

Difficult-to-fill vacancies survey

October 2022

This paper reports the findings of the Recruitment Agency Survey conducted in October 2022 by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in SOLAS. The survey gathered the views of selected Irish recruitment agencies in respect of vacancies for occupations that require skills which are in short supply and, in their view, are proving difficult to fill.

Sector news: The findings indicated that the demand for skills in sectors such as life sciences, ICT, construction, health and financial activities continued in 2022; this is despite issues facing the Irish economy such as rising inflation and reduced consumer confidence in light of the war in Ukraine and rising energy prices.

Science, engineering & technology



39% of reported difficult-to-fill vacancies in:

ICT — Software developers, engineers (including network, security, dev-ops, automation), analysts (IT business, quality), solutions architects, technical support staff, data scientists, system administrators

Life sciences

Engineering — Process, quality control/assurance, validation, mechanical, R&D, chemical, manufacturing, environmental health & safety (EHS), automation; technicians (engineering, maintenance, mechanical)

Other — Regulatory and compliance, scientists (process, analytical), operatives (packaging, production, food)

Construction



28% of reported difficult-to-fill vacancies in:

Project/site managers, civil/site engineers, quantity surveyors, electrical engineers, safety officers, BIM, site administration, maintenance technicians, EHS engineers, mechanical engineers

Construction drivers, carpenters (including shuttering), ground workers/banksman, electricians, steel erectors/fixers, scaffolders, welders, glaziers/fitters, foremen/supervisors, curtain wallers, pipe layers

Transport & Logistics

11% of reported difficult-to-fill vacancies in:

Transport management roles, warehouse operatives, drivers (rigid/artic, reach truck, forklift), freight forwarding, procurement/sales managers, customs clearance administrators, planners (junior roles), general operatives



Health



7% of reported difficult-to-fill vacancies in:

Nurses, nurse managers, healthcare assistants, consultants, registrars, GPs

Other

Middle management (hospitality/commercial), customer care with languages, sales/marketing managers, HR specialists/managers, administrative assistants, chefs, waiting staff

Financial

8% of reported difficult-to-fill vacancies in:

Various accountants (financial, practice, insurance, tax), financial administrators, credit control, payroll, actuaries, financial recruiters



Findings

Salaries

Competitive salaries remained a key factor; this is reflected in respondents indicating an increase in salary offered for over four-fifths of the vacancies mentioned as difficult-to-fill. These increases were primarily in areas of identified skill shortages (National Skills Bulletin 2022). Many agencies also stated that salaries are becoming less competitive due to the increase in the cost of living and accommodation affordability.



Degree of difficulty

Specific industry knowledge and experience remain key criteria when hiring. This is reflected in the results of the survey which indicated that almost three quarters of the vacancy responses were a combination of very and too difficult to fill (60% of vacancies were considered very difficult to fill, with a further 14% too difficult to fill). This level of difficulty was particularly acute for engineering and construction vacancies.



Experience

Employers continue to show flexibility when attracting new talent in response to a strong competitive market when sourcing skilled candidates. This is reflected in this survey with over half of the vacancy responses (61%) accepting candidates with 3 years and less experience, while only 17% of candidates sought 5 years plus experience.



Demand

The Irish economy's continued growth is reflected in the increase in the demand for the majority (82%) of the mentioned difficult-to-fill vacancies in the last year.



Nationality

Respondents stated that they were working hard to attract European and international talent back to Ireland after their pandemic exit, particularly those skills in which Ireland is facing a serious shortage. The result of this survey found that 32% of the difficult-to-fill vacancies were filled by Irish candidates only, while the remainder were filled by a combination of Irish, EU and non-EU candidates.



Contract Type

The results of this survey indicated that 62% of the difficult-to-fill vacancies related to permanent positions while the remainder related to a combination of both permanent and contract positions. Recruitment agents stated that many candidates have been reluctant to move jobs within this uncertain economic climate and that job security, along with other factors, such as the choice of remote/hybrid working and company branding, are very influential in their decision to move jobs.



Factors that impact job attractiveness

According to the agencies surveyed, the difficulties around hiring continue to remain the same for employers; salaries, job security, hybrid working, work-life balance, promotional prospects, upskilling and developmental opportunities all impact on perceived job attractiveness. Many agencies surveyed reported that pensions, healthcare and bonuses are now a minimum expectation for many professional roles, while shares, equity and car allowance are an expectation at senior level.



Soft skills

Most agencies agreed that transferable skills are becoming increasingly important in the workplace and helpful to recruiters when deciding between candidates with similar experience and education. The increase in the demand for remote working has led to soft skills becoming more valued in the virtual workplace. According to the agencies surveyed, good communication/negotiations skills, multi-tasking, flexibility, and motivation skills were among the top soft skills sought.



Challenges

Respondents stated that experienced energy and environmental engineering roles remained difficult-to-fill and demand continues for upskilling/training of existing roles in green skills. They also commented that the rising cost of living and limited availability and cost of accommodation has made Ireland less competitive in attracting and retaining international talent. In response to these challenges, they have increased their marketing budget, were looking for staff in their origin countries and have implemented several relocation or retention packages to make it more enticing for people to move to Ireland. The survey respondents have also stated they were active on LinkedIn when sourcing candidates and have also held overseas careers fairs to attract new talent.



Digital readiness

Agencies reported that remote and hybrid working are now an expectation of many employees, and this has raised the importance of digital readiness for many industries. Respondents stated that standard digital skills are a minimum expectation across most roles in science, engineering and logistics. Agencies also stated that digital skills are becoming essential now in sectors where it wasn't necessary before e.g. modern farm management or precision agriculture.



Top comments

Accommodation availability/cost has hindered the flow of international candidates

Recruitment and retention issues now more critical than ever

Demand rising, supply decreasing for skilled staff

Salaries within most sectors remain very competitive

Permanent/fixed term contract positions difficult to fill

Experienced, skilled staff very difficult to source

Sustainability-focused roles are in demand across many sectors

The choice of hybrid/flexible working a major incentive to employees

Mid-management level staff very difficult to fill within commercial/transport/hospitality sectors