AGRI-FOOD & BIOSCIENCES INSTITUTE

Candidate Information Booklet

Senior Scientific Officer - Statistical Consultant

IRC332743

Completed Application Forms must be submitted no later than 18th December 2026

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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.

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 note (AFBI specific) - read across will not be undertaken by the panel. The candidate must demonstrate how they meet each criterion in the relevant response to each criterion.**

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 week commencing 25th January 2027.

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.

You want to change the world. So do we.

Agri-Food and BioSciences Institute (AFBI) is a leading provider of scientific research and services to government, non-governmental organisations and commercial organisations. We are sponsored by our key stakeholder, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

Our customers include a range of local, national and international commercial companies, Northern Ireland and UK Departments, Agencies and associated bodies in the European Union.

As a leading institute of research, we tackle the complex challenges of our industry through purpose-driven science. We are a community with a common goal: to leave the world better than we found it. Are we ambitious? Definitely. Are our ambitions achievable? Absolutely. AFBI has been defying scientific boundaries to create measurable, scalable and enduring solutions to agri-food and marine science complexities in Northern Ireland - and beyond - since 2006.

We are delighted that you are considering joining us.

Of all the many factors that come together to make AFBI what it is, nothing is more important than our employees. Every area of our service delivery is underpinned by a number of dedicated teams working in synchrony to ensure the provision of scientific excellence. Across our four divisions, every team member, from those on the scientific front to those working behind the scenes in one of our offices, plays an essential role in delivering our long tradition of excellence, whilst helping to propel future discoveries.
Together we are better.

Our People Vision is to:

Attract, empower and grow purpose-driven staff with the passion and capability to pursue excellence, embrace technology and cultivate innovation and change.

This is how we do great science.

Great people. Great science.

Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division

The Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division (SAFSD) employs scientific, technical and support staff across its six scientific based branches and is a highly multidisciplinary team with a central focus on sustainable farming. In doing so its overarching goal is to drive innovations and science which deliver positive outcomes for livestock and plants, the environment they are grown in as well as the wider economy. This multi-disciplinary team explores all aspects of the food supply chain taking research and scientific exploration from the soil through to the plant, the animal, and the resultant food quality and nutritional value. It also works with colleagues at VSD to ensure animal health and food safety is optimised. A key element of the work also examines quantitative and qualitative socioeconomic 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 reviewed publications whilst also ensuring the practical translation of science through an active dissemination programme.

SAFSD Branches

Agronomy & Plant Science Branch is concerned with optimising grass and crop production through the breeding and testing of new varieties, understanding the interaction of plants with the soil and wider environment, and the development of new plant-based agricultural and horticultural products.

Economics Research Branch undertakes quantitative and qualitative socioeconomic research to inform agri-food and rural policy development and industry decision making, regionally and nationally. Environmental economics, linked with the local, national and international economy is of increasing prominence in this branch.

Plant Health & Integrated Pest Management Branch underpins DAERA's policy development on plant health and delivers scientific advances in the detection, management and control of invasive and native pests and pathogens affecting plants, agriculture and the environment.

Sustainable Livestock Systems Branch links fundamental livestock science to systems level research to deliver innovations which drive sustainability within the agri-food sector and advance scientific knowledge.

Statistics and Data Science Branch work in partnership with scientists across SAFSD and wider AFBI to provide statistical analyses, data science assistance and expert advice in support of scientific research projects and statutory work carried out by AFBI.

Researched Farmed Estate provides the essential Support Services to ensure the Science and Research objectives and requirements are met and delivered on the Farmed Platform.

This job role sits within the **Statistics & Data Science Branch**

About the Statistics and Data Science Branch

Statistics and Data Science Branch (SDS) is one of six Branches within the Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division (SAFSD). The Branch currently comprises one Head of Branch, three Statistical Consultants, and two Data Analysts. The Branch is responsible for providing statistical and data science support to staff across all AFBI Divisions, including scientists, administrators and postgraduate researchers, as well as to external clients which include DAERA and other government departments, the wider agri-food industry, and academia. As a Branch we aim to optimise the statistical and data science aspects of our clients' work and so help maximise its scientific value with the best use of resources. The team supports clients in a range of data analytics initiatives in addition to traditional statistical methods and techniques, which supports innovation, enhances efficiency, and delivers high-quality evidence to inform policy and research.

