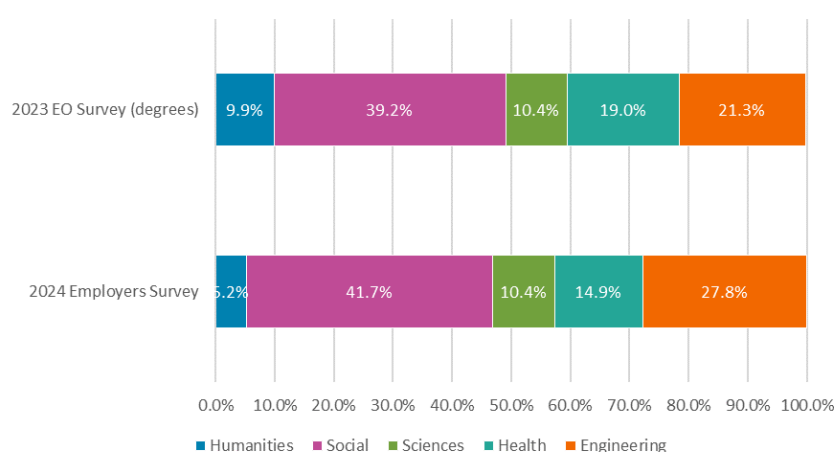
## Employers' opinion on university education

Humanities	Social	Sciences	Health	Engineering
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Philosophy and History</li> <li>•Languages and Literature</li> <li>•Arts and Design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Economics, Business and Tourism</li> <li>•Law, Labour and Politics</li> <li>•Communication and Documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Biological and Earth Sciences</li> <li>•Experimental Sciences and Maths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Nursing and Healthcare</li> <li>•Psychology and Therapy</li> <li>•Medicine and Biomedical Sciences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Architecture, Construction and Civil Engineering</li> <li>•Industrial Technologies</li> <li>•ICT</li> <li>•Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries</li> </ul>

### The results of the Employers Survey are representative in terms of the educational fields of the recent graduates

- Although the organisations that participated in the Employers Survey are not representative of Catalonia's business ecosystem as a whole, the distribution of the educational fields of the recent graduates they have hired is reasonably similar to the distribution of educational fields for all graduates from the Catalan Higher Education System (SUC).
- The most notable differences are found in two specific areas. The Health field is underrepresented among participating organisations, probably because this sector is dominated by publicly owned entities, which often have less direct decision-making power in recruitment. On the other hand, there is an overrepresentation of organisations that have hired graduates in the field of Engineering.

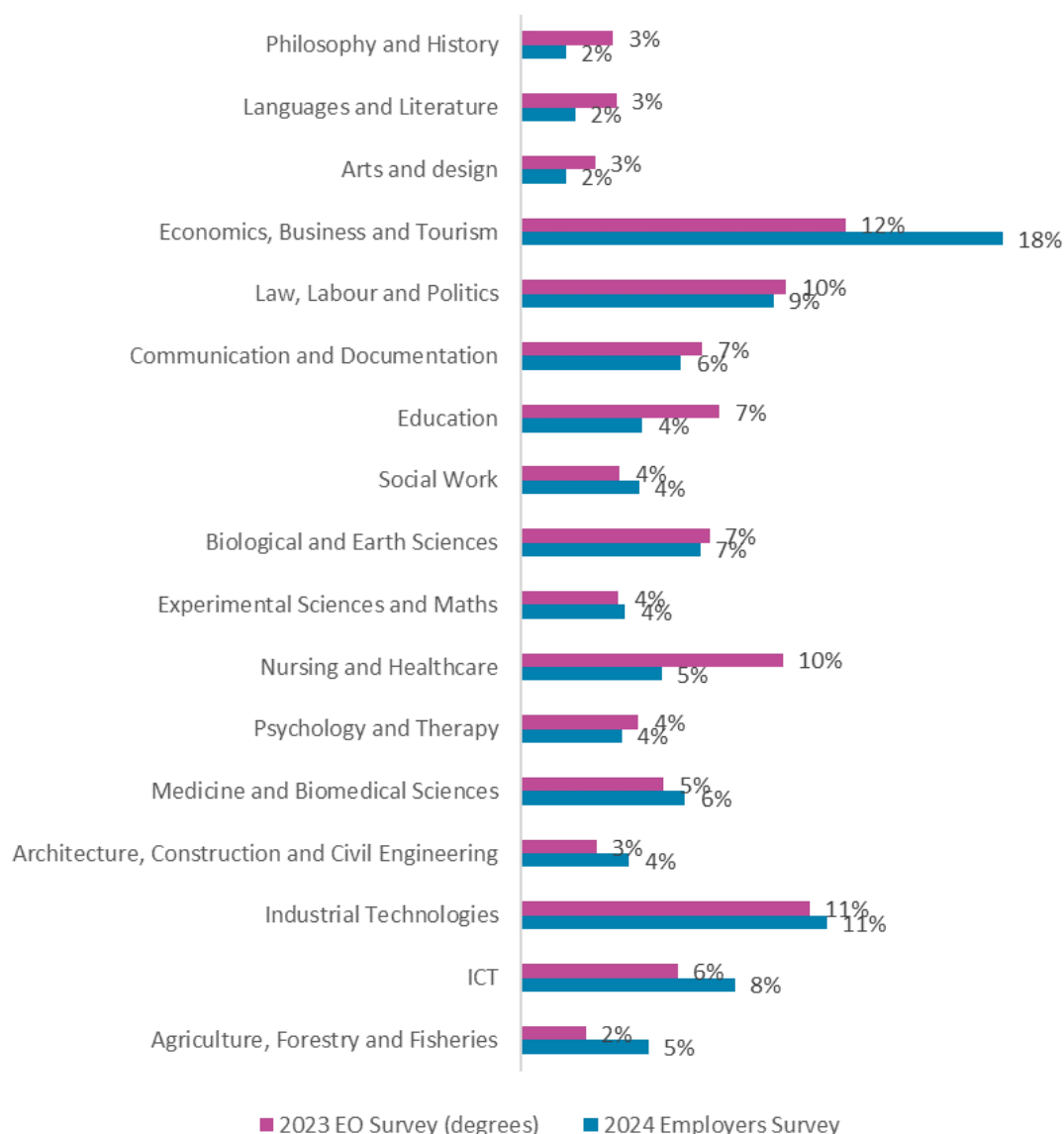
*Figure 3. Distribution of educational fields: recent graduates according to the 2024 Employers Survey compared to the 2023 Employment Outcomes Survey*



*Note: The Employment Outcomes Survey (IL) for degrees refers to the distribution of all graduates according to the educational fields in which they studied. This data is representative of the Catalan Higher Education System as a whole. The Employers Survey data refers only to the distribution of the educational fields of recent graduates hired by the organisations that took part in the survey.*

## Employers' opinion on university education

**Figure 4. Distribution of the educational sub-fields: recent graduates according to the 2024 Employers Survey compared to the 2023 Employment Outcomes Survey**



*Note: The Employment Outcomes Survey (ILO) for degrees refers to the distribution of all graduates according to the educational sub-fields in which they studied. This data is representative of the Catalan Higher Education System as a whole. The Employers Survey data refers only to the distribution of the educational sub-fields of recent graduates hired by the organisations that took part in the survey.*

# RESULTS OF THE EMPLOYERS SURVEY ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

The results detailed below are structured into the following sections:



## Section 1. Recruitment factors

This section outlines the aspects most valued by employers during selection processes, ranging from formal requirements (level of studies, languages) to skills acquired through previous experiences or extracurricular activities. It also examines their views on the potential of innovative training programmes to improve employability.

These findings can help the Catalan Higher Education System in identifying key areas that should be strengthened and incorporated into the curriculum or student support services.

### Which factors were a prerequisite during their recruitment processes?

The organisations are asked to specify their requirements when hiring recent graduates, specifically in terms of formal education (Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, or PhD) and proficiency in English. These results are also categorised based on the educational sub-fields of the candidates.

## Having a bachelor's degree was a prerequisite for companies that recruited recent graduates, whereas a master's degree was not perceived as an essential requirement

- A bachelor's degree was a prerequisite for almost all the organisations surveyed, regardless of the educational field of the individuals recruited (the percentage ranges from 88% in Philology and History to 97% in Psychology and Therapy).
- By contrast, proof of more advanced studies, such as a master's or doctorate, was typically not a requirement of their recruitment processes. In fact, only one in four organisations asked for a master's degree as a condition for employing recent graduates, and virtually none required a doctorate.
- A high level of English was a requirement for half of the organisations that recruited recent graduates.

