



Candidate Information Booklet

Higher Scientific Officer

Chemical Surveillance Branch (CSB)

IRC331884

Completed Application Forms must be submitted no later than 13th November 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 Stormont, Stoney Road, Belfast during week commencing 4th 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.

About the Veterinary Sciences Division

The Veterinary Sciences Division (VSD) consists of 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 research and development (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 VSD 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 VSD is underpinned by R&D on animal diseases and food safety issues relevant to the local industry.

VSD Branches are:

Bacteriology Branch undertakes statutory, analytical and research work on the major bacterial pathogens of animal and public health significance. Much of this work underpins important DAERA animal disease control programmes in areas such as bovine tuberculosis and food-borne zoonoses.

Chemical Surveillance Branch delivers testing for chemical residues/contaminants in food/feed commodities i.e. veterinary drugs, pesticides, additives, contaminants and marine biotoxins in line with respective legislative frameworks with the aim to reduce the incidence of non-compliant results for authorised compounds and eliminate residues of prohibited and/or unauthorised substances.

Disease Surveillance and Investigation Branch undertakes a programme of scanning (passive) disease surveillance on behalf of DAERA and provides commercial laboratory services in support of industry led disease eradication and control programmes.

Virology Branch aims to improve the diagnosis and control of viral diseases of farmed animals (pigs, poultry, cattle, sheep and aquaculture). It also has responsibility for the molecular confirmation of major infectious / epizootic diseases in animals. Immunodiagnostic testing in support of a number of disease control programmes including brucellosis, transboundary diseases, import/export testing and TSE is also undertaken.

The Higher Scientific Officer post sits within the Chemical Surveillance Branch.

About the Chemical Surveillance Branch

The work of the Chemical Surveillance Branch (CSB) is aimed at addressing current and emerging chemical food and/or feed safety challenges and risks.

Scientific services and R&D activities delivered by the Branch are key to:

- **Provide** emergency and incident response capability to government and industry when faced with food and/or feed safety threats
- **Demonstrate** compliance with relevant domestic (NI/UK) and EU legislation
- **Ensure** DAERA/HSE-CRD/FSA deliver on their statutory obligation as the competent authorities (designation of official laboratory under Article 37 of OCR (EU) 2017/625)
- **Protect** human, animal (livestock and wildlife) and environmental health
- **Facilitate** trade by ensuring safety of food supply chains and fair practices in trade as well as enabling NI to export globally
- **Promote** integrity of NI agri-food sector

The statutory (official control), commercial and research functions in CSB are closely interlinked, and a cornerstone is the delivery of statutory monitoring and surveillance programmes for various governmental bodies including DAERA, HSE-CRD and FSA in accordance with respective domestic (NI/UK) and EU food and/or feed legislation.

The Branch is structured around three Statutory and Support Units, namely, Veterinary Drug Residues (VDR), Pesticides, Additives and Contaminants (PAC) and Marine Biotoxins, and a dedicated Research and Development Unit.

CSB delivers targeted analytical methodologies for chemical residues/contaminants - veterinary drugs, pesticides, additives, contaminants and marine biotoxins, employing state-of-the-art instrumentation, the majority of which are MS-based, to test products of animal origin (POAO) from a range of animal species (bovine, ovine, porcine, avian, caprine, cervidae), including tissue (muscle, liver, kidney), biofluids (urine, blood plasma and serum), eggs, milk, fat, honey and aquaculture species as well as animal feed. The assays employed to fulfil the duties of competent authorities designated official laboratory (OL) are accredited to ISO/IEC 17025:2017 (UKAS/INAB).

A Research and Development Unit has been assembled to implement new legislative requirements CIR (EU) 2021/808 as well as to extend the scope of branch testing portfolio to include e.g. freshwater toxins, mycotoxins and other analyte groups in various matrices in response to local/national/worldwide emergencies as well as to address future legislative changes.

Over the last five years the Branch has heavily invested in state-of-the-art analytical platforms i.e. UHPLC-MS/MS, GC-MS/MS and ICP-MS. CSB has well-resourced labs, and the specialist equipment recently purchased include a microwave supplied with a fibre-optic probe and stirrer, robotic standard preparation workstation, post-column infusion pumps, alternative ionisation sources, e.g. APCI, Unispray, quaternary liquid chromatography pump and multi-column manager to support 2D LC-MS/MS.

At present the Branch is located on the Stoney Road site and will relocate on-site to the new Animal Health Sciences Building anticipated in 2029.

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 £37,694 - £38,990 (under review) 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. This post is not suitable for home working and / or remote working arrangements.

