



UK Government

**THE UK'S MODERN
INDUSTRIAL
STRATEGY**

LIFE SCIENCES

Jobs Plan

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Ministerial Foreword

The UK's Life Sciences sector is one of our greatest national strengths. It sits at the heart of our modern Industrial Strategy, driving innovation, attracting investment, and delivering high-value growth across every part of the country. From cutting-edge research to world-leading companies, this is a sector in which the UK already excels, and one that will be central to our future prosperity.

Life Sciences is also fundamental to our ambition to build a healthier nation and deliver on the government's Health Mission. The innovations developed by this sector underpin the transformation of our health system – supporting the shift from hospital to community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention set out in our 10 Year Health Plan.

At the heart of this opportunity are the people that sustain this sector. Skills and talent will determine whether the UK can fully realise the potential of Life Sciences, and this plan sets out how we will ensure we have the highly skilled, adaptable workforce the sector needs to grow – supporting both the pipeline of future talent and the development of those already working across the system.

Life Sciences offers some of the most rewarding careers in our economy. These are highly skilled, highly paid jobs that provide real opportunity for individuals and communities across the UK. They are jobs that are not only intellectually and professionally fulfilling, but which have a direct and profound impact on patients by delivering new medicines, technologies, and treatments that improve outcomes and save lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated just how critical a strong Life Sciences workforce is to our national resilience. From vaccine development to clinical trials and manufacturing at scale, it was the strength of our people and institutions that enabled the UK to respond at pace to a global crisis. We saw that investing in skills and talent is essential for growth and for preparedness in the face of future health challenges.

Life Sciences companies already invest significantly in skills, training, and workforce development. Across the UK, businesses are creating opportunities and supporting the



Lord Vallance, Minister for Science, Innovation, Research and Nuclear

next generation of talent. This Plan brings together many of these initiatives, alongside new actions, to strengthen and scale what is already working well.

Place will be central to ensuring that the benefits of Life Sciences growth are felt across the UK. By connecting national ambition with the strengths of local clusters, this Plan will help more communities access the skills, jobs, and opportunities created by a growing Life Science sector.

As with the Life Sciences Sector Plan, the Jobs Plan is a shared commitment. It has been developed in partnership with industry and the wider sector, recognising that to enact material change the system must pull in the same direction. By working together, we can build a world-leading Life Sciences workforce, unlock growth in every region, and ensure that innovation delivers for patients across the country.



Executive Summary

Purpose

The Life Sciences Jobs Plan sets out how government, industry and other partners across the UK will work together over the next three years to address current and future workforce challenges in the sector. The Plan responds to an Industrial Strategy commitment to develop published, sector-specific Jobs Plans for priority growth sectors.

The Jobs Plan complements the Life Sciences Sector Plan, 10 Year Health Plan, the associated 10 Year Workforce Plan, and wider policy developments in skills, employment rights, and migration. Actions in the Life Sciences Sector Plan aim to drive investment and create jobs, with government analysis estimating that around 66,000 additional jobs in priority occupations will be created in the sector between 2025 and 2035.¹ The Jobs Plan is structured around the four pillars of improving sector coordination, skills, hiring, and good jobs. It sets out actions aimed at ensuring there is a domestic pipeline of skilled workers to fill these jobs, linked to actions within the Sector Plan. Place is a key theme, shaping our approach to job creation and investment, alongside a focus on youth and efforts to maximise the benefits of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital technology.

The Challenges

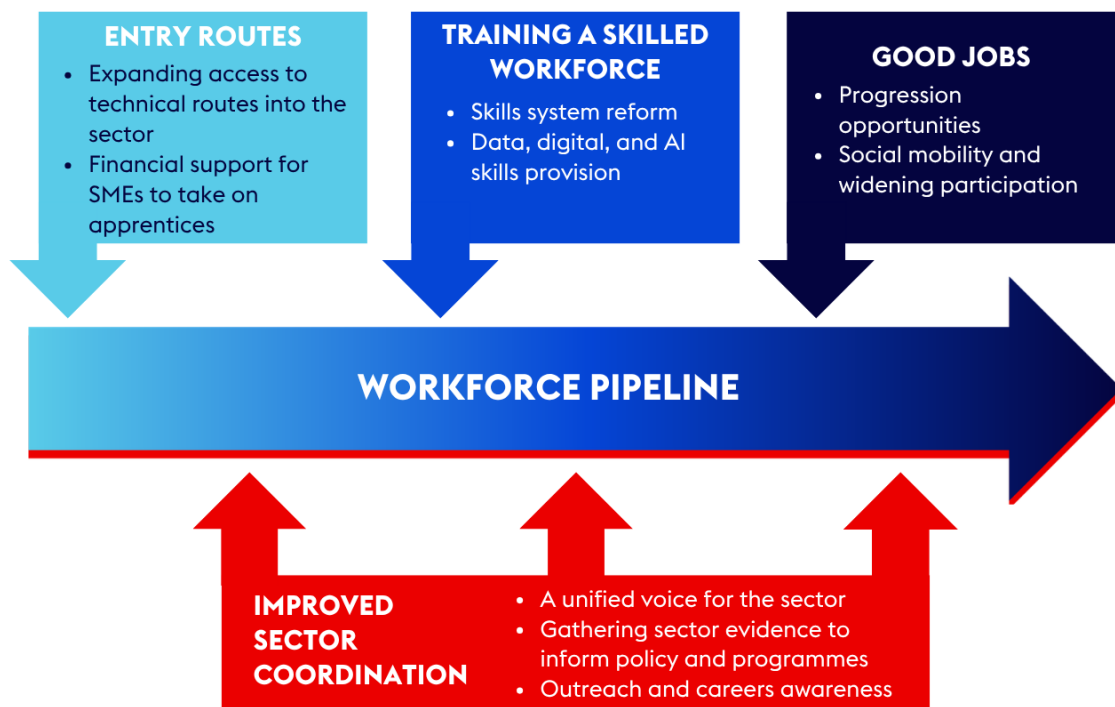
The Life Sciences sector is made up of highly productive jobs: gross value added (GVA) per worker for pharmaceutical manufacturing (SIC 21) is around £530,000, over seven times higher than the UK average of £75,000.² The sector's ability to offer well-paid, rewarding careers is a significant strength, but without access to a pipeline of highly skilled workers, it will face workforce shortages that threaten growth and the ability to attract new investment. To support the sector to secure the workforce it needs, we must:

- Meet an estimated demand for 66,000 additional jobs in priority occupations by 2035.
- Improve entry routes to the sector and ensure work-readiness.
- Support a skills and training system that can adapt to include emerging technologies and other necessary skill sets.
- Support SMEs to access the skills and training offer.

Outcomes

By addressing these challenges and strengthening domestic talent pipelines, we can develop a highly skilled workforce in the UK that enables the Life Sciences sector to continue expanding and delivering lifesaving treatments and technologies. This Plan is a call to action for sector stakeholders to come together through a single industry-led body to coordinate action to enable growth across the UK.

Projected workforce demand in priority occupations: 66,000 additional jobs between 2025 and 2035



The diagram shows the interventions in the Jobs Plan that will help meet the projected workforce demand in priority occupations of 66,000 additional jobs between 2025 and 2035. Entry routes: expanding access to technical routes into the sector and financial support for SMEs to take on apprentices. Training a skilled workforce: Skills system reform and Data, digital, and AI skills provision. Good jobs: Progression opportunities and Social mobility and widening participation. Improved sector coordination: A unified voice for the sector, Gathering sector evidence to inform policy and programmes, and Outreach and careers awareness.



Sector Context

The Economic Opportunity

The UK Life Sciences sector has a rich history of cutting-edge innovation and groundbreaking discoveries that have benefited human health, including the discovery of penicillin and creation of the world's first vaccine, and have laid the foundation for today's world-leading ecosystem.³ Today, the UK is home to one of the world's largest personalised cancer vaccine development platforms,⁴ was the first country to licence and deploy vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic,⁵ and the first to provide regulatory approval for a medicine relying on CRISPR gene editing technology.⁶ The sector also drives significant economic activity, generating a turnover of £147 billion in 2023/24⁷ and providing many high-skill, high-wage jobs.⁸

The Office for Life Sciences is already supporting growth across the sector through major investment programmes, grants, and scale-up support. Through initiatives such as the up to £520 million Life Sciences Innovative Manufacturing Fund, the £50 million Life Sciences Transformational R&D Investment Fund pilot, and support for high-growth Life Sciences companies through the scale-up support service, government is helping businesses to expand in the UK, attract investment, increase manufacturing and R&D activity, and create high-quality jobs across the country.

