

Difficult-to-fill vacancies survey

October 2020

This paper reports the findings of the recruitment agency survey conducted in October 2020 on behalf of the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in SOLAS. This survey gathered the views of selected recruitment agencies in Ireland in respect of occupations that require skills which are in short supply, and in their view, are proving difficult to fill since the impact of **COVID-19** in March 2020.

The findings indicated that demand for skills in sectors such as construction, IT and life sciences continued despite the difficulties faced for many in the Irish labour market in 2020.

Science,
engineering &
technology

53%

Over half reported difficulty in:

IT — software developers, analysts, designers, engineers, architects, technical support staff

Engineering — process, automation, validation, EHS, quality, regulatory, manufacturing, chemical, electrical, maintenance engineers and technicians



Construction

27% **Reported difficulty in:**

Quantity surveyors, civil engineers, site engineers, contract/project managers, BIM, EHS engineers, electrical engineers, precision engineers, quality control engineers and technicians

Welders, electricians, carpenters (including shuttering), glaziers/fitters, steel erectors/fixers, scaffolders, pipe layers, curtain-wallers, various drivers, ground workers



Finance

4%

Reported difficulty in:

Accountants (tax, financial, cost, revenue, practice), payroll, blockchain engineers



Transport & Storage

9%

Reported difficulty in:

HGV drivers, forklift drivers, freight forwarders, buyers/planners (junior/mid-management roles), transport managers/engineers, warehouse operatives, customs clearance staff



Other Sectors

Health — nurses, GPs, healthcare assistants

Other — sales roles



Findings of survey since COVID-19 commenced March 2020

Salaries

Those who responded to the survey reported that salaries were up again from last year with more than three quarters (80%) of the responses indicating an increase in the salary offered. These increases were primarily for difficult-to-fill vacancies in sectors such as IT, construction and life sciences, while salaries remained broadly the same within the financial, health and transport sectors.



Degree of difficulty

Vacancies are becoming more difficult to fill as many companies are currently looking for a cross-section of skills and candidates with specific industry experience. This is reflected in the results of the survey which indicated that over three quarters of the vacancy responses were a combination of very and too difficult to fill (63% found it very difficult to fill vacancies and 14% found it too difficult to fill vacancies). The reason for the majority of these difficulties was an insufficient number of skilled candidates available within the Irish labour market.



Experience

Respondents indicated that employers continue to respond to the increasing difficulty in attracting skilled candidates by accepting candidates with less experience. This is reflected in this survey with over three quarters of the vacancy responses (78%) accepting candidates with 3 years and less experience. The number of candidates requiring 5 years plus experience has decreased in recent years.



Nationality

Hiring and retention of qualified and experienced employees continues to be an issue particularly in the IT and life sciences sectors. 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

Respondents indicated that many candidates are reluctant to move jobs within the uncertain economic climate of COVID-19 and Brexit. The results of this survey indicated that over a third, 39%, of difficult-to-fill vacancies were for permanent positions only, while the remainder were for a combination of permanent and contract positions.



Factors that impact job attractiveness

According to the agencies surveyed, the difficulties around hiring continue to remain the same for employers, including the location of the job, job security, salary, promotional prospects, upskilling and developmental opportunities, with the additional new opportunity for remote working also an attraction.

Brexit

This survey reported that the majority of agencies remain broadly positive about Brexit. Many agencies stated that it is hoped it will provide a better pool of potential candidates (as Ireland may prove to be a more attractive location than the UK), although others reported that some manufacturing industries are reluctant to invest in R&D until the Brexit outcome is resolved.

Remote working/technology

The respondents found that remote working is working well for most medium to large sized companies, when assisted by modern technologies such as Skype, Zoom, VPN (virtual private network), network security and malware protection. Respondents state that remote working has been vital in facilitating interviews, meetings, on-boarding and staff training.