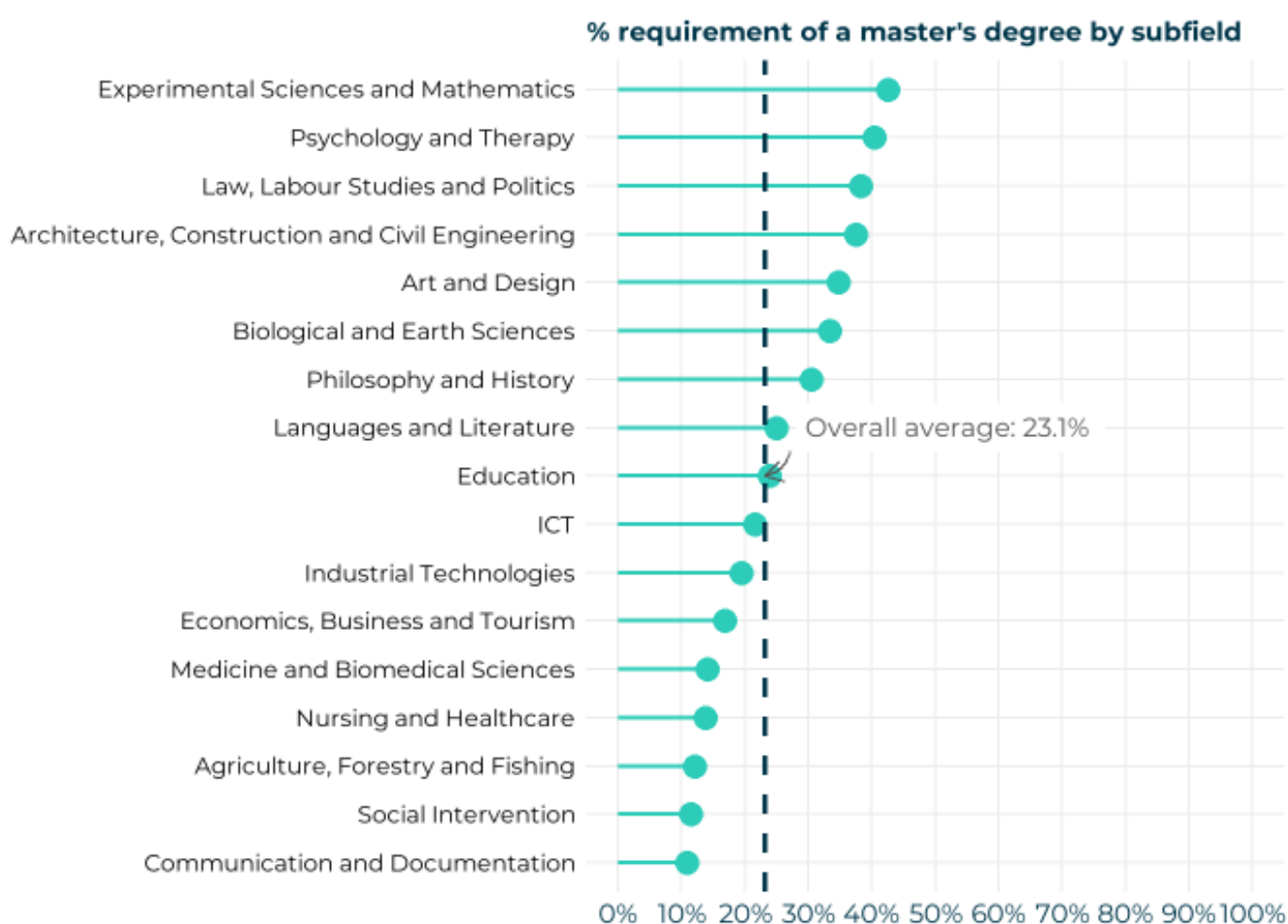
*Figure 5. Percentage of organisations requiring formal education and a high level of English as a prerequisite in the recruitment of recent graduates, with the minimum and maximum by educational sub-field*



## One in four organisations stipulated that candidates must hold a master's degree in their recruitment processes, particularly in educational sub-fields that have a qualifying master's degree

- More than 40% of the organisations that recruited recent graduates in **Experimental Sciences and Mathematics**—especially **Chemistry**—mandated a master's degree as a prerequisite for hiring. This requirement is likely explained by the wide variety of specialisations within the chemical industry, which demand highly qualified profiles with a level of training that can often only be achieved through master's studies.
- Moreover, as would be expected, the sub-fields in which a Master's degree is a prerequisite for professional practise have the highest percentages of master's requirements. Particularly noteworthy among these are **Psychology and Therapy**; **Law, Labour and Politics**; and **Architecture, Construction and Civil Engineering**.

*Figure 6. Percentage of organisations requiring a master's degree for recruitment according to the educational field of the newly recruited graduate*

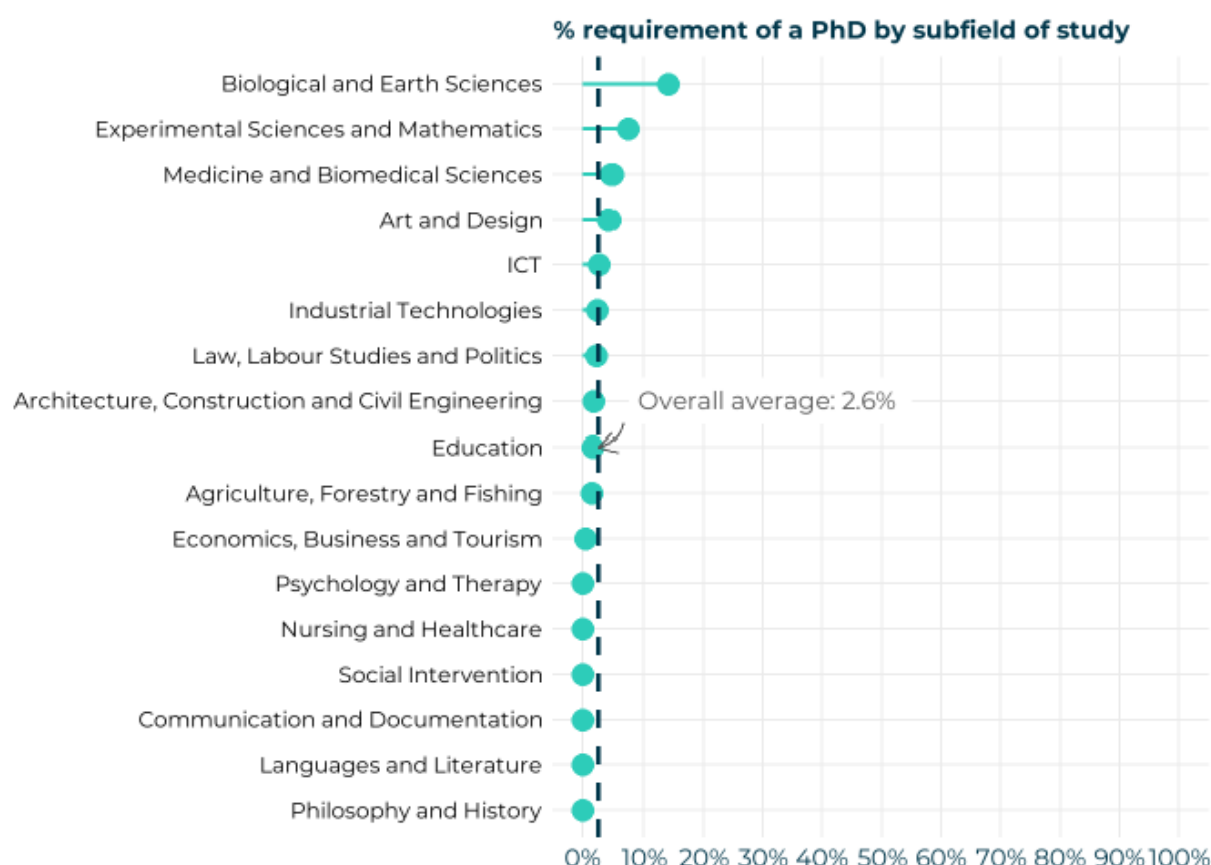




## Doctorate-level degrees were only required in the scientific fields

- 2.6% of the organisations participating in the survey stipulated that candidates must hold a doctorate in their recruitment processes.
- This percentage is slightly higher for **Biological and Earth Sciences**, followed by **Experimental Sciences and Mathematics**.

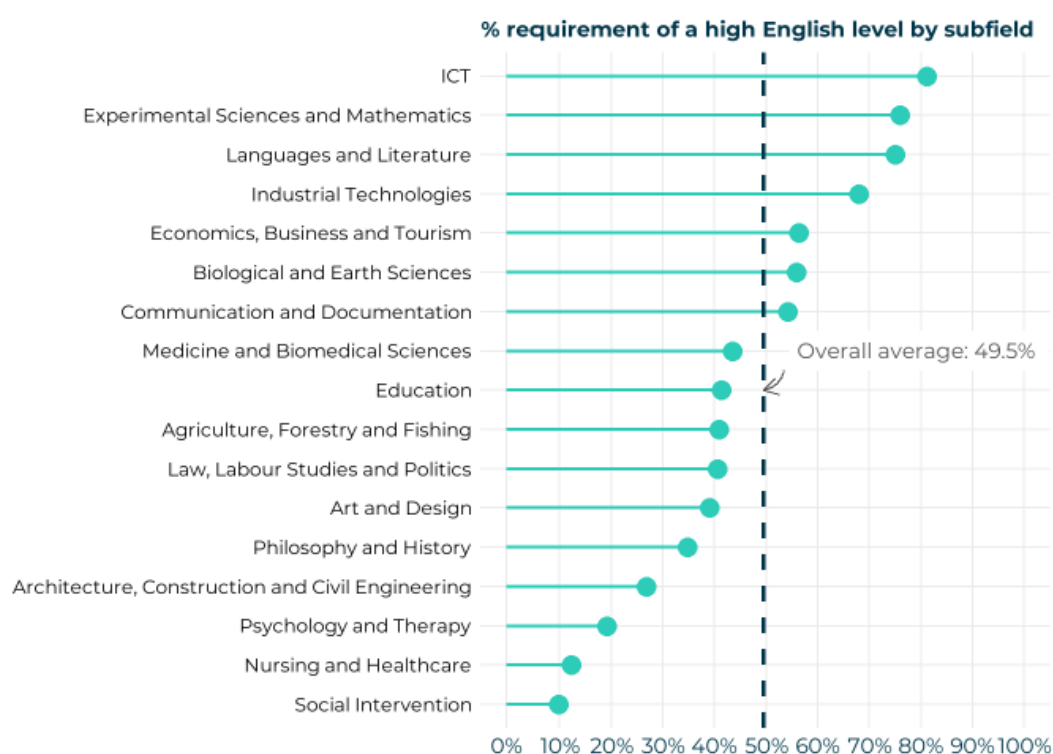
*Figure 7. Percentage of organisations requiring a doctorate degree for recruitment according to the educational field of the newly recruited graduate*



## A high level of English was a requirement for half of the organisations when recruiting recent graduates

- The sub-fields in which this requirement is most common are ICT, Experimental Sciences and Mathematics, Languages and Literature, and Industrial Technologies.
- By contrast, the sub-fields which, due to their nature, focus on providing national coverage, such as healthcare, care work, law and construction, typically view a high level of English as an asset rather than a requirement.
- Although a strong command of English is deemed to be crucial for many organisations, graduates often report that it was one of the least emphasised skills during their studies<sup>8</sup>. This indicates a disconnect between the training provided in academic programmes and the actual needs of the job market.

*Figure 8. Percentage of employers requiring a high level of English for recruitment according to the educational field of the newly recruited graduate*



<sup>8</sup> AQU Catalunya. [Employment outcomes of master's degree graduates from Catalan universities](#). Barcelona, 2023.

## Which factors were most important in recruitment?

Beyond the requirements for formal education and language skills in selection processes, the survey aims to uncover which additional factors—related to training design or extracurricular activities—improve the recruitment prospects of recent graduates.

