

Cost of labour hinders Irish exports

Thursday, April 30, 2015

Peter O'Dwyer



Cost pressures, skills shortages and a potential 'Brexit' are among the chief risks Irish exporters currently face, according to the head of their representative body.

Irish Exporters Association (IEA) chief executive, Simon McKeever said exporters' cost base remains an issue

with energy costs and rates compounding the cost of labour which remains the biggest issue.

A lack of skills across a host of support roles which, together, form the foundation of other industries is also hampering exporting firms progress, he said.

"We spent six or seven years getting our competitiveness down to a level where we can compete on the world stage and we need to be very, very careful that we don't lose the run of ourselves again so we need to caution with restraint around wage hikes and need to be careful we don't lose what we've gained over the past number of years," said Mr McKeever.

"The other issues and a big challenge is the whole skills thing... When you look at the infrastructure of skills that support manufacturing, we have a shortage of HGV drivers in this country. Other countries have apprenticeships around it and there is actually a very good wage to be earned in it.

"There's a shortage of electrical engineers, particularly in the Dublin region; chemical engineers in the midlands so we're trying to get to the bottom of what's the infrastructure of skills.

Britain's potential exit from the EU would also be "a massive issue for both countries" that would have huge implications for Irish exporters, Mr McKeever said.

Further government support is also needed to help the SME sector but private agencies such as the IEA also need to step up to the mark, he added.

The IEA chief was speaking at the first National Export Campaign (NEC) regional workshop in Little Island, Cork which attracted 150 businesses to the Radisson Blu hotel.

Launched in March 2015, the aim of the National Export Campaign and National Export Hub is help 20 companies either export for the first time; increase exports in an existing market; or open a new market, and then to assist an additional 80 firms over the next year.

The NEC is the first of its kind in the country bringing private sponsors and the IEA together with State agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Offices, Bord Bia and the Department of Foreign Affairs

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/business/cost-of-labour-hinders-irish-exports-327843.html>