



Candidate Information Booklet

Freshwater Fisheries Section Head Principal Scientific Officer

**Salary: £61,673 - £64,469 Per annum
Plus, an employer pension contribution of 34.25%**

**Competition Reference Number: IRC323908
Closing Date for applications: 12 noon, Friday 27 March 2026**

Contents

.....	2
Recruitment overview	3
Environment and Marine Sciences Division	5
About the Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems Branch	6
Job Background.....	10
Eligibility Criteria.....	13
Shortlisting Criteria.....	14
Person Specification	15
Interview Criteria.....	16

Communication between HRConnect and you

HRConnect will issue competition communications electronically. Please ensure you check your email account regularly, to make sure that you don't miss any important communications.

Please update us with any changes to your email address and home address to ensure you are fully informed at all times.

Equal opportunities

Agri-Food and BioSciences Institute (AFBI) is an equal opportunities employer and has been awarded the Bronze Charter Mark in recognition for our commitment towards Gender Diversity and Inclusion in the workplace. All appointments will be made strictly on the basis of merit. If you have any queries with regard to this recruitment process or require any documentation in an alternative format, please contact HRConnect via email Recruitment@HRConnect.nigov.net or call 0800 1 300 330.

Feedback - AFBI is committed to providing feedback to assist the development of current and future applications.

Recruitment overview

Thank you for your interest in our organisation. At AFBI you will find a fantastic team spirit and a commitment to the development of both you and your skills so that you can choose to have a long-term career with us.

This Candidate Information Booklet offers specific information to applicants.

Please note (AFBI specific) - read across will not be undertaken by the panel. The candidate must demonstrate how they meet each criterion in the relevant response to each criterion.

Please read this document carefully in advance of submitting your application and retain it for reference throughout the recruitment process.

At AFBI, we take great pride in the work we undertake. All AFBI employees are appointed on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.

We wish you every success in your application!

Important dates - It is intended that interviews for this post will take place in AFBI HQ, Newforge Lane, Belfast on 29 and 30 April 2026.

Compulsory documentation - It is compulsory that all candidates invited to attend an assessment and/or interview, bring sufficient identification. Your attendance may not be permitted in instances where identification cannot be shown.

You want to change the world. So do we.

[Agri-Food and BioSciences Institute \(AFBI\)](#) is a leading provider of scientific research and services to government, non-governmental organisations and commercial organisations. We are sponsored by our key stakeholder, the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

Our customers include a range of local, national and international commercial companies, Northern Ireland and UK Departments, Agencies and associated bodies in the European Union.

As a leading institute of research, we tackle the complex challenges of our industry through purpose-driven science. We are a community with a common goal: to leave the world better than we found it. Are we ambitious? Definitely. Are our ambitions achievable? Absolutely. AFBI has been defying scientific boundaries to create measurable, scalable and enduring solutions to agri-food and marine science complexities in Northern Ireland - and beyond - since 2006.

We are delighted that you are considering joining us.

Of all the many factors that come together to make AFBI what it is, nothing is more important than our employees. Every area of our service delivery is underpinned by a number of dedicated teams working in synchrony to ensure the provision of scientific excellence. Across our four divisions, every team member, from those on the scientific front to those working behind the scenes in one of our offices, plays an essential role in delivering our long tradition of excellence, whilst helping to propel future discoveries. Together we are better.

Our People Vision is to:

Attract, empower and grow purpose-driven staff with the passion and capability to pursue excellence, embrace technology and cultivate innovation and change.

This is how we do great science.

Great people. Great science.

Environment and Marine Sciences Division

Environment and Marine Sciences Division (EMSD) was established as a separate science division in 2021 following a review of AFBI's organisational structure. The establishment of the Division reflected the increasing importance and amount of scientific work undertaken by AFBI in the agri-environment, marine and aquatic ecosystems areas.

The Division is focused on evidence-based science, which is key to addressing the significant environmental challenges whilst ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources and the future prosperity of the agri-food sector. The Division is in a unique position to deliver on a high impact and quality integrated programmes of research spanning from the soil to the sea.

EMSD Branches

Agri-Environment Branch interfaces between intensive livestock production, and environmental management and regulation. This includes investigating the impacts of agricultural land use practices on soil, water and air, and identifying ways of optimizing land-based livestock production.

Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems Branch conducts research and development, monitoring and technology transfer in marine fisheries stock assessment, coastal zone science, biological oceanography, marine ecosystem health, and freshwater fisheries stock assessment.

This job role sits within the **Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems Branch**.

