



Candidate Information Booklet

Head of Agri-Environment Sciences (Grade 6)

IRC298508

Completed Application Forms must be submitted no later than 12 noon on
Wednesday 29th May 2024

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Communication between HRConnect and you

HRConnect will issue competition communications electronically. Please ensure you check your email account regularly, to make sure that you don't miss any important communications.

Please update us with any changes to your email address and home address to ensure you are fully informed at all times.

Equal opportunities

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) is an equal opportunities employer and has been awarded the Bronze Charter Mark in recognition for our commitment towards Gender Diversity and Inclusion in the workplace. All appointments will be made strictly on the basis of merit. If you have any queries with regard to this recruitment process or require any documentation in an alternative format, please contact HRConnect via email Recruitment@HRConnect.nigov.net or call 0800 1 300 330.

We would particularly welcome applications from females and those from a Roman Catholic background.

Feedback - AFBI is committed to providing feedback to assist the development of current and future applications.

Recruitment overview

Thank you for your interest in our organisation. At AFBI you will find a fantastic team spirit and a commitment to the development of both you and your skills so that you can choose to have a long-term career with us.

This Candidate Information Booklet offers specific information to applicants.

Please read this document carefully in advance of submitting your application and retain it for reference throughout the recruitment process.

At AFBI, we take great pride in the work we undertake. All AFBI employees are appointed on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.

We wish you every success in your application!

Important dates - It is intended that interviews for this post will take place in AFBI HQ, Newforge Lane, Belfast during June 2024.

Compulsory documentation - It is compulsory that all candidates invited to attend an assessment and/or interview, bring sufficient identification. Your attendance may not be permitted in instances where identification cannot be shown.

FOREWORD FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Thank you for your interest in this important post of Head of Agri-Environment Branch in AFBI.

The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) is non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and is the Northern Ireland government's main research and science provider in the agri-food and marine sectors. In addition to our work for DAERA, AFBI also undertakes a substantial and increasing programme of externally funded R&D and other scientific work, which is secured from a range of public sector funding organisations, other public sector bodies, industry funders and commercial companies.

AFBI science is critical to Northern Ireland's long term economic and environmental sustainability, contributing to the protection of our terrestrial and marine environments, leading improvements in our agri-food systems, helping protect animal and plant health, and ensuring the safety of the food that we eat. By delivering essential statutory testing, monitoring and surveillance programmes, research and development work as well as emergency response capability and expert scientific advice, AFBI scientists enable the NI agri-food industry to market products nationally and internationally while ensuring long term environmental sustainability, from soil to sea. The science is critical to the work of our sponsoring department DAERA and contributes significantly to the overall achievement of the NI Executive's programme for government.

The Institute is now seeking an outstanding individual with a high level of expertise and knowledge of agri-environmental science to join its scientific team and lead our work in this area. Northern Ireland has a high livestock density and a number of associated agri-environmental challenges. This opens a wide range of opportunities for agri-environmental sciences to develop solutions which contribute to improving water, air and soil quality and enhance our biodiversity.

The appointee will be expected to provide vision, leadership and strategic direction in the area of agri-environmental sciences and to ensure that the work undertaken demonstrates scientific excellence and achieves impact.

This is a challenging and rewarding post, which will provide the opportunity to inform future government and industry strategies as well as contributing to AFBI's long term success as it continues to develop the quality and range of science delivered to DAERA and our local, national and international funders.

Thank you for your interest in this competition.

Dr Stanley McDowell (Chief Executive)

BACKGROUND

ABOUT THE AGRI-FOOD AND BIOSCIENCES INSTITUTE

AFBI is a non-departmental public body sponsored by DAERA and a leading provider of scientific research and services to government, non-governmental organisations and commercial companies.

We are an internationally recognised multidisciplinary scientific organisation with a broad remit of work spanning the key themes of 1) leading improvements in the agri-food industry to enhance its sustainability 2) protecting animal, plant and human health and 3) enhancing the natural and marine environment.

