

## Exporters say skilled staff are harder to find

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*As many as 44pc of Irish exporters have said they had difficulty finding suitably qualified workers (stock photo)*

Half of Irish exporters quizzed for a survey said they had taken on extra staff since the start of the year. But 44pc said they had difficulty finding suitably qualified workers.

Half also said sterling fluctuations had negatively impacted their business in the first quarter, yet 73pc are not hedging.

Although sterling has recovered over a third of its losses since early April as opinion polls give the 'remain' campaign in the Brexit referendum a wider margin, the pound is still some way off the level it was at last November.

The UK currency is trading at around 76p to the €1, down from the 81p it was trading at in early April but well above the 69p level last autumn.

A survey by the Irish Exporters' Association (IEA) found increased business costs were also a concern, including insurance, exchange rates, labour, regulatory burden costs and legal costs. Simon McKeever, IEA chief executive, said the underlying problem identified throughout the review was cost competitiveness.

"Firstly, the impending referendum in the UK is having an impact, 63pc of respondents are transacting in Sterling and 50pc have said that Sterling fluctuation has negatively impacted their financial performance in the last quarter, yet 73pc are not hedging this risk," he said.

### **Costs**

"Secondly, the rising costs of doing business in Ireland were cited by 15pc of members as one of the biggest challenges currently facing them.

"And lastly ... the skills shortage in Ireland that has been left in the wake of the most recent recession is really being felt by our members."

The survey is the first quarterly review by the agency this year.

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