



# Exporter Forum points towards sustainability

IRISH EXPORTERS ASSOCIATION FORUM SAYS GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN FORWARD MOMENTUM.

The inaugural Export Leadership forum took place over two days this week in Croke Park. The industry-focused event was run by the Irish Exporters Association, the independent representative body for Irish exporters.

As the Irish economic recovery continues the event presented a timely reminder that Irish exports can be developed further with the right assistance and encouragement from government. According to the latest figures from the Central Statistics Office, the Irish economy grew by 7% year on year up to the end of September 2015.

Simon McKeever, chief executive of the Irish Exporters Association, was determined that the forum address issues that are facing Irish exporters and removing barriers to Irish trade.

"We want to move the horizon of export thinking beyond where it is now," he said. "We wanted to bring in world class thought leaders and look at export trends around the world."

its 65th anniversary this year and Mc Keever is keen to remind the government of just how vital exports are to the Irish economic engine.

The Irish Exporters Association lobbies government on behalf of its members, making submissions on export-related policy. Noting that the country is currently gripped by election fever, he has a strong message for the incoming government.

"We need to maintain cost competitiveness in Ireland and ensure the country remains business friendly," said McKeever, adding, "We need a stable government, one that is going to be around for a number of years so they can implement policies and continue to grow the economy. Education and training will be a massive issue as it will stop wage costs from spiralling," he said.

"From an exporting point of view, we'll need more resources overseas, we'll need more resources in our embassies, Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia and the IDA, so that Irish companies that are looking to go overseas have the help they need on the ground" said McKeever.

stream-specific industry presentations.

The forum aimed to provide an overview of where Irish exports stand at this moment, while also looking towards the future, examining new ideas and best practice.

One notable contributor to the forum was Anton Brummelhuis, senior director of Sustainability at Philips Lighting.

"Ireland is looking for business development ideas. I wanted to share what we are doing at Philips, developing business in a sustainable way," Brummelhuis said.

Philips Lighting has boosted its profits dramatically by decreasing waste by recycling. Brummelhuis wanted to emphasise that our current consumption model is completely unsustainable and the ideas he was advocating on the circular economy will only come to the fore as the world's middle class increases.

His sentiments were echoed in a talk later in the day by John Flahavan, managing director at Flahavans, who revealed that the voters at Flahavans have been powered by dis-

carded out chaffs since the early 1990s.

The ambassadors of two of Ireland's biggest trading partners, the United Kingdom and the United States, spoke at the event, highlighting the role that diplomacy plays in opening up foreign markets to Irish exporters.

Speaking to the Sunday Times, the American ambassador, Kevin O'Malley, said: "Part of this event had to do with exporting and business, and that's an important part of my job and the Irish American relationship."

He is also hopeful that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) will greatly reduce red tape, particularly for small and medium sized enterprises. If passed, TTIP will be the world's biggest bilateral trade and investment deal, and a successful pact is expected to benefit Ireland more than any other EU member state.

The ambassador went on to speak of the value of face to face meetings with industry leaders at the Export Leadership forum. "It brings together all of the Irish businesses interested in exporting. Having Irish businesses export to the US is something we are very interested in as much as we are having American exports in Ireland. The trade between our countries is part of the reason that this economic engine has been so successful and we want that to continue" said O'Malley.

Google's sales director, David Sneedon, gave a presentation on how exporters can best utilise the free online tools that are available as they try to break in to new markets and engage with new customers.

"It's still very much early morning in the internet" said Sneedon. "There are massive opportunities out there for Irish businesses. There are currently about 2.6 billion users on line, by 2020 there will probably be about 5 billion. There are massive markets opening up every day. I want to convey that to people here."

Another speaker Barry O'Neill, chairman & CEO at StoryToys believes that government assistance could greatly assist the games industry in Ireland. O'Neill is also on the board of Games Ireland, a not-for-profit organisation working to support, promote and drive sustainable growth for the games industry.

He has been agitating for the extension of the film and television industries' 48% tax re-

McKeever hopes that the event shows how the best in Ireland are going about their business of exporting, but also how global leaders in exporting go about their business and how Irish enterprises and the Irish government can learn from them.

He cites Boeing and Phillips, both international leaders in their respective fields as companies Irish exporters can seek to emulate when looking for new export opportunities while minimising their own costs base. The Irish Exporters Association celebrates

to be expensive hires. He thinks the government could better utilise the existing budget by engaging people with local knowledge of overseas markets, who are integrated in the business communities that Irish exporters are trying to break in to.

The forum featured contributions from a wide variety of speakers across key industries and sectors. The keynote presentations focused on large scale innovations and best practices, as well as having a number of

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lief to the games industry. "Less than 1% of our revenues come from Ireland, it is fundamentally an export business" O'Neill said. He is fearful that he could start haemorrhaging talent to the UK which introduced tax credits for their games industry in 2013.

As the world economy moves in to a period of uncertainty events such as the Export Leadership forum remind us that we cannot be complacent about recovery and will provide much food for thought for the attendees both from business and from government.