

# “Home is where the heart is” - a Conference on Return Migration

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has issued the following news release:  
September 16, 2014 Tuesday National Youth Council of Ireland Minister Jimmy Deenihan Dublin Castle,

## REMARKS – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

*My message here today is a simple one – we want to provide opportunities for our young people to come home.*

*It is my great pleasure to be here with you this morning and to open this National Youth Council Conference on return migration.*

As Ireland’s first Minister for the Diaspora I would like to congratulate the National Youth Council for organising this conference which will provide further ideas and suggestions for our emigration strategy review

In the last few years we have witnessed huge numbers of our young people leave these shores, some because they felt they had no other choice, some to enhance their experience and to improve their options and others because they sought new challenges. Recent figures from the CSO show that emigration fell in the last twelve months for the first time in seven years. While this reduction is welcome, it is interesting to note that 47% of those who left were third level graduates and most were either in employment or education.

Some would say that this exodus has helped the country to get back on its feet by reducing the numbers seeking employment. The statistics indicate that many of those that left were already in employment and left jobs here in search of better opportunities. The reality is that many of our young people are now overseas.

The loss of the youth of our country will create problems in the future and it is necessary to address this now. We need to encourage these young people, armed with their new skills, their experience, and their new-found confidence, to return to Ireland to join in the development of the kind of society that we all aspire to live in.

In order to encourage these people back we need to provide them with

opportunities in their chosen fields and professions. The Government has made job creation its number 1 priority over the last few years and this is bearing fruit. Although still unacceptably high, unemployment is falling - down from a peak of 15.1% in early 2012 to the most recent figure of 11.2% last month. Entrepreneurship is being fostered and nurtured and home grown industry is developing. Credit is finally attainable with banks beginning to lend again. We have weathered the worst of the austerity years and can now see that this fiscal adjustment, although painful, has paid off.

The Government, through its Departments and Agencies, is thinking more creatively than ever on how to develop indigenous industry, how to encourage Foreign Direct Investment and how to maintain and grow the economy on a sustainable basis. Successive Action Plans for Jobs ensure cross-Government focus on the tasks at hand and have ensured that job creating policies are at the heart of Departmental agendas.

One example of this is the soon to be launched Year of Irish Design 2015. This initiative, which was created at the last Global Irish Economic Forum, is now firmly rooted in the 2014 Action Plan for Jobs and will soon be ready to launch. It is an exciting endeavour which puts Irish design, across a very broad spectrum, in the spotlight both nationally and internationally. This year, we will showcase all aspects of Irish design in new and creative ways, with a firm focus on developing the sector, embedding design in industry and creating new and sustainable jobs.

In tandem with job creation, every effort has been made to re-train and re-skill those who have lost their jobs and to support, often difficult transitions, from one sector to another. “Skills to Work” is the Government’s campaign to make it easier for jobseekers and employers to know what Government skills initiatives are available to them.

Educational reform and the realignment of the skills base required to meet the jobs

market is also high on the Government agenda. The changes to the points system giving bonus points to those taking higher level maths has already encouraged significantly more students to take this on. Recent Leaving Cert results show an increase in the numbers taking Higher Level maths since this was introduced with 27% taking the higher option in 2014 compared to just 16% three years ago. Given that there is a projected skills shortage in ICT and other STEM careers, not just in Ireland but throughout the EU, this is an encouraging development.

Losing so many of our young people to emigration is a huge blow to our society. We lose their innovation, their creativity and their capacity to challenge established norms and ideas. It is vital that we encourage as many of these back to Ireland as possible. We need their fresh thinking.

It is inevitable that some will put down roots in the adopted homes and they, like many Irish before them will contribute to Irish communities around the world. This too provides a valuable support to Ireland.

We have been fortunate to have Irish people all over the world who never forget where they came from. Many of these people work quietly on behalf of Ireland, supporting the vulnerable, promoting Ireland as a place to visit or to do business. Some have made a lasting contribution to peace on our island while others have made substantial financial donations to help the Irish health and education sectors. Many of our Diaspora regularly assist our Embassy network and State Agencies in their day-to-day work including helping with Trade Missions and particularly around the St Patrick’s Day period.

