

Difficult-to-fill vacancies survey

October 2021

This paper reports the findings of the Recruitment Agency Survey conducted in October 2021 by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in SOLAS. The survey gathered the views of selected Irish recruitment agencies in respect of 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, IT, construction, health and financial activities continued despite the difficulties faced for many in the Irish labour market in 2021.

Science,
engineering &
technology



46% or almost half, reported difficulty for roles including:

IT — Software developers, mobile/web developers, IT engineers (e.g. devOps, security, test, virtualisation), designers, architects (cloud, data, IT, solutions), data analysts/scientists, technical support staff (with languages)

Engineering — engineers (process, validation, automation, manufacturing, quality and regulatory, R&D, electrical, environmental, health and safety (EHS)), scientists (analytical, process), compliance and regulatory affairs specialists, technicians (maintenance, quality)

Health



9%

reported difficulty in:

Nurses (e.g. theatre, oncology, cath lab, ICU), registrars, nurse managers, GPs, healthcare assistants

Transport
& Logistics



8%

reported difficulty in:

HGV/artic truck drivers, warehouse operatives, procurement roles, transport management roles, customs clearance, forklift drivers, freight forwarding, support roles

Construction



26% reported difficulty in:

Project/site managers, quantity surveyors, engineers (electrical, civil/site engineers, construction design, EHS), BIM, planners, safety officers, administrators

Construction drivers (e.g. forklift, crane, site dump, teleporter), carpenters (including shuttering), electricians, steel erectors/fixers, welders, scaffolders, pipe layers, curtain wallers, glaziers/fitters, ground workers

Financial



8%

reported difficulty in:

Financial managers, accountants (including tax), regulatory, financial controllers, financial admin roles, customer service agents

Other

Admin assistance, chefs, waiting staff

Issues relating to recruitment - key findings

Salaries

Respondents indicated that an increase in salary was offered for 85% of the vacancies mentioned as difficult-to-fill reflecting how competitive the market is for these skills currently. These increases were primarily in areas of identified skill shortages (National Skills Bulletin 2021).



Degree of difficulty

Certain vacancies continue to remain difficult to fill as many companies are looking for two key elements when hiring: candidates with specific industry skills and relevant experience. 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 (64% of vacancies were considered very difficult to fill, with a further 8% too difficult to fill). The reason given for the majority of these difficulties was an insufficient number of skilled candidates available within the Irish labour market.



Experience

Employers continue to respond to the increasing difficulty in attracting skilled candidates by accepting those with less experience. This is reflected in this survey with over half of the vacancy responses (52%) accepting candidates with 3 years and less experience; approximately a quarter of candidates required 5 years plus experience.



Nationality

Recruitment agents noted that COVID-19 resulted in many European and international candidates returning to their home countries and that the respondents are awaiting a return of this international talent to Ireland. The result of this survey found that 33% of the difficult to fill vacancies are filled by Irish candidates only, while the remainder are filled by a combination of Irish, EU and non-EU candidates.



Contract Type

The results of this survey indicated that 52% of the difficult-to-fill vacancies related to permanent positions while the remainder related to a combination of both permanent and contract positions. Both permanent and fixed contract jobs were difficult to fill, where job security is seen as a critical factor more than ever. Recruitment agents commented that many candidates have been reluctant to move jobs within this uncertain economic climate and that the choice of remote working is 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, with the location of the job (many candidates wanted the option of remote working), job security, salary, promotional prospects, upskilling and developmental opportunities all impacting on perceived job attractiveness.



Brexit

Some agencies reported that Brexit has led to clients looking for candidates with experience in customs and importing requirements to deal with customers' needs. They also commented that many companies were hiring with tighter budgets and being cautious because of Brexit. Other recruitment agents are hoping that Brexit will encourage foreign candidates to come to Ireland as it remains the only English-speaking EU country.



Remote working

Due to COVID-19 restrictions many agencies suggested that they have now adapted well to virtual recruitment technology, which has allowed recruiters to contact a wider pool of potential candidate in a timelier and cost-effective way. The ability and choice to work remotely is a huge factor in recruiting and retaining staff.



Green skill needs

Energy and environmental engineering roles are on the rise due to the increase in demand for green sustainable energy in most sectors in Ireland according to those surveyed. Agencies stated that the main challenge is the recruitment of qualified and experienced candidates and the upskilling and training for existing roles and that salaries for all skilled candidates within the renewable energy sector are expected to be very competitive.



Key responses

Demand is rising, supply of skilled staff has fallen

Sustainability-focused roles are in demand across all sectors

Salaries within renewable energy sector are competitive

Experienced, skilled staff difficult to source

Upskilling/ training required in new build/ retrofit within construction

Fixed term contracts difficult to fill

COVID-19 has hindered the flow of international candidates

French, Dutch, German are main languages in demand

Companies focusing on retaining existing staff as much as hiring new ones