AFBI is located on seven sites across Northern Ireland, with its headquarters at Newforge Lane, Belfast. Other AFBI sites are located at Stormont, Hillsborough, Crossnacreevy, Loughgall, Omagh and Bushmills. In addition, the Institute has a 53 m dedicated marine research vessel, the RV *Corystes*, based in the Port of Belfast.

Our Vision

Scientific excellence delivering impactful and sustainable outcomes for society, economy and the natural environment.

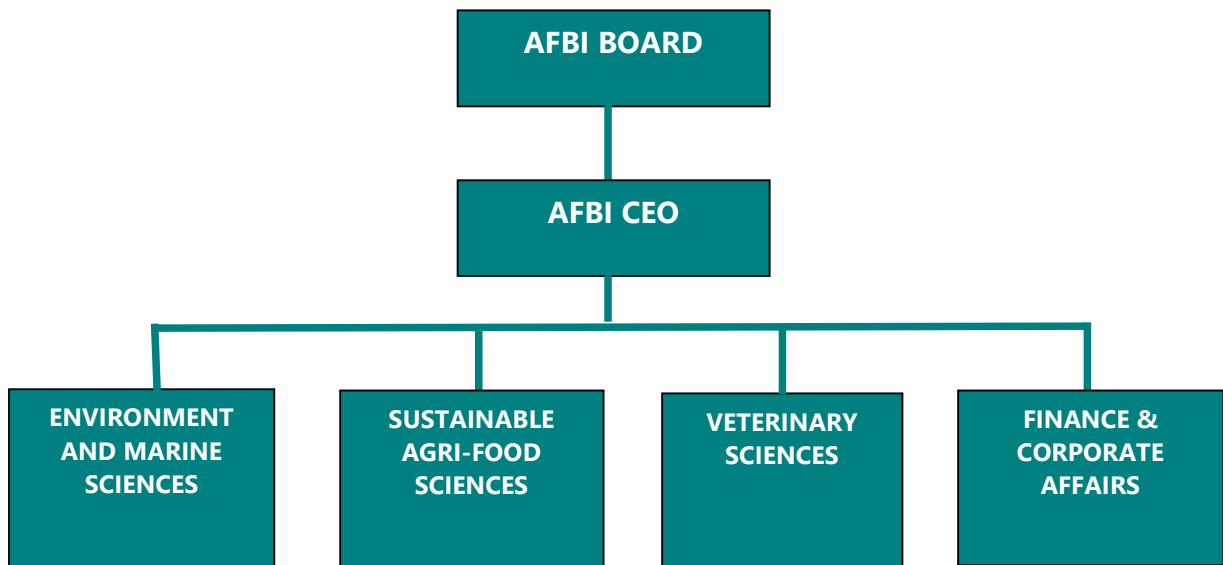
Our Purpose

To deliver trusted, independent research, statutory & surveillance science and expert advice that addresses local and global challenges, informs government policy and industry decision making, and underpins a sustainable agri-food industry and the natural and marine environments.

As the Northern Ireland government's main research and science provider in the areas of agri-food, fisheries and the environment, AFBI plays a major role in the Northern Ireland knowledge economy. AFBI's scale, relationships with a wide range of international research organisations and close links with local universities and industry mean that it is ideally placed to carry out research that has both global and local impact. AFBI's science is outcome-driven and aimed at solving important practical problems for a wide range of local, national and international funders in the public and private sectors. Our staff carry out world class scientific research, surveillance, and analytic and diagnostic testing in the fields of animal health and welfare, sustainable agricultural systems, plant science, food safety, environmental protection, fisheries and aquatic ecosystems, and agricultural and rural economics.

The organisation has a staff complement of approximately 700 people, with an annual turnover of approximately £80 million. We are currently organised across 4 divisions – Environment and Marine Sciences Division (EMSD), Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division (SAFSD), Veterinary Science Division (VSD) and Finance and Corporate Affairs Division (FCAD).

