

---

## Understanding Ireland's emerging project-based economy

Dean of [Trinity Business School](#) Prof Andrew Burke says the project-based economy is on the rise and it is time to understand the needs of the growing contingent workforce.

Important new Irish research by Trinity College Dublin has been commissioned to assess the extent and nature of professional contracting in Ireland's labour market, as the country's growing contingent workforce and project-based economy emerges.

The move to contracted professional services in the workplace is steadily growing, from locum medics and pharma specialists to engineering project managers, journalists and IT experts.

The pandemic accelerated a shift in how and where people work, and also how they are hired, with many businesses seeking the flexibility of independent professional contractors to supplement full-time employees.

**Professional contractors can drive innovation**

Independent professionals, also known as project workers, independent contractors, consultants or self-employed professionals, are a key cohort of the skills which attract multinationals to Ireland, Professor Andrew Burke, Dean of Trinity Business School says.

“Operating in almost every sector of the economy, studies in Europe have proven how the use of professional contractors drives innovation, de-risks growth and increases overall net job creation”, Professor Burke says of the survey research to be carried out in Ireland by Trinity Business School in early February.

This comprehensive report will be the first of its kind in Ireland offering evidence-based results on what the independent professional sector looks like here, according to Jimmy Sheehan, Managing Director of Contracting PLUS, who commissioned the research.

“Independent professionals are a key component impacting the employment and economic scales in society, and yet there is little data-driven knowledge of the challenges they face or the contribution they make, and how to harness it.

“Given this new normal of working via freelancing or contracting, serious concerns are being raised about how this market is controlled, from the perspective of the main stakeholders, including the contractors themselves, recruiters, and employers engaging contractors”, Jimmy Sheehan explained.

Contracting PLUS is a leading provider of umbrella companies and accountancy services for professional contractors. The commissioned research will be by way of anonymous survey, independently designed, collated and verified by Trinity Business School researchers in Trinity College Dublin.

It aims to be the most comprehensive longitudinal study of self-employed professionals in Europe, currently, with the aim of having contributors opt in to be part of the survey annually, in order to track the confidence of the sector on a rolling basis.

The survey will also generate business confidence indices, providing an outlook on the prospects for the Irish economy. A link to the survey and relevant information in relation to it can be found at: [www.tcd.ie/business/freelancers.php](http://www.tcd.ie/business/freelancers.php)

Professor Andrew Burke explains that “independent professional freelancers are often hired on projects associated with growth and development, such as developing innovation, embedding new technology into organisations, and enabling companies to respond rapidly to market opportunities. As a result, they are in an advantageous position to forecast economic performance, as they are one of the first groups of workers who get an insight into firms’ plans for investment and growth.”

## **Shaping the future workplace**

## ***Jimmy Sheehan, Contracting Plus***

The researchers are calling for independent contractors and freelance professionals to answer the survey questionnaire, as well as input from companies who engage them and recruiters who source them.

“This research will shape workplaces and our jobs market and it is crucial that the voice of professional contractors is heard. We need to understand the challenges, be it tax policy or employment rights, so the valuable industry resource that is independent professionals, can thrive and add value in our economy”, Jimmy Sheehan of Contracting PLUS says.

Key survey metrics will look at skillsets, the sectors in which contractors operate, gender split and earnings potential, and satisfaction compared to employees and contractors in other European countries, where there is already comparable European data.

The new research will serve as a useful insight into an important cohort of workers in Ireland, where there is currently very little data available, Professor Andrew Burke of Trinity Business School says.

“An agile freelance workforce model is shown to add value at lower fixed costs. Sufficiently understanding these workers and their potential will ensure Ireland can continue to meet our economic development and skills needs. It will allow Government to shape policy that is fair and will harnesses and promote the benefits of this working model for all concerned

By [John Kennedy](mailto:john.kennedy3@boi.com) (john.kennedy3@boi.com)

Published: 2021