



Candidate Information Booklet

Assistant Scientific Officer - Laboratory and Field

IRC301425

Completed Application Forms must be submitted no later than 12 noon on
Friday 5th April 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 week commencing Monday 29th April 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.

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.

Environment and Marine Sciences Division

Environment and Marine Sciences Division (EMSD) is a new science division, which has been established following a review of AFBI's organizational structure. The decision to establish this new division reflects the increasing importance and amount of scientific work undertaken by AFBI in the agri-environment, marine and aquatic ecosystems areas. This division will focus 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**. Where a similar job arises across other locations and divisions, an offer will be made from this competition.

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 the Action Plan for Northern Ireland to comply with the Nitrates Directive and Derogation, 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 six 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
6. Soil Nutrient Health Scheme

Job Information and Employee Benefits

There are currently a number of permanent and fixed-term positions to be filled at Assistant Scientific Officer grade within the Agri-Environment Branch. Roles include both field and laboratory-based duties.

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 £23,071 - £24,507 (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. Where there may be a requirement for overtime, this will be worked on a voluntary basis and any entitlement associated to overtime will be paid.

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.

Travel

The post will entail travel across AFBI sites and for this reason the successful applicant will require access to a form of transport which will permit them to meet the requirements of the post in full. National and international travel may be required on occasion.

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 candidate will be asked to complete a health declaration questionnaire and may be invited to attend a medical examination to confirm that they are fit to carry out the physical duties of the post.

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 Emma Horner, AFBI People Operations & Workforce Planning Advisor on 028 9025 5333 or 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 successful candidate will work as an Assistant Scientific Officer, supporting data collection within the Nutrient Management and Catchment Sciences research programmes in Agri Environment Branch. Duties include field sampling and laboratory analysis of soil and freshwater samples. The post holder(s) will report to a Scientific Officer grade or above.

1. Delivery of Research and Development Programmes

The successful candidate will conduct a range of field and laboratory-based activities related to soil and river water sampling and monitoring from a diverse range of habitats across Northern Ireland. Defined sampling protocols must be followed.

2. Manage resources

Postholders will be required to maintain and manage resources in the field and laboratory, including preparation of field equipment and operation of laboratory instruments.

3. Laboratory processing of samples

Postholders must follow set protocols in the field and laboratory to analyse soil or water samples for a range of nutrient and other physiochemical parameters.

4. Data entry

Postholders will be asked to complete data entry tasks, as required by project leads, and assist in the production of summary reports and survey results.

5. Quality Assurance

Postholders must ensure quality standards are adhered to, in accordance with existing ISO9001 accreditation. Standard operating procedures must be followed and postholders will assist in the maintenance and calibration of laboratory and field instruments.

6. To work as part of a team

Postholders will be required to work effectively and co-operatively as part of a team in both field and laboratory settings.

7. Access to Remote Locations

Postholders will be required to drive a company vehicle to fulfil the duties of this role which involves attending remote locations.

This list is not exclusive, 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.

1. 5 GCSEs (or equivalent*). 3 out of the 5 must include Science, Maths & English at grades A-C;
2. Experience working in a scientific field or laboratory environment;
3. Possess a full, current/transferrable** driving licence (to aid the successful candidate in driving an AFBI vehicle) enabling the licence holder to fulfil the duties of this role. Under DDA any reasonable adjustments will be considered.

*Applicants must demonstrate on their application form how the qualifications they have provided are equivalent, in level, to those qualifications requested as part of the eligibility criteria. Applicants must also show how the qualifications they have provided contain an equivalent English Language, Mathematics and Science subjects (to include Biology, Chemistry or Physics) content to at least GCSE-Level.

**Information on validity and exchange of driving licences can be found on: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/exchanging-your-foreign-driving-licence> and <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/advice-foreign-driving-licences-northern-ireland>.

Relevant or equivalent qualifications: 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. 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 <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/qualifications-what-different-levels-mean>.

Person Specification

This position is analogous to Admin Officer in the NICS.

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate the skills and competencies set out in the Eligibility Criteria and shortlisting Criteria (if necessary). 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 1 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 1 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 necessary) applicants will also be expected to display the following qualities and skills at interview-

1. Professional Skills and Knowledge

Marks available: 25 Minimum Standard: 15

2. Collaborating and Partnering

Marks available: 25 Minimum Standard: 15

3. Making Effective Decisions

Marks available: 25

4. Delivering at Pace

Marks available: 25

Total marks available: 100

Overall pass mark: 60 (60%)