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



Environment and Marine Sciences Division

Environment and Marine Sciences Division (EMSD) was established as a separate science division in 2021 following a review of AFBI's organisational structure. The establishment of the Division reflected the increasing importance and amount of scientific work undertaken by AFBI in the agri-environment, marine and aquatic ecosystems areas.

The Division is focused on evidence-based science, which is key to addressing significant environmental challenges whilst ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources and the future prosperity of the agri-food sector.

A key priority of this division is to deliver on a high impact and quality integrated programme of research spanning from 'the soil to the sea'.

EMSD Branches

Agri-Environment Branch interfaces between intensive livestock production, and environmental management and regulation. This includes investigating the impacts of agricultural land use practices on soil, water and air, and identifying ways of optimizing land-based livestock production.

Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems Branch conducts research and development, monitoring and technology transfer in the area of marine fisheries stock assessment, coastal zone science, biological oceanography, marine ecosystem health, and freshwater fisheries stock assessment.

This job role sits within the **Agri-Environment Branch**.

SUSTAINABLE AGRI-FOOD SCIENCES DIVISION (SAFSD)

SAFSD is a highly multidisciplinary division with a focus on livestock, plant and in general agriculture production, its impact on the environment and the economy. This multi-disciplinary team of approximately 200 staff are sited across AFBI Newforge, Hillsborough, Loughgall and Crossnacreevy and conducts science across all aspects of the food supply chain taking research from the soil through to the plant, the animal and the resultant food quality and nutritional value, while also working with colleagues at VSD to ensure animal health and food safety is optimised. A key element of the work also examines quantitative and qualitative socio-economic impacts.

SAFSD utilises a highly instrumented platform across livestock and land management to service its main deliverables of research and innovation and monitoring and surveillance. SAFSD also collaborates extensively with other research organisations, industry and government departments locally, nationally and internationally. A key drive within SAFSD is to produce high quality peer review publications while also ensuring the research conducted has impact through an active dissemination programme.

VETERINARY SCIENCES DIVISION (VSD)

VSD currently employs approximately 260 veterinary, scientific, technical and support staff across its four Branches (Bacteriology, Chemical Surveillance, Disease Surveillance and Investigation, and Virology). The Division is predominantly based at Stoney Road, Belfast with a smaller disease surveillance centre based at Omagh, Co. Tyrone.

The Division undertakes an integrated programme of statutory, disease surveillance, emergency response and R&D work on the diseases of major animal and human health significance along with significant programmes of work on the chemical and microbiological safety of food. The work supports government policy and disease eradication and control programmes in areas such as bovine tuberculosis, food-borne zoonotic infections and transboundary diseases. One of the key roles of the Division is in delivering a laboratory response to local, national and international emergencies involving animal diseases, and food and feed contamination incidents.

VSD also provides a disease investigation service covering all of the major farm animal species and fish and provides commercial laboratory services in support of industry led disease eradication and control programmes. The work of the Division is underpinned by research and development (R&D) on animal diseases and food safety issues relevant to the local industry.

FINANCE AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS DIVISION

The Finance and Corporate Affairs Division (FCAD) currently employs approximately circa 100 staff across its Branches. The Division is based primarily at AFBI headquarters, Newforge Lane, Belfast but with staff deployed at some of the larger sites.

The Division supports the AFBI Chief Executive and Executive management team (EMT) in securing and deploying the financial, people and infrastructure resources of AFBI. The Division has a key role in ensuring that AFBI is an efficient, effective, sustainable and accountable organisation with high standards of governance.

The Division has responsibility for leading and providing the support services across the Institute including finance, governance and performance, information systems, research support, corporate communications, human resources, health and safety, estates and emergency planning.