Scope

The UK Life Sciences sector comprises two core subsectors: biopharmaceuticals and medical technology. It spans discovery and research, clinical development, manufacturing, scale-up, and the development and supply of medical devices,

diagnostics and digital health technologies. It includes both core companies developing or producing their own products, and service and supply companies providing goods and services to them.

The sector is closely connected to the wider health and research system, drawing on skills and experience developed across industry, the NHS, and academia. Clinical researchers play a particularly important role in translating discoveries into new medicines, technologies and treatments. Industry relies on this talent pool for clinical trial delivery, regulatory science, translational research and commercialisation, and this mobility strengthens the UK's attractiveness for Life Sciences investment.

Alongside this Jobs Plan, the Department for Health and Social Care is developing the 10 Year Workforce Plan and a Research Workforce Strategy that will address NHS workforce challenges and support delivery of the 10 Year Health Plan for England. The Office for Life Sciences and Department for Health and Social Care will work together to share workforce evidence and identify opportunities for coordinated action, particularly on clinical research careers and movement between the NHS, academia, and industry.

In response to evidence from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)⁹ and the Russell Group¹⁰ on a decline in the clinical academic workforce, funders including Medical Research Council (MRC), National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), Cancer Research UK, Wellcome, and the British Heart Foundation have committed to coordinated action. This includes a new National Clinical Research Career Pathway; additional Clinical Future Leaders Fellowships to support progression into secure independent research posts; and MRC's Regional Accounts for Clinical Researchers scheme, providing flexible regional funding at key career transition points. These sit alongside existing fellowship schemes supporting PhD training and independent research careers.

The Academy of Medical Sciences has also established a UK Medical Science Careers Taskforce to develop a national plan spanning academia, the NHS, and industry. Its emerging priorities include better coordination of workforce planning, tackling insecurity at career transitions, protecting clinical research capacity, and building technical capability in areas such as AI, data science, and genomics. Its findings will inform future iterations of this Jobs Plan where relevant to the industry workforce.

Together, these initiatives complement the Life Sciences Jobs Plan by helping sustain the wider skilled research ecosystem on which the industry depends.

Current Workforce Profile

The UK Life Sciences sector represents an economically significant workforce. In 2023/2024, there were an estimated 7,320 companies, collectively employing approximately 360,000 people. Of the two subsectors, medical technology is the largest in employment terms, accounting for around 55% of sector jobs. Biopharmaceutical

companies account for the remaining 45% of employment but generate 67% of total sector turnover.¹¹

There are clear concentrations of Life Sciences jobs in the South East, London, and East of England. However, 46% of Life Sciences employment was based in companies registered outside of these regions demonstrating the presence of new and established clusters that drive Life Sciences activity across the UK (see table 1).¹²

Reflecting this nationwide footprint, the Industrial Strategy place methodology identifies high-potential Life Sciences locations across the UK: Belfast City Region, Derry/Londonderry, and Coleraine in Northern Ireland; Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, and Aberdeen in Scotland; Cardiff, Swansea, and Wrexham in Wales; Greater London, the East Midlands, the North East and Tees Valley, Greater Manchester, Liverpool and Cheshire, the Oxford–Cambridge Growth Corridor, the West Midlands, and South and West Yorkshire in England.¹³

Examples of investment and skills activity in high potential locations include:

- **Glasgow City Region**, where the £50 million Local Innovation Partnerships Fund includes £5 million for skills and £20 million for laboratory infrastructure.¹⁴
- **Northern Ireland**, where the £1.2 billion City and Growth Deals programme includes support for Life Sciences assets such as the Future Medicines Institute and the £64 million iREACH Health clinical research centre.¹⁵
- **The North West**, where the ecosystem is supported by assets including the University of Liverpool, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Knowledge Quarter Liverpool, Sci-Tech Daresbury, Manchester’s universities, and NHS partners.
- **The Oxford–Cambridge Growth Corridor**, which is supported by a consortium of ten universities and specialist research institutions.¹⁶
- **London**, which is investing £4.05 million from the Adult Skills Fund over three years in sub-regional talent hubs across priority sectors.¹⁷

In terms of business activity, 25% of Life Sciences companies report manufacturing as their primary activity, while 19% identify research and development (R&D) as theirs.¹⁸ This emphasises the sector’s reliance on both highly skilled research roles and a technically proficient manufacturing and production workforce.

	Number of Companies	Employment	Turnover (£ billions)
East Midlands	511	22,413	5.8
East of England	944	50,845	30.3
London	1,275	56,903	33.9
North East	166	8,032	1.2
North West	739	32,454	8.7
Northern Ireland	137	9,461	2.0
Scotland	404	17,126	4.4
South East	1,397	84,797	39.4
South West	397	16,005	4.5
Wales	287	13,287	3.6
West Midlands	533	23,765	8.3
Yorkshire and The Humber	527	24,495	5.0

Table 1: Number of Life Sciences (biopharmaceutical and medical technology) companies, employment and turnover by international territorial level (ITL) 1 region, UK, 2023/24. Note: company employment figures are allocated to ITL 1 regions based on the location of the company's registered address. Data from table 1 can be found in tables 6-8 of the 'Bioscience and health technology sector statistics 2023/2024: accompanying data tables'

Life Sciences in all areas of the UK

The UK Life Sciences sector has strengths distributed across every nation and region. From globally recognised innovation hubs to emerging local ecosystems, its impact is powered by place – bringing together businesses, universities, healthcare systems, and communities to drive discovery, growth, and improved health outcomes.

Skills policy is devolved to the governments of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, while aspects of adult skills funding are devolved at a regional level within England. Delivery arrangements, funding mechanisms, and institutional responsibilities therefore differ across the UK, requiring this Plan to combine UK-wide ambition with nation-specific approaches. Regional differences in skills, infrastructure, access to capital, and health system capacity shape how the sector develops and where intervention is most needed.

To unlock the full potential of Life Sciences, government must take a place-based approach that recognises these differences. By supporting local strengths, addressing regional barriers, and connecting clusters into a coherent national ecosystem, we can ensure growth is both nationally significant and locally rooted – delivering economic opportunity and better health outcomes in every part of the UK.

Local Skills Improvement Plans in England

Across England, Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) provide a framework for addressing skills gaps locally. Established under the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, they bring together employers, education providers, Strategic Authorities, and wider local stakeholders to identify and respond to post-16 technical skills needs within a defined geographical area. There are 39 LSIPs in England, each led by a designated Employer Representative Body and covering a three-year cycle from 2026 to 2029.

Jobs Plans and LSIPs offer different but complementary perspectives. This Jobs Plan sets out a national, sector-led direction for workforce growth and productivity, while LSIPs are cross-sectoral, setting local priorities that reflect employer-led intelligence on local skills needs, provision, and constraints.

There is clear value in aligning the two. LSIPs generate employer-led intelligence on local labour markets that can inform the evidence base and regional relevance of this Jobs Plan, giving local insight a direct route into national policy. In turn, LSIP statutory guidance requires plans to reflect Industrial Strategy sector priorities, enabling national actions to be translated into locally tailored provision – creating a two-way flow between national ambition and local delivery in Life Sciences cluster areas.

Realising that potential will depend on active collaboration, government will work with Employer Representative Bodies, Strategic Authorities, colleges, universities, and Life Sciences employers in cluster regions to share evidence, co-ordinate engagement, and pursue joint action, so that the commitments in this Plan and the ambitions of local LSIPs reinforce each other in delivery.

Regional Strengths in Life Sciences Skills in England

The UK's Life Sciences workforce strength rests on connected regional clusters, each developing distinctive approaches to skills. Liverpool City Region's Life Sciences Innovation Zone gives employers access to tailored recruitment support, Skills Bootcamps, apprenticeships, and Adult Skills Fund provision, while its Life Sciences University Technical College creates early pathways into laboratory science and biomanufacturing careers. Greater Manchester uses devolved adult skills funding and The Manchester College's Centre for Clinical and Biomedical Sciences to equip learners with industry-standard technical skills for genomics, diagnostics, and advanced therapies roles. The emerging Northern Arc could widen access to training and deepen employer talent pools, while the Oxford–Cambridge Growth Corridor's ten universities and specialist research institutes support pathways from technician to postgraduate level, blending biology with data, AI, and automation skills. In London, the Mayor's employer-led Life Science Talent Board and pan-London Hub are aligning public training investment directly with industry workforce needs.

