

“Ferocious” competition in Northern Ireland job market as vacancies hit record

Northern Ireland’s job market is “ferociously competitive” as employers jostle to attract the right talent to fill a record number of vacancies.

That’s according to the latest report from online jobs portal NIJobs which said employees are now in the driving seat and forcing employers to flex to meet more growing demands from workers.

Of note, the number of jobs in human resources advertised on its website were two-and-half times higher in the final three months of 2021 compared to the same period a year earlier, an indication employers are bringing in extra resource to fill vacancies.

Overall, 28 of the 31 employment categories listed on NIJobs posted an increase in listings with 23 listing a record high of vacancies. Encouragingly, 24 categories had listings in 2021 above pre-pandemic levels in 2019.

That is a trend which looks set to continue.

“...employers will be forced to work even harder to attract talent,” Sam McIlveen, General Manager at NIJobs, said. “This is the new reality for recruitment, a fact acknowledged earlier this month in a survey from Manufacturing NI which reported that 60% of their firms said access to labour was the biggest issue.

“It is likely employers will battle for talent in 2022 and beyond. Hiring will be an ongoing challenge and businesses need to resolve this issue creatively. The HR function of any

business is vital and, since the pandemic, its responsibilities have grown considerably from managing public health advice to planning remote working strategies as well as keeping employees engaged.”

When it comes to sectors, the report said nursing, healthcare & medical; hospitality, IT; accountancy & finance; and sales roles occupied the top five recruitment categories and accounted for almost half of all recruitment activity. Nursing, healthcare & medical and hospitality were ranked the top two employment categories for recruitment activity.

Almost 1 in 10 of all listings were within the hospitality sector. Nursing, healthcare & medical and hospitality are expected to top the recruitment rankings in 2022.

Ulster Bank’s Chief Economist Richard Ramsey said 2021 was a year to remember and agreed that 2022 is likely to be another strong year for recruitment.

“The pandemic triggered a slump in activity within the recruitment market in 2020,” he said. “Fears of a surge in unemployment after the removal of the Job Retention Scheme have not come to pass. Instead, payroll numbers and unemployment have diverged in the right directions.

“As far as signs of stress in the labour market are concerned, the most visible are those of the positive variety, namely skills shortages rather than job losses. Redundancies in 2021 were a fraction of what they were in 2020 and the recruitment market is characterised by record numbers of job vacancies.”