About the Agri-Environment Branch

Agri-Environment Branch (AEB) is one of two branches within the Environment and Marine Sciences Division (EMSD). The aims of the Branch are to develop and sustain an integrated research effort with national and international recognition on nutrient management within agricultural systems, focusing particularly on the needs of Northern Ireland, thereby

- Developing sustainable practices within a competitive industry
- Providing a scientific basis for government policy and
- Enhancing the quality of the environment.

Environmental research in the Branch addresses land and nutrient management issues to make appropriate and efficient use of resources, while protecting the environment. The integrated research effort covers the impact of agriculture on air, soil, water quality and biodiversity. The outputs of this research have provided much of the scientific basis for the development of DAERA policy in soil and nutrient management in Northern Ireland, for example, the Nitrates Action Programme, Phosphorus Regulations and Water Framework Directive. The Branch undertakes basic, strategic and applied research for DAERA and other government departments and agencies, as well as commercial organisations.

Research programmes are in place within the Branch to address issues affecting the Northern Ireland Agri-food industry in relation to nutrient use efficiency, water quality, soil health, biodiversity, ammonia and greenhouse gas emissions, bioenergy and the circular economy.

Our research is currently delivered via five research programmes:

1. Air Quality & Climate Change
2. Catchment Sciences
3. Sustainable Soil Management & Crop Nutrition
4. Soil Biogeochemistry & Terrestrial Ecology
5. Agri-Environmental Technologies.

The Head of AEB will provide scientific leadership and management of a team of enthusiastic and dynamic scientific and technical support staff to deliver on agri-environment science work streams in AFBI. The post holder will build on the continued success of the branch by developing and expanding the science programme. There are significant potential for and opportunities in the area of agri-environmental science linked to a number of national and international environment and national agriculture strategic initiatives. AFBI is continuing to invest in this science area illustrated through the implementation of an ambitious soil nutrient health scheme.

AEB is leading on the implementation of the £45 million Soil Nutrient Health Scheme (SNHS) that is being funded by DAERA and delivered by AFBI from 2022 – 2026 (<https://www.afbini.gov.uk/articles/afbi-soil-nutrient-health-scheme-snhs>). The SNHS is one of the most comprehensive regional soil nutrient sampling schemes to be undertaken anywhere in the world and is a key part of the strategy in Northern Ireland to reduce nutrient emission and achieve Net-

Zero. The SNHS scheme will build on the success of previous soil pilot schemes and aims to soil sample ~700,000 fields across Northern Ireland and thereby provide unique region-wide baseline information on soil pH (lime requirement), P, K, Ca, Mg, S and Lol (soil C proxy) at field, farm, and catchment scales, and for different enterprise types. Farmers will be provided with nutrient field maps, runoff risk maps and cost-saving opportunity maps, with CAFRE (<https://www.cafre.ac.uk/>) providing training and advice to participating farmers. The successful applicant will oversee the successful delivery of the SNHS within the wider agri-environment research programme of the branch.

This is an exciting opportunity for an experienced, horizon scanning scientist to lead and further develop the agri-environment science portfolio at AFBI to provide evidence-based research towards an integrated approach to the management of Northern Ireland's agriculture sector and environment. The role requires an ambitious individual who can evolve and develop this work area towards a centre of agri-environment science excellence at a national level, but also towards enhancing and maximising AFBI's science reputation internationally.

Job Information and Employee Benefits

A reserve list will exist and will be held for a period of 12 months from the date of interview, to cover any similar vacancies which may arise.

Salary

Currently the salary for the post will be within the range £65,409 - £71,353 within which pay increases will be on an incremental basis provided staff performance reports are satisfactory.

Starting salary will be at the minimum of the scale.

Working Hours

The successful candidate will normally be required to work 5 days each week, totalling 37 hours. AFBI operates a flexi working system.

Location

The successful candidate will be based at AFBI Newforge, 18a Newforge Lane, Belfast, BT9 5PX, however, they may, on occasion, also be expected to work at other sites in Northern Ireland as required.