Scotland

Scotland's Life Sciences sector is a major contributor to economic growth, innovation, and public wellbeing, with a strong platform for further expansion over the next decade. In 2025 the GVA of the sector was £4.7 billion, generating 2.8% of Scotland's total economic output. Between 2015 and 2025 GVA of the sector was estimated to have increased by 1.6% on average each year.¹⁹ It is one of Scotland's most productive sectors, providing high-skill, high-wage jobs across the nation.²⁰

Wales

Wales has a compact and connected Life Sciences sector with strengths in MedTech, diagnostics, regenerative medicine, cell therapy and precision medicine, with a significant export focus.²¹ Wales's Life Sciences offer is supported by close relationships between industry, universities, NHS Wales, Welsh Government, and national innovation bodies, with Life Sciences Hub Wales acting as a key connector between innovators and the health and social care system.²²

The sector is particularly strong in medical technology and diagnostics, with a large SME base and a track record of translating innovation into practical use across health and care. Wales also benefits from research and skills assets across Cardiff, Swansea, Bangor, and other institutions, alongside a growing innovation infrastructure focused on health, data, advanced therapies, and adoption.^{23,24}

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has a well-established and fast-growing Life and Health Sciences sector. The sector accounts for more than 2.5% of regional economic output, generates approximately £1.2 billion in GVA annually, and is described as the fastest growing sector in the economy. The sector is predominantly SME-led, export-oriented, and supported by strong academic institutions, notably Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, which contribute significantly to research excellence and skills development.²⁵ Strengths include diagnostics, MedTech, biotechnology, and precision medicine, with growing capabilities in pharmaceuticals, digital health, and clinical trials.

Almac Group: Inspiring the Next Generation of Life Sciences Talent in Northern Ireland²⁶

Almac Group is one of Northern Ireland's largest Life Sciences employers, with around 4,000 of its almost 8,000 global staff based locally.²⁷ The company helps develop, manufacture, test, and distribute medicines across more than 20 therapeutic areas, including oncology, gene therapy, and neurology. Alongside its commercial work, Almac runs an extensive outreach programme to build the future workforce. Its MEDLAB partnership with Belfast's W5 science centre welcomed 250,000 visitors in 2025 and gives work experience students hands-on laboratory training led by Almac scientists. Each year, nearly 300 students complete three-day programmes at its Craigavon facility, while its STEM outreach team delivered 84 events last year. Through the Science-in-a-Box initiative with STEAM Education, around 5,000 primary pupils across 69 schools have engaged with Life Sciences learning.²⁸

Workforce Diversity

Analysis of the Life Sciences workforce, drawing on ONS Labour Force Survey data, estimates that the sector is 59% male (rising to 92% in Skilled Trades) compared to 52% nationally, and only 4% of workers are under 25 versus 11% across the UK, likely reflecting longer educational pathways.²⁹

Workers self-reporting a disability are estimated to make up just over 10%, compared to 16% nationally. The analysis indicates ethnic diversity broadly matches the national average, but includes below-average representation of Black, Black British, Caribbean or African workers – a finding echoed by the BioIndustry Association (BIA).³⁰

It is estimated 70% of the workforce holds a degree or equivalent,³¹ nearly double the UK average of 41%. As the Social Mobility Commission points out, this presents a barrier for those from less advantaged backgrounds.³² 25% were estimated to be born outside the UK, rising to 31% in Professional Occupations (which include highly specialised roles such as biological scientists, R&D professionals, and software developers).³³ These estimates inform the actions set out in this Plan to widen access to the sector, diversify the talent pipeline, and ensure people from all backgrounds can benefit from rewarding Life Sciences careers.

RESILIENCE: Building Inclusive Pathways into Medicines Manufacturing

RESILIENCE, the UK Medicines Manufacturing Skills Centre of Excellence, is supporting a more inclusive and resilient Life Sciences workforce by embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion across its training and outreach. Delivered by a consortium of leading universities and industry partners, it focuses on removing barriers to entry and mobilising talent from diverse social and educational backgrounds. By the end of March 2026, 2,275 learners had attended industry-relevant training events led by RESILIENCE partners, 51% of these were female and 40% BAME.³⁴ Its industry-relevant courses, outreach, and workplace accelerators provide hands-on experience in regulated environments, supporting learners from foundation level (16–19) through to experienced professionals.

Alongside this the Industry Skills Accelerator – led by the Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult, CPI, and Cogent Skills – has developed new technical training and apprenticeship pathways, widened access, and strengthened a more diverse future workforce.³⁵

Domestic and International Talent

An estimated 25% of the Life Sciences workforce was born outside of the UK, demonstrating the sector's global nature.³⁶ Diversity of ideas from around the world is vital and availability of routes to overseas hiring for certain roles is a key factor for companies considering where to locate global investments. We must achieve a balance between enabling this international flow of ideas and creating opportunities for domestic talent. This balanced approach is reflected in the Government's wider migration policy, as set out in the Immigration White Paper, which emphasises both attracting the world's best talent and strengthening domestic skills pipelines.³⁷

Government is taking action to maintain this balance: the Global Talent Taskforce provides a coordinated offer to attract researchers, entrepreneurs, and investors, with the Office for Life Sciences working to align this with sector needs, while engagement with the Migration Advisory Committee will help ensure that the sector's workforce needs are considered as part of future discussions on visa salary thresholds and the Temporary Shortage List.



Workforce Requirements and Sector Challenges

The Life Sciences Sector Plan sets out actions that aim to drive investment and sector growth. Government estimates that around 66,000 additional jobs in priority occupations will be created in the sector between 2025 and 2035.³⁸ Priority occupations are those that are expected to see growth in employment over the next 10 years, currently face skills shortages, are in high demand, or have high importance to the sector.

A robust domestic talent pipeline that adapts to emerging workforce demands is essential if we are to continue securing investment in the sector and realising this growth potential, which will create opportunities at every level of the workforce: from apprentices and technicians through to researchers, engineers, manufacturing specialists, data scientists, and senior commercial leaders.

In this section we outline the skills and workforce challenges currently facing the sector, informed by extensive engagement undertaken by the Office for Life Sciences to support development of the Jobs Plan. This engagement drew on existing industry engagement channels, dedicated roundtable discussions with SMEs and large companies, and discussions with stakeholders convened by sector organisations and representative bodies. Discussions covered current and future workforce needs, skills shortages, recruitment challenges, training and apprenticeship provision, workforce diversity, and barriers to workforce growth. This engagement took place between February and June 2026.

Challenge 1: Meeting demand for 66,000 additional highly skilled jobs

Government analysis estimates that there will be 66,000 additional Life Sciences jobs in priority occupations between 2025 and 2035, alongside a need to replace an estimated 52,000 existing workers.³⁹ Maintaining a strong pipeline of skilled workers is critical to the future success of the sector. Demand for priority occupations in Life Sciences is already high, with 73% in critical (substantially higher demand than usual) or elevated (above average) demand across the UK, including 35% in critical demand.⁴⁰

Most priority occupations in Life Sciences overlap with those in other sectors, especially the digital and technologies sector with which it shares 14 priority occupations, intensifying demand for experienced talent. Of the 31 priority occupations identified for Life Sciences, 28 overlap with at least one other priority sector. As these occupations are shared across Industrial Strategy sectors, government is coordinating actions across sectors – informed by Skills England’s cross-sector skills analysis – so that growing the domestic pipeline benefits the whole economy rather than sectors competing between one another.⁴¹

Rank	Occupation	2025 to 2035 volume growth
1	Programmers and software development professionals	6,300
2	Production managers and directors in manufacturing	6,100
3	Laboratory technicians	4,500
4	Research and development managers	3,300
5	Natural and social science professionals n.e.c	3,200
6	Engineering professionals n.e.c.	3,200
7	Management consultants and business analysts	2,700
8	IT managers	2,600
9	Sales accounts and business development managers	2,400
10	Biochemists and biomedical scientists	2,300

Table 2: Top 10 priority occupations in Life Sciences by additional employment demand to 2035. N.e.c. = not elsewhere classified. For a full explanation of methodology see [Skills England’s Sector Skills Needs Assessment: Life Sciences](#).

Life Sciences needs highly skilled workers who are trained to the level that their role requires. Government analysis shows that 83% of projected additional employment in Life Sciences priority occupations requires qualifications at Level 4 and above, significantly higher than the 62% average across all priority sectors. This underlines the need for close engagement with higher education institutions alongside vocational and technical routes. Growth in core science pathways such as Chemistry at Level 6+ has been modest (3% between 2021 to 2022 and 2023 to 2024), while digital computing routes have grown more rapidly (40%) which may indicate an imbalance in the pipeline, although it should be noted that these figures are across all sectors and may simply capture the increasing digitisation of many industries.⁴²

Universities are particularly important to the postgraduate and research talent pipeline. Analysis of graduate outcomes found that 95% of science postgraduate researchers entered an Industrial Strategy growth sector within five years, with 52% working in Life Sciences, demonstrating that universities are critical to the Industrial Strategy.⁴³ This reinforces the importance of maintaining pathways through postgraduate study and doctoral training, alongside technical, vocational, and apprenticeship routes.

