

Building the Teams Behind Oxfordshire Science & Innovation

The people, operational roles and business support functions helping scientific organisations scale successfully.

Recruiting Excellence in Oxfordshire since 1998



Introduction

Since Allen Associates was established in Oxford in 1998, we have worked alongside employers across the county as their organisations have grown, changed and created new opportunities.

During that time, Oxfordshire's scientific and innovation community has developed significantly. Research-led organisations, university spin-outs, laboratories, technology businesses and ambitious SMEs have become an important part of the region's economy.

As these organisations grow, their people requirements grow with them. Scientific progress depends on specialist technical talent, but successful organisations also need the right support around those specialists. HR, Finance, Marketing, Administration and operational professionals help businesses recruit and support their people, manage increasing complexity, communicate effectively and give scientific and senior teams more time to focus on their core priorities.

The challenge is that these roles rarely remain static in a growing organisation. Responsibilities develop, systems change, and new commercial and operational pressures emerge. Recruitment therefore needs to consider both what the organisation needs now and how that role may develop.

Our longstanding relationships with Oxfordshire employers have been built through a collaborative, consultative approach: taking the time to understand the role, team, culture and candidate market before beginning the search.

"Allen Associates has been supporting Oxfordshire employers since 1998. With an established reputation, deep regional knowledge, and a consultative approach, we help scientific and innovation businesses build exceptional teams that drive long-term success."

In this guide, we look at four areas shaping recruitment within growing scientific and innovation businesses: the changing role of people teams, the operational roles supporting scientific organisations, the business support functions behind innovation and how growing organisations can build sustainable teams.



What Scaling Scientific Businesses Need From Their People Teams

Oxfordshire continues to strengthen its position as one of the UK's leading centres for science, research and innovation. The county is home to around 1,500 STEM-focused businesses and more than 12,000 people working in research and development.

Oxford also has a high employment rate. Official labour market data shows employment at 82.2% in Oxford, compared with 75.5% across Great Britain, while unemployment remains below the national average.

For employers, this reinforces what many are already experiencing: competition for skilled talent remains strong.

People teams are also planning around roles whose scope is changing. A role brief written around today's pressures may not reflect the capability the organisation will need in 12 months, particularly as automation and new systems change how work is managed.

Skills England's 2026 Life Sciences assessment adds further context, with 73% of Life Sciences priority occupations in critical or elevated demand.

Workforce planning moves closer to business strategy

Scientific businesses increasingly need to decide which capability should be hired externally, which skills can be developed internally, where flexible support could help and whether a role needs to be redesigned before it goes to market.

AI is adding another dimension to these decisions. ONS data shows that, among businesses planning to adopt AI, administrative and clerical roles were most commonly expected to be affected. Government research also identifies professional, scientific and technical activities as one of the sectors exposed to AI, particularly in clerical work, finance, business management and analysis.

However, automation does not remove the need for human judgement.

AI-supported tools can help with administrative recruitment tasks, financial processing and first drafts of marketing content. But people are still needed to assess candidate experience, review grant spend and project budgets, check technical accuracy and make decisions where context and judgement matter.

For people teams, the question is therefore not simply which tasks can be automated. It is where human judgement needs to sit and how that changes the skills required from future hires.



Plan for roles that are still evolving

Preparation should start before the job description is confirmed.

People teams need to separate the work requiring immediate delivery from responsibilities likely to grow, the skills that can be developed internally and the capability that needs to be hired now.

Those decisions can change the salary, seniority and interview questions, as well as whether the organisation needs a permanent hire or flexible support while the role is still taking shape.

Testing these decisions against the candidate market can show whether adjacent-sector experience could strengthen the shortlist, whether the salary range is realistic and whether the role needs to be reshaped before recruitment begins.

Retention depends on the reality around the role

The risk grows when the role someone joins is different from the role they applied for.

Someone recruited for HR coordination, finance support, marketing or administration can quickly find their responsibilities expanding into systems management, internal communication, reporting or process improvement.

Those changes can become retention issues when additional responsibilities only become clear after someone is in post. The recruitment process therefore needs to explain how the role works today, where it is developing, what support exists and how the organisation expects the position to change.

Candidate communication, offer conversations and onboarding should all reflect the same version of the role.

Market insight before the brief is agreed

Before an advert is written, salary, hybrid expectations, notice periods, candidate availability and transferable skills all need to be considered.

Candidates from adjacent sectors can be strong options, particularly where they are comfortable working around technical teams, handling complex information and operating in environments where roles continue to develop.

Understanding the candidate market before the brief is fixed gives employers more opportunity to adjust the role rather than discovering later that the requirements, salary and available talent do not align.

This is where early conversations with a recruitment partner can be particularly useful: testing the brief against the market before the search begins.

The Operational Roles Powering Oxfordshire Science

As scientific organisations scale, more work gathers around the research. Without clear ownership, senior leaders and technical teams can find increasing amounts of their time being absorbed by coordination, administration and operational activity.

Executive support, project coordination, operations and office management can therefore become important parts of the infrastructure around scientific teams.