It is envisaged that some element of home working and / or remote working may be possible in line with the AFBI Hybrid Working policy and business need.

Travel

The post will entail travel locally, nationally and internationally and for this reason the successful candidate will require access to a form of transport which will permit them to meet the requirements of the post in full.

Pre-employment checks

Pre-employment checks consist of a qualification check and an AccessNI check. The security check required for this post is basic level. HRConnect will provide your details to Experian who will undertake this check. This is a two-part process during which all communications will be issued to you electronically.

The successful postholder may be required to undertake a medical in advance of securing appointment.

Annual Leave

In addition to the usual public and privilege holidays, there is an annual leave allowance of 25 days, increasing to 30 after five year's satisfactory service.

Probationary Period

The post holder will serve 12 months' probation in the new post. This will commence from the date of appointment. At the end of the probation period a formal review will be conducted.

Professional Development

We believe in our employees and understand the importance of investing in ongoing development. Support for professional development will always be considered.

Employee Benefits

AFBI offers employees an unrivalled benefits package. For further information please click [here](#).

Further Information

Further Information about the post may be obtained from EMSDpeopleandculture@afbini.gov.uk

For information on how the recruitment process will be managed and for further recruitment and selection resources, please click [here](#).

For information on our equal opportunities, please click [here](#).

Job Background

The Head of Agri-Environment Sciences in AFBI will lead AFBI's work on agri-environmental research. The person appointed to the post will be expected to provide vision, scientific leadership and strategic direction for their work area and team.

As a member of AFBI's wider senior management group, the person appointed will also have the opportunity and be expected to contribute at a corporate level to AFBI's scientific and strategic development.

The role includes a significant management component and the successful candidate must be able to demonstrate strong interpersonal skills and have the ability to present a clear and compelling vision of the future for staff. This will include fostering an environment and culture that delivers excellence in all activities and that is inspiring, creative and rewarding for staff.

Candidates for this position should be internationally recognised with a strong track record of leading and managing substantial programmes of agri-environment orientated research and building effective stakeholder networks.

The post holder will report to the Director of Environment and Marine Sciences and the key responsibilities of the post include:-

Scientific Leadership

- Provide overall leadership of Agri-Environment Sciences in AFBI and set the strategic direction for current and future work programmes, to include expanded collaborations, locally, nationally and internationally, and development of new areas of work to promote the scientific excellence of AFBI.
- Lead on the successful establishment, implementation and delivery of strategic projects within the branch, including the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme.
- Provide authoritative and expert advice to DAERA and stakeholders on agri-environment science related issues

Programme delivery

- Lead the development and delivery of a complex research and analysis programme to achieve the goals of the branch while interacting with a wide range of funders, including government departments, the agri-food industry, supply chain representatives and research sponsors, to promote the scientific excellence of AFBI;
- In agreement with DAERA and other funders agree and develop a programme of relevant R&D for both the short and long term.
- Secure external (non-DAERA) research funding from local, national and international sources

Leadership and People Management

- Provide strong and energetic leadership and vision to staff, innovatively and effectively leading and managing change;

- Maintain a positive working environment and a clear understanding of the business goals for all staff;
- Ensure effective staffing structures are in place with the appropriate levels of skills and expertise.

Finance and Corporate Governance

- Lead the preparation of budget plans and manage the branch resources and budget allocations and ensure that the required income targets are achieved
- Maintain a sound system of internal control including ensuring compliance with corporate policies and other governance requirements
- Ensure compliance with the relevant legislation such as data sharing, health and safety

Planning and Strategy

- Prepare the branch annual business plan and manage the delivery of related KPI's
- Clearly communicate goals and objectives to key stakeholders and manage performance against agreed targets in line with strategic plans
- Contribute as a member of the Division's Senior Management Team and deputise for the Director of the Division when required.