A large part of the Branch's collaborative work with AFBI scientists is in support of their work for DAERA (Evidence and Innovation (R&D) projects as well as statutory and diagnostic work) in addition to supporting externally funded projects. In this work the Branch's Statistical Consultants are expected to provide advice (ranging from experimental design, sampling regimes, and most appropriate analytical technique), to encourage and support the scientists to do their own analyses - where sensible to do so, in addition to identifying opportunities and provide support in the use of innovative technology and advanced analytical methods. The Statistical Consultant is also expected to provide mentoring to AFBI scientists and so work to raise AFBI's statistical capabilities, and to promote the use of good statistical practice across the organisation.

The post-holder will be expected to work as a Statistical Consultant within the Branch, providing statistical support to staff across all AFBI divisions and broader clients, as required. Additionally, in response to the increasing volume and type of data being generated, stored, linked, and analysed, the post-holder, along with all others in the Branch, will be expected to seek to expand their data science knowledge and capabilities, and apply these in their work to the benefit of AFBI, especially to maximise the impact from AFBI's data estate and research insights.

Job Information and Employee Benefits

There is currently one permanent full-time position to be filled at Senior Scientific Officer (SSO) grade. A reserve list will exist and will be held for a period of 12 months from the date of interview, to cover any further permanent or Fixed Term vacancies which may arise.

Salary

The salary for the post will be within the range £47,304 - £49,515 (under review) within which pay increases will be on an incremental basis provided staff performance reports are satisfactory.

Starting salary will normally be at the minimum of the scale.

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.

Working Hours

The successful candidate will normally be required to work 5 days each week, totalling 37 hours. On occasions the duties may include some evening and weekend working. AFBI operates a flexi working system.

Location

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

Hybrid working can also be considered.

Travel

The post will require access to a form of transport which will permit the successful candidate 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.

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 to determine if the posting will be extended.

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.

Right to Work

Candidates must be able to demonstrate their Right to Work. Where a candidate has a Right to Work status which has a time limitation, ongoing checks will be in place to ensure the Right to Work is maintained.

VISAs (if applicable)

If there is a requirement for a VISA/VISA renewal, AFBI would not be responsible for the financial costs, this would be the onus of the candidate. AFBI will however support the Certificate of Sponsorship.

Further Information

Further Information about the post may be obtained from AFBI People & Culture via email at SAFSDpeopleandculture@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 post holder will report to the SDS Head of Branch, and the main duties of the post will be as follows:

1. Deliver expertise as a statistical consultant
The post holder shall collaborate as a Statistical Consultant with AFBI scientists and stakeholders as well as the broader client base, by applying statistical techniques knowledgeably to support the AFBI work programme. This collaboration shall include the provision of expert advice and support in the design and analysis of both experiments and surveys. The Statistical Consultant will also seek to identify opportunities for the use of innovative technology and advanced analytical methods, and lead initiatives and projects to maximize the value of AFBI's data, mainly in collaboration with others across AFBI.

2. Provide Mentoring and Knowledge Transfer
The post holder will actively participate in collaborative team-working within their own team and across the AFBI, contributing to AFBI's Analytics Community of Practice and engaging in AFBI-wide knowledge share forums where required. This will include the delivery of training and/or talks in statistical topics to AFBI staff as required. They will also seek to promote the use of good statistical practice across the organisation.

3. Data interpretation and dissemination of research findings
Communicate effectively with all levels of audience, choosing the most effective means of delivery to clearly explain statistical concepts and findings. To support AFBI scientists in data interpretation, in the publication (including by Open-Access in support of reproducible research) of data, results and scientific papers/reports, and in the dissemination of research findings to the wider industry.

4.To manage staff and resources
To manage staff as required and as appropriate, in compliance with all relevant AFBI health and safety and staff management practices. To ensure that all resources are used to greatest effect and properly maintained.

5. Establish and maintain linkages with local, national and international statistics research groups
The post holder will be expected to build and maintain effective collaborations with statistics research groups locally, nationally and internationally with the aim of optimising the outcomes for AFBI's research.

6. Support the Head of Statistics and Data Science Branch
To support and assist the Head of the Statistics and Data Science Branch in wider Branch management activities.

7. To undertake continuous professional development

The post holder must maintain an up-to-date knowledge and awareness of developments in statistics and seek to expand their knowledge and capabilities in data science. The post holder will be expected to keep abreast of the relevant

scientific literature and should be prepared to attend and participate in scientific conferences and workshops. The post holder should also avail of training courses to enhance professional competencies.