Challenge 2: Improving routes into the sector and ensuring work-readiness of new entrants

Sector engagement undertaken to inform the Jobs Plan identified low and inconsistent awareness of the careers available in the Life Sciences sector and the training pathways that can lead into the sector. This is particularly acute in areas such as regulation, engineering, and MedTech. Addressing this will support diversity in the workforce by ensuring a wider talent pool has awareness of the opportunities provided by the sector.

This engagement has also identified a widespread gap between the skill level of newly graduated BSc students and the knowledge companies expect on day one of employment, with MSc graduates typically seen as more work-ready. This skills gap is primarily in hands-on lab skills but also extends to more general skills such as communication and understanding of the commercial environment. This gap leaves employers with a choice to either offer opportunities to recent graduates accepting that some upskilling will be required, or to recruit workers who already have this experience and are likely to be more experienced and therefore older. It also contributes to graduates being underemployed whilst they gain experience in entry level jobs and can lead to high turnover in roles such as lab technicians.

Challenge 3: Supporting a skills and training system that can adapt to include emerging technologies and other necessary skill sets

Innovative technologies and approaches are at the heart of the Life Sciences industry, meaning the skill set of a successful worker must be constantly evolving to keep up with this change. Advances in areas such as digital health, data-enabled discovery, and advanced therapies are reshaping the sector's skills profile.

Feedback gathered through engagement with industry to inform the Jobs Plan suggested increasing need for hybrid skill sets that combine core scientific expertise with digital, data, AI, regulatory, and quality assurance capabilities. Analysis of job postings shows IT and computer science roles now account for around 13% of recruitment activity, while

demand for AI, data, and regulatory skills has risen markedly since 2020.⁴⁴ Government analysis confirms that programmers and software development professionals represent the single largest occupation by projected additional demand in Life Sciences, with 6,300 additional workers (an increase of 56%) needed by 2035. Meanwhile, 14 of the sector's 31 priority occupations overlap with the Digital and Technologies sector, intensifying cross-sector competition.⁴⁵ Accelerated adoption of AI has the potential to transform drug discovery, clinical research, and healthcare delivery. A shortage of interdisciplinary talent – ‘bilingual’ researchers who can navigate the worlds of Life Sciences and AI – is a barrier which must be addressed.⁴⁶

A lack of commercial and entrepreneurial skills at all stages of education and employment was consistently raised during engagement to inform the Jobs Plan, and employers and sector stakeholders highlighted this as a barrier to translating the UK's world-leading science base into high-value businesses. Skills England identifies ‘Leading organisational operations and improvements’ as a top technical skill area for Life Sciences priority occupations.⁴⁷

Employers from across the Life Sciences sector, including both SMEs and larger companies, highlighted a need to improve opportunities for upskilling and reskilling existing workers. Stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of flexible, modular training provision in emerging areas such as AI and data. Crucially, this provision must be set in the context of the sector – for example, through specific courses like *AI for drug discovery*. A solid understanding of the ethics and guardrails needed to safely deploy AI technology is also needed. These mid-to-late career workers may have greater caring responsibilities outside of work, making flexible training options crucial to ensure that this group has the skills needed to drive their career and the sector forwards.

Challenge 4: Supporting SMEs to access the skills and training offer

During engagement undertaken by the Office for Life Sciences to inform the Jobs Plan, we spoke to many SMEs across the Life Sciences sector who consistently highlighted workforce challenges linked to their more limited HR, recruitment, and training capacity compared to larger employers. SME employers reported difficulties navigating the skills and training landscape, identifying appropriate provision, and managing the administrative requirements associated with accessing support. These challenges were reported particularly strongly by specialist, research-intensive, and rapidly growing innovative companies, where limited capacity can make engagement with the skills system more difficult.

One of the most widely reported challenges raised during this engagement is a lack of resources to address the work readiness gap of recent graduates. Some larger employers may have the ability to address this through in-house training programmes, but for

smaller companies operating with lean budgets and short cash runways, the initial return on investment for an inexperienced graduate who requires significant upskilling is simply too low. Companies don't have the resources to support these workers until they become sufficiently experienced. This precludes many SMEs from tapping into a large pool of potential workers and can leave graduates underemployed while they gain experience in other roles.

Some SMEs face challenges in engaging with apprenticeships and other structured training routes. The resource commitment of hosting a multi-year apprentice is difficult for businesses with short cash runways and uncertainty about the future direction of the business, and the HR requirements such as arranging insurance is burdensome on often small and stretched teams. T Level placements were also seen by some as too short to deliver meaningful value for either the learner or the employer.

SMEs also face acute competition for talent – not only from large pharmaceutical companies offering higher salaries and clearer progression, but increasingly from the technology sector, which can draw the AI, data, and digital talent that Life Sciences companies urgently need. In high-cost areas such as the Golden Triangle, this competition is compounded by the relatively high cost of living, making it especially difficult to attract and retain junior staff. Immigration and visa constraints add a further barrier, limiting SMEs' ability to retain the international postgraduate talent on which many are heavily reliant.

Challenges across the UK's devolved nations

The challenges outlined above apply across the UK, but evidence also highlights specific pressures shaped by local context and structures.

Northern Ireland

Evidence from the Northern Ireland Skills Barometer (2023–2033)⁴⁸ highlights a structural undersupply of graduates in biological sciences, biomedical sciences, medicine, and physical sciences. Severe shortages in digital and data skills constrain progress in diagnostics, bioinformatics, and AI-driven health innovation, while gaps in engineering and manufacturing capability limit the scaling of medtech and pharmaceutical production. These issues are compounded by high replacement demand in clinical and health science roles, weak student inflow, low retention of international graduates, declining employer-led training, and shortages at technician level (RQF Levels 4 and 5) across laboratory, manufacturing, and clinical settings.

Scotland

The Life and Chemical Sciences Future Skills Needs report⁴⁹ points to a persistent shortage of technicians and mid-level specialists, alongside gaps in practical, work-ready skills among new entrants. This particularly affects laboratory operations, manufacturing,

regulatory functions, quality assurance/control, and bioprocessing. There are also shortages of experienced professionals in regulatory, quality assurance, and leadership roles, reflecting both rising demand and challenges in retaining talent as the sector grows.

Wales

Pressures are particularly acute in MedTech, diagnostics, precision medicine, and advanced therapies, where employers need people who can combine scientific knowledge with data, engineering, quality assurance, regulatory, and manufacturing capability. The sector's SME-led structure creates additional challenges, as smaller companies can find it harder to absorb the cost and capacity demands of placements, apprenticeships, regulatory development, and workforce training. There are also challenges in ensuring innovation-ready skills are available across the full pathway from research and product development through to evaluation, procurement, adoption, and scale within health and social care.^{50,51}



Actions

Reflecting the challenges outlined above, this section sets out the actions being taken to develop a strong domestic workforce, organised according to the four pillars: improving sector coordination, skills, hiring, and good jobs.

The government has placed skills at the centre of its Plan for Change, identifying workforce development as critical to economic growth, productivity, and opportunity. Recent reforms focus on creating a more joined-up, targeted, and responsive skills system that supports delivery of the Industrial Strategy. Additionally, public procurement will continue to support wider government objectives relating to jobs, skills and workforce development where appropriate and proportionate.

Significant investment underpins this shift. The government will invest an additional £2.5 billion over the next three years through the Youth Guarantee and the Growth and Skills Levy to support almost one million young people and unlock up to 500,000 jobs, training, and learning opportunities. Additionally, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement will provide individuals with a loan entitlement to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education to upskill and retrain across their working lives up to the age of 60.⁵²

Together, these measures aim to educate and train the workforce of the future and ensure people have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, with provision increasingly informed by national and local labour market needs. The actions detailed in this section will outline how government plans to ensure this system is delivering for the Life Sciences sector.

Implementation of the Jobs Plan will be a shared endeavour. The UK Government will work with devolved governments in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, respecting devolved responsibilities and building on existing strategies. In England, mayoral strategic authorities, local authorities, and employer bodies will play a key role in translating national ambitions into place-based delivery.

This partnership will build on existing structures to share workforce intelligence, align priorities, and connect national strategy with local delivery. Evidence from devolved skills plans and LSIPs will help shape provision, ensuring it is relevant, applied, and responsive to employer demand, while enabling effective local approaches to be scaled and avoid duplication.

Improving sector coordination

Central to our Jobs Plan is the commitment to explore establishing an industry-led body to support the coordination of skills and workforce activity across the Life Sciences sector and provide expert, evidence-based advice to government to inform policy and programmes. This will provide a mechanism through which the sector can gather evidence on the challenges facing the sector, maintain an open dialogue with government, and galvanise action from industry.