About the Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems Branch

Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems Branch (FAEB) is one of three national marine and freshwater science laboratories in the United Kingdom delivering scientific services and advice to government on marine and aquatic matters. We conduct research and development, monitoring and technology transfer in support of the sustainable management of productive, healthy and biodiverse marine and freshwater ecosystems, including fisheries and aquatic resources, focusing particularly on the needs of Northern Ireland.

Our work programme is delivered by approximately 65 permanent staff, together with contract staff, temporary staff and students. Our 53m marine research vessel R.V. *Corystes* and the availability of Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) facilities at the River Bush Salmon Station are among our key assets.

FAEB conducts science programmes across the following core areas: -

- Marine Fisheries
- Marine Ecology
- Oceanography & Limnology
- Freshwater Fisheries

We work collaboratively to foster multidisciplinary research programmes that merit national and international recognition, attract scientific collaborations and help develop novel ideas. We provide evidence-based research that informs policy, addresses emerging scientific questions and supports an ecosystem-based approach to the sustainable management of Northern Ireland's aquatic resources. By integrating our knowledge of fish stocks, the environments they live in and the underlying processes that underpin production and sustainability, we aim to apply an ecosystem approach in addressing DAERA, national and international marine and fisheries emerging scientific challenges.

The FAEB Freshwater Fisheries group carries out fish stock assessments in rivers and lakes across Northern Ireland, providing management advice to the DAERA Inland Fisheries and Water Management units. Collected data supplies Northern Ireland's reporting requirements into the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO), national and international management of salmon and eel stocks and assessments of river and lake quality and ecology. Freshwater fisheries scientific staff are based at Newforge Lane Belfast and at the Bushmills Salmon station.

Job Information and Employee Benefits

There is currently one full-time, Section Head, Principle Scientific Officer permanent position to be filled in the Freshwater section in the Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems Branch (FAEB).

A reserve list will exist and will be held for a period of 12 months from the date of interview, to cover any similar vacancies which may arise.

Salary

Currently the salary for the post will be within the range £61,673 - £64,469 within which pay increases will be on an incremental basis provided staff performance reports are satisfactory.

Starting salary will be at the minimum of the scale.

Working Hours

The successful candidate will be required to work 5 days each week, totalling 37 hours. On occasions there may be a requirement to work outside normal hours, which may include some evening/night and weekend working. AFBI operates a flexi working system.

Location

The successful candidate will normally be based at AFBI Headquarters, Newforge Lane Belfast, BT9 5PX. They may also be expected to work at other AFBI sites in Northern Ireland as required. The successful candidate will occasionally need to work on or by lakes and rivers, on small vessels, and in inclement conditions.

Hybrid working can also be considered.

Travel

The post will entail some travel throughout the UK, Ireland and internationally. The successful candidate will be required to drive AFBI vehicles as part of their duties and must therefore have a full current UK driving licence for manual vehicles to meet the requirements of the post in full.

Pre-employment checks

Pre-employment checks consist of a qualification check and an AccessNI check. The security check required for this post is basic level. HRConnect will provide your details to Experian who will undertake this check. This is a two-part process during which all communications will be issued to you electronically.

Medical

The successful postholder will be required to undertake a medical in advance of securing appointment to confirm that they are fit to carry out the physical duties of the post, working on vessels and in or beside water ways required for scientific studies

Health, Safety

AFBI is required to ensure that there is full compliance with all relevant Health and Safety legislation concerning the health, safety, and welfare of its employees at work and of others who may be affected by its operations.

Training

Appropriate training will be provided, where required, to enable the successful candidates to carry out the full range of assigned duties. It will also be a condition of appointment that the post holder must have completed a Personal Survival Techniques course or be able to pass the course (if not already undertaken within the last five years).

Annual Leave

In addition to the usual public and privilege holidays, there is an annual leave allowance of 25 days, increasing to 30 after five year's satisfactory service.

Right to Work

Right to work checks are mandatory for successful candidates. For AFBI there are no nationality requirements therefore share codes are not required at application stage.

VISAs (if applicable)

If there is a requirement for a VISA/VISA renewal, AFBI would not be responsible for the financial costs, this would be the onus of the successful candidate. AFBI will however support the Certificate of Sponsorship.

Probationary Period

The post holder will serve 12 months' probation in the new post. This will commence from the date of appointment. At the end of the probation period a formal review will be conducted.

Professional Development

We believe in our employees and understand the importance of investing in ongoing development. Support for professional development will always be considered.

