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Barrack Street, Ennis, County Clare, Ireland

Irish graduates need something extra

Owen Ryan

IRELAND might not be able to compete with low cost-countries but it can come out of the recession by training its young people in a different way, according to David McCourt, an Irish-American CEO, who spends much of his time in Clare.

Mr. McCourt is CEO of Skyware Global, the world's first total solutions provider of satellite antennas and he is also chairman/CEO of Granahan McCourt Capital, an investment firm specialising in telecoms and media companies. He was the first person to receive an award from the White House recognising extraordinary accomplishments by private sector businesses, while The Economist described him as having "impeccable credentials as a telecom revolutionary". He visits Clare more than 10 times a year and says he has a deep affection for the county and for Ireland.

"I have an old period house in Newmarket-on-Fergus and I've been renovating it for the last 10 years. It's a labour of love, I guess. My roots are in Galway and we used to rent a house there. One year we came to Clare instead and we just fell in love with it. We loved the quality of life and we made friends here."

Skyware Global recently announced a strategic alliance with UCD to deliver an industry-focused partnership for top engineering and technology students.

The partnership will allow UCD's students to gain high-level work experience and Mr McCourt says it makes sense for him because of the type of engineers UCD produces.

"We have a lot of engineers all over the world, a lot in England and Germany. One thing we have a lot of problems with is getting engineers to approach things from a business point of view, rather than an engineering point of view. The engineers coming from UCD are more well rounded and that's what we're looking for."

He feels the country's graduates will have to offer some kind of x-factor, because Ireland is so uncompetitive in terms of price.

"There is no way you can compete with Asia unless you're different in some way, because it's so cheap."

UCD's engineering faculty has managed to produce a superior type of graduate, he says.

"They are more holistic in the way that they approach problems. You'd probably be better to talk to them about the specifics but they seem to expose them more to other disciplines. The agenda of how they learn seems to be very different from other schools."

Producing the type of graduates who have something extra to offer is the only way for Ireland to get out of the economic mire it has been stuck in for the last couple of years, he believes.

"I would say the only way out of it is to train young people differently. Ireland doesn't have enough scale and the costs are much higher than in Asia. It's important that people are able to think differently and I think Ireland has a good opportunity to do that because it's inbred in Irish people to be good communicators and most engineers aren't good communicators. People need to be trained from a business standpoint to help customers to improve their business and if that is done, you can be competitive."

He says that Skyware Global would ultimately like to open a world-class engineering centre in Ireland, which would provide employment for graduates here.