It will also provide a mechanism for engaging with other industry stakeholders such as industry associations, trade unions, education and training providers, individual companies, and skills bodies and agencies across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – recognising that workforce challenges and opportunities in Life Sciences extend across the whole of the UK.

This body will have three core themes to its remit, supported by relevant departments and arm's-length bodies:

- a. Acting as a convenor of industry views (facilitating contributions from employers).
- b. Engaging and informing policy and programmes (e.g. early career pathway; roll out of T Levels, new V Levels, and new level 2 qualifications; design and future roll out of apprenticeship standards and units; and future programmes to support upskilling and reskilling).
- c. Acting as a delivery partner for the Jobs Plan.

Our preference is to explore options to build on established structures, such as the Futures Group – previously an expert subgroup of the Life Sciences Council – rather than creating a new body. The Futures Group brings together a number of industry stakeholders and is coordinated by Cogent Skills – the science industry skills body. The Office for Life Sciences will act as sponsor of this body and manage the interface with government.

Aligned to the proposed remit, our initial expectation is that the industry-led body would provide support in the following areas:

Acting as a convenor of industry views

Action 1: Monitoring industry sentiment and sector delivery of Jobs Plan priorities

Cogent Skills is developing a major employer survey of the Life Sciences sector. The survey will generate detailed, industry-wide evidence on employer perspectives of the skills landscape, including:

- Workforce composition across the sector, including by organisational size and sub-sector
- Employer experiences of the apprenticeship system and barriers to uptake
- Awareness and likely use of Growth and Skills Levy-funded training
- Skills products that have become of little use to the sector and could reasonably be scaled back
- Recruitment pipelines for graduates and postgraduates
- Higher-level skills strategies and responses to recent policy changes
- Employer priorities for government action over the next 2–3 years

The survey will be co-designed with the Office for Life Sciences. Findings will be able to inform the ongoing delivery of this plan and the development of future skills interventions, providing a baseline against which progress can be measured.

Engaging and informing policy and programmes

Action 2: Informing how policy and programmes can be more responsive to the needs of the Life Sciences sector

The industry-led body will work with industry to assess skills and workforce challenges and provide rich, relevant insight to government to inform future policy and programme design. This would include occupation-focused information on the scale and urgency of the issue, quantitative and qualitative evidence from industry, and a clear assessment of how policy and programmes address those challenges and alleviate the problem. The evidence would be shared with government to inform policy development. At a national level this includes Skills England, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and Department for Education (DfE); and at a regional level this would include devolved governments, mayoral strategic authorities, strategic authorities, local authorities, and employer representative bodies in their LSIP areas in England.

West Midlands Combined Authority: Employer-Led MedTech Skills for a Growing Sector

The West Midlands is using its MedTech strengths to develop more responsive, employer-led technical skills provision. Working with Skills England, Pearson, and industry partners, the West Midlands Combined Authority has co-designed new Higher Technical Qualifications at Levels 4 and 5, approved by Skills England and recognised as a regional testbed for skills innovation. BMet College will deliver the new provision from September through the WMCA-backed Future Talent Laboratory, equipping learners with practical skills in digital health systems, regulation, and product testing. Co-led by WMCA and Medilink Midlands, the Health and MedTech Skills Forum brings together government, industry, the NHS, and education to identify workforce needs. The approach demonstrates a scalable model for linking curriculum design directly to employer demand, helping meet projected growth in the MedTech sector.

Action 3: Commercialisation and entrepreneurship skills

The industry-led body will work with employers, education providers, and government to improve awareness of, and access to, commercialisation, entrepreneurship, and leadership skills across the Life Sciences workforce, for example by encouraging existing providers to add these elements to existing courses by evidencing their importance to the sector. Engagement undertaken during development of the Jobs Plan identified a consistent view that while the UK has a strong scientific and research base, there are opportunities to strengthen the skills needed to translate innovation into commercial success.

Action 4: Access to higher-level training provision

Recent changes to the funding of level 7 apprenticeships have led some providers to withdraw courses at this level due to uncertainty about their ongoing viability, but engagement with the sector demonstrates continued demand for skills and training at graduate and postgraduate levels. The industry-led body will therefore explore possible initiatives that address the sector's need for high-level training options whilst aligning to government priorities of youth and growth.

A delivery partner for the Jobs Plan

The industry-led body will propose and coordinate sector-led action to address skills challenges and determine the most appropriate delivery partner for each project, drawing on companies, industry bodies, trade associations, and other relevant organisations as appropriate.

Action 5: Enabling SMEs to access apprenticeships and training provision

During engagement undertaken by the Office for Life Sciences to inform the Jobs Plan, SMEs, especially innovative startups, reported that they often struggle to support apprenticeships because of short cash runways and uncertainty about the future direction of the business. This is consistent with a 2024 Department for Education evaluation of the Apprenticeship SME Brokerage Pathfinder, which found that SMEs face barriers to apprenticeship participation including difficulties understanding where to begin, navigating the perceived complexity of the system, and accessing information and support.⁵³ Alongside recent changes to the Growth and Skills Levy to alleviate these issues, the industry-led body could explore initiatives to further address these challenges and support SMEs with greater access to the apprenticeship offer.

Action 6: Outreach and careers awareness

Engagement undertaken by the Office for Life Sciences to inform the Jobs Plan revealed that, across the sector, current approaches to school engagement and careers promotion are often fragmented, and that awareness of career paths – particularly in areas such as manufacturing, engineering, regulation, and MedTech – remains low. There is an opportunity to improve the coordination, messaging, and reach of careers outreach activity across the Life Sciences sector to help build a strong pipeline of young people into the sector through traditional higher education routes, alternative technical routes such as apprenticeships, and opportunities for young people such as work placements.

Improving the reach and targeting of careers outreach is also important for addressing representation gaps identified in the sector's workforce. Research by the Science Industry Skills Partnership highlights careers outreach as a key mechanism for increasing diversity in Life Sciences, particularly for reaching young people from underrepresented groups who may not otherwise be aware of the opportunities available.⁵⁴ With only 4% of the sector workforce aged under 25, and below-average representation of disabled workers and Black workers,⁵⁵ there is a clear case for outreach that specifically targets these groups.

Industry-Led Youth Outreach Across the Life Sciences Sector⁵⁶

Life Sciences employers are investing significantly in youth outreach to inspire the next generation of STEM talent. Bayer's Baylab Reading, a free hands-on education laboratory, has engaged more than 16,500 young people aged 7–18 since 2017, working with state schools, special educational needs schools, and pupil referral units to widen access. Bayer's internal assessment suggests that Baylab has a strong impact on student aspirations and career awareness, with students reporting increased confidence and a stronger understanding of future opportunities. AstraZeneca's STEM Inspiration Lab in Cambridge welcomes around 1,000 7–14-year-olds each year, supported by sponsorship of the Cambridge Festival and Big Biology Day, grant funding for the Royal Institution's Science in Schools programme, and the Active Science Programme – now in its ninth year – which uses football partnerships in Cambridge, Macclesfield, and Everton to reach over 1,000 students annually with over 6,000 hours of Active Science delivery.

Skills

A growing, globally competitive Life Sciences sector depends on a workforce with the right technical, scientific, and digital capabilities at every level, from laboratory technicians to clinical researchers and manufacturing specialists. This section sets out how government, industry, and the wider skills system will work together to ensure the skills system is operating as effectively as possible, including by strengthening existing talent, supporting a pipeline into the sector, and ensuring the workforce keeps pace with rapid technological innovation.

Training a highly skilled workforce

Action 7: Skills system reform

The Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper sets out a more responsive, flexible, employer-led skills system to address workforce change, close skills gaps, and boost productivity.⁵⁷ Standard apprenticeships remain the principal route into skilled employment, including those developed for Life and Industrial Science roles from level 2 to level 6.

Part of these reforms are Apprenticeship Units, funded through the Growth and Skills Levy – short, targeted courses (30–140 hours, 1–16 weeks, levels 2–5) built from existing standards to upskill employees aged 19+, meet business needs, and respond quickly to emerging gaps. These changes sit alongside Skills England's role as the single authoritative body on national and sectoral skills needs, and reformed funding through the Growth and Skills Levy, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, and Sector Skills Packages.

The white paper also announced V Levels, DfE's flagship vocational qualification, and Level 2 Occupational Certificates, designed for students to progress into employment. V Levels in Health, Healthcare and Clinical Technologies, and Applied Research and Technology will be available from 2028.⁵⁸ The new qualifications are based on or have direct links to occupational standards with input from employers, meeting skills needs and giving businesses access to a pipeline of new talent to build their future workforce and address skills shortages while giving young people a clear path from school into Life Sciences careers, apprenticeships, or higher technical study.

