

## Irish exporters' UK reliance higher since Brexit vote



*Irish Exporters Association CEO Simon McKeever with Glenn Carr, general manager freight rail/road & Rosslare Europort, Iarnród Éireann; Eddie Cullen, managing director, commercial banking division, Ulster Bank; Jarlath Sweeney, group editor/director, Fleet Transport; and Declan Sinnott, managing director, Rhenus Logistics Ireland, at a recent Brexit event. Photo: Jason Clarke*

Irish exporters are pumping more of their products into the UK despite Brexit, a survey shows.

Around the time of UK's EU referendum in June 2016, just under a third of exporters said they sold a quarter of their produce into the UK market.

That's now risen to 44pc of exporters. And 41pc say they plan to increase UK sales further in the next six months, according to the latest assessment from the Irish Exporters Association (IEA).

In the wake of the UK referendum in June 2016, the IEA surveyed its member's views on Brexit's impact.

In January, it repeated the study and has now compared the results.

"What our analysis shows is the resilience of the Irish export industry," Simon McKeever, Irish Exporters Association chief executive, said.

About 93pc of IEA members do business with the UK; for most that accounts for less than a quarter of their sales, although the UK is becoming increasingly important since the initial survey.

Four out of 10 exporter say they plan to increase UK sales over the next six months, just 3pc say they'll reduce them, and 57pc say they'll maintain current levels.

The IEA said members are also increasingly looking to new markets, with two-thirds planning to diversify within the next six months, a significant increase. Germany, at 29pc, was the top alternative destination, followed by the US, France and Spain.

"The results show a very positive picture but also show that exporters are proceeding with caution," Mr McKeever said. "Irish exporters need more clarity around what a post-Brexit trading environment will look like as concerns over possible customs procedures and tariff implications have increased for our members since the referendum."

The survey also showed skills shortages are a concern. About 62pc of those surveyed experienced difficulty in recruitment in the last six months.

Sales and marketing (31pc), transport logistics (23pc), operations (20pc) and supply chain (19pc) are all affected.

The IEA said the logistics sector has been a major concern for some time and said approximately a third of members are experiencing difficulty finding drivers, managers and directors in storage and warehousing, and customs expertise.