

# Office professionals: skills opportunities and challenges (2016)

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## Summary

Over the last decade, employment for office, or business administration professionals grew by 26%. Over the period 2015-2025, the pace of growth is expected to slow down (ca. 13%).

## Key facts:

- The five key skills for business and administration professionals are problem solving, moderate ICT skills, communication, numeracy and planning.
- However, over the last decade, employment for business professionals grew by 26%. Over the period 2015-2025, the pace of growth is expected to slow down (ca. 13%).
- Around half of business professionals are employed in four sectors – legal, accounting & consulting, public administration & defence, wholesale and retail trade and financial & insurance activities.
- They are a **shortage** occupation in thirteen EU Member States, while only one EU country reports them as a **surplus** occupation.
- The qualification mix is projected to remain fairly stable between 2015 and 2025: three quarters of business and administration professionals will have high qualifications while almost one in four will hold medium-level qualifications.
- The expansion of social networks and new types of media will also affect a variety of tasks that professionals within this occupational group carry out.
- As business professionals are employed in a wide range of sectors and industries, performing different roles, there can be no one skill profile that fits all.

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## Who are they?

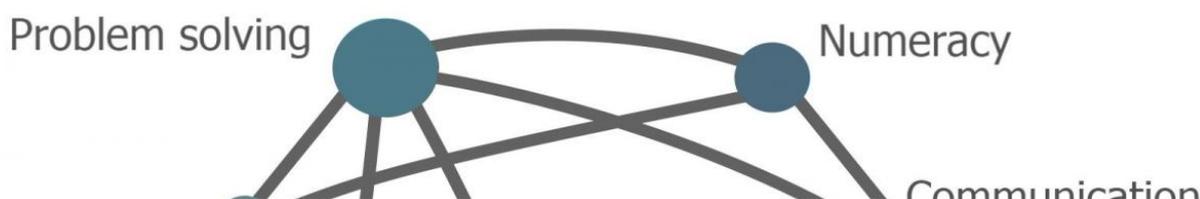
Business and administration professionals – also called ‘business professionals’ – are skilled office workers who carry out a broad range of tasks that involve dealing with business, administration, sales and marketing issues <sup>1</sup>. Three broad sub-occupations can be identified within this occupational group:

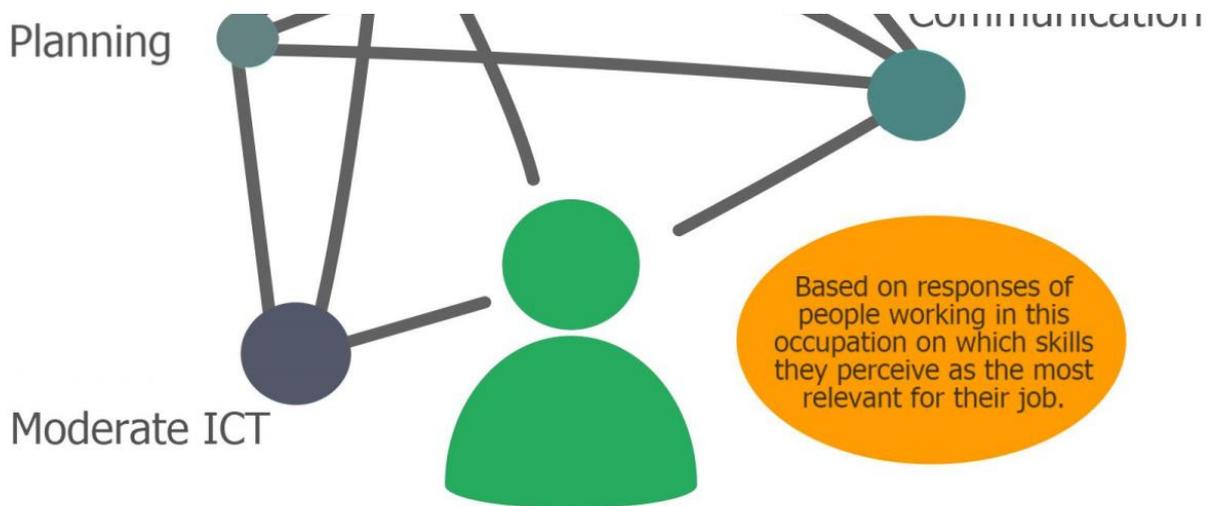
- finance professionals, e.g. accountants, financial analysts, etc.;
- administration professionals, such as management and organisational analysts; and
- sales, marketing and public relations professionals, e.g. advertising and marketing professionals, public relations professionals, etc.