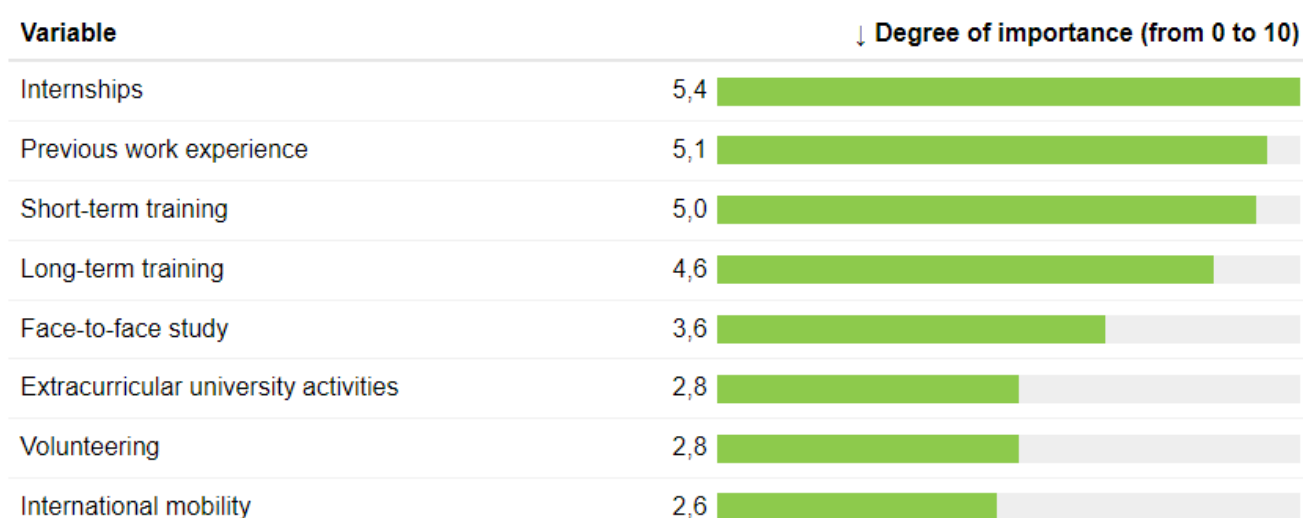
To this end, employers were asked to what extent, on a scale of 0 to 10, the following factors influenced their decisions to hire recent graduates: having completed internships in companies, having previous work experience, having completed complementary training (short or long-term), having studied on campus, having taken part in extracurricular university activities or volunteering, and having experience of studying abroad.

These results are also broken down by the educational sub-field of the recruits.

### While internships and work experience were highly valued in recruitment, they were not the sole determining factors in hiring decisions

- Aspects related to **practical training** were the most pertinent to the organisations, although they were given a medium degree of importance (around 5 on a scale of 0 to 10).
- **Complementary training**, both short-term and long-term, also plays a relatively important role in the selection of candidates. Therefore, the organisations that hired recent graduates place significant value on further training.
- **Factors related to extracurricular university activities**, however, did not play a significant role in their recruitment decisions.

*Figure 9. Degree of importance (from 0 to 10) given by the organisations to various factors when recruiting recent graduates*



## The results are broadly consistent across the various educational sub-fields, though there are some noteworthy specifics to consider

Although the recruitment factors rated by the organisations suggest a degree of standardisation between the educational sub-fields, there are some important nuances that are worth highlighting:

- **Previous work experience and internships** are particularly sought after in people-oriented degrees such as Education, Social Work, Nursing and Healthcare, as well as Psychology and Therapy.
- **Complementary training, both short and long-term**, is highly valued in candidates with Psychology and Therapy degrees, likely due to the access they provide to various fields of specialisation.
- **Volunteering** is valued, above all, in Education and Social Work, and participating in **extracurricular university activities** is regarded as important for positions in Social Work. These factors reflect coherence with the professional values of the sector.
- **International mobility** can be important for recruitment in Languages and Literature.
- **On-campus face-to-face study** is given some importance in several sub-fields, although it is not concentrated in any one particular sub-field.

*Table 1. Degree of importance (from 0 to 10) given by the organisations to various factors when recruiting recent graduates by educational sub-field*

	Work experience	Internships	International mobility	Face-to-face study	Volunteering	Extracurricular university activities	Long-term training	Short-term training
Philosophy and History	5,11	4,46	2,14	4,32	3,64	3,18	4,67	5,23
Languages and Literature	4,26	4,73	4,6	4,58	3,3	3,65	5,1	4,8
Art and Design	5,54	4,89	2,17	3,33	1,67	1,79	3,64	4,52
Economics, Business and Tourism	4,99	5,65	2,91	3,83	2,85	3,04	4,46	5,42
Law, Labour Studies and Politics	4,58	4,88	1,91	2,79	2,52	2,42	4,65	4,38
Communication and Documentation	4,91	5,59	2,91	3,56	3,01	2,78	4,42	4,86
Education	6,07	4,47	2,17	3,12	4,12	3,88	5,25	5,55
Social Intervention	7,3	5,62	1,52	2,63	4,7	4,42	5,47	5,65
Biological and Earth Sciences	4,73	5	3,27	3,95	2,98	2,78	5,11	5,06
Experimental Sciences and Mathematics	4,62	4,62	2,84	2,95	2,4	2,16	4,33	4,29
Nursing and Healthcare	5,7	6,48	1,38	4,08	2,61	2,75	5,25	4,93
Psychology and Therapy	5,49	6,62	1,5	2,85	3,04	2,69	6,13	6,02
Medicine and Biomedical Sciences	5,33	5,98	2,23	3,73	2,04	1,95	4,23	4,88
Architecture, Construction and Civil Engineering	5,04	4,87	1,75	3,66	2,28	2,45	5	5,97
Industrial Technologies	4,83	5,16	3,59	3,86	2,47	2,68	3,7	4,36
ICT	4,39	5,16	2,82	2,94	2,36	2,71	4,12	4,68
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	5,38	5,96	2,58	4,72	3,24	3	4,33	4,52

## *Long and short-term complementary training*

**Formal degree education** is crucial for developing a strong knowledge base and acquiring soft skills that are recognised both nationally and internationally. However, it's important to bear in mind that these studies often have a generalist focus and that the updating of curricula cannot keep pace with rapidly evolving work environments.

As explained in the introduction, **lifelong learning** is essential to ensure that everyone has the knowledge, abilities and skills needed to thrive in a changing labour market. It provides both the specialisation and retraining required to meet the challenges of the digital and ecological transitions.

This report distinguishes between two principal forms of lifelong learning:

- > **Complementary long-term training**, such as master's, postgraduate or other annual courses that facilitate in-depth specialisation. This type of training typically requires a significant investment of both time and money.
- > **Complementary short-term training**, such as short online courses, bootcamps or fast-track certifications. Given its shorter format, this type of training offers greater flexibility at a lower cost and can be easily adapted to the changing needs of the market. However, one of its major drawbacks is its lack of formal recognition, as the quality and academic equivalence of the learning can not always be guaranteed.

Recently, short-term complementary training has been receiving increasing attention, not least because of the European Union's efforts to encourage higher education sectors to become more involved in a domain traditionally associated with non-formal education. In this context, micro-credentials are emerging as a key strategy for combining the advantages of short-term complementary training with official recognition.

Catalan universities, as outlined in the [Microcreds Plan](#) for developing university micro-credentials in Spain, have significant potential to enhance lifelong learning and re-skilling due to their robust infrastructures and qualified personnel.

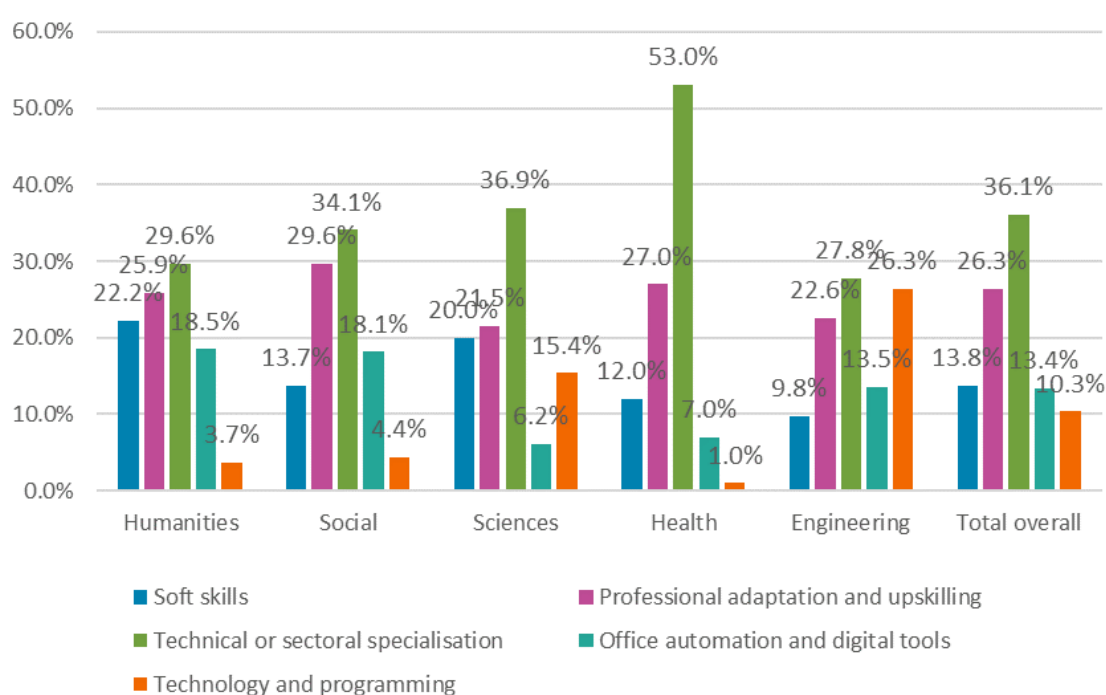
In this context, the Employers Survey seeks insights from organisations in regard to the short- and long-term complementary training courses they find valuable when recruiting recent graduates. While the responses may vary and have different interpretations, a qualitative analysis and classification of these responses enables us to identify the types of training that are most valued in the labour market, as detailed in the following sections.

## Complementary short-term training valued in the recruitment of recent graduates

Organisations value a range of short-term training types when recruiting recent graduates, with significant differences depending on the field of study

- One-third of the organisations that consider short-term training when recruiting recent graduates particularly prioritise **courses orientated towards specialisation**. Specifically, technical or sectoral specialisation courses are the most highly valued across all educational fields but are particularly relevant within the field of Health.
- Secondly, approximately 25% of the organisations value courses that contribute to professional **adaptation and upskilling**, which underlines the importance of keeping up to date with sectoral know-how and trends.
- Thirdly, 20% highlight the importance of training in **information and communication technologies (ICT)**. Within this area, we can identify two main pathways: on the one hand, courses focused on **office automation and digital tools**, which are particularly valued in the **Humanities and Social Sciences**, and on the other hand, **technology and programming** courses, which are more highly valued in **Scientific and**, above all, **Engineering fields**.
- Lastly, around 10% of the organisations value training aimed at developing **soft skills**, such as communication, adaptability and teamwork.

