UK & Ireland

Europe Life Sciences Labour Market Trends

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Introduction

The UK and Ireland life sciences sector is entering 2026 with a renewed sense of momentum. After a difficult 2025, in which vacancies fell 6.8% in the UK and a sharper 27.6% in Ireland, both markets are now showing clear signs of recovery. Across the region, hiring is forecast to grow by 13.3% in the UK and 7.7% in Ireland this year and having spent the past twelve months speaking with clients navigating that downturn, it's genuinely encouraging to see confidence returning.

This shift isn't happening by accident. Government backing through the UK's Life Sciences Sector Plan, faster clinical trial approvals, and more than £3 billion in public and private investment are giving organisations the confidence to move research programmes from planning into delivery. In Ireland, targeted investment in quality control, validation engineering and clinical operations is underpinning a similar, if more measured, resurgence, supported by initiatives such as the EU Biotech Act and Research Ireland's €460 million funding commitment.

What stands out most to me is how the nature of hiring itself is changing. Employers are no longer chasing volume; they're being deliberate, prioritising specialist scientific, regulatory and clinical talent capable of supporting increasingly complex, high-value programmes. That's a meaningful shift for recruitment partners and candidates alike, and it's reshaping where the real competition for talent is happening, from R&D and biotechnology through to medical affairs and quality assurance.

This report brings together the latest vacancy data across both markets, examining sector-by-sector performance, the skills employers are prioritising, and the companies driving recruitment activity. Our aim, as ever, is to give clients and candidates a clear, evidence-based view of where the market is heading, so they can plan their next move with confidence.

We hope you find it useful.

Paul Thomas

Director at Cpl

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Overview

Following a 6.8% decline in vacancies during 2025, the UK life sciences labour market is forecast to return to growth, with hiring expected to increase by 13.3% in 2026. The recovery is being driven by a combination of government support, regulatory reform and renewed investment across the sector. The UK's Life Sciences Sector Plan, together with reforms designed to accelerate clinical trial approvals, is helping organisations move research programmes into delivery more quickly. At the same time, more than £3 billion of public and private investment is supporting expansion across advanced therapeutics, AI-enabled drug discovery and clinical operations. As activity increases, employers are focusing recruitment on experienced scientific, regulatory and clinical professionals capable of supporting high-value research programmes.

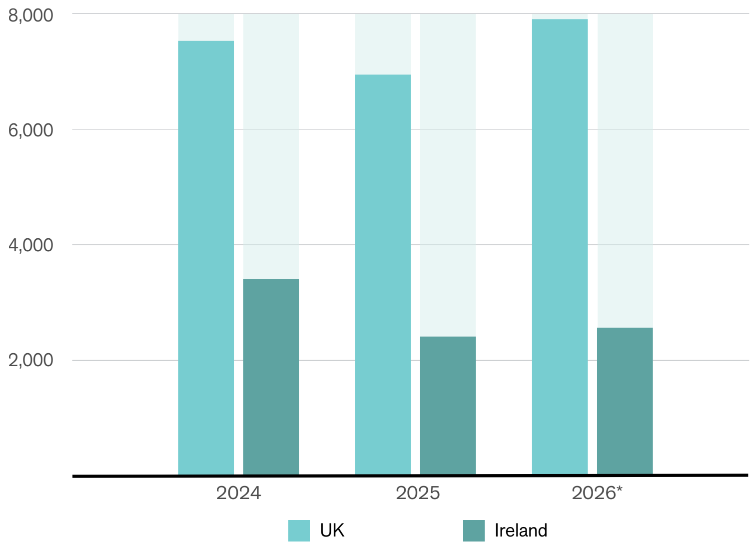
Hiring momentum strengthened during the first half of 2026. Vacancies in Q1 were 20.5% higher than in Q4 2025, reflecting renewed confidence following regulatory improvements and increased investment across the sector. Although vacancies eased by 1.5% in Q2, this follows a particularly strong start to the year and suggests demand is stabilising rather than weakening. Employers are becoming more selective, prioritising specialist and leadership appointments over volume hiring as organisations scale research and manufacturing programmes.

Ireland is also entering a new growth phase following a challenging 2025. Scientific vacancies are forecast to increase by 7.7% during 2026 after falling 27.6% the previous year. The recovery is being driven by targeted investment rather than broad expansion, with companies concentrating recruitment on quality control, validation engineering and clinical operations to support manufacturing capacity and regulatory compliance.

