

East Anglia's Fields of Dreams

"Working with great people makes you great; you learn a lot and it also gives you experience and confidence to move on with your own career."

This sentiment from American musician Nas seems an appropriate place to start when considering why talented life scientists and entrepreneurs benefit from locating in our region, *writes Tony Jones, CEO of life science membership body One Nucleus.*

Innovation is a contact sport

Highly innovative, curious and talented people arise everywhere. How they are able to capitalise on those personal attributes can be determined by where they are located. There is often a desire to want to cluster with like-minded people who they can challenge, and be challenged by, when wanting to question accepted dogma.

It's not that collaboration is not possible over distance, but physical proximity matters too in driving innovation. Social as well as work ecosystems build trust, openness and confidence to share ideas. Evaluation by friends can feel a much safer place to start an innovation journey.

The East of England's standing as one of the premier innovation ecosystems in the world is rarely, if ever, questioned. A tradition of attracting great minds to address global challenges, the creation of new companies and the magnetic effect that has on corporate and financial investors has earned that status. Continued growth means an ever increasing need to meet both the skills and people demand challenges it brings.

Opportunity knocks for the ambitious

The depth and track-record of innovation across multiple science and technology sectors in the region is leading to a rich seam of innovative assets to be mined. And it's not just R & D investment.

Such potential for growth attracts the other stakeholders too. Property developers such as BioMed Realty, IQHQ, Kadans, Bruntwood Scientific and Brookfield are committing £millions building the R & D space for our nascent companies to grow into as pipeline demand is far in excess of 0.5 million sq ft.

This attraction reflects the record-breaking £4.5 billion level of investment into the UK Life Sciences R & D companies in 2021 (cf BIA & Clarivate 2022).

The promise of like-minded peers with whom to innovate; high levels of investment; diverse science & technology sectors and a proven ecosystem mixing experience with ideas appears to be quite an attractive offer to attract talent.

So, why do we hear a string of growing life science companies indicating the competition or cost of human capital has never been greater? Life science vacancy rates in 2021 (cf: Cpl Life Sciences & Vacancysoft) indicated the UK saw 72 per cent growth compared to 2020. With London and Cambridge dominating there is little wonder therefore that demand is outstripping supply in the region.

The cost of being competitive

The 2021 Stem Survey (cf New Scientist Jobs & SRG) looking at STEM careers shows the average UK salaries have increased by >30 per cent in the past seven years.

Whilst most advertised positions in the region will quote '£negotiable' or '£competitive' in terms of salary, some do reveal typical salaries of circa £65k for eg QA Manager and £35k for a lab technician.

Engineering jobs generally pay higher than life science salaries, so we may see payroll costs escalate further in the sector as convergence of tech and biomedicine continues.

The report indicates that East Anglia's life science employees respond very positively on job satisfaction. The costs may not always be measured in money units alone.

For our sector and region to attract the best, it means we have to individually and collectively be an employer of choice. Increasingly meaningful is the need to align the values and culture in an organisation with the personal values of their workforce. Flexibility, ED&I (Equality, Inclusion & Diversity) policies and sustainability are key motivator drivers.

Let's not leave our talent pipeline to chance

[One Nucleus](#), through its activities with members including training courses, Employer-of-Choice sessions, job advertising and the Building Life Science Adventures careers conference is acutely aware of the need to support life science businesses to be the best destination they can be for great people.

Collaboration with other major stakeholders such as the universities, regional government and community groups mean we can all support our companies in meeting this challenge.

Taking our lead from Future Place Leadership, some potential activities that could help the cause include; soft-landing opportunities; inclusive funding for life-long learning & development; increase flexibility around apprenticeship models and funding; and address the barriers such as commuting accessibility, physical laboratory space and supervision capacity

Be the destination of choice

East Anglia nears the top of the regional salaries table in

the UK at an average £43.424, but that may not be sufficient if salaries of up to £45k still mean housing affordability remains a challenge (Cambridge Ahead & RAND Europe 2020).

The UK government's UK Life Science Strategy (2020) included a people and culture strategy aimed at attracting the best talent from around the world and ensuring R & D was for everyone.

Whether describing a single employer, a sector or indeed a region then there is a clear imperative to attracting, developing and retaining the best labour pool.

That imperative is to ensure you are the most attractive career destination. If you can deliver the best journey as well as best destination, then all the better.