Figure 10. Percentage of organisations that value short-term complementary training in recruitment, by type of training and educational field

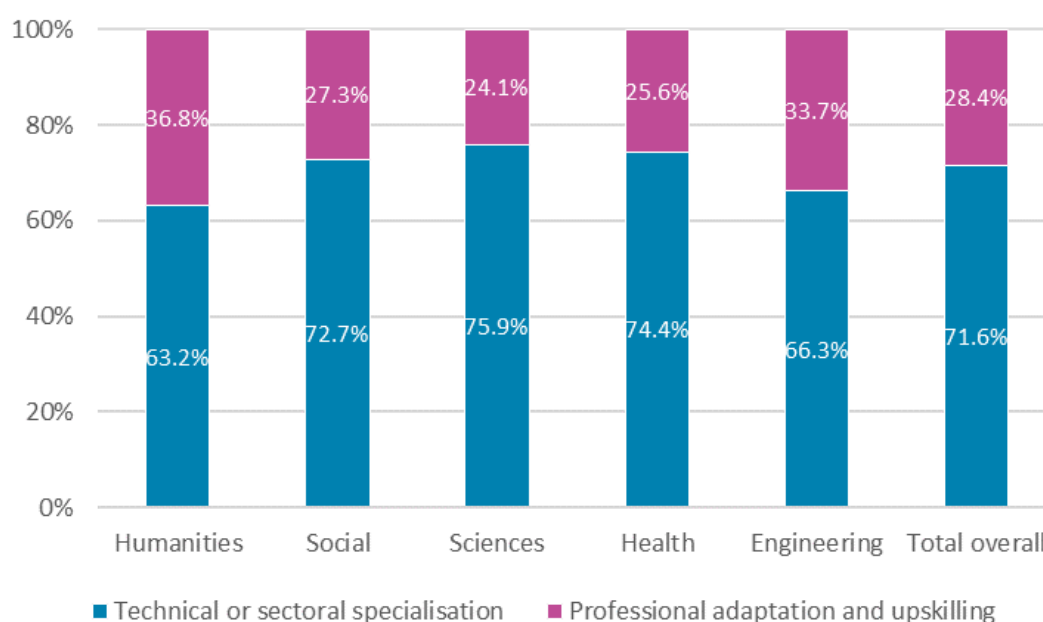


## Long-term complementary training valued in the recruitment of recent graduates

### Of the organisations surveyed, 70% value long-term training due to the potential for specialisation

- Most of the organisations that consider long-term training when recruiting recent graduates—specifically, 70%— principally value **courses orientated towards professional specialisation**. This trend is relatively consistent across all the educational fields.
- The other forms of long-term training that organisations consider relevant involve updating professional knowledge and skills, highlighting the importance of staying current in a constantly changing work environment.

*Figure 11. Percentage of organisations that value long-term complementary training in recruitment, by type of training and educational field*



## Recruitment factors: assessment of innovative training proposals that improve employability

In recent years, universities have been integrating innovative training proposals into the framework of official university degrees. Many of these initiatives are being implemented to enhance the professional and personal development of graduates, either through their high practical component, such as dual degrees or in-company final dissertations, because they enable students to acquire knowledge and skills in multiple disciplines (double degrees), or because they foster mobility and the consequent acquisition of cultural and linguistic flexibility (joint international inter-university degrees). However, it is important to note that we lack substantial evidence of the added value, particularly in terms of employability, of some of these programmes compared to traditional degrees, and in part, this is why the survey seeks to find out what the labour market thinks of them. A brief explanation of these different formats, along with a summary of their strengths and weaknesses, is provided below.

### Double university degree

A double degree allows students to pursue two degrees simultaneously, enabling them to earn two official degrees in a shorter time frame than if they were to study each degree separately. Typically, these programmes take between five and six years to complete. In Spain, double degrees were first introduced in 2007 through Royal Decree 1393/2007, issued on October 29. Since then, there has been a steady increase in the availability of double degrees.

According to a recent study carried out by the Fundación para el Conocimiento madri+d<sup>9</sup> and based on data from the Integrated University Information System (SIIU), **in the 2023-2024 academic year, 20.1% of undergraduate degrees in Catalonia were offered as double degrees.**

According to the same study, double degrees offer several advantages:

- > They are highly regarded by both students and employers.
- > The entry grades are typically very high, so only exceptional students qualify.

However, there are also some disadvantages to consider:

- > A lack of practical training and coordination between subjects has been identified.
- > They do not undergo an external assessment process; only the individual degrees are assessed.

Similar opinions have been echoed internationally. In the UK, students believe that pursuing training in two disciplines offers a valuable educational experience. However, they report facing several challenges, including difficulties in integrating into two different learning communities, a lack of support from universities, the need to navigate differing assessment and teaching

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<sup>9</sup> Fundación para el Conocimiento madri+d. [Double degrees. Double the opportunities?](#). Madrid, 2024.



methods and managing a heavy workload<sup>10</sup>. The issues associated with the difficulty of integrating into a learning community have also been observed in Australian universities<sup>11</sup>.

### Dual degrees

A dual degree is an educational programme that combines apprenticeships in an entity and education in a vocational school or university. Specifically, as stated in a report on dual training in the SUC prepared by the Ministry for Research and Universities<sup>12</sup>, dual degrees comply with the following:

- > They involve three main groups: the students, the tutors at the collaborating entities, and the teaching staff at the university faculty or school.
- > Students alternate their training between the university and the entity at different intervals.
- > There is a legal relationship between the students and the entity in the form of a specific employment contract for dual university training.

Currently, **the SUC offers around twenty degrees in dual format**<sup>13</sup>.

Historically, dual training programmes have primarily been associated with vocational training systems. However, the increasing participation of universities has led to these types of programmes being gradually incorporated into their course offerings<sup>14</sup>. The main advantage of dual training programmes is that they enable students to gain practical experience while pursuing their studies. Conversely, a significant disadvantage is that some companies, especially smaller ones, may lack the training expertise and time required to adequately tutor students.

### In-company final dissertations (TFE)

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<sup>10</sup> Louise PIGDEN and Franc JEGEDE. [“Thematic analysis of the learning experience of joint honours students: their perception of teaching quality, value for money and employability”](#), *Studies in Higher Education*, 45, 8 (2nd August 2020), pp. 1650-63.

<sup>11</sup> A. Wendy RUSSELL, Sara DOLNICAR, Marina AYOUN. [“Double Degrees: Double the Trouble or Twice the Return?”](#), *Higher Education*, 55, 5 (1st May 2008), pp. 575-91.

<sup>12</sup> Margarita MOLTÓ ARIBAU (coord.). “Dual training in the Catalan Higher Education System”. Barcelona, Directorate General of Universities, Ministry for Research and Universities, Government of Catalonia, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> The data has been sourced from the Official Register of Studies and Degrees (ROC) and the Catalan University Studies portal (EUC reports).

<sup>14</sup> Hubert ERTL. [“Dual study programmes in Germany: blurring the boundaries between higher education and vocational training?”](#), *Oxford Review of Education*, 46, 1 (2nd January 2020), pp. 79-95.

All official bachelor's and master's degree programmes require students to complete a final dissertation, known by its acronyms in Catalan as TFG (bachelor's degrees) or TFM (master's degrees). However, some programmes allow students to write their dissertation in collaboration with a company or institution.

This option provides several advantages. For the student, it represents an opportunity to develop the project in a real-world professional environment, which facilitates the acquisition of work experience and first-hand knowledge of the sector. For the company, the dissertations can represent a valuable academic contribution, as they are often geared towards addressing specific needs or strategic challenges.

Although we lack systematic data on the percentage of students who prepare their dissertation in a company, we do know that this practice is particularly common in the field of Engineering, where there is a long tradition of final dissertations being prepared in collaboration with the productive ecosystem<sup>15</sup>.

Along similar lines, the [Industrial Doctorate Programme](#) fosters collaborative applied research projects between companies and universities or research centres, integrating doctoral students working on projects with strategic impact.

### Joint inter-university international degrees

A **joint university degree** is a study programme offered by two or more universities that collaborate to award a single official degree to students. This means that, upon completion of their studies, graduates receive a single diploma that is **recognised by all the participating universities**.

These types of degrees promote student mobility and language learning and improve job prospects, as companies particularly value candidates who can demonstrate adaptability, the ability to work in diverse environments, and cross-disciplinary training. However, one of the conclusions of the ED-AFFICHE<sup>16</sup> project, which was completed in 2024, is that despite the existence of academically appealing and strategically relevant course offerings, they often have limited social impact.

Currently, there are a total of 59 active joint international university degrees in Catalonia<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Elena VALDERRAMA VALLÉS (ed.). [Guide to assessing competencies in bachelor's and master's degree final dissertations in Engineering](#). Barcelona, AQU Catalunya, 2009.

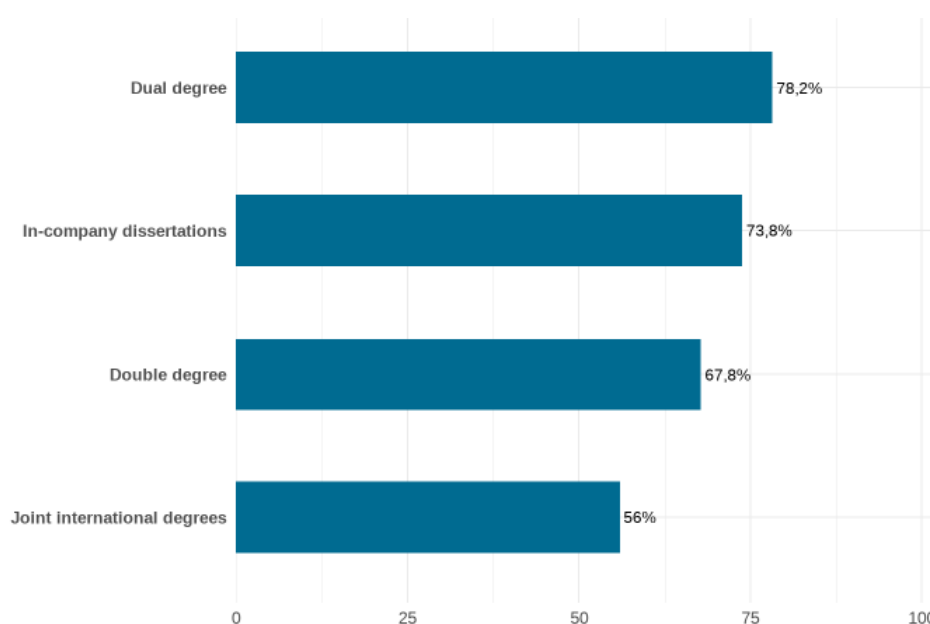
<sup>16</sup> European Degree – Advancing the Framework for Institutional Cooperation in Higher Education is a pilot initiative funded by the European Commission as part of the Erasmus+ programme.