The improvement is reflected in quarterly hiring trends, with vacancies increasing by 6.0% between Q4 2025 and Q1 2026, followed by a further 6.2% rise in Q2. Early growth was supported by the return of capital investment and greater use of contract recruitment, while permanent hiring has accelerated as manufacturing and clinical programmes progress. Together, these trends point to a more sustainable recovery focused on long-term research, advanced manufacturing and specialist scientific capability.

Annual Totals

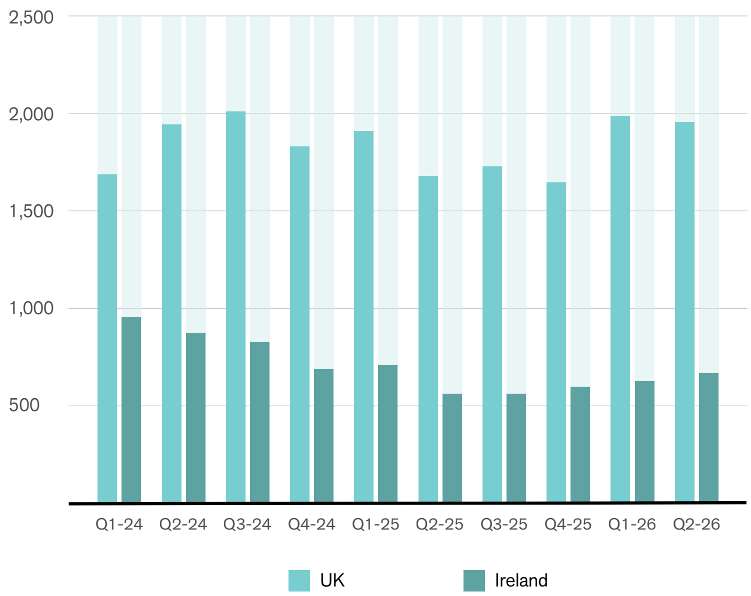
Scientific Vacancies, Life Sciences, UK vs R.Ireland, 2024 - 2026* Est



Source: Vacancysoft Analytics

Quarterly Totals

Scientific Vacancies, Life Sciences, UK vs R.Ireland, 2024 - 2026 (Q1 - Q2)



