

Strategies to enhance Irish Diaspora engagement in Australia

July 2014



Irish Australian
Chamber of Commerce

Foreword

In late April 2014, the IACC participated in the Irish Government's Department of Foreign Affairs Diaspora Strategy review process via written submission.

As board sponsors of the submission project, we were able to identify a number of the themes from our findings as they developed, particularly those from our Diaspora Survey, that were of such significance that we felt it was important to subsequently publish the following paper.

As an overseas Irish network who regularly hosts Irish Government representatives including Presidents, Taoisigh, Ambassadors and visiting delegations, our aim is to provide this information as a framework through which to raise awareness of issues and stimulate debate within the Diaspora.

Our shared commitment is to strive for greater cohesion within and engagement with the Irish Diaspora in Australia. It is our intention to conduct such research every two years in order that we maintain a voice for the Irish Diaspora on an ongoing basis.

We look forward to further engagement and comment across the community and would encourage you to respond to the points raised via email to office@irishchamber.com.au or on social media — @IrishChamber is our Twitter handle, or you can find us on [facebook.com/irishchamber](https://www.facebook.com/irishchamber) or our LinkedIn group, Irish Australian Chamber of Commerce.

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Board Sponsors of the Project

July 2014

Executive Summary

- The Irish Government is aware that the Irish Diaspora (said to number 70 million worldwide) is a multi-faceted and ever-changing group. Over 10% of the Australian population claim an Irish ancestor, meaning Australia has proportionally more people of Irish descent than any other place outside Ireland. The Government has committed to a review of Diaspora Strategy and its impact on wider policy, and the IACC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this Review.
- The IACC has, since 2011, been a recipient of funding from the Emigrant Support Program which we used to part-fund a Business Mentoring program for many recently arrived Irish emigrants in Australia. In 2014, we have over 120 program participants and face considerable demand to expand the program and other activities.
- Feedback from our survey conducted with members of the Irish Australian Diaspora suggests deficiencies in the current level of communication and engagement between the Irish Government and the local Irish community. Respondents strongly feel they are disenfranchised due to the inability to vote in Irish elections and referenda.
- Respondents continue to strongly identify themselves with Ireland, with culture, heritage and “being Irish” featuring prominently in comments submitted. There is significant interest in engaging with the Government, and understanding opportunities to return to or otherwise engage with Ireland, but current channels are not reaching or engaging these parties.
- We consider there is a further role for the IACC and similar organisations worldwide to support and facilitate Diaspora engagement and to help deliver key messages and provide support for the Embassy network in Diaspora engagement.
- There is a significant resource within the Irish Australian Diaspora that could benefit Ireland both economically and socially. Ireland has an opportunity to learn from the skills and experience acquired by the Diaspora as a result of their exposure to other countries, cultures and their global experiences.

Methodology

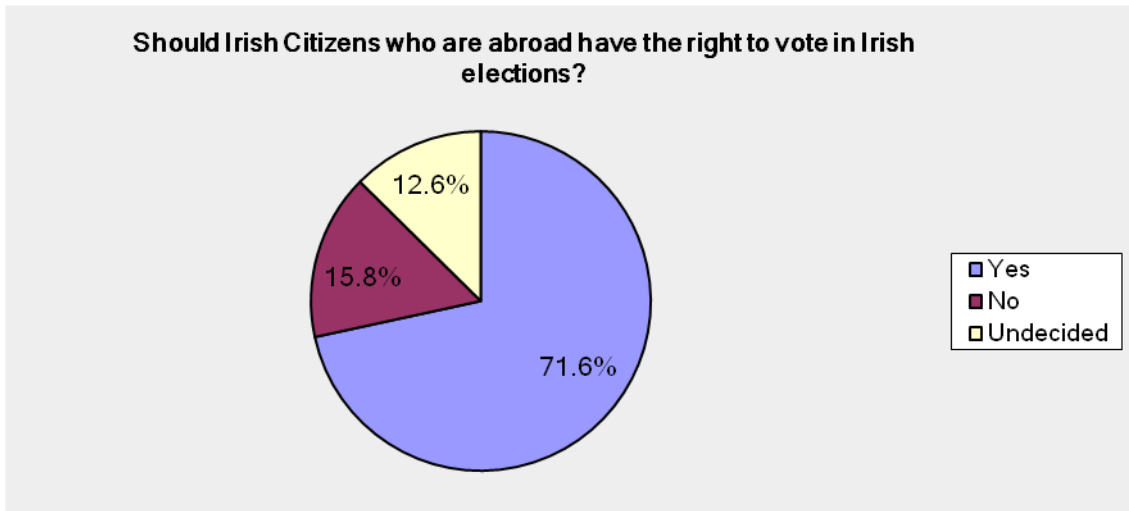
- We conducted an on-line survey our members and broader network to address specific questions regarding Diaspora engagement.
- We also invited narrative submissions from members who wished to add more detailed feedback.
- A sample of 100 respondents to this survey and individual narrative submissions received have formed the basis of our research to support the findings and recommendations in this paper.