Location

The successful candidate will be based at AFBI Stormont, Stoney Road, Belfast, BT4 3SD, however, they may, on occasion, also be expected to work at other sites in Northern Ireland as required.

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.

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.

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, vsdpeopleandculture@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 candidate for this position should have broad experience in analytical chemistry, in particular with analytical methods for detection of small molecules e.g. chemical residues/contaminants - veterinary drugs, pesticides, additives, contaminants and marine biotoxins, in various matrices employing gas and / or liquid chromatography - mass spectrometric (GC-MS / LC-MS) based technology, with a track record of successful management of laboratory testing.

The role includes a significant management component, and the successful candidate is required to demonstrate strong interpersonal skills. The post holder will be expected to play a role in managing the delivery of statutory and commercial testing services. The post will be fully laboratory based and the post holder will report to the Laboratory Manager (Statutory and Support or R&D).

Key responsibilities of the post include:

1. To participate in the delivery of a complex statutory and/or commercial testing programme to achieve Branch objectives through management of staff and resources.
2. To manage, optimise and troubleshoot existing multi-analyte LC-MS test methods employed within the Branch, ensuring that these are fit-for-purpose and operating within validation parameters.
3. To assist in ensuring the scope of ISO/IEC 17025:2017 is compliant with national and international requirements, as well as facilitating internal and external accreditation audits.
4. To assist in expanding the scope of ISO/IEC 17025:2017 accreditation and the development, validation, implementation and extension of methods in accordance with current food and feed legislation, including the preparation of validation dossiers for accreditation under Flexible scope.
5. To assist in managing the delivery of statutory and commercial testing programmes to achieve the goals of the Branch.
6. To contribute to the development, management and delivery of research projects, both internally and externally funded.
7. To manage staff in compliance with all relevant AFBI health and safety, quality assurance, work-force management and governance practices.
8. To assist in providing expert advice to DAERA Policy leads, other government officials, agri-food industry representatives and external customers on analysis of chemical residues/contaminants; assist in providing appropriate evidence based scientific advice to support/develop policy, to identify and react to changing requirements in the testing programmes and to contribute to the ongoing development of the Branch strategy on analysis of pharmacologically active substances.

9. To maintain an up-to-date knowledge of relevant legislation, scientific literature, and scientific developments in the area of chemical residues/contaminants, and to demonstrate personal development in all relevant areas of managing scientific programmes, staff and resources.
10. To prepare reports (e.g. press articles, quarterly/annual reports, industry reports, and other material) as required under statutory programmes or external contracts to ensure effective technology transfer of relevant results.
11. To communicate the outcomes of analysis and/or research to industry, stakeholders and to the scientific community at meetings and conferences when appropriate.
12. To assist in maintaining existing and to contribute to the establishment of new external customers (locally, nationally and internationally).
13. To assist in maintaining linkages with other relevant laboratories in the UK, Republic of Ireland and internationally.

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. Honours Degree (Level 6), equivalent* or higher in a STEM discipline AND 1 year post qualification laboratory experience relevant to the work of the Branch**.

OR

- 1b. Level 5 (Foundation Degree) or equivalent* or higher in a STEM discipline AND 2 years' post qualification laboratory experience relevant to the work of the Branch**.

OR

- 1c. Level 4 or equivalent* (HNC) in a STEM discipline AND 3 years' post qualification laboratory experience relevant to the work of the Branch**.

AND

2. A minimum of 2 years' practical experience in the last 5 years of using GC-MS and /or LC-MS platforms.

AND

3. A minimum of 2 years' experience of successful project management of analytical testing including staff and/or resources management.

***Relevant or equivalent qualifications:**

Applications will also be considered from Candidates with relevant formal qualifications considered by the selection panel to be of an equivalent or higher standard to those stated. If you believe your qualification is equivalent to the one required, the onus is on you to provide the panel with details of modules studied, information proving equivalency, etc. so that a well-informed decision can be made.

Further information on determining the equivalence of relevant formal qualifications can be found at www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/compare-different-qualification-levels

****Relevant experience to the work of the branch:**

Experience in analytical chemistry techniques and analytical methods for detection of small molecules.

Person Specification

This position is analogous to Staff Officer 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 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:

1. Professional Knowledge & Skills

Marks available: 60 Minimum standard: 36

2. Making Effective Decisions

Marks available: 10

3. Leading and Communicating

Marks available: 10

4. Delivering at Pace

Marks available: 10

5. Managing a Quality Service

Marks available: 10 Minimum standard: 6

Total marks available: 100

Overall pass mark: 60 (60%)