Following the first Global Irish Economic Forum in Farnleigh in 2009, the Global Irish Network was established. This Network now has approximately 350 of the most influential Irish or Irish-connected people in the world based in almost 40 countries. This is an enormous resource

available to the country and one which we fully appreciate.

One gap in the Network has been the lack of young voices and I want to see how I can remedy that. The current gender imbalance in the Network also needs to be addressed.

Many of the young people who have emigrated recently have joined many of the other Irish networks around the globe, be they business, sporting, cultural or social gatherings. These networks provide a strong support base to newly arrived migrants, providing them with a welcome, a friendly face and in many cases business or job opportunities.

I am delighted to see thriving networks such as those for Irish teachers in the UK, the Wild Geese which provides a network for Irish scientists, the Irish International Business Network and the Irish Network USA among others. Some of these networks will help develop the next generation of the Global Irish Network providing a stable continuum of support and expertise available to Ireland.

One vital network overseas, particularly in recent years, has been the GAA. The GAA has been close to my heart all my life and it has proven itself to often be the first port of call for many new emigrants when they arrive in an unfamiliar place.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has been able to partner, through the Emigrant Support Programme, with the GAA to help them to grow and develop the supports, both sporting and social, that the Association provides to emigrants at all stages in their life journey, but particularly to our young people. And I am delighted that we now have GAA teams across the globe, not just in the traditional areas where Irish people tend to be, but also in more far-flung destinations – we now have teams such as the Myanmar Celts and the South Africa Gaels!

It is also very welcome that the GAA, through the Gaelic Players Association, have brought the issue of mental health and the need to take care of your mental health to the fore. Their “We wear more than our county colours” mental health campaign for county players highlights the fact that mental health problems can affect anyone and it encourages young people to seek help if they are struggling with such issues. I am also looking forward to seeing the results of Crosscare Migrant Project’s recent survey on Irish emigrant mental health and commend them for taking on this initiative.

The Emigrant Support Programme provides funding to organisations around

the world that provide support to Irish people. These organisations range from pensioners groups in London to the Irish Canadian Immigration centre in Toronto to a group supporting Irish Families in Perth. Each of these groups, and a myriad of organisations in between, provides a vital support network for Irish communities. We are very conscious of the need to support organisations that provide assistance to young people who may be feeling isolated or vulnerable in their new surroundings. A number of the programmes we fund are aimed specifically at supporting young people and young families as they adjust and integrate into their new homes for however long they chose to stay there.

It is important that we think strategically, and ensure that we do everything we can, to stay in touch with our young people and to encourage them to return to Ireland. There is no doubt that the Government must communicate effectively with our young people who have grown up in the Information Age. This is true in Ireland and around the world. Change has been so swift that, in a way, we have not kept pace with it. We will improve our communications with young Irish people overseas. To do this we must communicate with them in the ways that they communicate with each other.

Our aim, when people decide to make the move home is to make the transition as welcoming and as smooth as it can possibly be. We are examining all areas of this process including; providing access to information and services, social welfare entitlements, regulations around residency, exchange of driving licenses, and recognition of skills and qualifications. While it may not be possible to change some of the regulations that are in place, we will challenge each of the obstacles and remove barriers where possible.

I am happy to report that following work by our Embassy in Canada, the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport and the Road Safety Authority, the first of these challenges is in the process of being removed with progress on the recognition of Irish driving licenses in place in some provinces in Canada, with similar arrangements to follow in other Canadian jurisdictions. These practical issues are important for those looking to emigrate, and those planning to return. I want to know more about these issues, and to resolve them where I can.

When I look around the room here in Dublin Castle today it is very encouraging to see so many experts who are here to give their time and voice to such an important topic. I encourage you to share your views and opinions frankly. We are

currently reviewing the Government’s diaspora policy and I look forward to being able to incorporate some of the views, ideas and suggestions that come out of today’s conference.

By opening this discussion we are beginning a conversation that would not have been possible a few years ago. As a nation we have shown our resilience and our strength as we endured a very difficult period.

We can now look to the future, welcome home many of those who left and look forward to working with those who will remain abroad as they become the next generation of the Irish diaspora.

This is the beginning of a necessary conversation. It will not end today, but I want to be part of it. The return of young Irish emigrants is an issue of national importance – it is achievable - let’s make it happen.