In line with the white paper commitment to increase the flexibility of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), the government is broadening the approval process to make it more responsive to employer needs. This could increase the scope for collaborative and regional development within the Life Sciences pathway.

Action 8: Prioritising apprenticeship routes that deliver government objectives

As part of building a skills system that is responsive to the needs of priority sectors, future funding decisions will be guided by government objectives on economic growth, affordability and supporting young people. This will not involve a blanket approach by level; rather, government will prioritise apprenticeships, including at level 6, where they deliver the strongest impact against these priorities.

Apprenticeship provision also supports the Plan's diversity objectives. Apprenticeships offer an alternative entry route that can widen access for people from a broader range of socio-economic backgrounds, helping to address the sector's high qualification threshold – 70% of the workforce currently holds a degree-level qualification. The growth of starts on level 6 courses within the sector – rising from 6% to 30% of total sector starts between 2017/18 and 2021/22 – demonstrates the viability of these pathways for developing advanced skills outside traditional university routes.^{59,60}

Action 9: Better targeting of the Strategic Priorities Grant and strengthening higher education STEM pathways

Government recognises that STEM graduates are crucial to the pipeline into the Life Sciences sector. For the 2025/26 academic year, over two thirds of the £1.3 billion Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG)⁶¹ recurrent programme budget has been allocated to providers to support the provision of high-cost subjects, including science, engineering, and technology subjects that are the traditional feeder subjects to the sector. DfE is working with the Office for Students to review and reform the SPG to ensure that high-cost subject funding is more effectively targeted towards priority provision that supports future skills needs and the Industrial Strategy.

Government, universities, and industry will need to work together to maintain strong pipelines in strategically important disciplines and improve the transition from higher education into Life Sciences employment. This includes strengthening opportunities for students and researchers to gain practical, commercial and industry experience.

Action 10: Strengthening entry routes through T Levels

T Levels, large Level 3 qualifications equivalent to 3 A Levels, prepare students for work or further study in their chosen industry. Each T Level is designed with employers to reflect industry need. Industry placements of a minimum of 315 hours are a core, mandatory element of T Levels, aimed at giving students substantial real-life work experience and the opportunity to apply their learning. Employers also benefit from hosting students on their placement by helping them build their future workforce and tackle skills shortages in their business, whilst boosting productivity and bringing in new ideas and perspectives.

A variety of employers, including [NHS Blood and Transplant](#), [Francis Crick Institute](#), and [Cogent Skills](#) are involved in hosting placements for students taking Science T Levels, and speak positively about the benefits to the student and to the employers' talent pipeline. 31% of Health and Science students who were working after completing their T Level were working for their placement employer,⁶² and DfE is updating the T Levels in Health and Science from September 2026 to further strengthen entry routes for young people. There is a wide range of support and resources to help employers of all sizes plan how to deliver high quality industry placements that suit the needs of the Life Sciences industry.⁶³ The Employer Support Fund will continue into financial year 2026-27, helping SMEs hosting industry placements for all T Levels to meet essential costs and ensure they can experience the benefits of T Levels in their business.

Action 11: Russell Group universities: supporting talent and commercialisation

Russell Group universities make a significant contribution to the UK's health and Life Sciences workforce, training more than half of biosciences graduates and half of biomedical engineers. Through their Healthier Communities 2030 commitment, they aim to be training 181,000 UK graduates by 2030 with skills that support a healthier future, including clinical, scientific, engineering, digital, and policy expertise. Additionally, by expanding entrepreneurship support, mentoring, funding, and business incubation, Russell Group universities aim to help Life Sciences spinouts secure around £5 billion in external investment in 2030.⁶⁴

Supporting graduate employability in Scotland

The Scottish Universities Life Sciences Alliance (SULSA) administers the Graduate Employability Masterclass (GEM) programme, an industry-led initiative running since 2013 that strengthens graduate employability across Scotland's Life Sciences and chemical sectors. Delivered in partnership with 12 Scottish universities, industry, Skills Development Scotland, and ScotCHEM, the masterclasses help students understand the diversity of roles available within Life Sciences companies, develop their career pathway, and improve job applications and CVs through direct mentoring from industry representatives. Modelled on Technology Readiness Levels, the modules take students from concept through to commercialisation, building commercial awareness, sector-specific knowledge, and professional networks that ease the transition into employment. In 2021, SULSA scaled the programme to reach 500 students across Scotland, with over 95% reporting positive feedback on its benefits to their career planning.^{65,66}

Action 12: The Lifelong Learning Entitlement will expand training opportunities for mid to late career workers by providing funding for modules in subjects that align with the Industrial Strategy

The Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will provide individuals with a loan entitlement to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education (£39,160 based on the maximum tuition fees for 26/27 academic year) to use over their working lives, up to the age of 60.⁶⁷

The LLE will, for the first time, enable access to student finance for modules of high-value courses. The LLE will make it possible to learn one module at a time, allowing for upskilling in high demand subjects, including those linked to Life Sciences such as computing, engineering, chemistry, physics, and mathematical sciences.

The expansion of student finance through the introduction of the LLE will create opportunities for FE and HE providers to work with employers and industry bodies to co-design more flexible provision and new learner pathways into the workforce.

In addition, as part of the changes that will see the introduction of the LLE, government is removing the equivalent level qualification (ELQ) rules that currently prevent those who have already achieved a HE qualification from accessing government funding for a second qualification where it is an equivalent or lower qualification to the one they already hold. This has been identified as a significant barrier preventing individuals from accessing education to retrain or upskill.

Action 13: Recruiting skilled teachers into the further education workforce

DfE has just launched Taking Teaching Further (TTF) for 2026. TTF is a 2-year programme that financially supports FE providers to recruit industry professionals and retrain them as teachers. It also funds early career support, including a reduced timetable. The programme applies to those teaching across the 15 technical routes as identified by Skills

England, English, maths, science, and SEND specialist roles. Not only does this initiative aim to bolster the teaching workforce for science subjects fundamental to Life Sciences, but it provides a route for industry professionals to bring their unique, hands-on perspectives to the classroom.

Action 14: Building in-demand skills through Skills Bootcamps

Skills Bootcamps tackle shortages in priority areas like Life Sciences by offering flexible, employer-led training of up to 16 weeks at Levels 2–5. Programmes such as Laboratory Skills, Pharmacy Technician and Manufacturing, and Biotechnology Skills Bootcamps help adults build in-demand skills quickly. Employers can shape provision by identifying local skills needs, co-designing and delivering programmes, offering guaranteed interviews to graduates, and using Bootcamps to upskill existing staff – ensuring training aligns with current and future sector demand.

Giving industry a voice in designing the skills offer

Action 15: Skills England

Skills England plays a central role in ensuring the government’s skills system meets industry needs. It works with employers, sector bodies, and regional partners to assess current and future skills demand, using data and direct engagement to shape training products. This includes co-creating new apprenticeship units, such as the rapid development of a battery manufacturing unit following employer consultation,⁶⁸ and AI leadership units designed to build AI leadership literacy, including the capabilities and limitations of AI and the opportunities it presents to Life Sciences companies – themes brought up in industry engagement to inform the Jobs Plan. Skills England also ensures that existing apprenticeships that support the government’s growth and opportunity agendas remain aligned to employer needs.

Action 16: Skills England Investment and Infrastructure Skills Service

The recently established Skills England Investment and Infrastructure Skills Service will complement government’s existing support offer for Life Sciences investments. The service has been set up to provide authoritative advice on skills supply, provision, and training; work with investors to co-design solutions; and mobilise delivery in partnership with government, regions, and providers. This support could be valuable for large investment projects with clear skills needs.

Action 17: Supporting the sector with high-impact wrap-around grant support

The Office for Life Sciences will continue to work with companies receiving government grants and scale-up support to better understand future workforce and skills needs associated with major Life Sciences investments. This will help maximise the job creation benefits of public investment and strengthen links between supported businesses and domestic talent pipelines.

Skills of the future

AI is creating one of the biggest opportunities in generations to grow the economy, boost productivity, and open up better jobs for people across the country. AI can help workers do more of what matters, make work more rewarding, and expand opportunities for everyone.

Action 18: Tech skills with TechFirst

TechFirst is the Department for Science and Technology (DSIT)'s flagship tech skills programme designed to build advanced digital, data, and AI capability across the UK workforce. It will support priority sectors, including Life Sciences, to adopt emerging technologies and develop the hybrid skills increasingly required. DSIT will work with the Office for Life Sciences and industry partners to ensure the programme reflects sector needs and helps accelerate the uptake of digital and AI skills across the workforce.

