

IEA Submission: Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) Driver Shortage

Irish Exporters Association submission to the Department of Transport's Logistics and Supply Chain Skills Group

12 August 2021

Overview: The Irish Exporters Association

The Irish Exporters Association (IEA) is the leading independent representative body and voice for exporters based in Ireland. The IEA represents exporters and supply chain operators across the country and works at regional, national, and European level, representing its members in front of legislators to create a regulatory and legislative framework that supports, drives, and fosters Irish exports.

We assist our members to grow their exports to world markets and drive the growth and development of all exporting businesses based in Ireland. We provide a set of highly relevant business services and products to assist our members with international trade.

- We **represent** the needs of members in the development of policy, lobbying, intervention at Government and EU level and in the media. Brexit and the Diversification of Export Markets, Trade Compliance, Climate Change & Sustainability and their impact on Irish exporters are core to our work.
- We offer **trade services** in the form of practical training, support, and advice right across the supply chain including our Certificate in International Trade, customs awareness, GDP, export and import compliance, consular, business travel support (visa and export documentation), route to market and general assistance with trade related queries.
- We have created **knowledge networks** among our membership to support our members in exploring new markets, route to market scenario planning, understand customs and supply chain challenges and provide thought leadership through a series of events and webinars. Networking and connectivity remain an important part of membership benefits. Our Export Industry Awards programme is our flagship event that celebrates the achievements of exporting companies and highlights the importance of the export sector to Ireland.

The IEA represents the whole spectrum of companies within the export industry including SME's who are beginning to think about exporting for the first time right through to global multinational companies who are already extensively exporting from Ireland as well as the providers of key services to the sector. The IEA is the connecting force for Irish exporters, providing practical knowledge and support across the Island of Ireland and in foreign markets.

Introduction

Addressing the shortage of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers is a critical issue. We welcome Minister Naughton's and the Department of Transport's continued efforts to tackle the issue. We value our membership of the Department's National Logistics and Supply Chain Skills Group and the work of the group that is extremely important for our members, of which the logistics and transport sectors accounted for circa 30% of all IEA members in 2020.

As part of our submission to the Department's recent consultation on developing a Ten-year strategy for the road haulage sector we asked relevant members to give their input on *how can the ability of the haulage sector to attract and retain talent be strengthened to service the demand for skills over the coming years?* Members were very engaged on the issue. It was clear from the feedback received that the issue of professionalising skills in the sector is a key area for Government and industry to work on.

The pandemic, and indeed Brexit, has highlighted how critical supply chains are to the functioning of economies, businesses and indeed our lives. The critical role of those that service the supply chains is particularly evident from the widespread distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the delivery of Covid-19 vaccines. HGV drivers play a fundamental role in the movement of goods and their role must be acknowledged as that of critical to the future of trade and the Irish economy as a whole.

Recommendations

- **IEA input on the issue of skills shortage to the Department's open consultation on developing a ten-year strategy for the road haulage sector:**

In [our submission](#) we made the following contribution on the issue of skills shortages in the sector after consultation with our members in the logistics and supply chain space. Please note that we have made some additions to ensure the piece is up to date:

Shortages in labour for the road haulage sector, particularly in the early stage of autonomous vehicles, is an issue that intensified over the past number of years and if not addressed, will limit the sector's ability to move goods on and off the island, which will ultimately impact Ireland's attractiveness to businesses. IEA members believe that the establishment of a national apprenticeship programme is one practical step that could be taken as part of the Government's ten-year strategy for the sector and would contribute to ensuring that workers receive sufficient remuneration for carrying out this essential work. We have concerns about the level of insurance premiums being demanded for younger drivers, which may be a barrier for younger drivers coming on stream. Rolling out cost effective and/or subsidised training programmes would go some way to attracting workers. With links to long term career development and mobility within the international trade sector, so that drivers have a developmental route for different stages of their lives, when perhaps travel becomes less attractive.

We encourage the department to engage in a campaign that increases both the visibility and the attractiveness of working in the sector, cross referenced against competing demands for labour, such as the construction sector – a greater professionalisation of the role is key to attracting young people to the sector. Members firmly believe that the many aspects associated with working in the sector need to be highlighted including the innovation in the sector, the importance and essentialness of the sector to Ireland's open trading economy and the ongoing work on modernising fleets and ensuring supply chains are sustainable and operate in line with international and national climate objectives. Aside from attracting drivers, there is a need for drivers with specialist qualifications including ADR, which is required for the carriage of dangerous goods, something that is a feature of some pharma and food and drink manufacture businesses. The availability of such specialist drivers is a consideration to make considering Ireland's foreign direct investment model.

Members cite that changes in consumer preferences and expectations, which have escalated during the pandemic, feed into the overall attractiveness of working in the sector. Given that there will be an increasing need for night-time and weekend working, especially as the port sector is pressed for space and needs to expand its operating hours into nights/weekends, the need to work during ‘social hours’ will continue and will impact the draw to work in the sector. Shorter journeys and more regular hours will encourage skills into the sector.

➤ **Recommendations on actions for the European Union, Government and industry to work on:**

The Department has effectively mapped out possible actions to tackle the issue of HGV driver shortage. Below are some additional points that may be of interest to this important work:

- Given that the shortage of HGV drivers is a global one, and we face competition for the existing pool of drivers from our nearest neighbour, greater coordination at EU level is potentially needed. Arranging a discussion between the Department of Transport, the Department of Social Protection’s (DSP) EURES European Employment Services and Irish Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), particularly those that are members of the Parliament’s Transport and Tourism (TRAN) committee, is an important step in understanding the situation at EU level and to understand what actions have been and will need to be taken in the Member States. Such a meeting could gauge interest of Irish MEPs in requesting an exchange of views with the European Commission and MEPs from across Member States at an upcoming TRAN committee meeting to explore what measures may be at the Commission’s disposal.
- At EU level, EU Commissioner for Transport, Adina Valean has been tasked with developing a sustainable and smart mobility strategy with the EU institutions. This work presents an important opportunity to ensure that drivers are the custodians of a modern transport and logistics model that will have to undergo alternations to fully operate in line with EU and national climate targets. Drivers should be trained in the benefits of using a more sustainable transport model and acquire the knowledge that will feed into national efforts to develop a green economy. Acquiring such knowledge and skills would potentially add another dimension to a career in this sector and may contribute to career progression and longevity.
- Effective marketing of the sector in the coming years will be crucial to attracting workers. The sector has the possibility to be at the fore front of the green economy that the EU Green Deal and the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 are aiming to achieve. There is a desire from all sections of society to contribute to efforts to tackle the climate crisis, if the logistics and transport sector is to the fore of that work, this may lead to more entrants joining the profession.
- Exploring a liberal/fast tracked visa procedure for drivers coming from third countries, particularly from those countries that implement right-hand driving.
- Our media partner Fleet Magazine published a piece entitled [*Five original strategies to successfully recruit truck drivers*](#), which may be of interest to the Department.

- Like any profession, pay and conditions are an important factor in attracting workers - an issue that industry representatives may need to explore with their own respective workforces/membership.
- We would like to draw the Department's attention to the ongoing consultation on proposed [Changes to HGV and bus driving tests](#) in the UK. In that regard, we would like to draw attention to a recent article on the issue of driver shortages in the UK, [How retailers can avoid empty shelves in response to the HGV driver shortage](#), which highlights the need for collaboration to work through the issue.

On behalf of the IEA,

Simon McKeever
Chief Executive

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