Executive support keeps senior scientific teams moving

Growing scientific organisations can have investor updates, commercial discussions, recruitment approvals, programme decisions, site questions and partner communication all landing with the same senior team.

Executive support becomes increasingly valuable when senior time is being lost to scattered follow-up and unclear ownership.

Board papers, action logs, briefing notes and meeting preparation may require someone with enough context to connect technical detail with commercial priorities and recognise when missing information needs escalating.

In research-led or regulated environments, these roles can require discretion, judgement and confidence around technical language. If the position is presented as straightforward administration, the search can miss the level of experience actually required.

The hiring process therefore needs to establish whether the title reflects the work and whether candidates from adjacent sectors could bring the right senior support experience.

Project coordination ensures delivery is on track

As scientific organisations grow, more delivery work develops around research activity. Funding updates, partner communication, governance papers, recruitment activity and internal reporting can all affect technical milestones.

When that coordination remains spread across senior leaders, technical teams or general administration, delivery can become harder to track.

The issue is not always the volume of work. It can be the lack of clear ownership around updates, actions and decisions.

The hiring question is therefore whether the organisation needs administrative support, project coordination or a more experienced operations hire.

Making that distinction before recruitment begins means candidates can be assessed against the work they will actually need to manage.



Scientific environments need operational ownership

Scientific teams rely on spaces, equipment and processes that have to work consistently.

As organisations grow, equipment lead times, supplier issues, audit preparation, licences, maintenance requests and space planning can all begin to affect pace.

If that work remains informal, technical teams can lose time chasing suppliers, solving site issues or filling gaps in documentation. In research-led environments, relatively small operational delays can affect lab access and project timelines.

The hiring route should reflect the nature of the work.

A site move, audit, equipment programme or systems implementation may require flexible support around a defined period. Ongoing responsibility for facilities, procurement, compliance or technical operations may point towards a permanent hire with greater ownership.

Business support roles now require a wider brief

Automation is also changing what organisations require from business support. Routine tasks may increasingly be supported by technology, but people are still needed to check accuracy, manage information, understand confidentiality and keep processes reliable.

A business support role may therefore require systems confidence, communication judgement and attention to detail as well as traditional administrative skills. The important point is to avoid shaping the role too narrowly or too broadly.

A role built only around immediate pressure can become too wide, too senior for the salary or too vague for candidates to understand. Equally, a narrowly defined role can overlook the judgement, systems knowledge and communication skills required to work around technical teams and external partners.

Understanding salary expectations, candidate availability and transferable skills before recruitment starts can help employers define the level of operational support they actually need.

Behind the Lab: The Business Support Teams Driving Innovation

As Oxfordshire's science and innovation economy grows, finance, HR, communications, customer support and administration all become important as organisations move through research, investment and commercial expansion.

Skills England's 2026 Life Sciences assessment illustrates why these functions belong within workforce planning. Priority occupations in the sector extend beyond research and technical delivery into operations, information management, data interpretation, commercial activity and leadership.

Business support roles can look familiar by title while the work within them changes through systems, automation, funding requirements and growing external relationships.

Finance support gives leaders better control over growth

Financial activity can become complex quickly in science-led organisations.

Research projects, specialist equipment, grant funding, supplier costs, lab or office expansion, payroll and audit requirements all need consistent management.

In early-stage businesses, finance activity may sit with founders, senior leaders, outsourced providers or a small internal team. That can work for a period, but once leaders are regularly chasing purchase orders, checking supplier costs or trying to understand project spend, finance administration is already affecting senior capacity.

The hiring process needs to distinguish between transactional finance support and a role requiring greater systems confidence, procurement awareness, reporting discipline and judgement around project budgets or funding conditions.

HR and recruitment support strengthen the hiring process

Headcount growth puts pressure on the whole recruitment process, not only individual vacancies.

A science-led business may be recruiting technical specialists, finance support, commercial roles and operations staff simultaneously, often around funding, project delivery or expansion.

This is particularly important in a market where demand for many Life Sciences priority occupations remains high.

In this type of market, delays in role approval, interview scheduling, feedback, offer management or onboarding can affect whether a shortlist becomes a successful appointment.



HR Administrators, People Coordinators, Recruitment Coordinators and Office and People Managers can provide clearer ownership of the recruitment process, keeping hiring stages connected and communication moving.

Some organisations need administrative support around interviews and onboarding. Others need someone who can manage candidate communication, coordinate hiring managers, track approvals and identify where the process is beginning to slow down.

Understanding that difference helps determine the level of hire required.

Communications and customer support build external confidence

As science-led organisations grow, communication becomes more closely connected to commercial activity, recruitment, funding and reputation.

Research milestones, product updates, clinical or technical progress, events, investor conversations and partner communication all need to be explained clearly without losing accuracy.

Communications, customer success, commercial administration and partnerships roles can give clearer ownership to this work, while bringing technical colleagues into conversations at the appropriate point.

The search should assess how candidates handle complex information, rather than relying only on previous life sciences experience.