Action 19: Integrating AI and digital skills in existing training pathways

Government is working across education and skills systems to ensure these capabilities are embedded within relevant qualifications and training pathways, in line with wider reforms to technical education and skills standards. Government will encourage take up of these qualifications and entry routes by supporting the implementation of a new flexible model for work experience for secondary school pupils. Alongside higher-level digital and AI capability, government is strengthening the essential digital skills pathway from Entry Level 1 up to Level 2 by updating the National Standards for Essential Digital Skills, reflecting the core skills adults need to participate confidently in life and work and ensuring the offer remains relevant to learners' needs in the context of rapidly evolving technology.

Roche: Building Enterprise-Wide AI Capability Through Responsible Upskilling

Roche, with close to 3,000 UK employees among its 100,000-strong global workforce,^{69,70} identified AI as central to accelerating drug development and expanding patient access to medicines. To close a widespread skills gap, the company delivered a mandatory AI training programme to its entire global workforce in the second half of 2025. The curriculum combined practical tool use, ethical considerations, and a clear human-in-the-loop accountability model, delivered through live virtual sessions and short asynchronous modules with personalised progress dashboards. AI champions sustained momentum through fortnightly "Everyday AI" peer-learning sessions. The impact was significant: around 50% of Regulatory employees saved four or more hours per week through AI use.⁷¹ The programme also drove a cultural shift, with employees moving from viewing AI as threatening to embracing it as an everyday tool.

Action 20: Leadership and entrepreneurial skills provision

As part of building a stronger end-to-end skills pipeline, including progression from Levels 4 and 5 into higher-level roles, the sector will benefit from more flexible provision in leadership, management, and professional skills.

From January 2027, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement will transform how individuals can access skills training, by funding both full courses and, importantly, modular study. The LLE allows Higher Technical Qualifications to be studied in a more accessible way, allowing learners to build towards higher-level skills over time, in a way that fits around work. For the Life Sciences sector that flexibility is particularly valuable. It means learners can upskill in targeted areas. For example, individual modules in relevant Higher Technical Qualifications like management, leadership, or technical business functions, without committing to full programmes upfront.

There is already a growing offer of Higher Technical Qualifications in business and management. These include Level 4 and 5 qualifications in areas like operations management, leadership, coaching, and business administration which provide a clear progression route into Level 6 and 7 roles. For example, qualifications such as Level 5 Diplomas in Operational Management or Higher National Diplomas in Leadership and Management are designed to support the kinds of professional roles that the sector requires. While many of these qualifications are relatively new, they form a key part of building a stronger, more flexible pipeline into higher-level professional and leadership skills.

Hiring

The UK Life Sciences sector is projected to need significant numbers of new workers in the coming years, to fill jobs created by growth and investment, as well as replacement of existing employees who leave the workforce due to retirement or other reasons.⁷² These hires will span all career stages and therefore require differing levels of qualifications and expertise. Given that only 4% of the sector's workforce is under 25 – less than half the national average – and that demographic data shows below-average representation of Black workers and disabled workers in the sector, it is particularly important that these entry-level opportunities and outreach activities are designed to reach and engage people from underrepresented groups.⁷³

Expand entry routes to the sector

Action 21: Supporting the government's youth mission and creating opportunities for young people

Recent data shows that almost one million young people are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), a 26% increase from pre-pandemic levels.⁷⁴ The government has been clear that it will not leave a generation behind, and is investing an additional £2.5 billion over the next three years through the Youth Guarantee and the Growth and Skills Levy to support almost one million young people and unlock up to 500,000 jobs, training, and learning opportunities. This includes a reform package for young people under 25, aimed at creating 50,000 additional apprenticeship opportunities, delivering 300,000 work placements to provide valuable experience, unlocking up to 90,000 jobs through the Jobs Guarantee and a further 60,000 through the Youth Jobs Grant, and expanding access to training and employment.^{75,76}

Young workers are also expected to be some of the largest beneficiaries of the Employment Rights Act, which Government analysis shows will increase employment and benefit over 18 million workers⁷⁷. The Life Sciences sector already provides a range of routes for young people, including industrial placements for students and apprenticeships, with 48% of apprenticeship starts in the wider science sector taken up by individuals aged under 25.⁷⁸

Furthermore, employers of all sizes recruiting an eligible 18–24-year-old who has been unemployed and on Universal Credit for at least six months are able to access a £3,000 Youth Jobs Grant, opening a new route for Life Sciences companies to bring young people into entry-level technical and support roles. The Jobs Guarantee also provides six months of paid employment at 25 hours a week at the relevant minimum wage, with the government covering 100% of employment costs, for eligible 18–24-year-olds who have been on Universal Credit and looking for work for 18 months. National delivery from November 2026 will give Life Sciences employers a fully funded route to test the potential of young people who might not otherwise reach the sector.

Action 22: Supporting SME Apprenticeship Participation

A substantial challenge for SMEs identified in our engagement is the financial cost of taking on apprentices. Government is taking action to alleviate this through financial support. From August 2026, training costs for 16–24-year-old apprentices at non-levy paying employers – which includes many Life Sciences SMEs – will be fully funded by government, removing one of the most consistently cited barriers to apprenticeship uptake by smaller firms in the sector. From October 2026, those same non-levy paying employers will be able to claim an apprenticeship hiring payment of £2,000 when they take on a new apprentice aged 16-24, providing meaningful financial support for SMEs to grow technician-level pipelines in areas such as bioprocessing and manufacturing.⁷⁹

Action 23: Supporting entry-level pathways in an AI-enabled economy

Through the new Early Careers Jobs Alliance backed by £20 million, DSIT is bringing together government, employers, trade unions, and young people to understand how AI is reshaping entry-level work and to develop practical approaches that protect and expand routes into employment.⁸⁰ The Alliance will map how entry-level roles are changing,

identify examples of good practice, and provide practical support to help employers redesign jobs while maintaining opportunities for those entering the labour market. Following an initial focus on the Digital and Technologies sector, the programme will expand across all eight Industrial Strategy sectors, including Life Sciences. The Office for Life Sciences will support DSIT in rolling the programme out to the Life Sciences sector, including by facilitating industry engagement and providing sector context.

Opening Doors for Young People Across the Life Sciences Sector⁸¹

Life Sciences employers across the UK offer a wide breadth of placements, apprenticeships, and work experience opportunities that help young people explore the sector and build the skills needed for long-term careers. Bayer UK's Insights into the Life Sciences Sector programme, launched in 2022, has supported over 500 students and delivered more than 400 hours of work experience, connecting young people with employees from both scientific and non-scientific backgrounds to showcase the diversity of roles available. Autolus, an SME developing CAR T cell therapies in Stevenage, has expanded its early careers offer through apprenticeships in good manufacturing practice (GMP), HR, and manufacturing science and technology, alongside MSc placements and STEM outreach designed to challenge traditional perceptions of advanced therapy manufacturing. UCB combines investment in the wider research ecosystem with practical workforce development, currently supporting 15 PhD studentships, 19 apprenticeships, 30 industrial placements, and 25 graduate placements – building on nearly 200 PhDs sponsored since 2004. Furthermore, since 2012 UCB has given more than 500 budding young scientists from underrepresented groups an insight into pharma careers through Work in Science Week. GSK offers over 146 apprenticeships from GCSE to postgraduate level, around 250 industrial placements, and 20 graduate roles each year. Its Unlocked programme has supported 163 students from lower socio-economic backgrounds since 2019, helping widen access into the sector.

Action 24: MSA apprenticeship brokerage

Young people aged 16–24, particularly those not in education, employment, or training (NEET), can face challenges in accessing employment opportunities,⁸² while employers – especially SMEs – often struggle to identify suitable candidates⁸³ and navigate the apprenticeship system. To tackle this, DWP is inviting Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) to apply to deliver Apprenticeship Brokerage Pilots, following the Prime Minister's December 2025 announcement of £140 million to improve 16–24-year-olds' access to apprenticeships. Up to £60 million will fund MSA delivery and £80 million will fund training and assessment, with pilots running across 5–8 areas from late 2026 to March 2029.⁸⁴

The pilots will test place-based, locally led brokerage systems that aggregate vacancies, build shared talent pools, and use a "clearing-style" model to match unsuccessful applicants with alternative opportunities. They aim to increase apprenticeship starts and completions, engage more SMEs, and build evidence to support the development of a

scalable model for wider rollout. By targeting NEETs, this intervention not only aims to support young people, but those of a lower socio-economic background – the rate of NEETs in lower working-class backgrounds is higher than any other socio-economic group (22%).⁸⁵

Unlock wider talent pools

Action 25: Support for workers transitioning into Life Sciences from other industries

The Oil and Gas Transition Training Fund, backed by £18 million of joint UK and Scottish Government investment over three years, supports current and former oil and gas workers to move into secure, high-skill roles in growing industries. Delivered by Skills Development Scotland, the Fund provides careers advice and funding for industry-recognised training and is being broadened across Scotland after a successful pilot in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

As announced in the North Sea Future Plan, government will deliver a North Sea Jobs Service, which will offer end-to-end career transition support for oil and gas workers looking to move into secure jobs in growing industries. The Jobs Service will work closely with industry to identify vacancies, match eligible workers to prospective employers, and identify ways to close any qualification gaps including through existing services, ensuring that workers are supported into jobs in critical sectors.

