

## Increased opportunities in the medical devices sector

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The sector's ultimate goal is to become a self-regenerating industry, from which a series of new products can evolve.

A MEDICAL device can be defined as an object which is useful for diagnostic or therapeutic purposes. The term 'medical device' covers all products, except medicines, used in healthcare for the diagnosis, prevention, monitoring or treatment of illness or disability. This includes anything from contact lenses to heart valves.

Ireland is one of the leading global medical device centres, with a strong reputation for excellence in manufacturing and research driven activities. Overseas investment has increased substantially, particularly in manufacturing, but also in research and development.

The major medical devices industries in Ireland are in high growth and high valueadded activities, and include the manufacture of medical and surgical instruments, and surgical appliances and supplies. Ireland is also home to significant research and development operations, all of this means that the medical devices industry of Ireland is responsible for generating a significant amount of employment.

The sector has grown rapidly over the last decade in Ireland, particularly due to inward investment, with foreign owned companies accounting for 90% of employment. This foreign interest can be partly attributed to the value that the 'made in Ireland' brand has generated within the medical device industry.

Most of the Irish sector is focused on the manufacture of medical and surgical instruments as well as

surgical appliances and supplies. Although a great variety of products are produced by the sector, there is a strong focus on technologies for minimally invasive surgery, particularly in cardiovascular surgery.

The Irish Medical Devices Association (IMDA) is the business association within IBEC for the medical devices and diagnostics sector. It is working to make Ireland the location of choice for R&D, manufacture and marketing of innovative products in the medical device sector.

IMDA works to make this goal a reality by ensuring that the government, its agencies and its regulators understand just how much the medical devices industry contributes to the economy.

According to the IMDA, the industry exports products to a value in excess of 6 billion per annum and annual export growth is approximately 16%.

"The Irish government has identified the medical technology sector as one of the key drivers of industrial growth for the future and provides a wide range of supports to encourage and foster this growth" explained Sharon Higgins, director of the IMDA.

While the majority of the industry originates from abroad, with 10 of the world's top 12 companies based here, the indigenous base is growing rapidly too. But, regardless of the origin of the company, the growth within the industry has had a significant impact on employment, with over 26,000 people directly employed in the sector, which amounts to 11.5% of Ireland's manufacturing workforce. The jobs within the sector vary as the industry itself grows and changes, as Higgins explained.

"The medical technology industry in Ireland is changing from being prominently manufacturing to being more complex and driven by R&D, " she said. "It now involves intensive collaboration between a broad range of partners, including research institutions, clinicians, manufacturing companies and government agencies. But, for Ireland's medical technology sector to achieve its potential, the industry requires strategic leadership, a highly skilled and adaptable workforce and continuous improvement in productivity through investment in technology."

All of this will be taking place in a sector which has evolved from its purely manufacturing-based beginnings. And, what this means for careers is that there has been a notable increase in value-added jobs.

"The research and development engineering side has picked up quite considerably here in Galway," said Deirdre Kennedy, general manager of Sigmar Recruitment. "There has been an increase in indigenous companies here too, in an effort to not be so reliant on the US. But the manufacturing end of things is still very strong here, so the quality and manufacturing engineers, process engineers, manufacturing supervisors and other such roles are still in demand within the industry.

The sector has been further bolstered by the fact that the scientific and lab analyses side of the medical devices industry is becoming very big in terms of farming because of the increase in usage of medical devices in farming products and techniques. This has created a big demand for validation engineers, lab analysts and other such roles.

According to Kennedy, about 80% of the people that apply to Sigmar are looking to get into the medical devices sector. Thus, as the sector continues to grow, so do the employment opportunities.