

The changing Irish workforce

By Ian Dowd, marketing director for UK and Ireland region, ***NGA Human Resources***

Ireland, which boasts the fastest-growing economy in the European Union and an enviable below-average unemployment rate, is forging a strong economic recovery.

The outward migration of nearly 30,000 Irish nationals over recent years caused a skills shortage in some major areas including ICT, engineering, sales & customer care, logistics, health, business and finance. But immigration is now rising with the return of some Irish nationals as well as the arrival of workers from other parts of the EU, bringing

much needed skills and knowledge back into the Irish workforce and economy.

Ireland has the youngest population and workforce in the EU with 40% of workers aged under 30. A generation of young Irish workers is returning from elsewhere hungry to contribute to the country's





growth, prosperity and sustainability by using the new skills they have acquired during their time away.

The top HR concerns in Ireland are similar to those in many other countries, with culture and engagement being major issues. But they are even

more prevalent among Irish companies due to the rapid, high-impact changes that are taking place in the workforce and economy.

As the competition for skills and talent intensifies, employers need to have a strong value proposition to attract the right people. They also have to ▶

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have suitable programmes in place to retain staff and ensure employment loyalty.

As a result, organisations need to engage with their employees to discover what is important to them. Particular attention must be paid to the Millennial generation of workers as they form such a huge part of the Irish workforce and will shape the culture over the coming decade.

Strategic information

Research shows that while salary is important to this age group, they are particularly motivated by training, support and career progression. Getting these potentially low-cost motivators right could be a key differentiator in recruiting and retaining the younger generation. But to do so, a clear understanding of culture is required, something that needs to start at the top with a commitment from the leadership team.

Work/life balance is still a huge factor to consider as the mobile workplace evolves. Staff do not necessarily need to be in an office for eight hours a day to do their job, which provides them with highly sought-after flexibility.

On the flip side, if emails are received during evenings and weekends, it can lead to working hours and personal lives becoming blurred, causing employees

to feel overwhelmed and unable to switch off. This is one of the top issues facing Irish organisations and should be a priority for all HR departments.

HR personnel have a crucial role to play in growing the workforce and economy, which makes it a perfect time to focus on assuming a more strategic role. The best HR decisions are made by a combination of intuition and experience backed up by accurate and timely data.

In any organisation, a lot of people data becomes available as a result of all their transactional HR processes related to everything from starters and leavers to holidays and attrition. The key is in bringing it to life and making it useful for decision-making purposes and in forming the basis of strategic plans. By doing so, companies are not only investing in their own people, but also ultimately in the future of the country. ■

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