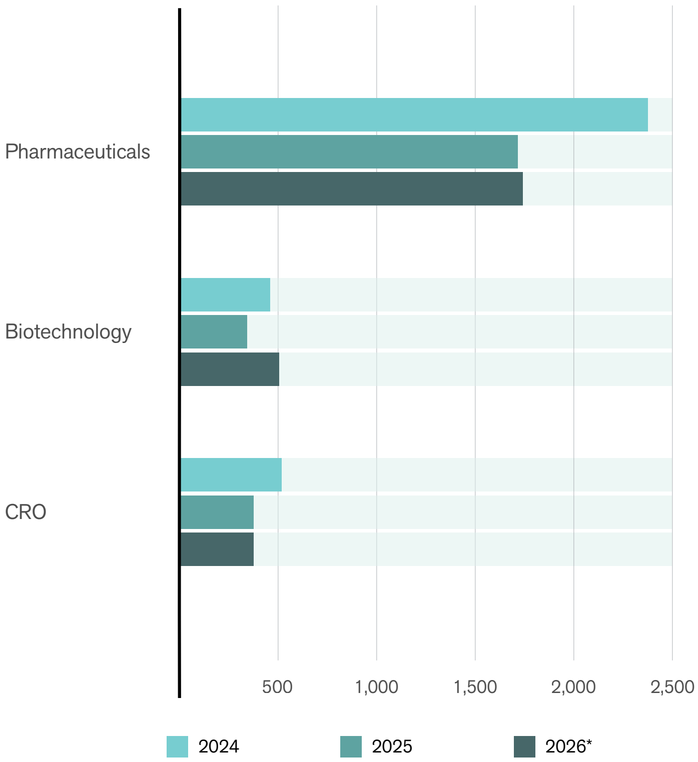
2026 - Estimation*

Source: Vacancysoft Analytics

Ireland

Sectorial Breakdown

Scientific Vacancies, Life Sciences, R.Ireland, 2024 - 2026* Est

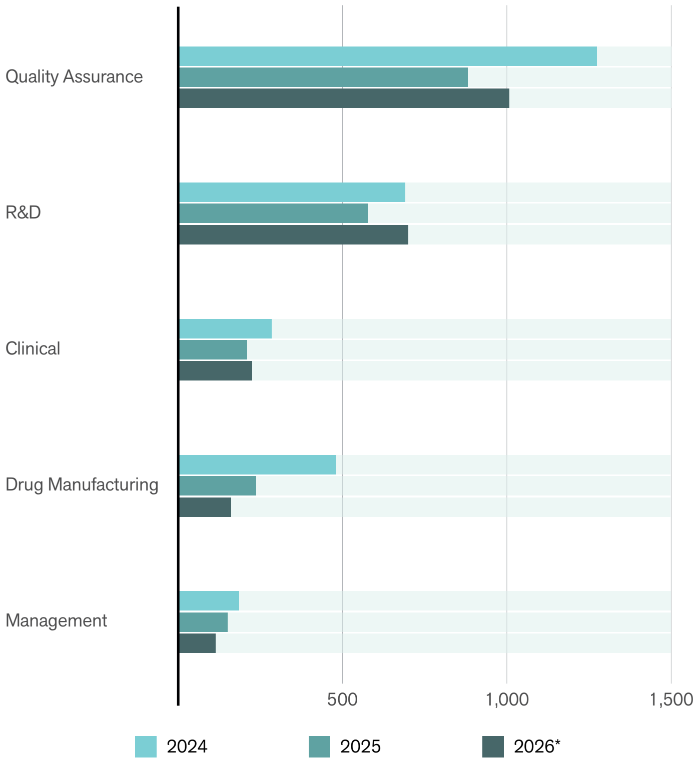


2026 - Estimation*

Source: Vacancysoft Analytics

Skills in Demand

Top Divisions, Scientific Vacancies, Life Sciences, R.Ireland, 2024 - 2026* Est



2026 - Estimation*

Source: Vacancysoft Analytics

Biotechnology is expected to be Ireland's fastest-growing scientific discipline in 2026, with vacancies forecast to increase by 46.8%. The sector is benefiting from stronger venture capital investment alongside continued expansion by multinational life sciences companies across Dublin, Cork and Limerick. Ireland's role in advancing the EU Biotech Act has also reinforced investor confidence and strengthened support for high-value research. As biotechnology companies scale, recruitment is increasingly focused on bioprocess engineering, automation and data-driven manufacturing capabilities.

Pharmaceuticals will remain Ireland's largest life sciences employer, accounting for 66.4% of scientific vacancies in 2026 despite a slight decline in market share from the previous year. Rather than indicating weaker demand, this reflects faster growth across biotechnology and emerging scientific disciplines. Pharmaceutical manufacturers continue to invest in production capacity, while adapting supply chains and operations to changing global market conditions. As a result, hiring remains strong across manufacturing, quality and technical operations.

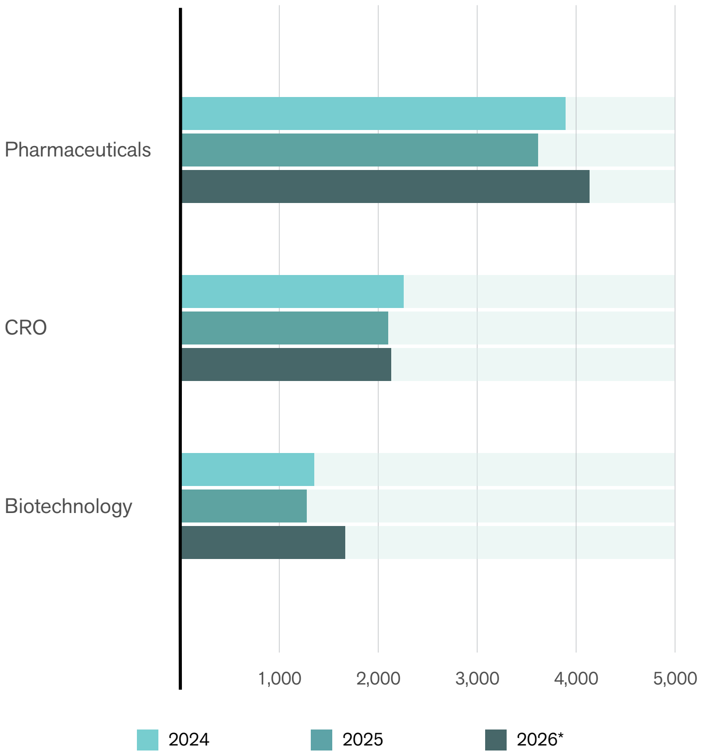
Research and Development is forecast to record a 20.7% increase in vacancies during 2026, supported by the Irish Government's €460 million investment in seven new Research Ireland centres. The funding is strengthening collaboration between academia and industry while encouraging greater commercialisation of scientific research. Employers are therefore placing greater emphasis on recruiting experienced researchers capable of translating innovation into clinical and commercial outcomes.

