Candidate Information Booklet

Higher Scientific Officer – Research Scientist

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute Northern Ireland (AFBI)

IRC332690

Completed Application Forms must be submitted no later than 12 noon on Friday 4th 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 Crossnacreevy, Belfast during week 11th 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 it's 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 are-

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.

Economic 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.

Statistical & Data Sciences Branch provides statistical analyses, consultation services and data analytics to bring forward data driven solutions for a sustainable agri-food industry and our environment. It also supports a wide range 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 Agronomy and Plant Science branch.

About the Agronomy and Plant Science Branch

The Agronomy and Plant Science Branch (APSB) sits within the Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division (SAFSD) and is based across AFBI's Crossnacreevy and Loughgall sites. The branch provides a UK based statutory function aligned with variety and seed testing of grasses and cereals as well as a programme of research on agronomy which includes a focus on plant genetics and genomics, especially aligned with adapting to climate change. Knowledge exchange activities to a wide variety of stakeholders is also undertaken extensively.

The work of the Branch aligns closely with AFBI's strategic theme of 'Leading Improvements in the Agri-food Industry to Enhance its Sustainability'. The work of the branch is focused on delivering the following two high level strategic initiatives:

- To identify and explore opportunities for new land management and alternative food production systems which optimise the economic value of the NI food system and promote the circular bioeconomy within it.
- To explore and harness opportunities for industry aligned with climate change adaption while minimising the risks from climate change.

The work program of the branch has a focus on grass and cereal varieties which present opportunities for climate resilience in the future as well as crops and agronomic techniques which maximize the economic value that can be attained from land whilst minimizing the environmental impact of land use. As such agronomy research within the branch will work closely with Agri-environment colleagues to focus on soil health and evaluate the impact of what is applied to and grown in the soil.

AFBI Crossnacreevy is AFBI's Plant Testing Station and is also the location of the Official Seed Testing Station for Northern Ireland. Statutory work at Crossnacreevy includes evaluation of grass, clover and cereal crops for value for cultivation and use (VCU), the assessment of grass and clover for DUS (Distinct, Uniform and Stable) for Plant Breeders' Rights for the EU and seed certification.

Throughout the year, there are several key events for stakeholders to disseminate information from both the statutory and research work portfolio. In addition, senior staff are required to represent Northern Ireland at UK National Committees in relation to varieties and seeds.

Scientists at AFBI also contribute to a diverse research programme contributing to sustainable agricultural production in collaboration with soil, animal, and environmental scientists.

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.

Location

The successful candidate will be based at AFBI Crossnacreevy, 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.
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.

Medical

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.

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.

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 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 Senior Scientists within the Agronomy and Plant Science Branch, Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division, based at Crossnacreevy. The main duties of the post will include the following:

Research and Development

- **Contribute to the design, delivery, and reporting of multidisciplinary R&D projects in the area of plant science and agronomy**, supporting activities from initial planning through to final reporting including development of standard operating procedures and risk assessments.
- **Plan, conduct, and oversee field trials, controlled-environment (greenhouse/polytunnel) studies, and laboratory experiments**, ensuring work is carried out to high scientific and operational standards.
- **Manage data collection, processing, and analysis** across field, greenhouse, and laboratory research, ensuring accurate and timely communication of results to meet project deadlines.
- **Carry out laboratory sample preparation, including DNA and RNA extraction, for plant and soil microbiome.**
- **Prepare scientific and technical outputs**, including internal reports, stakeholder updates, and contributions to presentations and publications as required by project leads.
- **Assist in organising and hosting stakeholder, collaborator, farmer, and advisor visits** to Crossnacreevy and off-site trials.
- **Adhere to health and safety procedures, develop standard operating procedures, and risk assessments whilst ensuring compliance to IOS9001 standards**

Manage Resources

- **Plan and manage field plot operations**, ensuring alignment with the requirements of scientific programmes and effective integration with laboratory and greenhouse research activities.
- **Oversee laboratory and greenhouse facilities**, including facility maintenance, workflow organisation, compliance with safety procedures, and coordination of space and resources to support research programmes.
- **Support project leads** in maintaining high standards of governance, including assistance with procurement, budgeting, and supervision or mentoring of technical and scientific staff.

Professional Development

- **Demonstrate continuing professional development** across relevant scientific, operational, and managerial areas.

- Undertake training as required to maintain and enhance competencies in field experimentation, greenhouse management, laboratory techniques, and data analysis.

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** demonstrate in their application form that they possess the following criteria, by the closing date:

1. Honours Degree (Level 6), equivalent or higher in a relevant biological or agricultural discipline

AND

2. 1 years' demonstrable experience in a research capacity post qualification in a relevant agricultural related research role

AND

3. 1 peer reviewed publication as an author in areas relevant to Agronomy and/or Plant Science.

AND

4. Possess a full, current/exchangeable* driving licence for manual vehicles, (to aid the successful candidate in driving an AFBI vehicle) enabling the licence holder to fulfil the duties of this role. As per the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) any reasonable adjustments will be considered.

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. You must give the type of qualification and date awarded. 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 etc so that a well-informed decision can be made.

Please Note:

Publish is defined as papers either accepted for publication or published.

Applicants must provide evidence of eligibility criterion 3 by submitting a fully cited bibliography (authors, paper title, journal title, volume, and page numbers) of **all** publications offered. For the papers submitted applicants must demonstrate the contribution made under the following author roles from the Elsevier Credit taxonomy: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft, and supervision.

Candidates can provide this information within the application form itself, or if necessary, it can be sent by the closing date for applications as a separate attachment to: recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net

The bibliography should be marked with the relevant competition reference number (IRC332690), competition title and your full name.

*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.

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: 20 Minimum standard: 12

4. Managing a Quality Service

Marks Available: 10 Minimum standard: 6

Total Marks Available: 100

Overall Pass Mark: 60