

Difficult-to-fill vacancies survey

November 2024

This paper reports the findings of the Recruitment Agency Survey conducted in November 2024 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 attraction and retention of top talent remains a key focus within Ireland's highly competitive recruitment market. With near full employment, recruiters continue to have difficulty in hiring for certain roles. Sector-specific, cross-sectoral and transversal skills are in demand across many industries. The demand for certain skills in sectors such as ICT, life sciences, construction, health and financial activities continued in 2024.

Science, engineering & technology



41% of reported difficult to fill vacancies in:

ICT — Software developers, engineers (including networking, dev ops, security, AI, machine learning), data analysts/scientists/engineers, solutions architects, technical support staff.

Life sciences

Engineers — Quality control/assurance, environmental health & safety (EHS), validation, process, automation, R&D, manufacturing, mechanical, electrical, design.

Other — Regulatory and compliance, operatives (packaging, general, food), pharmacovigilance specialists, technicians (maintenance, electrical, mechanical), scientists (process, analytical, microbiologist, clinical research), managers (production, quality, EHS).

Health



5% of reported difficult to fill vacancies in:

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

Other

Managers (hospitality, commercial sales/marketing), customer care with languages, sales agents, chefs, recruitment specialists, waiting and cleaning staff.

Construction



28% of reported difficult to fill vacancies in:

Project/site managers, engineers (civil/site, structural, electrical, mechanical, EHS), quantity surveyors, safety officers, BIM, technicians (maintenance, quality), site administration, planners, procurement staff.

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

Transport & Logistics

11% of reported difficult to fill vacancies in:

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



Financial



10% of reported difficult to fill vacancies in:

Various accountants (financial, insurance, tax, practice) including those newly or part qualified, financial and insurance advisers, credit controllers, payroll/accounts administrators, regulatory and compliance roles, data analysts, company secretaries.

Findings

Salaries

According to the agencies surveyed, competitive salaries remain crucial in attracting and retaining skilled employees in a tight labour market with cost of living pressures a factor. Respondents indicated that an increase in salary was offered for almost two thirds (64%) of the difficult-to-fill vacancy mentions. These increases were primarily in areas of identified skill shortages (National Skills Bulletin 2024).



Degree of difficulty

The results of the survey indicated that almost half (47%) of the difficult-to-fill vacancy mentions were either very or too difficult to fill. This level of difficulty was particularly acute for construction and engineering vacancies.



Experience

Agencies stated that employers were aware of how competitive the market is when attracting new skilled talent and in response, some companies are willing to hire potential over experience in order to fill certain roles. This is reflected in this survey with over half of the responses (59%) indicating a willingness to accept candidates with 3 years and less experience, while only 22% sought 5 years plus experience; these roles were more senior positions in most cases.



Demand

Respondents said they remain cautious when hiring due to wider economic uncertainty. The results indicated that just over a third (35%) of the vacancy responses mentioned an increase in demand for difficult-to-fill vacancies in the last year, while 61% stated that demand remains unchanged from the previous year and a further 4% stated a fall in demand for the mentioned difficult-to-fill vacancies in the last year.



International Talent

Respondents mentioned that many firms are offering financial incentives and relocation packages to attract international talent. However, the higher cost of living and limited availability of accommodation remains a major barrier when attracting and retaining international talent, especially for vacancies which are proving most difficult to fill. The result of this survey found that 26% of the difficult-to-fill vacancies were filled by mostly Irish candidates, while the remainder were filled by a combination of Irish, EU and non-EU candidates.



Contract Type

The results of this survey found that of the difficult-to-fill vacancy mentions, 58% related to permanent positions, 16% to contract positions, while the remainder related to a combination of both permanent and contract positions. Recruitment agents also stated that factors such as the choice of flexible working conditions has helped eased the skill gap within certain roles.



Factors that impact job attractiveness

According to the agencies surveyed, the difficulties around hiring and retaining employees continues to remain the same for employers. In their opinion, salary and the choice of remote working are the most important factors impacting job attractiveness, followed by job permanency, perks and bonuses and upskilling opportunities.



SALARY



WORK LIFE
BALANCE



CONTRACT



PERKS AND
BONUSES



SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT

Soft skills

Respondents stated that soft skills are increasingly important within the workplace. The survey found that people with good communication, leadership, adaptability, problem-solving and teamwork skills are the key interpersonal skills sought within the current challenging business environment.



COMMUNICATION



TEAMWORK



DECISION
MAKING



ADAPTABILITY



LEADERSHIP

Challenges

Respondents stated that accommodation availability and affordability remain the key obstacles to the flow of international candidates to Ireland. Companies must offer competitive salaries due to higher cost of living expenses. Challenges within an economy close to full employment make it difficult to attract and retain skilled and experienced employees. Respondents mentioned that flexible working conditions were in place in order to retain talent, despite the fact that employers are seeking staff to work onsite more often in the expectation it will enhance work relationships and productivity. Opportunities for upskilling and progression were also viewed as important in retaining talent. Green skills are becoming a focus for all industries, and there is a shortage of talent. Respondents stated that there is demand for environmental, health and safety staff and that new talent and roles are emerging, such as energy traders, head of sustainability, sustainability officers etc.



Digital readiness

Agencies stated that the importance of digital skills has increased across many roles and industries in the last year, due in part to hybrid and remote working conditions still favoured by candidates.

