

Ready for lift-off?



Scientist salary survey

Job Title	Annual pay (€)
Chemistry analysts	38,000
QA analyst	40,000
QA specialist	42,000
Documentation specialist	38,000
Validation specialist	40,000+
Regulatory affairs officer	50,000
Process development chemist (PhD)	50,000+
Process engineer	50,000+
Electrical engineer	48,000+
Automation engineer	52,000+
Mechanical project engineer	48,000+
Maintenance engineer	45,000+
Chemical engineer	52,000+

Source: Berkley Recruitment

Now is a good time to launch your scientific career, as a recent survey indicates there are plenty of jobs to choose from in the industry. Photograph: iStockphoto

The job market in the pharmaceutical and medical devices market is in rude health in the capital, but things are that bit more competitive outside Dublin. Paul O'Doherty reports

In October this year, Berkley Recruitment carried out its quarterly online salary survey, putting general scenarios and questions relating to the pharmaceutical and medical-device industry to 25,000 of the 150,000 subscribers in its database. Armed with a hit rate of 10 per cent, or 2,500 replies, Berkley Recruitment's director, Fergal Brosnan, forged the following conclusion: salaries in the pharmaceutical and medical-device industry are not dramatically on the increase - inflation linked plus 1 per cent - with employers and employees in general "taking

a very realistic approach" to the job market. One of the key findings acknowledges that growth in the industry is coming from reinvestment, as opposed to new investment.

As part of the research, which matched salaries to job titles, the survey showed three different summits - lower, mid and higher end - from entry level to the top of each profession. For example, a chemistry analyst should expect an annual pay scale of €25,000 (lower), €33,000 (mid) and €38,000 (higher end). Other pay scales using similar measurements include: quality assurance

(QA) analyst expectations of €26,000, €34,000 and €40,000; validation specialist expectations of €30,000, €36,000 and €40,000-plus; regulatory affairs officer expectations of €30,000, €40,000 and €50,000; process development chemist (PhD) expectations of €34,000, €42,000 and €50,000-plus; process engineer expectations of €29,000, €42,000 and €50,000-plus; electrical engineer expectations of €28,000, €40,000 and €48,000-plus; automation engineer expectations of €28,000, €45,000 and €52,000-plus; and chemical engineer expectations of €30,000, €45,000 and €52,000-plus.

Commenting on whether the salaries are high enough to attract the top people, Fergal Brosnan maintains that the "perceived gap is very much at the mid level, with people with five or six years' experience tending to look at greener fields, perhaps abroad, wondering 'is there something better out there for me?'. The top level seems to be attracting the

right people and we have no issue with people in the US, UK or mainland Europe coming here saying salaries are not on par with what's on offer in their own countries."

Aside from salary expectations, the survey also posed a number of hypothetical scenarios to see how subscribers would respond. Chief among this line of questioning was how subscribers felt about taking a wage freeze in the present economic climate, for a year, if the Government was also to freeze prices on all goods and services for the same period. Berkley Recruitment concluded that, "71 per cent [of subscribers] said 'yes' or 'maybe'... highlighting that people are becoming less selfish and greedy in their attitude to jobs and are prepared to show realistic restraint with a long-term goal of keeping the economy competitive".

While the question is a little cumbersome, and economically naive, the conclusions, to say the least, are skewed; you could argue from the results that 61 per

cent said "no" or "maybe". Despite Brosnan's acknowledgment that "it's not a likely scenario, we're not living in Russia or in a communist state", there is still the underlying reality and concern in the industry that unless salaries are kept in check, Irish competitiveness could be undermined.

According to Berkley Recruitment, the survey also highlighted that 75 per cent of people felt that there were enough or lots of opportunities and confidence in the job market, although such high findings were not as positive outside Dublin, with nearly twice as many people in the country, as opposed to Dublin, suggesting that the market was weak, which could be reflective of job losses in certain areas.

It was also maintained that only 9 per cent surveyed were worried about job security. From this and the previous point, Berkley Recruitment take the view that "people are cautiously optimistic, that there is more realism in the marketplace, and

less bullishness than was prevalent in the Celtic Tiger boom years".

The survey also found that "when looking at motivators to move jobs, 51 per cent favour career progression over money and job location combined, and that 75 per cent would go back to education full time in order to progress their careers". When asked "would you be willing to work in the North of Ireland?", 33 per cent of respondents said "they would, now, with the change in the political environment".

Reflecting overall on the highlights in the survey, and looking to the future, Brosnan is fairly optimistic that the industry is in rude health.

"While people might perceive that there has been a downturn, what we have found is that it has maintained 2006 levels and the demand for resources is the same this year as it was last year. And, if we maintain this level or stay within five per cent of it, we'll be doing very well."

A gap year without a career gap

The Bioscience Global Alliance is a grandiose nomenclature for an arrangement between recruitment companies around the world within the parameters of the pharmaceutical and medical-device industry; in essence, it is a global job-shop. Originally the brainchild of Berkley Recruitment, which is based in Cork, and On Q, an Australian recruitment firm run by Irishwoman Catherine O'Mahony, who lives in Sydney, the alliance, now in its third year, has affiliates in Ireland and Australia (Berkley and On Q) and in Singapore, Holland and Britain, with plans at an advanced stage to include an American recruitment agency or consultancy in the future.

According to Berkley Recruitment's director, Fergal Brosnan, the idea came about as a partial solution to solving the perennial problem of sourcing a supply of suitable candidates. Many younger recruits to the industry with bags of experience take gap years out of their profession to see the world. Typically, they lose track of their intended career path, and spend the time grape or fruit-picking or pulling pints around the world to meet expenses, and this is particularly apparent in Australia. Berkley Recruitment saw an opportunity to tap into this market.

"Through various

introductions we met On Q and as they had a similar ethos to ourselves, it was a logical marriage for us to say 'we have the potential fruit-pickers with three years' experience here in the pharmaceutical industry, who are going to go to Australia for a few years. Why don't you guys find them short-term work within the vertical of whatever pharmaceutical sector they are coming from?' And then, when they are coming home with the relevant work experience to go back into the industry, we can find them suitable positions here in Ireland."

The Bioscience Global Alliance offers what it calls a "single-point access" to international vacancies, candidates and recruiters across a number of disciplines and sectors. For the job-hunter who fancies a bit of backpacking around the world, it is a portal for accessing relevant vacancies in specific specialities across a global network. Similarly, the alliance offers employers an opportunity to draw on a global pool. For the recruitment firms in the middle, the suggestion is that the system provides a network of like-minded recruiters motivated to oversee both the interests of jobseekers and clients alike.

To highlight the emergence of this new partnership, a website, www.bioscience.com, will be launched on November 14th.



Many science graduates travel the world on a gap year, particularly to Australia. Photograph: AP/Steve Strike

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