Quality Assurance is expected to account for 38.6% of scientific vacancies, making it the largest functional discipline within Ireland's life sciences market. As manufacturers expand advanced therapeutics production and adopt greater automation, maintaining regulatory compliance becomes increasingly important. Guidance from the HPRA and the growing complexity of biologics manufacturing continue to drive demand for QA specialists, validation engineers and compliance professionals who can ensure production standards are maintained as facilities expand.

UK

Sectorial Breakdown

Scientific Vacancies, Life Sciences, UK, 2024 - 2026* Est

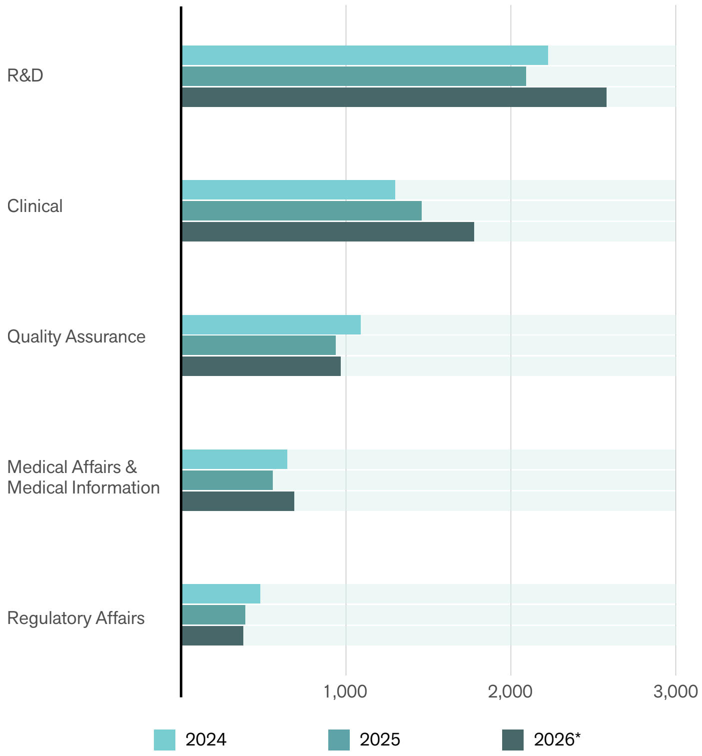


2026 - Estimation*

Source: Vacancysoft Analytics

Skills in Demand

Top Divisions, Scientific Vacancies, Life Sciences, UK, 2024 - 2026* Est



2026 - Estimation*

Source: Vacancysoft Analytics

Biotechnology is forecast to deliver the strongest recruitment growth within the UK life sciences sector, with vacancies increasing by 30.5% during 2026. Government support through the Life Sciences Sector Plan, together with UK Research and Innovation funding for engineering biology, is helping innovative companies move discoveries closer to commercial production. Recruitment is increasingly centred on computational biology, cell and gene therapy, and AI-enabled drug discovery, reflecting the industry's growing reliance on advanced technologies throughout the research pipeline.

Pharmaceuticals will continue to represent the largest scientific employer, accounting for 52.2% of vacancies across the UK. Confidence has strengthened following the UK-US pharmaceutical trade agreement, which protects exports from additional tariffs, while the VPAG Investment Programme is supporting further investment in NHS clinical research infrastructure. These developments are encouraging companies to expand research programmes and manufacturing operations, sustaining demand across scientific, regulatory and operational roles.

Research and Development vacancies are forecast to increase by 68.4%, making R&D the fastest-growing scientific function in the UK during 2026. More than £3 billion of new investment, including major expansion projects from AstraZeneca and Moderna, is increasing research capacity across the country. Combined with record UKRI funding and faster NHS clinical trial approvals, employers are competing for experienced scientists capable of accelerating drug discovery and bringing innovative therapies to market more quickly.

Medical Affairs is expected to grow by 30.1% during 2026 as pharmaceutical companies prepare for the commercialisation of new oncology and GLP-1 therapies. At the same time, updated PMCPA guidance has increased regulatory expectations around engagement with healthcare providers and the communication of clinical evidence. Consequently, organisations are strengthening Medical Affairs teams by recruiting Medical Science Liaisons, scientific advisors and compliance specialists to support increasingly complex product launches.