Survey Findings

Respondents still strongly identify themselves as Irish - 93% identified themselves as Irish Citizens living in Australia; yet 81% also have Australian citizenship or permanent residence.

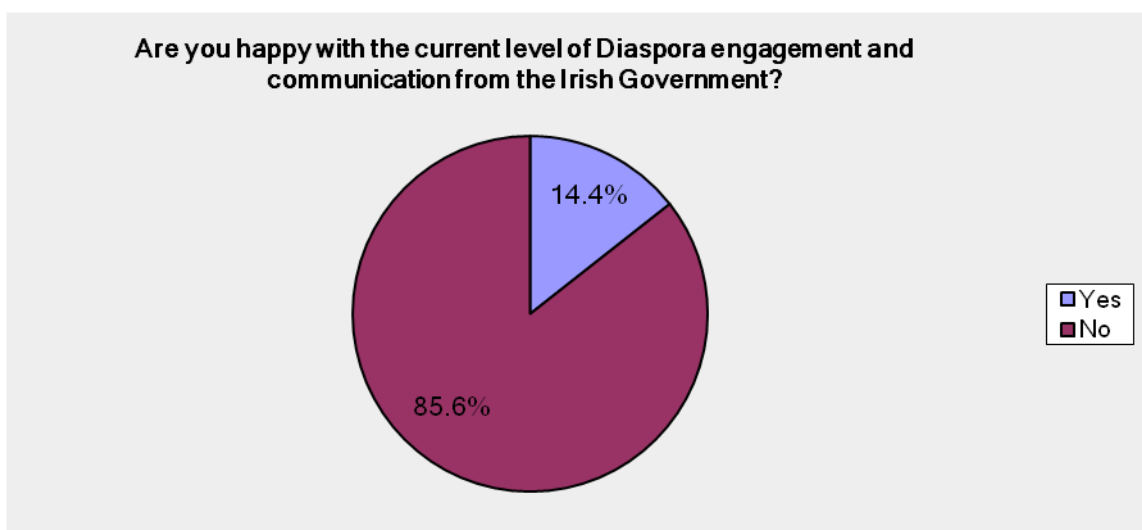
Culture, heritage and “being Irish” are identified strongly in comments submitted.

Respondents expressed a very strong desire to be able to vote in Irish elections, or to have (at least) Seanad representation. Many respondents cite examples of other countries with overseas voting rights (e.g. France) and express frustration with (potentially) paying taxes in two countries but unable to vote in either.

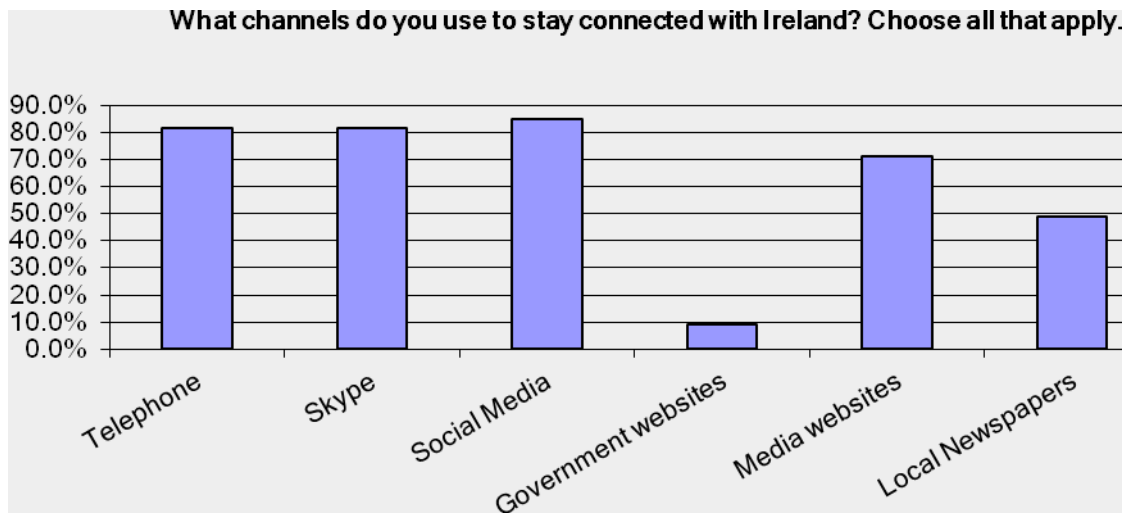


Respondents have a stated desire for increased communication regarding Ireland and engagement with the Diaspora; however have limited engagement or awareness of current Government initiatives.