Government has confirmed that Life Sciences is now a destination sector under the Transition Training Fund, and will be under the North Sea Jobs Service, recognising the strong overlap in technical, engineering, and regulated-environment skills between offshore operations and Life Sciences manufacturing, bioprocessing, and quality roles – opening a new, funded route for experienced workers to transition into the sector.^{86,87}

Pennine Healthcare: Opening Routes into MedTech for Prison Leavers

Pennine Healthcare, a Derby-based MedTech company, is widening access to Life Sciences careers through Project Phoenix – a programme that enables prisoners on Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) to gain meaningful employment experience while contributing to the manufacture of critical medical products. The initiative shows how employers can build talent pipelines from non-traditional routes when they invest in trust, training, and structured support. By embedding prison leavers into regulated MedTech environments, Pennine has demonstrated that capable workers can emerge from overlooked groups, helping address persistent recruitment challenges in a sector facing around 50,000 manufacturing vacancies nationally.⁸⁸ The programme also challenges outdated perceptions of manufacturing by positioning it as purposeful, skilled work with direct societal impact – aligning social mobility with labour market need and strengthening domestic MedTech capability.

Maintain access to global talent

Action 26: Balancing overseas and domestic talent

The Office for Life Sciences will continue to work with the sector, and across government to support an approach that balances the government's objectives on reducing migration with the need for the Life Sciences sector to continue growing and attracting investment. This includes prioritising the development of domestic talent pipelines wherever possible, while ensuring employers can continue to access highly skilled international talent where there is a clear and legitimate business need that supports UK growth, research excellence, and innovation leadership.

This approach aligns with the government's Immigration White Paper, which establishes a new Labour Market Evidence Group and requires key sectors to produce workforce strategies that demonstrate investment in domestic skills alongside any continued overseas recruitment. The Life Sciences Jobs Plan will serve as the sector's workforce strategy in this context, and the Office for Life Sciences will engage with the Labour Market Evidence Group and the Migration Advisory Committee to ensure the sector's needs are properly reflected.⁸⁹

Good Jobs

Good jobs are central to economic prosperity and quality of life in the UK. That is why the government's Plan to Make Work Pay is bringing the UK's employment rights legislation into the 21st century, extending the employment protections already given by the best British companies to millions more workers across the country. The government is supporting employers to raise standards and to recruit and employ on a level playing field.

We want the Life Sciences sector to be one of the best sectors to work for in the UK, offering competitive and fair pay, strong progression opportunities and high satisfaction. Recruitment in the sector should also be inclusive and offer opportunities to a diverse talent pool.

Attraction and retention of talent

The Life Sciences sector is a vital source of high-quality jobs across the UK. Jobs are generally well paid. For example, in April 2025, the median yearly salary of a full-time pharmaceutical worker was just over £53,000, an increase of 17% from the previous year and 36% higher than the whole-UK median of approximately £39,000.⁹⁰ Competition for those with the required skills and experience is high, especially where these are also in demand in other sectors such as digital and tech companies. Life Sciences companies offer a range of employee benefits, in some cases going beyond statutory requirements.

Sub-sector	Median yearly full time salary April 2025	% change from previous year
Manufacture of basic pharmaceutical products and pharmaceutical preparations (SIC 21)	£53,181	17.3
Manufacture of irradiation, electromedical, and electrotherapeutic equipment (SIC 266)	£55,513	12.0
Manufacture of medical and dental instrument and supplies (SIC 325)	£36,854	11.4
Research and experimental development on biotechnology (SIC 7211)	£53,874	4.9
All UK employees	£39,039	4.3

Table 3: Median yearly salaries of Life Sciences sub-sectors. This data only includes businesses with a primary activity of one of the listed SIC codes in the table. Therefore, the median salaries will only relate to a subset of businesses in the UK Life Sciences sector. Data from table 3 can be found in table 16.7a of the [Earnings and hours worked data from the ONS Employee earnings in the UK: 2025 publication](#).

AstraZeneca: Enhanced Family-Friendly Parental Leave

AstraZeneca's parental leave policy goes significantly beyond UK statutory minimums to support working families and encourage more equal caring responsibilities. Eligible primary parents receive 29 weeks of full pay during maternity or adoption leave, while shared parental leave includes up to 27 weeks of full pay to be flexibly split between partners – helping reduce financial barriers and supporting more equal uptake of caring responsibilities. Non-primary parents may be eligible for either 14 weeks Enhanced New Parent Leave or 2 weeks Statutory New Parent Leave, depending on length of service, providing meaningful financial support at the start of a child's life. The policy also includes IVF treatment leave and structured "keep in touch" days, enabling a smoother transition back to work. Together, these provisions reflect a long-term commitment to supporting employees through significant life events and building a more inclusive workplace.

Progression opportunities at Moderna: Bianca Fiore – Supervisor, Drug Substance Operations

Bianca Fiore is a Manufacturing Supervisor at the Moderna Innovation and Technology Centre (MITC) at Harwell, Oxfordshire. In under two years, she has progressed from an entry-level Manufacturing Associate role to leading teams responsible for delivering manufacturing operations safely, efficiently, and to the highest quality standards.

“Looking back on my journey so far, I am proud of how quickly I have been able to develop my career. From joining as a Manufacturing Associate to leading teams and participating in industry leadership programmes, my experience demonstrates the opportunities for growth, development and progression that exist within the UK's Life Sciences sector and at Moderna.”

Bianca joined MITC in October 2024, at a time of significant growth for the site, and Moderna invested in her development from the outset. This included international training placements at its Norwood (USA) and Laval (Canada) sites, alongside structured opportunities to build her leadership and supervisory capability. Together, these experiences led to her direct promotion to Manufacturing Supervisor. More recently, Bianca was selected for the prestigious BIA Manufacturing Advisory Committee Leadership Programme, continuing her progression into industry-wide leadership.

Inclusive recruitment

A more diverse talent pipeline – one that opens up opportunities in the sector to people from all backgrounds and communities – will not only address representation gaps but will increase the number of people across the UK who can benefit from a rewarding career in Life Sciences.

Action 27: Social mobility

The Social Mobility Commission has identified Life Sciences, and STEM sectors more broadly, as facing significant social mobility challenges. For example, the BIA's 2022 research found that those in more senior roles were disproportionately likely to have grown up in households with access to doctoral-level knowledge and professional networks⁹¹. With 70% of the sector workforce estimated to hold a degree-level qualification,⁹² including 69% of workers in manufacture of basic pharmaceutical products, there is a risk that high educational thresholds act as a barrier to those from less advantaged backgrounds.

The actions in this plan address this challenge directly. Apprenticeships at Levels 2–6 provide an alternative entry route into the sector, while the Lifelong Learning Entitlement will enable individuals to access modular, flexible training without committing to full-time degree study. Careers outreach coordinated through the new industry-led body will target engagement with young people from underrepresented groups, helping to challenge

perceptions that Life Sciences careers are only accessible through traditional academic routes⁹³.

Autolus: People-First Recruitment to Broaden Access to GMP Careers

Autolus has built an end-to-end talent journey designed to widen access to careers in advanced therapy manufacturing by prioritising potential over prior experience. For entry-level GMP operational and technical roles, the company recruits on behaviours, motivation, and transferable skills rather than formal qualifications, opening routes for candidates from outside the traditional Life Sciences sector. A standardised assessment centre – combining team-based exercises, a structured interview, a practical task, and a short test – provides a consistent and equitable basis for selection. Successful candidates progress through bespoke bootcamp training tailored to specific roles, supported by a dedicated in-house training laboratory that replicates a GMP cleanroom environment. This model bridges theory and practice, embedding quality and compliance from day one while building a sustainable pipeline of diverse talent into regulated manufacturing careers.

Action 28: Cost of living

The concentration of Life Sciences employment in high-cost areas can present a particular barrier for junior workers and those from less advantaged backgrounds – 54% of Life Sciences employment was based at companies registered in London, the South East and the East of England regions.⁹⁴ Actions to support the growth of Life Sciences clusters in regions across the UK, as set out in the Place section of this plan, will help ensure that opportunities are not limited to the most expensive parts of the country. Flexi-job apprenticeships and remote or hybrid working practices, increasingly common across the sector, can also help mitigate cost-of-living pressures for early-career workers.

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