<sup>17</sup> Data from the ROC.

Innovative training schemes are generally highly regarded by organisations, especially those that facilitate interaction with the business world, such as dual degrees or dissertations conducted in collaboration with companies

- Our research shows that **78% of organisations** believe that students with **dual degrees** have a competitive advantage over those with traditional degrees during selection processes.
- Additionally, **74% of organisations** view students who completed **in-company dissertations (TFE)** favourably, considering it a beneficial factor during recruitment.
- **More academic** training proposals, such as **double degrees** and **joint international inter-university degrees**, are also well thought of by most companies but offer less of a competitive advantage in recruitment processes than the more practice-oriented options.

*Figure 12. Percentage of organisations that think innovative degree programmes improve the employability of graduates*

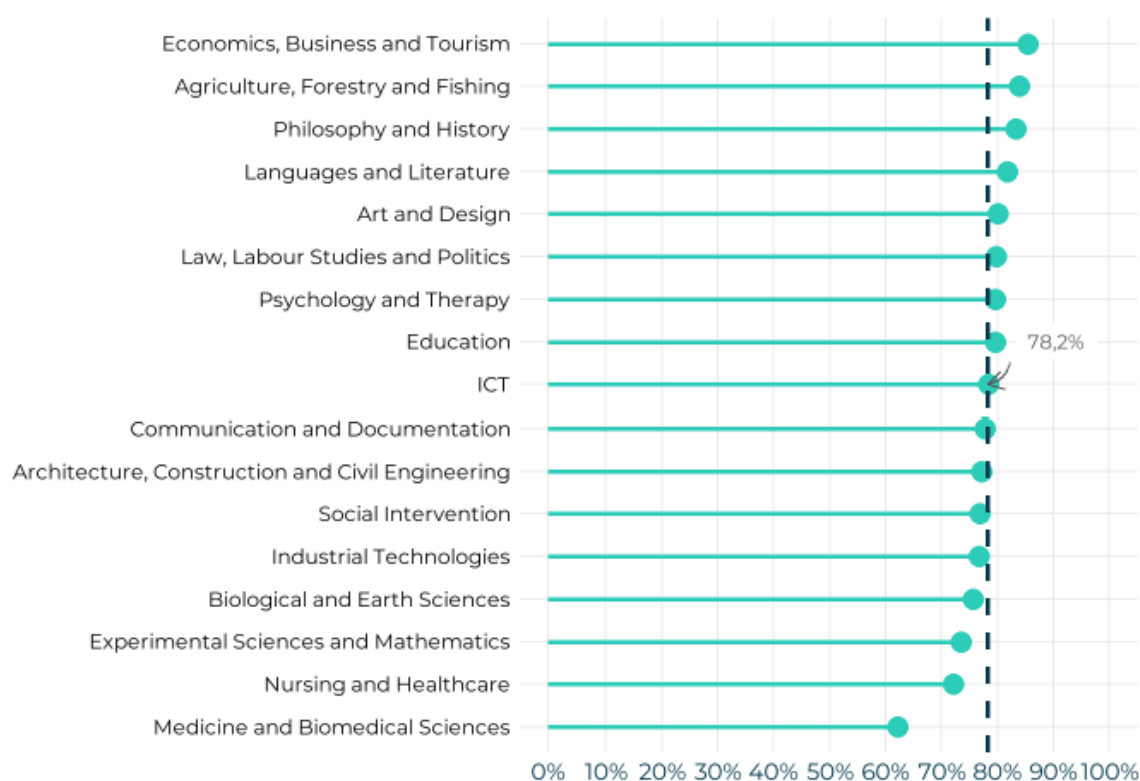


Furthermore, the organisations' assessments of some of the innovative degree models vary depending on the educational field of the recent graduates they hire.

## The perception that dual degrees enhance employability is relatively consistent across all educational fields

- Of particular note is the view of organisations hiring professionals in the fields of **Economics, Business and Tourism** and the **Humanities** (Philosophy and History, Languages and Literature and Arts and Design), which believe that having a dual degree could significantly improve employability in their fields.
- By contrast, compared to other sub-fields, dual degrees are perceived as being less important in Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. These results could be explained by the fact that degrees in these fields involve a high degree of workplace training.
- The dual degrees offered by the SUC are mainly in Economics and Business and Tourism; none are available in the field of Humanities.

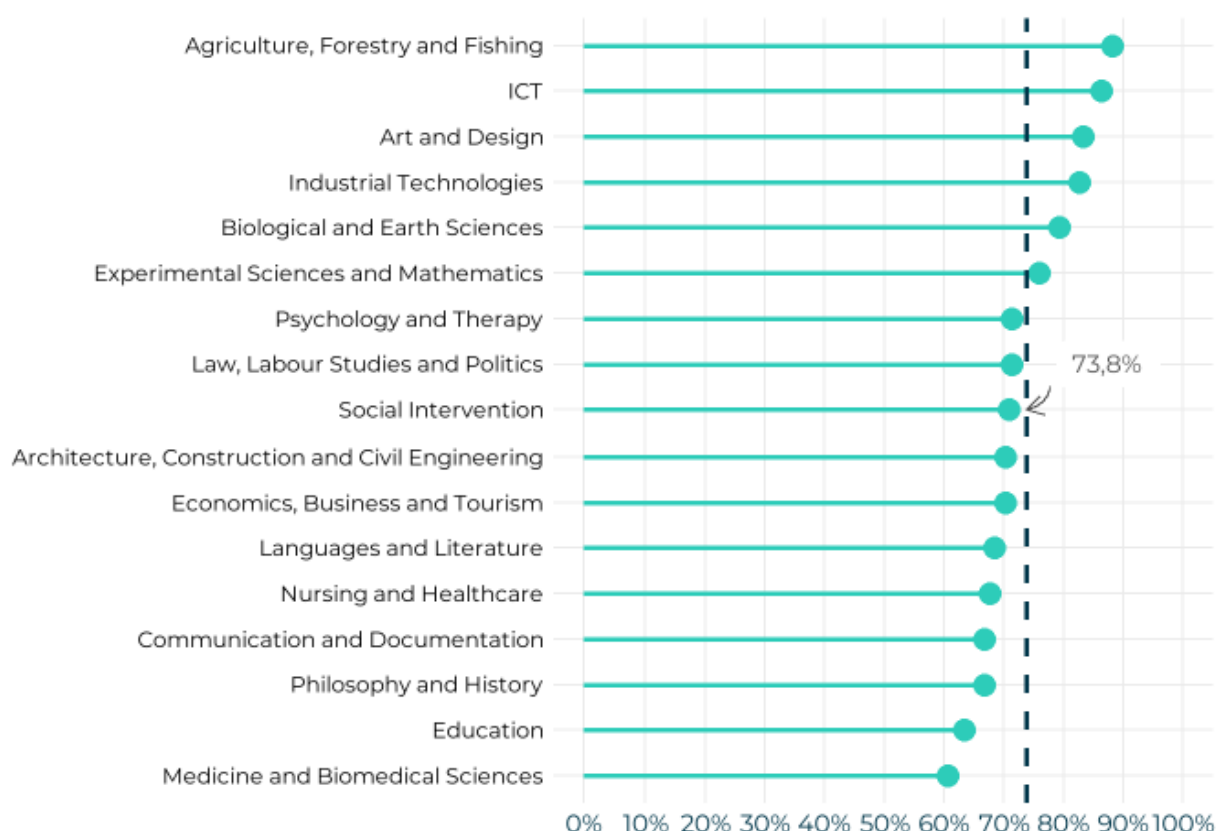
*Figure 13. Percentage of organisations that think dual degree programmes improve the employability of graduates, by educational sub-field*



## Organisations that hire graduates in the field of Engineering view in-company dissertations most favourably, regarding them as a positive factor that could improve employability

- Notably, among the sub-field with the highest percentages, those hiring Arts and Design students within the Humanities field also view in-company dissertations favourably.