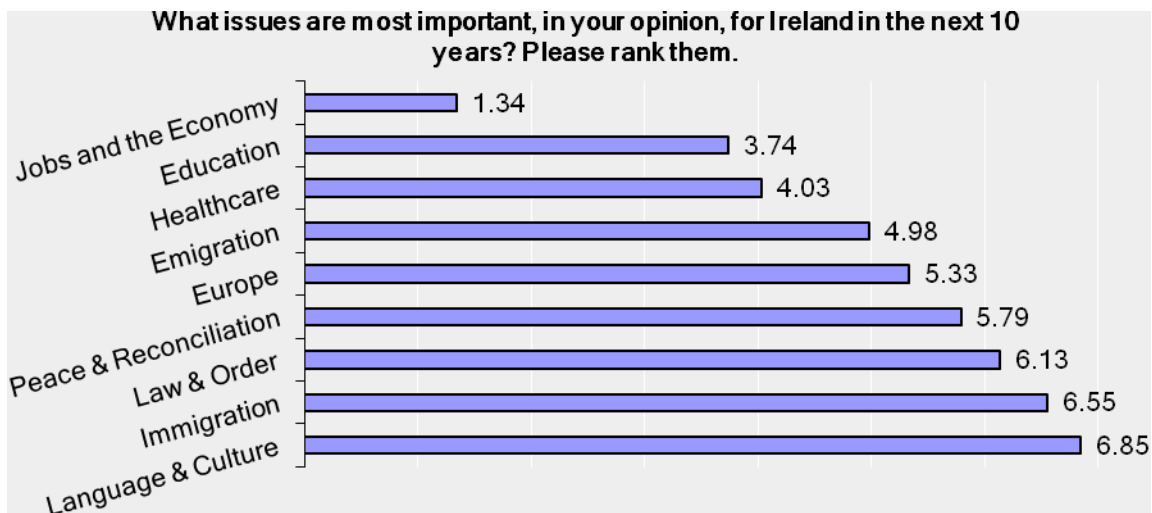
- less than 15% awareness of the Global Irish Network, the Global Irish Economic Forum or the Emigrant Support Program
- 75% of respondents had been unaware of the Diaspora Strategy Review until contacted by the IACC.



Less than 10% rely on Government bodies or access Government websites regularly however over 60% of respondents have had engagement with the Irish Embassy or the Consul General's Office so these forums may represent the best opportunity to engage with the Diaspora.



“Jobs and the Economy” was ranked by 85% of respondents as the most important when considering Ireland’s Issues, followed by “Education”, then “Healthcare” ranked second and third.



- Many respondents cite the quality of the Irish education as a major enabler of economic recovery, however greater options for secular secondary education are viewed as being important.
- **Only 30% of respondents state a current intention to return to Ireland within the next 5 years, with 41% undecided and 29% have no intention to return**
- Currently the requirements for returning emigrants in relation to the criteria for habitual residency was identified as a disincentive to return to Ireland
- 43% of respondents travel to Ireland annually or more frequently, primarily this is private travel but 19% travel for business.

Within our consultation process, we provided an opportunity for both narrative responses within the survey alongside emailed submissions sent directly to our office.

Some specific comments received include:

“Investment in Education must still be a priority. Without the fantastic education we have received, which is highly valued across the globe, the Diaspora of Ireland could have been in a very different situation. We must invest in our youth in terms of education and healthcare. There are a huge amount of families struggling to keep their heads above water in Ireland. Investment in education and health (basic rights) is priority.”

“Tourism also is one of our key industries and I feel more could be done to promote Ireland in Australia and Asia as a whole. There is an over focus on promotion in USA. Australians value their Irish heritage just as much as the Americans and they travel extensively. “

“The attitude towards emigrating must change radically from the Peig Sayers one to a more positive one. There is nothing wrong with emigrating for whatever reason. “

“I believe a stronger voice from the Diaspora would help change the culture of corruption by providing a strong voice and positive input based on experiences working in more cohesive societies. It would also help point out the positive things about Ireland as viewed by those living in another country and culture. “

“There used to be a “know before you go” pack available from FAS in relation to migrants coming to Ireland. It would be a start if the Government proactively used a similar method to those wishing to return home. “

“I believe by allowing us to vote they could build a database to communicate with us - that would be a first step. “

“Further support in the form of the programs like the Business Mentoring Program being offered by the Irish Australian Chamber of Commerce but funded from Ireland through the Emigrant Support Program. This is a tangible offering which is providing one on one support to individuals in Australia. Further programs like this can assist to educate and develop the Irish abroad whilst also providing them relevant information on what is happening at home and how they can make an impact from overseas. “

Recommendations

- Explore opportunity for staffed/representative offices or consular presence in Melbourne or similar cities without a current focal point for Irish Government engagement.
- Leverage technology more effectively, for example, by hosting a dedicated Diaspora website to provide information on activities worldwide, opportunities to engage with Ireland, central resources and “How To” guides.
- Provide an outlet via St Patrick’s events in all Australian state capitals for the Diaspora to express their “Irishness” in a positive manner with broad appeal to the community.
- Raise the profile of “Ireland Inc.” through active involvement in Irish Diaspora Business Awards globally. Not only does this provide an opportunity for more targeted engagement with EI/IDA but also serves as a succession planning strategy for the Global Irish Economic Forum.
- Commit to a Ministerial portfolio relating directly to the Diaspora with Oireachtas representation firmly on the table.
- Directly engage with and seek the support of organisations such as the IACC to provide updates on Diaspora policy to the community.

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