8. To fulfil other duties

The post-holder will be required to fulfil any other duties and responsibilities as determined by senior management that fall within the general responsibilities of the post. This job description is not intended to be rigid and inflexible but should be regarded as providing guidelines within which the post-holder will work.

Eligibility Criteria

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

1. Be in possession of:
   a. An honours degree* that includes at least one module in statistics, data analysis or social science research methods;

OR

   b. An honours degree* and a Royal Statistical Society award of at least Certificate level;

OR

   c. A postgraduate degree* that includes at least one module in statistics, data analysis or social science research methods.

AND

2. Minimum of three years' relevant professional experience gained in employment or equivalent professional practice**, of delivering statistical advice and support to include all the below:

   i. the provision of experimental design and/or survey design; and
   ii. the undertaking and interpretation of statistical analysis; and
   iii. the presentation of results using effective informative methods - including contribution to the preparation of scientific and/or technical papers/reports for a wider audience.
   iv. the application and use of a range of statistical programming languages, to include at least one of the following: R programming language, GenStat or SPSS.

For **Criteria 1**, please provide the following information for your qualification:

- **Degree Title**
- **Degree Classification**
- **Degree awarding-body**
- **Date degree awarded and modules undertaken relevant to the post**

The panel can only assess the information provided and cannot make assumptions about modules that are not listed. Where a module title is not self-explanatory, applicants should provide sufficient information to demonstrate any relevant statistics, data analysis or social science research methods content.

**** Please note: Professional Experience** does not include time spent in study or training.

Applications will also be considered from applicants with relevant formal qualifications considered by the selection panel to be of an equivalent or higher standard to those stated.

***Relevant or equivalent qualifications**: give the type of qualification and date awarded (the date awarded is the date on which you were notified of your result by the official awarding body). If you believe your qualification is equivalent to the one required, **the onus is on you to provide the panel with details the qualification's level**; its awarding body and date of award; its classification or result; the programme's duration and credit value, the complete list of modules or units completed; which modules or units covered statistics, data analysis or social science research methods; **and why you consider the qualification is equivalent to or higher than the stated requirement**.

Please note:

- Applicants must provide sufficient evidence, including relevant dates and examples, to demonstrate how they meet the eligibility criteria.
- The selection panel will assess only the information contained within the application form and cannot make assumptions about qualifications, job titles or experience.
- The examples you provide should be concise and relevant to the criteria. This is very important as the examples which you provide may be explored at interview and you may need to be prepared to talk about these in detail if you are invited to interview. It is your unique role the panel are interested in, not that of your team or division.
- **Applications that do not provide sufficient evidence may be rejected at sift stage.**

Shortlisting Criteria (and their use)

In addition, applicants should be aware that after the 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,depth and relevance of information provided by candidates in response to criteria 2. This will be completed on a scored basis. Only the highest scoring applicants will proceed to interview.

Person Specification

This position is analogous to Deputy Principal in the NICS.

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate the skills and competencies set out in the Eligibility 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 3 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 3 of the relevant competence areas.

To view the NICS Competency Framework, please click here.

Interview Criteria

In addition to satisfying the eligibility criteria applicants will also be expected to display the following qualities and skills at interview-

PRESENTATION

As part of the interview process, candidates will be required to make a presentation relevant to the responsibilities of the post lasting no longer than 7 minutes, which may be followed by questions from the panel to further explore key aspects of the presentation question. Where your presentation exceeds 7 minutes, the interview panel will ask you to stop presenting prior to progressing to the next stage of the process.

Candidates will be advised of presentation topic when they report for interview and will be given a maximum of 30 minutes to prepare. A flipchart and writing materials will be provided for candidates' use.

No personal documentation may be brought into the pre-interview room. Candidates will be allowed to bring any flipchart sheets and some short speaking notes into the interview room for assistance during the presentation (but note that use of the flipchart is not mandatory). **No other materials or visual aids will be permitted.**
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The presentation will be used to partly assess against the **Leading and Communicating** and the **Professional Knowledge and Skills** competencies.

Marks available: 20 Minimum standard: 12

1. Professional Knowledge and Skills

Marks Available: 40 Minimum Standard: 24

2. Leading and Communicating

Marks Available: 15

3. Making Effective Decisions

Marks Available: 20

4. Collaborating and Partnering

Marks Available: 20

5. Managing a Quality Service

Marks Available: 15

Total Marks Available: 130
Overall Pass Mark: 78(60%)