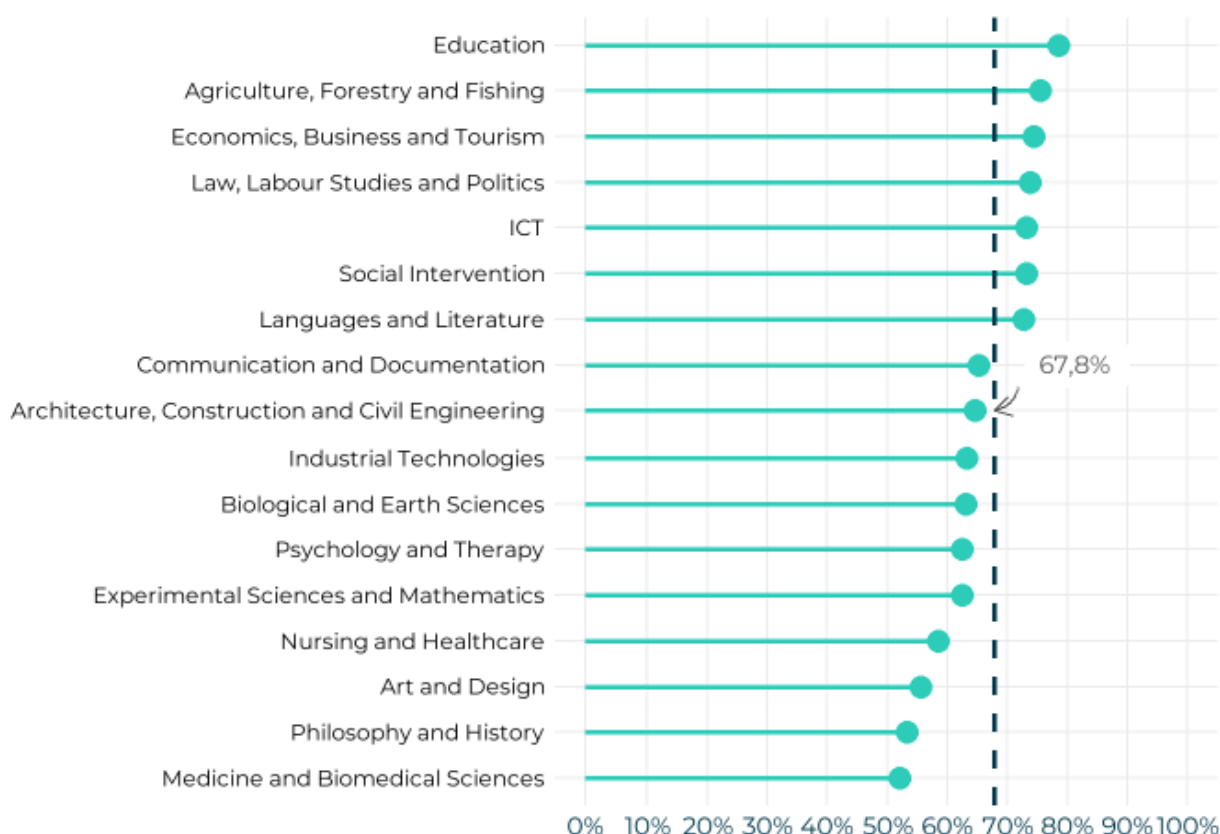
*Figure 14. Percentage of organisations that think in-company dissertations improve the employability of graduates, by educational sub-field*



## Double degrees add significant benefit to qualifications in the Social Sciences fields, particularly in Education

- In the specific case of Education, this benefit is particularly relevant in state-subsidised private schools, which tend to look for more versatile professional profiles<sup>18</sup>.
- Other fields include Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, ICT, and Languages and Literature.

**Figure 15. Percentage of organisations that think double degree programmes improve the employability of graduates, by educational sub-field**

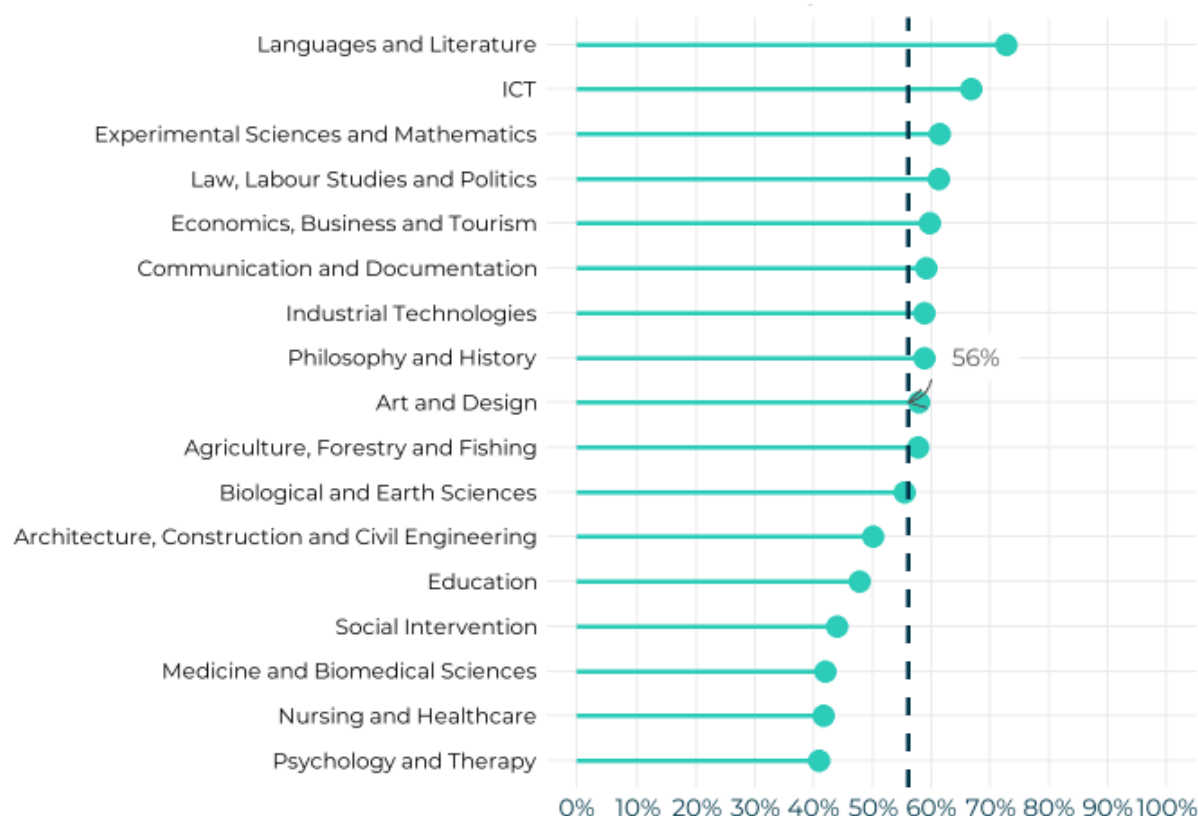


<sup>18</sup> AQU Catalunya. [Employability and university education in the field of Education](#).

## Joint inter-university international degrees are particularly valued in Languages and Literature

- The educational sub-fields in which this aspect is least appreciated are those in the field of Health.

*Figure 16. Percentage of organisations that think joint inter-university international degree programmes improve the employability of graduates, by educational sub-field*



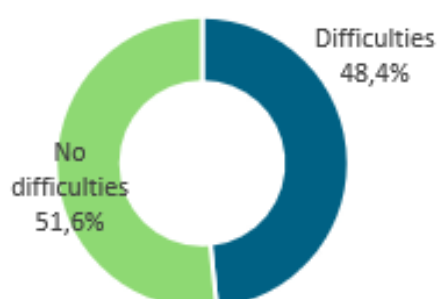
## Section 2. Recruitment issues

By understanding recruitment issues, we can identify specific labour market needs and align them with educational offerings. The organisations are therefore asked whether they encountered any difficulties in recruiting for the position filled by the person hired and, if so, the reasons for this are recorded. This analysis is also broken down by the educational field of the individuals hired in order to identify any specific trends.

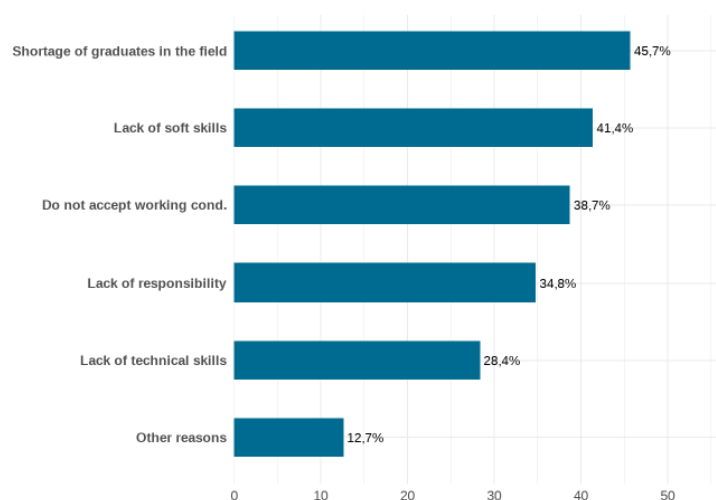
### Half of the organisations surveyed say they have difficulty recruiting the right people

- The primary reason for these difficulties is a shortage of graduates in specific fields (46%). Moreover, they emphasise an absence of generic skills such as responsibility, initiative, communication, and flexibility (41%), as well as a lack of acceptance of working conditions (39%).

*Figure 17. Percentage of organisations that encounter difficulties when recruiting*



