



PRESS RELEASE

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Boosting Foreign Languages and International Sales Skills Required to Drive Exports Vital to Economic Recovery

- Minister Bruton launches skills report that highlights critical need to improve our skills for trade.
- Potential for 2,200 jobs in exporting companies - could be filled through conversion programmes over next year.

Forfás and the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) have today published a study, *Key Skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally*, which sets out the skills and talent needed to drive Ireland's trade and export performance in both existing and emerging overseas markets. The study provides a detailed blueprint for adjustments to our education, training and professional development to align skills with the needs of exporting businesses.

Languages and Sales

The report outlines the essential skill sets that individuals should look to develop to avail of employment opportunities arising within exporting companies, in particular the need to dramatically improve our foreign language proficiency and our ability to sell into international markets.

The report makes a range of specific recommendations to ensure that our education, training and professional development meets the needs of our exporting companies. It recommends boosting the supply of foreign language skills (both numbers and proficiency) at third level including German, French, Spanish and Italian as well as Mandarin Chinese, Russian and Arabic. It also highlights the need to increase formal international sales training at third level, including compulsory modules on international sales in business courses and the introduction of a degree and post-graduate diploma in international sales with foreign languages.

Recruitment Difficulties

In the preparation of the study Forfás consulted widely with over 60 companies - both foreign affiliates and indigenous. The companies surveyed anticipate a positive employment outlook, with their employment levels expected to increase by between 15% - 20% over the next three years. Recruitment difficulties are anticipated in sourcing international sales staff and people with foreign language proficiency and software engineers.

Employment Opportunities

The study has identified 2,200 potential job opportunities arising within exporting companies which could be filled through tailored skills conversion courses, developed in partnership with industry - in the areas of ICT computing, customer sales & service support

with foreign languages, design engineering, international sales with foreign languages and project management.

Launching the report, Richard Bruton, T.D., Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation said:

“Ensuring we have the skills required for current and future business is a key part of the Action Plan for Jobs, and today’s finding that over 2,000 opportunities will come on stream in companies which could be filled through conversion courses is stark. I am determined to continue working with cabinet colleagues to ensure that not only do we create more jobs, but also that we have the skilled workers to fill more of them from within our workforce.”

Chairperson of the EGFSN, Una Halligan said, “We need to align our education, training and continuing professional development to the international trade skills requirements of our enterprises. The companies that we spoke to are telling us that they are finding it difficult to get skills in international sales and in foreign languages. In addition to these jobs we also know that there is potential for foreign affiliates and indigenous companies to further grow existing markets in the UK, US, and the euro zone and to develop new markets including Brazil, Russia, India, China South Africa (BRICS) and the Middle East.”

“Expanding into new markets requires a ramping up of skills and experience levels. Absolutely key in this regard are our abilities to sell effectively and for staff right across functional areas of companies to be able to communicate and understand those markets. Foreign language capability and cultural awareness are essential. An improved supply of domestic foreign languages capability, including German, French, Spanish and Italian as well as Mandarin Chinese and Japanese, would be a major boost to enterprises achieving their export potential. Firms have a main role to play in communicating a message of the value of foreign languages proficiency for rewarding career opportunities to students, parents and teachers. At third level, findings are that there is a relative lack of Irish graduates with foreign language proficiency and international market experience. Employers value such a period abroad, which increases the students’ employability and job prospects,” continued Halligan.

“Irish exports have proven resilient with total exports growing by 5.5 per cent to €172 billion. But despite a robust export performance Ireland is struggling to maintain its global share of world exports with a decline from 1.13 per cent in 2010 to 1.05 per cent in 2011. Irish goods exports also tend to be concentrated in a narrow range of sectors – pharma and business services being the two dominant sectors. The top 10 destinations of Irish export account for 70 per cent of total exports. There is a need for us to diversify in terms of sectors and markets,” said Martin D Shanahan, Chief Executive, Forfás.

“It will be a challenge for Irish exporting companies to increase their goods and service exports to existing markets in the USA, UK, Germany, France, Italy and Spain while at the same time increasing exports to newer high potential and emerging markets in the BRICS countries and Middle East. Skills are a key factor that can lead to export success. Having the international selling skills and the language and cultural capability and talent is a key requirement,” continued Shanahan.

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