## What skills do they need?

According to [Cedefop’s European skills and jobs survey \(ESJS\)](#) the key 5 skills for business and administration professionals are **problem solving, moderate ICT skills, communication, numeracy** and **planning**. These skills could support employees in this occupation to also tackle anticipated future skill challenges (see drivers of change below).

**Figure 1: Most important skills required for business and administration professionals**





From Cedefop's European skills and jobs survey

### Where are they mostly in demand?

The labour market dynamics for this occupation differ across EU Member States:

**Figure 2: Shortages and surpluses for business and administration professionals across the EU**

- Shortage
- Surplus





According to [Cedefop](#), business and administration professionals are highly demanded (i.e. they are in [shortage](#)) in Germany, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia. On a more detailed level, *financial professionals* are of short supply in Cyprus, Denmark, Ireland, France and the United Kingdom and *sales related professionals* are of a short supply in Spain. Contrariwise, [skills surplus](#) of these professionals (more precisely, *marketing professionals*) is found in Finland.

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## What are the trends for the future? <sup>2</sup>

Over the last decade, employment for business professionals grew by 26%. Over the period 2015–2025, the pace of growth is expected to slow down (ca. 13%). Nonetheless, over nine million job openings will be available, with around one third of them due to people leaving their jobs for various reasons, including retirement (replacement demand <sup>3</sup>).

Around half of business professionals are employed in four sectors – legal, accounting & consulting, [public administration & defence, wholesale and retail trade](#) and [financial & insurance activities](#). [Legal, accounting & consulting](#), wholesale and retail, and financial & insurance activities are those sectors where employment for business and administration professionals is expected to expand the most over the period 2015–2025 (20%, 17% and 14% respectively). Employment growth for this occupational group is also expected in [health](#) (almost 20% increase) and [construction](#) (over 40% increase).

The qualification mix is projected to remain fairly stable between 2015 and 2025: three quarters of business and administration professionals will have high qualifications while almost one in four will hold medium-level qualifications.

More information on employment trends and characteristics of these occupations can be found [here](#).

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## Which drivers of change will affect their skills?

Skills required within this occupation are expected to be mainly affected by a set of drivers of change:

- **The transformation of organisational structures** in response to various dynamic circumstances, such as privatisation of public organisations, changes in national regulatory frameworks and creation of supra-national bodies/frameworks (e.g. the European Central Bank single supervisory mechanism <sup>4</sup>) will prove to be an important driver of change. Business professionals, such as investment advisers, marketing and public relations professionals, will need strong ‘hard skills’ such as regulatory

marketing and public relations professionals, will need strong hard skills, such as regulatory knowledge.

- **Globalisation and the expansion of e-commerce** pave the way to new markets. To take advantage of the increased opportunities professionals, particularly in sales and marketing, will need to become familiar with new regulatory frameworks in this area and strengthen their language and intercultural skills. These factors will also affect the way in which organisations operate and business processes take place, e.g. development of new tools to monitor customers. Supply chain management skills will be also important to engage with local and regional suppliers. Management skills, such as coaching and team building, will be critical for some administration professionals, including personnel/human resources professionals, as well as language and intercultural skills to operate in cross-border/global markets.
- **Technological advancements** will significantly reshape the skills required from these professionals in a range of sectors:
  - **The reorganisation of the financial sector** through a wave of mergers and acquisitions, and the expansion of 'fintech'<sup>5</sup> among financial systems and consumers<sup>6</sup> are expected to shrink the employment opportunities for financial professionals within commercial banking. In this context, only those with sufficient ICT skills will have strong employment potential. Analytical skills, as well as time management skills will be paramount for those professionals who want to develop a career in banking. Similar types of skills will be necessary for accountants, who will also need to compete for fewer job openings related to the computerisation of accounting and book keeping<sup>7</sup>.
  - **Automation and computerisation** will not only affect 'day-to-day' processes. Office automation will also affect the workplace for administration professionals who will need to become advanced users of various packages for word processing, maintenance of databases, etc. ICT skills will be required as well in a context of expansion of on-line banking and on-line government services. Marketing automation platforms such as *Mautic* will also help to target customers, build a relationship with clients and monitor market penetration. Once again the importance of ICT skills is emphasised. In investment banking, the process of strengthening organisations' ICT architecture will also boost demand for ICT skills<sup>[8]</sup>.