Employee Benefits

AFBI offers employees an unrivalled benefits package. For further information please click [here](#).

Further Information

Further Information about the post may be obtained from Emma Horner, AFBI People Operations & Workforce Planning Advisor at EMSDpeopleandculture@afbini.gov.uk.

For information on how the recruitment process will be managed and for further recruitment and selection resources, please click [here](#).

For information on our equal opportunities, please click [here](#).

Job Background

There is currently one full time, permanent opportunity for a Section Head in, FAEB at Principle Scientific Officer Grade 7. The successful candidate will report directly to the FAEB Head of Branch.

This is an opportunity for an experienced scientist to lead and further develop the freshwater fisheries portfolio within FAEB. The post-holder will steer evidence-based research and contribute to the wider FAEB framework of an ecosystem-based approach to the management of Northern Ireland's aquatic environment. The role requires an individual who will enhance and maximise AFBI's science reputation internationally. The work is largely office based and requires skilled communication with staff and external representatives.

The main duties of the role:

1. To conduct scientific research

As Section Head you will be responsible for the execution and management of projects that support the sustainable management of the freshwater fishery resource in Northern Ireland. You will manage the freshwater fisheries elements of the DAERA-AFBI Assigned Work Programme and complementary externally funded projects to ensure that AFBI meets and maintains its long-term freshwater and migratory fish stock monitoring objectives for policy and external customers.

As an active scientist in the field of freshwater fisheries science and ecology, you will identify key research issues and propose research projects addressing the ecology and stock assessment of freshwater fish and fisheries resources, in support of sustainable and responsible aquatic ecosystem management. The research should support the development of policy and management strategies by government departments and needs to comply with international legislation, directives, and agreements including provision of stock management advice for commercial and recreational fisheries, and conservation of fish species listed under nature protection legislation.

The post requires regular working with scientists from other UK and European laboratories, customers, stakeholders and international science organisations such as ICES. Within Ireland, the post holder will maintain operational links with Inland Fisheries Ireland, The Loughs Agency, and the Marine Institute to foster collaborative information gathering and joint advice on trans-boundary freshwater catchments and migratory fish species which span the Northern Ireland- Republic of Ireland border.

You will take a leading role (Chair or Establishment Licence Holder) in the AFBI aquatic ecosystems Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Board (AWERB), and if required undertake the necessary training to gain or hold a Personal Licence under the Animals Scientific Procedures Act (ASPA).

You will supervise and participate in relevant projects and ensure that conclusions are simply and clearly communicated to appropriate stakeholders. The post holder will also be expected to initiate data collection, analysis, interpret

outputs, prepare reports arising from the projects and publish findings in scientific journals.

2. To manage staff and resources

As Section Head you will manage staff including project leaders, scientific and technical support staff in the freshwater fisheries section. You will maximise their efficiency and facilitate their personal and professional development.

You will be responsible for resources within the freshwater section including:

- ensuring that stock monitoring, analytical and stock assessment work programmes are maintained and developed.
- management of delegated resources, appropriate to a section head, including, business planning and bidding for resources and managing budgets.
- ensuring the delivery of scientific services for external customers, managed under a range of contracts.
- management of staff resources within the section and participation in staff recruitment where required in section and/or branch.
- liaison with research vessel manager and engineering team to ensure smooth operation of field-going activities.
- ensuring section compliance with ISO 9001 standards for research activities and projects.
- implementation and management of Health and Safety policy within the section.

The post holder will join FAEB's leadership team, providing senior leadership support to the head of branch and contribute to setting strategic direction of the scientific work programme within the branch.

3. To secure funding and work with funders

The post holder will be required to secure funding from government (such as DAERA, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)), EU, industry funders, and other funders as appropriate, and establish and maintain good relationships with these funders. The post holder will oversee the management of the contractual and financial aspects of research projects and contracts and will ensure that allocated budgets are handled in a fully auditable manner.

4. To deliver specialist advice

As an expert on freshwater fisheries, ecology and management, you will provide informed opinion to government departments and non-government stakeholders in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, on issues relating to freshwater fisheries resources in Northern Ireland.

You will represent AFBI and Northern Ireland at an appropriate level on technical and scientific committees across the United Kingdom and internationally. Such representation should enhance your own and the Institute's reputations.

5. To undertake continuous professional development

You will be required to keep up to date with knowledge and developments in fisheries science and management through scrutiny of relevant scientific literature and establishing national and international collaborative links. You will be prepared to attend and participate in scientific conferences and workshops, and to use training courses to enhance your personal development and the organisation's scientific reputation.

