

The North East of England is a thriving hub for the Pharmaceuticals Industry, described as “a jewel in the scientific and industrial crown” by the Government. The region accounts for nearly 35% of the UK’s GDP generated by pharmaceuticals, which amounts to £1.8bn ⁽¹⁾.

However, in the North East are we managing our pharmaceutical talent pool effectively? In this article we wanted to explore the impact the economic downturn may have had on attracting and retaining talent to the sector and within the region; in addition to taking a look at our graduate pool.

Research has shown that as a direct result of the economic downturn, 25% of employees in the Pharmaceutical sector are now more loyal to their employer. ⁽²⁾ The views of approximately 134,000 people, including almost 6,000 in the UK were the basis for the findings and from the North East respondents, 22% claimed to be more loyal to their employer, leading to less movement in an uncertain marketplace.

However, for those contemplating moving jobs within the pharmaceutical sector, significant importance was placed on assessing a prospective employer’s reputation. 46% of potential employees felt that the quality of the firm’s products and services was most important, strong leadership came in at 28% and skilled employees at 12%. Least important were global presence, financial performance and corporate social responsibility.

Nigel Wright recently carried out a Salary Survey ⁽³⁾ which also explored motivations. From the respondents in the pharmaceutical sector we found that being given the opportunity to work on ‘new challenges’ counted as 75% of the influence when changing jobs. Increased remuneration was second most influential at 70% and achieving an improved work-life balance had a score of 37.5%. Changing location on the other hand had a low score of 12.5%.

With less people moving around the industry what about new talent coming in? An important factor to the North East workforce and talent pool is the graduates that add to it every year. Interestingly, on a national level, 75% of university students move away from home to go to university, however only 16% of these stay in their university region once they graduate, with 47% returning home and 37% moving to a new region all together. The North East has the highest number of graduates who move away to study and 3rd lowest number of overall graduates studying in the region. This research, from the UK Innovation Research Centre ⁽⁴⁾, also found that the North East has the 2nd lowest number of graduates employed by region. Therefore, taking all of this into account the number of graduates who leave and the number who enter results in a net loss of graduates for the region.

This isn’t the same for all sectors. For example, research done by Newcastle University in 2011 ⁽⁵⁾ found that 56.1% of their graduates from the Medical Sciences Faculty who were in work were employed in the North East. Are our graduates employable? Research from The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) ⁽⁶⁾ found that the number of undergraduate industrial placements has significantly reduced in recent years; from 530 in 2007 to 268 in 2011. This type of work based learning requires intensive supervision at first, so the ability to take on these students has been affected by changes to budgets in recent years.

Industrial placements are an important step in graduates gaining work experience, the training and exposure given at this early stage is invaluable to the development and employability of university students and therefore the decrease in placements offered by pharmaceutical companies is a concern.

Professor Sir Tim Wilson DL agrees, stating in his work, The Wilson Review ⁽⁷⁾, “In order to enhance graduate skills levels and ensure a smooth and effective transition between university and business environments, there is a need to increase opportunities for students to acquire relevant work experience during their studies.”

So what do employers need to consider when attracting talent. In summary those people moving around the sector want to be assured that they are moving to a reputable firm with high quality products and services. They want to move for challenges and financial reward is important along with an improved work-life balance. They are less interested in changing location and are more influenced by the ‘local’ presence of the firm than its global position. In my opinion this has ‘dynamic, challenging SME’ all over it, which as a region we have in abundance. In addition employers need to look to the future and industrial placements will be key to talent development. Our

region has ambitious growth plans for the pharmaceutical and life sciences sectors and we need to take steps now to supply the workforce of tomorrow.

1. <http://firstforpharma.co.uk/pharmaceutical-industry.html>
2. *Kelly Global Workforce Index 2011*
3. <http://www.nigelwright.com/Assets/Documents/UKSalarySurvey2012.pdf?1341494351>
4. *UK innovation Research Centre: The Movement of Talent*
5. *Careers Service: Newcastle University Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Online*
6. *The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry: Enriching research, Training scientists. ABPI 2011 survey of partnership working between the pharmaceutical industry and the university sector.*
7. <http://www.wilsonreview.co.uk/wilson-review/wilson-review.pdf>