

Biotech industry hires 4,000 freshers

14 December 2012 | Features | By Narayan Kulkarni

Biotech industry hires 4,000 freshers



The Indian biotech industry growing at 18.5 percent comprises of 500 companies from various sectors such as biopharma, agriculture, bioinformatics, industrial biotechnology, bioservices, and biosuppliers. The industry looks at recruiting fresh minds as well as experienced personnel. Each year depending on the size of the organization these companies recruit close to 4,000 students with biotechnology backgrounds. Companies having revenue of over Rs200 crore recruit about 100 freshers while firms having revenue of Rs100-200 crore appoint 50-100 students. The companies having less than Rs 100 crore hire about 20-50 students. Companies with less than Rs50 crore look at hiring about 5-10 freshers each year. The offerings are for various functions such as R&D, sales and marketing, quality control, production and operations.

India has close to 450 colleges and institutes offering courses on biotechnology. This number has been declining in the last couple of years because the industry hasn't grown to the level to absorb all the students graduating from these institutes. The country has about 130 public institutes, offering post-graduate, MPhil and PhD courses, 40 engineering colleges and 280 private institutes offering under-graduate, post-graduate, MPhil and PhD courses. In all, India has about 40,000 students who are pursuing biotechnology as post-graduate, MPhil and PhD courses while about 50,000 students are pursuing biotechnology related courses at undergraduate level across the nation. So the ratio for supply and demand is in the range of 25:1.

The companies look for the best of the talent and take different approaches such as by participating in campus placements, advertising on their websites and references to hire the best candidates. Very few companies prefer to advertise in local media or newspapers and job portals. The experienced candidates are hired through placement consultancies.

Sharing information to the BioSpectrum Human Resources Survey 2012, Mr Saikiran Kalluri, manager, human resources (HR), talent acquisition team, Biocon, said, "We recruit close to 200 freshers every year. We conduct campus recruitment and also get a lot of responses to our advertisements on our website. Typically for the tier one colleges, we have a campus drive wherein senior management visits the campuses and personally handpicks students. We ideally prefer candidates with a life sciences background."

"Quintiles India recruits on an average of close to 80-100 freshers every year. We have been seeing a gradual increase in our intake of freshers over the last few years and are hopeful that this trend will continue. We rely entirely on campus recruitment for our intake of freshers and enjoy a great relationship with many of the leading educational institutes in our discipline which has helped us recruit good talent," adds Ms Trupti Talati, senior director, human resources, Quintiles.

Similarly Mr Nitendra Singh Rautela, senior manager, HR, Fortis Clinical Research (FCRL) said, "We believe in hiring freshers and grooming them as per our standards. Every year FCRL looks to impart quality training to a maximum number of students. On an average we induct around 15-20 student trainees every year. For filling up of the fresh positions either we absorb the in-house trainees post completion of their training or invite applications from various schools, colleges and institutes."

Besides biotechnology industry, even companies in supplier segment and information technology companies, with life sciences and healthcare verticals, recruit freshers. Sharing the hiring process, Mr Manish Sinha, director, human resources, Becton and Dickinson (BD), India said, "Hiring is a part of campus engagement at BD India. We hire summer interns from premier business schools and pharma graduates for our successful sales trainee program. We hire summer interns as that gives us the best opportunity to assess the management student. Once the summer internship is complete we then have the option of offering a pre-placement offer or pre-placement interview to the student. For our sales trainee program, we hire fresh graduates from campuses across the country who have pharmaceutical and BSc courses in their curriculum."

In addition to the principals, distributors who are dominating the supplier segment with over 75 percent (in terms of number) do look at biotechnology students for sales and after sales services. Mr Navneet Trehan, CEO, Genaxy Scientific said, "We recruit a mixed blend of experienced and fresh people every year and the ratio is generally 65-35 percent. We receive lot of applications online and we also conduct campus interviews in universities such as PUMBA, Mata Vaishno Devi and Amity University. Recruitments are done through newspaper advertisement in smaller towns and not in the metros."

Skills that companies look for in freshers

As the biotechnology industry covers different aspects of sciences such as biology, pharmacology, biophysics, biochemistry, nanotechnology, and informatics, the companies look at various skill sets among the students.

Anthem Biosciences, a contract research organization, prefer to have technical skills (organic chemistry, analytical chemistry), communication skills, and attitude to learn in freshers. Mr Ravindra Chandrappa, chief operating officer, Anthem Biosciences said, "We find that we have to invest a lot of time and money for training new recruits. They are quite underprepared for the demands of the industry."

Mr AR Ramachandran, general manager, human resources, Indian Immunologicals (IIL) said, "Being predominantly a farmer-oriented organization, commitment to rural work is our foremost priority. Quality is improving but not commitment to the same degree. This is easily seen from the fact that people jump their line from their core area to more lucrative areas. Thus, even where quality education is given, the fruits of education do not reach the society."

Apart from commitment, he further said, "We look for good subject knowledge, some exposure to real world (through field work experience, project work), good communication skills, ability to think practically and creatively, and a taste for continuous learning. We specifically look for people with varied interests as this improves 'learn ability'. It is not unusual for IIL to ask a lot of questions on 'other interests' to check on 'learn ability' specifically."

The criteria for recruitment at Novozymes South Asia, a leading global industrial enzyme player, includes technical or specific knowledge and skillset in the biotech industry. Also in areas such as IT and finance, besides domain knowledge, the company looks for analytical skills, academic performance, drive and enthusiasm. Ms Ajitha Pullakat, head P&O, Novozymes South Asia said, "Since we are looking for specific qualifications, we target colleges who have particular curriculum relating to our business and thus target those students."

While hiring freshers at Biocon, Mr Kalluri said, "We look at their ability to apply theoretical knowledge in regular life. Given that we are a fast growing company, we prefer candidates who have the drive and passion to succeed and can contribute positively to our growth rate. Integrity and the ability to take challenges head-on is also something that we look for when recruiting freshers. We have been regular recruiters at a few top institutes in India and continue to have strong relationships

with them on account of the student quality that we obtain. We are also exploring new institutes which can give us a wider pool of candidates to choose from to meet our increasing demand for fresh talent. We have partnered with some institutes where the course curriculum is jointly developed by the industry and the institute, with the idea of recruiting industry-ready candidates by the time they graduate."

Sharing details about the qualities Quintiles look among freshers, Ms Talati, Quintiles said, "We look for freshers who share and will embrace Quintiles' value system of customer service, team work, integrity, quality and leadership. They must have a high level of adaptability and be focused on continuous learning. Most of all, we look for freshers who share a passion for helping to find a cure for the world's most challenging diseases."

Ms Talati further adds, "Quintiles has always believed in diversity of talent. Freshers bring innovative, new and divergent thinking into the organization which is vital. Equally important, however, is the immense knowledge and experience brought in by talented people. We try to maintain a balance of freshers and talented people in the organization, depending on current and future needs of the organization and of our customers."

Commenting on the question on hiring freshers over experienced candidates, Mr Kalluri of Biocon said, "Different levels and tasks demand that we look at a wide talent pool. In case of roles where we need people to quickly adapt and deliver and also where we are looking at team leading and building skills, we prefer to hire people with prior work experience ideally in a similar scenario. For roles where quick learning, adaptability and fresh perspectives are important, we look to recruiting freshers. We do not treat hiring as a cost rather we think of it as an investment where each activity has its importance in the larger scheme of things and each candidate we hire will be contributing towards the Biocon growth story eventually."