

Difficult-to-fill vacancies survey

November 2023

This paper reports the findings of the Recruitment Agency Survey conducted in November 2023 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 talent market remains tight and highly competitive within Ireland, with recruiters continuing to have difficulty in hiring for certain roles. The findings indicate that despite challenging economic issues such as cost-of-living pressures, the demand for skills in sectors such as ICT, life sciences, construction, health and financial activities continued in 2023.

Science, engineering & technology



41% of reported difficult-to-fill vacancies in:

ICT — Software developers, engineers (including networking, dev-ops, security, windows), technical support staff, analysts (data, quality), solutions architects, data scientists

Life sciences

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

Other — Regulatory and compliance, pharmacovigilance specialists, technicians (engineering, maintenance, electrical, lab), operatives (packaging, general, food), scientists (process, analytical, microbiologist), procurement, production managers

Construction



31% of reported difficult-to-fill vacancies in:

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

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

Transport & Logistics

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

Drivers (rigid/artic, reach truck, forklift), logistics/warehouse managers, warehouse/general operatives, freight forwarders, supply chain analysts, planners, procurement managers



Health

5% of reported difficult-to-fill vacancies in:



Nurses, nurse managers, healthcare assistants, consultants/registrars (including psychiatric), GPs

Other

Management (hospitality/commercial), customer care with languages, sales/marketing managers, chefs, waiting staff, cleaning staff

Financial

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



Various accountants (financial, practice, insurance, tax), financial administrators, credit controllers, payroll/accounts administrators, regulatory roles, asset management roles

Findings

Salaries

According to agencies surveyed, competitive salaries remain essential in attracting and retaining skilled employees due to a tight labour market and higher cost of living, this is reflected in respondents indicating that an increase in salary was 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 2023).



Degree of difficulty

The results of the survey indicated that almost three quarters of the vacancy responses were a combination of very and too difficult to fill (59% of vacancies were considered very difficult to fill, with a further 13% too difficult to fill). This level of difficulty was particularly acute for engineering and construction vacancies.



Experience

Employers commented that they are aware of how competitive the market is when attracting new skilled talent and in response, continue to accept candidates with less experience in order to fill certain positions. This is reflected in this survey with over half of the vacancy responses (62%) accepting candidates with 3 years and less experience, while only 17% of candidates sought 5 years plus experience; these roles were more senior positions in most cases.



Demand

The Irish economy's successful recovery post-pandemic is reflected in the increase in demand for the majority (72%) of the mentioned difficult-to-fill vacancies in the last year. This was particularly the case for roles in accommodation & food and life sciences.



International Talent



Respondents commented that the rising cost of living and limited availability and cost of accommodation is leaving Ireland at a disadvantage when attracting and retaining international talent, in particular for vacancies which are proving most difficult to fill. Respondents stated that companies are increasing flexibility in work locations and focusing on competitive compensation to address this issue. The result of this survey found that 38% 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 61% 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 commented that factors such as the choice of remote/hybrid working, and job benefits are very influential in their decision to move jobs.

Factors that impact job attractiveness

According to the agencies surveyed, the difficulties around hiring and retaining employees continue to remain the same for employers, and in their opinion, the following are the most common factors that impact job attractiveness in order of importance.



SALARY



WORK LIFE
BALANCE



PERKS AND
BONUSES



SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT



CONTRACT

Soft skills

Most agencies agreed that demand for remote and hybrid working conditions have made soft skills of increased importance in the workplace. According to respondents, the soft skills most in demand were.



COMMUNICATION



NEGOTIATION



TEAMWORK



DECISION
MAKING



ADAPTABILITY



LEADERSHIP

Challenges

Respondents stated that the cost and availability of accommodation remains an ongoing challenge to entice international candidates to Ireland. Hybrid/flexible working options are helping to lower the cost of accommodation and commuting. Green skills are becoming a focus for most industries, there is a shortage of experienced talent, particularly sustainability and environmental engineering roles and many roles within manufacturing are now expected to have lean manufacturing process and equipment reliability training/experience. Respondents also stated that employment permits, increased focus on marketing budgets, the promotion of company culture and the use of social media platforms have facilitated the sourcing of new overseas talent.



Digital readiness

Agencies stated that remote and hybrid working is now favoured by many employees, making digital knowledge essential in response to an increased need for timely communication and effective sharing of knowledge. Respondents stated that standard digital skills are now the minimum expectation across most roles.



Top comments

Accommodation availability/cost continues to negatively impact the supply of international candidates

The choice of hybrid/flexible working continues to be highly valued by employees

Experienced skilled staff most difficult to fill

Competitive salaries and compensation packages remain key hiring/retention strategies within most sectors

Talent recruitment and retention identified as leading challenge

Demand is growing, supply decreasing for skilled staff

Lean manufacturing process and equipment reliability knowledge an expectation in many life science roles