6. Student supervision

The post holder will have the opportunity to co-supervise graduate and postgraduate students involved in research programmes.

To fulfil other duties

The post holder will be required to fulfil any other duties and responsibilities as determined by management that fall within the remit of the post. The job description is not intended to be rigid and inflexible but should be regarded as working guidelines within which the post will work.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must, by the closing date for applications provide evidence in their application form that they meet the following eligibility criteria.

- 1 a. A PhD in a relevant scientific discipline AND 3 years' post-doctoral experience in fisheries or aquatic science or a related scientific discipline.

OR

- 1 b. A Post Graduate qualification in a relevant scientific discipline AND 5 year's relevant experience in fisheries or aquatic science or a related scientific discipline.

AND

2. Evidence of a national and/or international standing in the area of the position through evidence of experience aligned with at least two of the following:
- Peer reviewed publications in a relevant field with at least one being first or last author.*
 - Experience in securing and the delivery of substantial research funding.
 - meaningful participation on national and/or international committees.
3. Demonstrable practical experience in leading multi-disciplinary research teams, including developing and managing science programmes to meet customer needs.
4. Possess a full, UK current or exchangeable** driving licence from the list for manual vehicles, (to aid the successful candidate in driving an AFBI vehicle) enabling the licence holder to fulfil the duties of this role. As per the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), any reasonable adjustments will be considered**.

*Candidates must provide evidence of peer reviewed publications in a relevant field by submitting a fully cited bibliography (authors, paper title, journal title, volume and page numbers) of all publications. Candidates can provide this information within the application form itself, or if necessary, it can be sent by the closing date for applications as a separate attachment to: recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net.

**Information on validity and exchange of driving licences can be found on:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/exchanging-your-foreign-driving-licence>
and <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/advice-foreign-driving-licences-northern-ireland>.

Applications will also be considered from applicants with relevant formal qualifications considered by the selection panel to be of an equivalent or higher standard to those stated.

Relevant or equivalent qualifications: give the type of qualification and date awarded (the date awarded is the date on which you were notified of your result by the official awarding body). If you believe your qualification is equivalent to the one required, the onus is on you to provide the panel with details of modules studied etc so that a well-informed decision can be made.

SHORTLISTING CRITERIA

A sift of all application forms received will be carried out by the appointed selection panel to assess each applicant against the eligibility criteria. The selection panel will reach a decision as to whether or not an applicant meets each criterion on the basis of the evidence provided on their application form. This will be completed on a scored basis for criteria 2 – 4 with a minimum score set for each criterion. Only those applicants assessed as meeting all essential criteria will be eligible to proceed to the next stage of the selection process.

However, in the case of a high volume of applicants the Institute may decide to limit the number of applicants it invites for interview in a proportionate manner. In this instance all applicants who meet the essential requirements will be listed in merit order according to their total score and the highest scoring applicants will proceed to interview.

Person Specification

This position is analogous to Grade 7 in the NICS.

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate the skills and competencies set out in the Essential Criteria. In addition, they will also be required to demonstrate competency in Professional Knowledge & Skills pertaining to this post together with the skills and competencies set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) competency framework at Level 4 for the purpose of personal and professional development.

Selection panels will design questions to test the applicant's knowledge and experience in each of the above areas and award marks accordingly.

You should refer to the behaviours listed under level 4 of the relevant competence areas.

To view the NICS Competency Framework, please click [here](#).

Interview Criteria

In addition to satisfying the eligibility criteria applicants will also be expected to display the following qualities and skills at interview-

PRESENTATION

Before the competence-based interview, candidates will be required to deliver a presentation, lasting no more than 7 minutes, the subject of which will be provided to candidates in the invitation to interview letter.

Candidates should fully prepare their presentation in advance of the interview, as no preparation time will be provided on the day of interview. Your presentation should be delivered via PowerPoint and you will be asked to submit it to HRConnect by a specific date prior to your interview. Full details will be provided should you be invited to interview.

Following the presentation, the panel may elect to ask questions on the presentation.

The presentation will be used to assess against **Seeing the Big Picture** competence.

1. Presentation

Marks available: 20 Minimum Standard: 12

2. Professional Skills and Knowledge

Marks available: 40 Minimum Standard: 24

3. Leading and Communicating

Marks available: 20 Minimum Standard: 12

4. Making Effective Decisions

Marks available: 10

5. Collaborating and Partnering

Marks available: 10

Total marks available: 100

Overall pass mark: 60