

International Recruitment: Feeding the Celtic-Tiger

Ireland's booming 'Celtic-Tiger' economy has led to significant talent shortages that cannot be met from the domestic market alone. Actuaries are in big demand. If the tiger is to be kept fit and healthy then 'international recruitment' will become key. This article examines the role of international recruitment and its particular relevance to the Irish market.

Go west young man !

The world is truly getting smaller. The all-consuming trend of globalisation is dramatically changing peoples' attitudes to where they will work and live.

Whereas a job in a 'high-growth' market like the Far East might have traditionally seemed like an indeterminate exile, it is now a potentially shrewd and enriching step in a high-flying career.

Rather than considering why they should travel, actuaries are now asking themselves the question of why they should stay. No amount of talent and ability can overcome a lack of real opportunity in a given market.

Actuaries who view their potential employer market on a global scale are getting access to an incredible range of skills and experience with major global financial institutions. They can expose themselves to the excitement and energy of a high-growth economy, the business and culture of a major financial player and the experience of a role that they could not access in their domestic market.

Mutual Recognition

In addition, recent mutual recognition agreements were signed by the Faculty and Institute of Actuaries, the Canadian Institute of Actuaries, the Institute of Actuaries of Australia and the Society of Actuaries in the US. These agreements will facilitate global trade in actuarial services, allowing actuaries access to a professional marketplace on a scale not seen before.

International recruitment as a solution

Ireland's booming 'celtic-tiger' economy has led to dramatic talent shortages in almost every major industry as institutions struggle to scale up in order to meet increasing market demand. The actuarial profession is no exception in this regard. The additional success of Ireland's International Financial Services Centre (known as the IFSC) in Dublin has placed an even greater strain on available actuarial resources.

Domestic and IFSC based institutions are increasingly turning to 'international recruitment' as a solution.

Finding talent through networks

The key role of the international recruitment agency is to source talent from abroad.

One of the main tools that they use is a database network of affiliates around the world through which the right talent can be matched with the right roles. It means that the search for talent can be conducted both quickly and on a broad scale.

This network consequently enables actuaries around the world to identify and assess opportunities outside their own local market easily and efficiently. By sharing common practices and techniques, the networks can ensure that a particular client profile is suited to specific international roles, resulting in fewer surprises or potential disappointment for clients and employers alike.

The network concept has allowed domestic recruitment agencies to gear up their operation and access the globalisation trend, whether by finding talent for their own market or supplying talent to international markets. Indeed it has become an essential tool for any agency in meeting the demands of multi-national clients.

Using the internet

The arrival of the internet has created an additional powerful tool for the international recruitment agencies. It gives them instant access to the global market for talent, a platform from which they can provide an exceptionally quick yet confidential service and all at a reasonable cost.

By creating well managed web-sites, the search for talent can be brought directly to the individual in a non-intrusive and casual environment. People interested in working internationally can discretely make their own enquiries and searches through the web before directly approaching agencies.

By looking at a given agency's web-site, people can assess the type of roles the agency is offering. Such an assessment would cover location, job description and benefits. They would also get a feel for the business the agency may specialise in. Examples might be consultancy or contract work or seniority of roles. A good web-site can also give a basic feel – I emphasise the word basic ! - for the way the agency operates and conducts its business.

E-mail allows agencies to update potential clients anywhere in the world on new positions and opportunities in a fast yet fully confidential manner. Without necessarily wanting to make a career move in the near term, clients can keep in real-time contact with the global recruitment market. If something interesting comes in, they can decide whether to pursue it further.

Is Ireland becoming one big financial services centre ?

Dublin's phenomenally successful International Financial Services Centre offers a location from which a wide range of financial services business can be conducted with the benefit of a 10% tax rate. Since its creation in 1987, Irish authorities have shown a commitment to develop this initiative by implementing an impressive programme of legislative change designed to address perceived barriers to its development. This has culminated with the proposed introduction of one low tax rate of 12.5% for all institutions operating from Ireland (IFSC and non-IFSC based) in the year 2003, potentially turning the island into one big IFSC !

Big Names, Big Plans

One of the most striking recent features is the number of 'big-name' global financial players using the IFSC as the base from which to develop their pan-European businesses. This includes major life and general insurers, re-insurers and asset managers looking to sell their products across Europe through partnership arrangements with local distribution channels.

Growth rates can be phenomenal. There are many examples of offices in the IFSC expanding from a starting staff of under 10 to well over 100 within 2 years and some again where the numbers total well over 1,000.

It gives Irish based actuaries a unique opportunity to get in on the 'ground-floor' with quality financial institutions that have the brand name and financial muscle to build successful businesses selling into the European market.

Seniority of Roles

While the IFSC presents opportunities to actuaries of all levels, the number of senior roles being filled is particularly noteworthy. Fully qualified actuaries with over 5 years experience are taking up positions such as Chief Executive, Chief Financial Officer and Appointed Actuary, while actuaries with up to 2 to 5 years experience are managing sizeable business units. This has been a tremendous opportunity for Irish actuaries in particular who might have been forced to look abroad in the past to access such positions.

Remuneration

As the barriers to travelling come down, salaries go up. Employers increasingly find themselves competing for employees interested in working in a variety of different countries and therefore the company has to take cognisance of salary levels in these overseas markets. And while local conditions still influence, there has been a noticeable "internationalisation" (upwards!) of salaries and benefit packages.

And now for something completely different

As well as providing traditional actuarial opportunities, the IFSC has opened up a huge variety of alternative roles for actuaries working in Ireland.

There is a strong emphasis on product and marketing innovation through a variety of European distribution channels attracting actuaries who enjoy the cut and thrust of a brave new sales environment.

Actuaries who want to broaden their professional skills base and gain experience in wider fields have a choice of roles in structured finance, venture capital, asset management and financial re-insurance.

Knock on effect for the non-IFSC market

The strong growth of the 'Celtic-Tiger' has led to a significant scaling up by domestic Irish institutions creating even more demand for actuaries of all levels particular in the product and marketing disciplines.

A good sign of this growth has been the rise in Irish and international actuarial consultancy firms setting up offices in Dublin to service domestic and IFSC based insurance companies. Again, more opportunities for Irish based actuaries !

Should I stay or should I go ?

Ireland's high-growth economy and its strategic position as a platform to develop European markets offers actuaries tremendous opportunities that they might not be able to access in their local market.

With the rise in globalisation, actuaries are becoming much more critical of the rationale for only working in their own local market. The ability of international recruitment agencies to keep in closer ongoing contact through the internet and e-mail has strengthened this issue.

Demand for actuaries in the Irish market far exceeds the supply at all levels, providing great opportunities for both junior student and senior actuary alike.

The next step is down to you !

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