*Figure 18. Reasons for the difficulties when recruiting (%)*

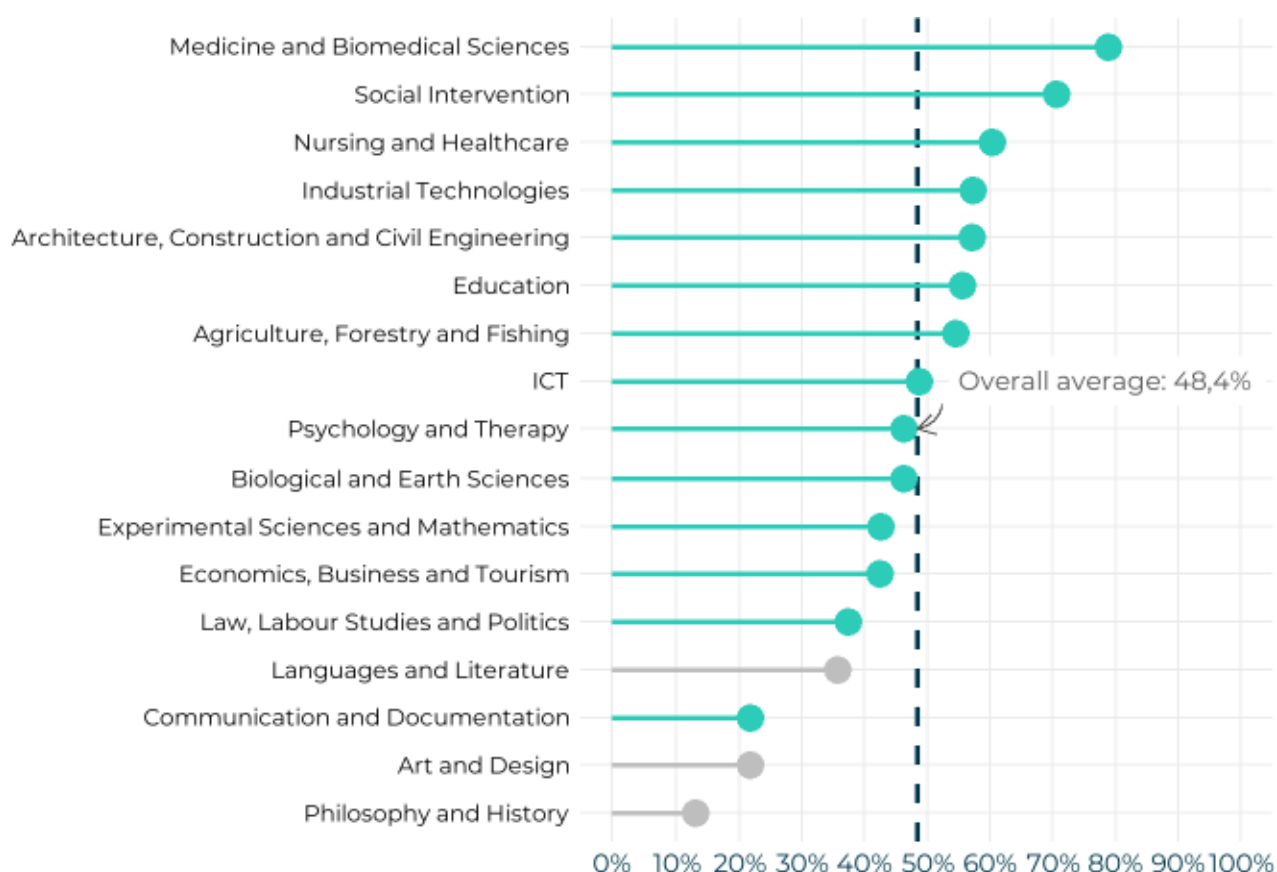




## There is a shortage of graduates in the fields of Health, Engineering and Education

- Recruitment issues are more prevalent among organisations in the field of Health. Specifically, 79% of organisations that hire graduates in Medicine and Biomedical Sciences and 60% of those that hire Nursing and Healthcare professionals have experienced difficulties filling vacancies in these fields, and they attribute this primarily to a lack of graduates in this field.
- In the field of Social Sciences, it is notable that 70% of organisations hiring Social Work professionals have encountered difficulties in recruitment, mainly because the candidates refuse to accept the working conditions offered. In Education, 56% of organisations also report difficulties, but in this case they are attributed to a lack of available graduates.
- All the Engineering sub-fields also report above-average difficulties, mainly due to a lack of graduates, followed by a lack of generic skills.

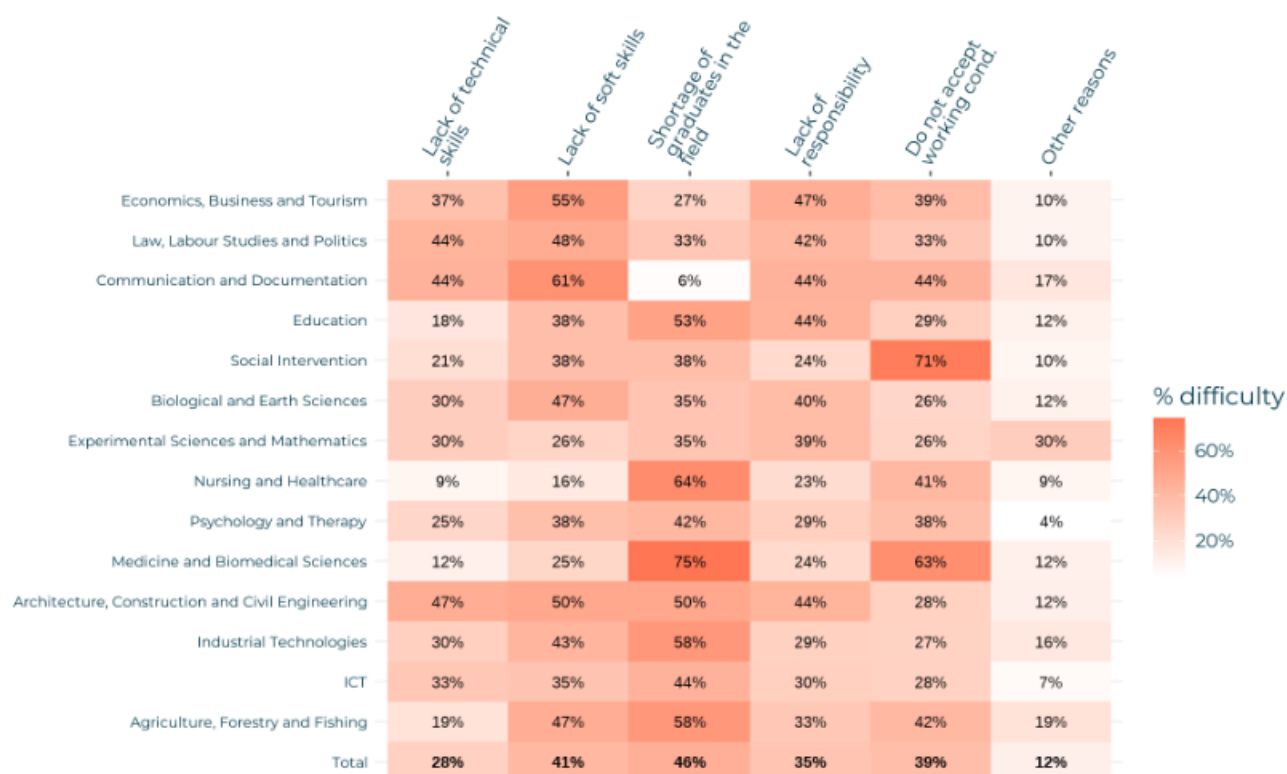
**Figure 19. Percentage of organisations that encounter difficulties when recruiting, by educational sub-field**



*Note: The grey dots indicate sub-fields with ten or fewer observations (organisations facing recruitment issues)*

## Employers' opinion on university education

**Table 2. Reasons for the difficulties in hiring the appropriate profiles, by educational sub-field**



Note: The data for the Humanities sub-fields is not provided due to an insufficient sample size.

## Section 3. Skills that need to be improved in recent graduates

The organisations are asked to identify between one and five skills that they believe recent graduates need to improve. This information is valuable for determining which aspects of university education can be strengthened and helps to pinpoint key areas for enhancing student preparation.

### More than half of the organisations agree on the need to improve problem-solving skills in the training of recent graduates

- The other skills most in need of improvement are practical training (46%) and planning and organisation (41%). It is worth noting that **these three skills are closely related to work experience** and could therefore be improved through **work placements or dual training**.
- Critical thinking (36%), teamwork (34%) and learning and independent learning skills (34%) are seen as areas for improvement by one in three organisations. These skills are more closely related to the teaching and learning process.

*Figure 20. Percentage of organisations identifying skills that need to be improved in university education*

Skills	Percentage
Problem-solving	53,5
Practical training	46,3
Planning and organisation	40,5
Critical thinking	35,9
Teamwork	34
Learning and independent learning	33,8
Written expression	27,6
Creativity and innovation	27
Oral communication	27
English	18,8
Ethical, social, and environmental responsibility	17,5
Technical and digital skills	17,4
Information search and management	13,8
Theoretical training	13,5

While the results were generally consistent across the various educational sub-fields, some differences were identified for the remaining skills.

## Problem-solving and practical training skills need improvement in all fields, but there are some differences between the sub-fields in regard to other skills

- There is particular room for improvement in the **planning and organisation** skills of Arts and Design and Social Work graduates.
- **Critical thinking** is a skill that needs to be improved in all fields except Humanities and Health.
- **Teamwork** needs to be improved in Social Work, Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, and Nursing and Healthcare.
- The **capacity for learning and independent learning** has room for improvement in Philosophy and History.
- **Theoretical training** is considered critical in Psychology and Therapy.
- **Creativity and innovation** need to be improved in Arts and Design.
- **Oral communication** could use improvement in the ICTs and **written expression** in Philosophy and History.
- **Ethical, social and environmental responsibility** is lacking in the personal services fields: Education, Social Work and Nursing and Health.

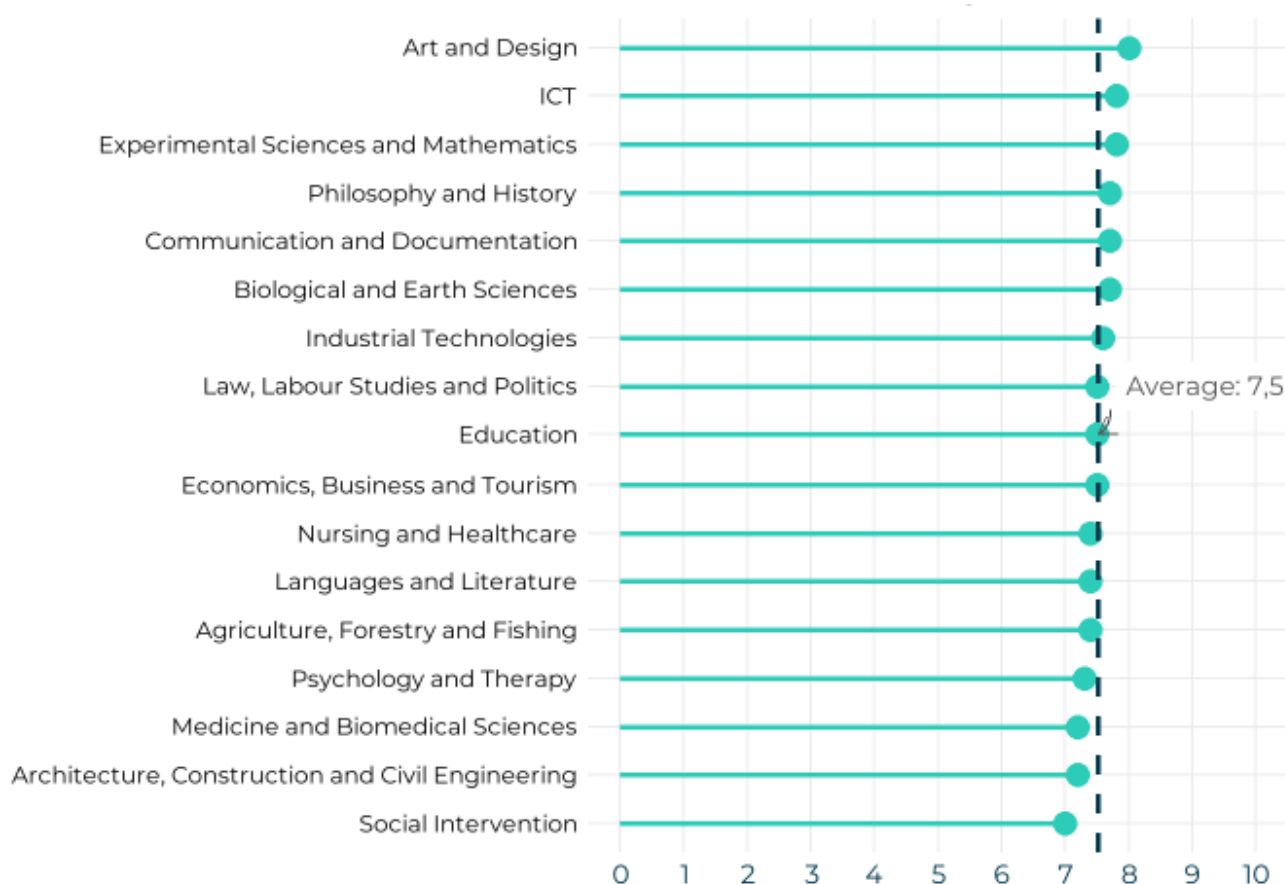
*Table 4. Percentage of organisations identifying skills that need to be improved in university education, by educational sub-field*