Candidates from technology, healthcare, education, professional services, research administration or specialist B2B environments may already understand complex stakeholders, longer decision-making processes and the importance of accurate communication.

Business support is changing with automation

As technology takes on more routine work, employers still need people who can check outputs, spot gaps, maintain reliable systems and recognise when information needs escalating.

The brief should therefore test systems confidence and judgement alongside task experience.

A candidate with strong data, workflow or information-quality experience from another structured environment may sometimes be more relevant than someone whose previous job title is an exact match.

By the time a scientific organisation is expanding its space, increasing headcount or preparing for commercial delivery, business support is already influencing how effectively the wider organisation can operate.

How Growing Innovation Businesses Build Sustainable Teams

Oxfordshire is widely recognised as one of the UK's most active innovation regions. Advanced Oxford's Innovation Engine identifies 2,950 high-tech businesses employing 29,000 people across the county, including 1,500 highly innovative STEM-based companies and 12,000 people working in R&D-intensive businesses.

As innovation businesses scale, recruitment often becomes more complex long before a vacancy is advertised.

Roles evolve, responsibilities shift and managers take on additional pressure while the organisation is still developing.

The recruitment process therefore needs to begin with understanding why a role is required and what the organisation needs that person to achieve.

Hiring needs to reflect the stage of growth

As innovation businesses mature, the structure around the work has to change. Growth can create pressure around governance, systems, customer experience, regulation, people management or commercial delivery before the organisation has decided what the next hire should look like.

Recruitment should therefore test whether candidates can prioritise, communicate across technical and non-technical teams and make decisions in an environment where internal structures may still be developing.

Understanding why the role is needed, what work it will own and what support will sit around it can help organisations make better decisions about how the position is presented and assessed.

The employee experience starts before someone joins

A growing business also has to translate a changing role into something a candidate can understand and trust.

A vacancy may have developed because of project pressure, new funding, customer demand or stretched management capacity, but the candidate still needs a clear picture of what they are joining.

CIPD research shows the pressure around this process, with more than a quarter of organisations that tried to recruit reporting challenges with counteroffers or candidates dropping out after accepting an offer. When candidates have options, delays and unclear communication can weaken confidence quickly.

Feedback, interview availability, offer management and onboarding information all contribute to the candidate's experience before their first day.



Recruitment should reflect how the organisation operates

The way an innovation business works day to day can affect the success of a hire as much as the responsibilities in the job description.

A candidate may have the right background but still struggle if the role moves between research, commercial conversations, internal systems and developing processes without that context being made clear.

Advanced Oxford found that 73% of companies had recruited staff with an academic background, with many adapting their recruitment processes to explore how candidates would adjust to a business environment.

Recruitment therefore needs to assess how someone will work within the organisation, not simply whether their previous experience looks familiar.

Candidates need enough information about how decisions are made, how technical and non-technical teams work together, what support exists and where processes are still developing.

These details matter for retention too, particularly where the pace, structure or expectations of the business differ from the environment someone is leaving.

Build the team around the work

By the time a role reaches the market, the hiring manager needs to understand what the appointment is meant to solve.

The pressure may be coming from work that has become too dependent on one person, inconsistent handovers, slower decisions or a new function being pulled across too many areas.

The starting point should therefore be the work rather than the job title. What needs ownership? What skills are required? How might those responsibilities develop? And which elements of a candidate's previous experience are genuinely important?

A recruitment partner can help employers answer these questions before the search begins, test the brief against the candidate market and identify transferable experience that may otherwise be overlooked.

This gives candidates a clearer understanding of the opportunity and employers a recruitment process that better reflects what the organisation actually needs.

Conclusion

Great science needs great teams behind it.

Scientific innovation may begin with an idea, a discovery or a breakthrough. Turning that potential into a sustainable organisation depends on the team built around it.

And those teams extend far beyond scientific and technical specialists.

They include the people professionals building and supporting the workforce. Finance teams providing control and visibility. Operations and administrative professionals creating structure and coordination. Marketing and communications specialists translating complex ideas for different audiences. And executive and project support professionals helping leaders maintain momentum as organisations grow.

For scientific and innovation businesses, the recruitment conversation therefore needs to go beyond: “Who do we need to hire?”

It should also consider:

What work needs clearer ownership?

What capability will we need as the organisation develops?

Does the work need permanent ownership or flexible support?

Are we looking for a particular job title, or the transferable skills needed to do the job well?

Are we giving candidates an accurate picture of the role and organisation they will join?

These questions are easier to answer when recruitment begins with a conversation rather than a vacancy.

Since 1998, Allen Associates has built longstanding relationships with employers and candidates across Oxfordshire. Our approach is collaborative and consultative, combining knowledge of the local candidate market with the time to understand each organisation, team, culture and role.

Because building a successful scientific business is not only about finding exceptional scientific talent.

It is about building the team that enables exceptional people to do their best work.



Building Your Next Team?

Whether you have an immediate vacancy, are reshaping an existing role or are considering the people and skills your organisation will need next, talk to Allen Associates.

We recruit permanent and temporary professionals across:

Finance

HR

Marketing

PA & Administration

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