**Major multinational employers concerned at language skills of Irish graduates**



Major multinational employers are concerned that Irish graduates from college and further education fall short in their ability to speak foreign languages.

Satisfaction ratings with the foreign language skills of new entrants to the workforce are low among foreign-owned employers here, according to a report for the Higher Education Authority, seen by the Sunday Independent.

The National Employer Survey of 760 firms based here provides valuable information on recruitment from higher education. It shows foreign firms are not as satisfied as Irish businesses with graduates' language skills.

Almost two-thirds of Irish employers (65pc) are satisfied with the foreign language skills of young employees coming from colleges and university. However, satisfaction ratings among foreign firms are below average. Just 45pc of multinational companies are happy with higher-education foreign language capability.

While 86pc of employers have indicated they are generally happy with the quality of graduates emerging from third level and 84pc are happy with further-education graduates, news that businesses are unhappy with language skills is worrying.

Foreign language capabilities are expected to become increasingly important as Brexit looms, with many foreign businesses based here expected to increase ties to EU countries and the Middle East.

This is creating further demand among employers for European languages such as French and German, as well as Arabic and Chinese.

Foreign countries where English is commonly taught and spoken are believed to have a competitive advantage over Ireland in this regard.

More than a quarter (27pc) of large companies - employing more than 250 people - said a lack of suitable candidates was a barrier to recruiting college graduates.

Three out of four businesses said they were satisfied with graduates' levels of commercial awareness and entrepreneurial skills. However, 25pc are unhappy with the skills produced here.

One in five employers suggested they are not satisfied with higher-education and further-education graduates' application of technical knowledge, computer and technical literacy, verbal and communication skills, numeracy and data interpretation skills and new employees' ability to work effectively on their own and with others.

Concern was also raised about the pay demands of workers emerging from third level, particularly among Irish-owned companies and small or medium-sized businesses.

"Salary expectations were cited as a barrier to recruitment by 5pc of employers not hiring higher-education graduates," the report states.

"This reason was much less cited by foreign-owned employers and large employers."

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