		Theoretical training	Practical training	Problem-solving	Creativity and innovation and independent learning	Planning and organisation	Critical thinking	Oral communication	Written expression	English	Technical and digital skills	Information search and management	Teamwork	ESE responsibility
Philosophy and History	13%	48%	52%	30%	57%	43%	9%	13%	57%	13%	26%	26%	43%	9%
Languages and Literature	4%	61%	54%	32%	21%	46%	21%	14%	21%	18%	25%	7%	18%	25%
Art and Design	9%	39%	52%	61%	43%	70%	22%	30%	35%	17%	13%	17%	35%	17%
Economics, Business and Tourism	8%	50%	57%	30%	30%	43%	38%	26%	24%	19%	24%	15%	27%	13%
Law, Labour Studies and Politics	15%	44%	46%	18%	40%	39%	36%	23%	43%	14%	24%	22%	33%	15%
Communication and Documentation	10%	37%	49%	35%	40%	39%	42%	24%	33%	16%	23%	19%	29%	16%
Education	17%	51%	49%	35%	24%	37%	35%	22%	17%	25%	14%	6%	41%	41%
Social Intervention	10%	48%	69%	31%	18%	56%	43%	23%	41%	0%	15%	8%	52%	39%
Biological and Earth Sciences	17%	41%	55%	18%	42%	34%	46%	27%	32%	20%	13%	17%	32%	12%
Experimental Sciences and Mathematics	17%	41%	46%	13%	39%	39%	37%	30%	24%	28%	13%	19%	30%	15%
Nursing and Healthcare	10%	47%	52%	19%	36%	34%	33%	25%	15%	12%	16%	12%	48%	38%
Psychology and Therapy	31%	56%	56%	27%	31%	38%	25%	37%	27%	13%	8%	4%	35%	25%
Medicine and Biomedical Sciences	12%	48%	55%	27%	32%	34%	21%	28%	13%	22%	21%	13%	49%	24%
Architecture, Construction and Civil Engineering	23%	50%	52%	14%	34%	43%	39%	23%	30%	18%	21%	14%	30%	14%
Industrial Technologies	15%	45%	55%	29%	29%	43%	38%	34%	28%	25%	11%	12%	29%	6%
ICT	14%	44%	46%	30%	35%	34%	40%	41%	26%	25%	11%	8%	34%	13%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	14%	45%	62%	30%	41%	39%	39%	17%	21%	18%	9%	12%	35%	14%
Total	14%	46%	54%	27%	34%	40%	36%	27%	28%	19%	17%	14%	34%	18%

## Despite the training shortcomings identified, organisations rate the skills of recent graduates highly (7.5)

- This assessment is broadly consistent across all the educational sub-fields (the evaluations range from 7 in Social Work to 8 in Arts and Design).
- The overall satisfaction of employers with the skills of the recent graduates they have hired is in line with the findings of previous editions of the Employers Survey<sup>19</sup>.

*Figure 21. Average level of employer satisfaction with the skills of recent graduates, by educational sub-field (scale from 0 to 10)*



<sup>19</sup> See more information from the [Employers project on the AQU Catalunya website](#).

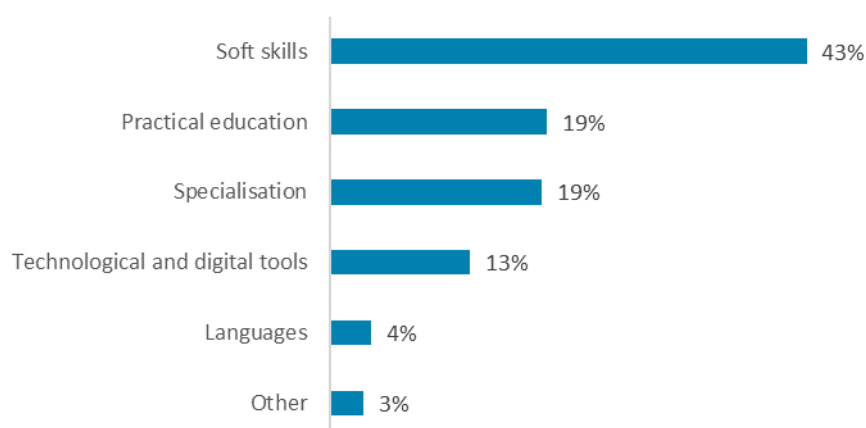
## Section 4. Training needs of the qualified staff within the surveyed organisations

Due to the rapid changes in the labour market, workers require access to targeted training to advance in their careers. To determine the training needs of the qualified staff within the surveyed organisations, employers are asked about these needs and which providers currently offer the necessary training.

### Almost half of the organisations that identify areas for improvement among their qualified staff point to the need to improve soft skills

- These skills are primarily linked to oral and written communication, teamwork, leadership and organisation.
- Moreover, as has been identified in recent university graduates, there is significant room for improvement in the practical training of university-educated personnel within organisations.
- Technical skills, including specialisation and proficiency in technological and digital tools, also have a significant impact.

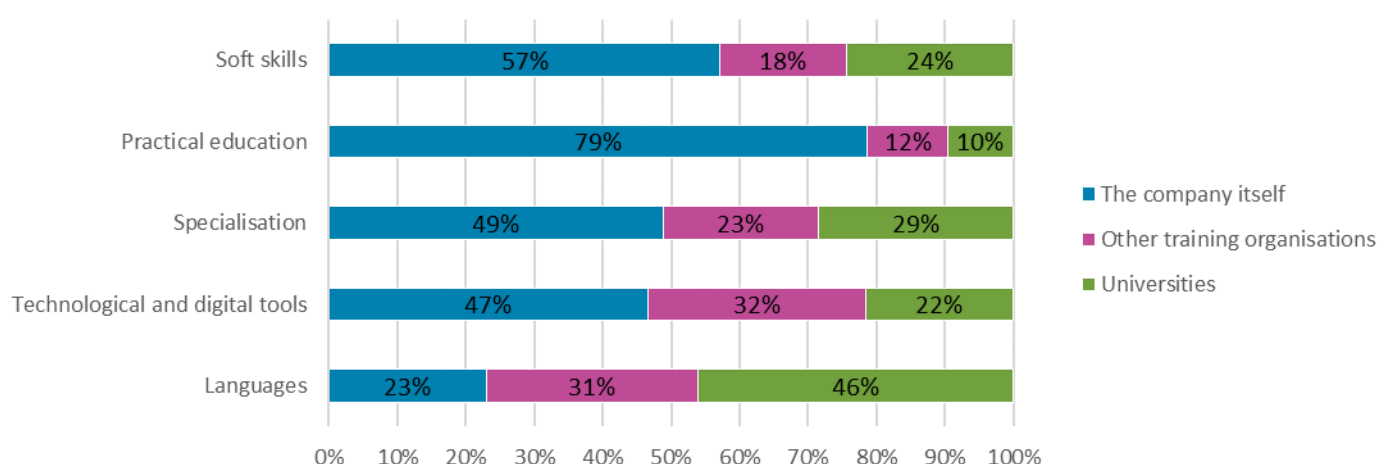
*Figure 22. Knowledge or skills to be improved among the university-educated personnel within the organisations*



## It is the organisations themselves that provide continuous training for their qualified personnel

- Currently, the organisations themselves cover the training needs of their qualified personnel, particularly when it comes to practical training. Around half are also providing training in soft skills, specialisation and technological and digital tools.
- However, these results underline the fact that, as it stands today, organisations do not perceive universities as relevant agents in the provision of lifelong learning.

*Figure 23. Entity offering quality training to enhance the skills of university-educated staff within organisations*



# DATA SHEET

*Technical information for the 4th edition of the Employer Survey (2024)*

<i>Population</i>	Organisations likely to have hired recent graduates from universities in Catalonia over the last three years
<i>Sampling frame</i>	Companies, organisations and institutions that have had contact with Catalan universities, primarily through their job banks.  Contacts
<i>Fieldwork</i>	From 18/11/2024 to the 20/12/2024
<i>Survey type</i>	Online. Software used: LimeSurvey

*Summary of the responses to the 4th edition of the employer survey (2024)*

<i>Sampling frame</i>	26,631
<i>Responses</i>	1,411
<i>Response rate</i>	5.3%



## Samples by the educational field and sub-field of the graduates hired

*Table 1. Distribution of the organisations according to the educational field of the people they hired*

<i>Educational field</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Humanities</i>	74	5.2
<i>Social</i>	588	41.7
<i>Sciences</i>	147	10.4
<i>Health</i>	210	14.9
<i>Engineering</i>	392	27.8
<i>Total</i>	1,411	100.0

*Table 2. Distribution of the organisations according to the educational sub-field of the people they hired*

<i>Educational sub-field</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Philosophy and History</i>	23	1.6
<i>Languages and Literature</i>	28	2.0
<i>Arts and Design</i>	23	1.6
<i>Economics, Business and Tourism</i>	250	17.7
<i>Law, Labour and Politics</i>	131	9.3
<i>Communication and Documentation</i>	83	5.9
<i>Education</i>	63	4.5
<i>Social Work</i>	61	4.3
<i>Biological and Earth Sciences</i>	93	6.6
<i>Experimental Sciences and Maths</i>	54	3.8
<i>Nursing and Healthcare</i>	73	5.2
<i>Psychology and Therapy</i>	52	3.7
<i>Medicine and Biomedical Sciences</i>	85	6.0
<i>Architecture, Construction and Civil Engineering</i>	56	4.0

## Employers' opinion on university education

<i>Industrial Technologies</i>	159	11.3
<i>ICT</i>	111	7.9
<i>Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries</i>	66	4.7
<i>Total</i>	1,411	100.0

**Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya**

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