Financial analysts and business analysts who understand statistics and command a firm grasp of database analytics can tap into the ever-growing big data flow to make valuable enterprise-wide contributions. A talented analyst could easily focus his efforts on strategic process improvements in areas such as human resources or operations. IT skills, such as systems analysis and proficiency with large enterprise resource planning systems, are also in great demand."

Source: "How to Sharpen Your Strategy as a Financial Analyst". Available at:

<https://www.roberthalf.com/finance/blog/in-demand-skills-for-a-financial-analyst>

- **New trends in marketing such as virtual reality or location-based marketing growth** – which rely on technologies such as Bluetooth Smart Beacons<sup>9</sup> – will create new opportunities for advertising

products and the promotion of engagement with their brand. Subsequently, sales and marketing professionals should be familiar with these technologies and be alert of their potential.

- **The expansion of social networks and new types of media** will also affect a variety of tasks that professionals within this occupational group carry out. For example, tools such as LinkedIn and Twitter will continue helping professionals to build their profile and establish their networks; at the same time they facilitate the recruitment of new staff with very specific skills. The so-called **cyberculture** (blogs, lifestyle websites, etc.) will increase their share of influence in marketing and public relations, i.e. creating new opportunities for reaching consumers. A deep knowledge of these platforms and the possibilities they offer would be a desirable skill for those aiming at succeeding in the field of marketing and public relations.
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### **How can these skill needs be met?**

As business professionals are employed in a wide range of sectors and industries, performing different roles, there can be no one skill profile that fits all. Nonetheless, common core skills such as strong analytical and ICT skills can be identified based on the drivers above.

Industry-standard certifications have an important role to play in skills development, as for example for accountants: specialist programmes offered by private providers; the Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA) program from ISACA; the CIW Internet Business Associate Certification; and the Chartered IT Professional Certification; or for human resources professionals, such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) certification.

Beyond certifications, business administration professionals should continuously upgrade and expand their skills (technical, soft; sector-specific or not) to cope with the changes anticipated in the majority of sectors they work. In particular, jobs in the financial & insurance services and professional services (such as legal, accounting and consulting), which are key employers of this occupational group, are expected to have significant rise in the need to learn new things <sup>10</sup>; while it is rather likely that current skills in these industries will become outdated in five years, probably due to some of the driving changes analysed above. The role of employers (private or public entities) in sharpening and broadening their employees' skills is of high importance for these professionals as they hold key positions and can directly impact on productivity and sustainability of organisations. Upskilling can take place in traditional forms (e.g. in classrooms), but also in the workplace, through positive learning culture and work structures (such as complex work, work autonomy etc.) <sup>11</sup>.

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### **References**

[1] Defined as ILO ISCO 08 group 24 Business and administration professionals. ILO (2012) International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO-08. Available [here](#). More information on the occupation can be found [here](#).

[2] 2016 Cedefop forecast

[3] The need to replace workers leaving a profession for various reasons, such as retirement, is referred to as replacement demand. For more information on replacement demand and how it drives employment across sectors, can be found on the Skills Panorama [here](#), accessed 16 June 2016

[4] European Central Bank, *Single Supervisory Mechanism*, accessed 10 June 2016.

[5] "Fintech" is an umbrella term used to describe technological innovations that significantly change the financial processes.

[6] "Who will disrupt the disruptors?", *The Journal of Financial Perspectives Issue*, Winter 2015, accessed 10 June 2016

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/606129>

[11] Cedefop 2015, *Skill shortages and gaps in European enterprises: striking a balance between vocational education and training and the labour market*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.  
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