Public Affairs and Policy

- Represent and negotiate on behalf of AFBI on scientific and policy matters at local, national and international level.
- Communicate the work of the branch to other scientists, the agri-food industry, other stakeholders and the wider public.
- Represent AFBI and Northern Ireland at an appropriate level on technical and scientific committees within UK, Ireland and internationally. Such representation should enhance their own and the Institute's reputation

This list is not exhaustive, and the successful candidate will be required to carry out other duties as allocated by management.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must, by the closing date for applications provide evidence in their application form that they meet the following eligibility criteria.

- 1a. A PhD in a relevant environmental and/or agricultural science subject or related scientific discipline;

OR

- 1b. A MSc in a relevant environmental and/or agricultural science subject or related scientific discipline plus lead authorship* of at least 3 scientific publications in peer reviewed journals;

AND

2. At least five years' post-doctoral or post-MSc** experience of successfully leading managing and delivering a substantial science programme in the area of agri-environmental science;
3. Experience of leading and managing people and resources to achieve science and/or business objectives;
4. A recognized international standing within the field of agri-environmental science evidenced through at least two of the following; authorship of scientific publications in peer reviewed journals and other research outputs; award of research funding; and representation on scientific groups at national and / or international level. Candidates must provide supporting evidence as detailed below.

Please note

* Lead authorship is considered to be either First or Last author

** Should not include time spent to obtain further full-time academic qualifications (e.g. PhD).

For eligibility criterion 1b and 4 candidates should provide full supporting information by submitting a fully cited bibliography of all peer reviewed publications and other research outputs; along with details of awards research funding; and representation on scientific groups at national and / or international level.

Candidates can provide this information within the application form itself, or it can be sent by the closing date for applications as a separate attachment to: recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net. The document should be marked with the relevant competition reference number (IRC298508), competition title and your full name.

Shortlisting Criteria

In addition, applicants should be aware that after an eligibility sift, should it be necessary to shortlist candidates to go forward to interview, the Panel will carry out an objective evaluation of the breadth and depth of information provided by candidates in response to eligibility criterion 2 - 4. This will be completed on a scored basis. Only the highest scoring applicants will proceed to interview.

Person Specification

This position is analogous to Grade 6 Level in the NICS.

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate the skills and competencies set out in the Essential Criteria. In addition, they will also be required to demonstrate competency in Professional Knowledge & Skills pertaining to this post together with the skills and competencies set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) competency framework at Level 4 for the purpose of personal and professional development.

Selection panels will design questions to test the applicant's knowledge and experience in each of the above areas and award marks accordingly.

You should refer to the behaviours listed under level 4 of the relevant competence areas.

To view the NICS Competency Framework, please click [here](#).

Interview Criteria

In addition to satisfying the eligibility criteria and shortlisting criteria (if applicable) applicants will also be expected to display qualities and skills pertaining to the post at interview. Applicants will be expected to demonstrate the following selection criteria/competences at interview:

Presentation

Candidates will be required to deliver a presentation, lasting no more than 7 minutes, the subject of which will be provided to candidates in the invitation to interview letter.

Candidates should fully prepare their presentation in advance of the interview and no preparation time will be provided on the day of interview. Your presentation should be delivered via PowerPoint and you will be asked to submit it to HRConnect by a specific date prior to your interview. Full details will be provided should you be invited to interview. Following the presentation, the panel may elect to ask questions on the presentation.

The presentation will be used to partly assess the **'Seeing the Big Picture'** competence.

Marks available: 20 Minimum Standard: 12

1. Professional skills and Knowledge

Marks available: 40 Minimum Standard: 24

2. Making Effective Decisions

Marks available: 10 Minimum Standard: 6

3. Changing and Improving

Marks available: 10

4. Leading & Communicating

Marks available: 20 Minimum Standard: 12

5. Collaborating and Partnering

Marks available: 10

6. Delivering at Pace

Marks available: 10

Total marks available: 120

Overall pass mark: 72 (60%)