Companies to Watch

PSC Biotech is forecast to record the strongest recruitment growth in Ireland, with vacancies expected to rise by 118.2% during 2026. Recent partnerships with De Lama and Blue Ocean Robotics are expanding the company's presence across pharmaceutical manufacturing and laboratory technologies, creating demand for validation engineers, laboratory specialists and technical sales professionals. As these projects move into delivery, recruitment is likely to remain concentrated on highly specialised technical expertise.

Eurofins Scientific is also expected to expand hiring in Ireland, with vacancies forecast to increase by 11.0%. Backed by approximately €200 million in annual capital investment, the company continues to strengthen its laboratory network through acquisitions and digital transformation initiatives. This growth is expected to support recruitment across laboratory operations, data science and digital technologies as Eurofins increases testing capacity throughout the region.

In the UK, IQVIA is forecast to increase vacancies by 66.1% following the reorganisation of its global operations and continued expansion of its clinical research activities. A substantial R&D contract backlog, combined with deeper collaboration with the NHS through Prime Sites, is creating sustained demand for clinical research professionals, project managers and data scientists. Recruitment is expected to remain closely aligned with the growth of decentralised clinical trials and real-world evidence programmes.

Johnson & Johnson is projected to increase UK hiring by 30.2% during 2026 as investment continues across both Innovative Medicine and MedTech. Strong commercial performance, combined with new product launches and expanded educational initiatives such as the UK-wide "We Are Surgery" programme, is supporting recruitment across medical affairs, regulatory affairs and scientific leadership. The company's continued investment highlights the ongoing demand for highly skilled professionals capable of supporting innovation throughout the product lifecycle.

Top 10 Companies

Scientific Vacancies, Life Sciences, R.Ireland, 2024 - 2026*

Organization	2024	2025	2026*	YoY% 25-26*
PSC Biotech	202	110	240	118.2%
Eurofins	224	173	192	11.0%
Merck	275	202	182	-9.9%
Lilly	381	272	154	-43.4%
Alexion	170	110	136	23.6%
Abbott	182	116	134	15.5%
Johnson & Johnson	101	97	126	29.9%
AbbVie	100	102	120	17.6%
Viatris	148	114	110	-3.5%
Bristol Myers Squibb	180	50	108	116.0%

2026 - Estimation*

Source: Vacancysoft Analytics

Top 10 Companies

Scientific Vacancies, Life Sciences, UK, 2024 - 2026* Est

Organization	2024	2025	2026*	YoY% 25-26*
GSK	685	499	626	25.5%
IQVIA	258	242	402	66.1%
Eurofins	486	354	360	1.7%
Johnson & Johnson	184	255	332	30.2%
AstraZeneca	380	258	300	16.3%
Syneos Health	214	248	264	6.5%
Parexel	135	162	188	16.0%
Novartis	181	193	180	-6.7%
Almac	179	115	158	37.4%
LGC	94	132	144	9.1%

2026 - Estimation*

Source: Vacancysoft Analytics

Where potential meets capability. Since 1989, Cpl has been helping people and organisations realise their potential. What began as a recruitment agency in Dublin has grown as the world of work has changed. Today, we bring recruitment, managed services and project solutions together under one Cpl brand, giving organisations access to the people, expertise and capability they need to grow, transform and solve complex challenges.

From first hires to transformative leaders, flexible workforces to fully managed services, and specialist expertise to project delivery, we work across the organisation to turn ambition into action.

Because potential is easy to talk about. Realising it takes more.

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Vacancysoft is the UK's leading provider of labour market data and analytics. We provide high-grade lead generation, client intelligence and market analysis solutions for Britain's top recruitment industry firms and others.

Vacancysoft's products helps firms to optimise their businesses. Established in 2006, we have thousands of clients worldwide, ranging from FTSE-listed businesses to industry specialists.

How we gather data

The data contained within this report is gathered solely and specifically from the career centres of company websites, not job boards.

Before publication, job postings are de-duplicated and verified as unique. Every vacancy is assigned up to 20 data points through Vacancysoft's proprietary algorithm, which is double-checked for validity by a data quality control team.

The data showcased here is available within the Vacancy Analytics platform, where users can create and customise their own reports. To find out more please contact a member of the team or email support@vacancysoft.com.

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About Vacancysoft Data

Every day Vacancysoft monitors careers centres on thousands of company websites, and gathers links where there is change. These links are then categorised automatically, and in the case of relevant content, by Vacancysoft staff