

The Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals Sector

As the economy recovers, new jobs and opportunities will emerge. The basic skills required for many of these jobs are expected to rise – it is estimated that by 2010 around 95% of all new jobs will be at Level 2 or above. These fact sheets have been designed to support people in making informed choices about future employment and / or training to make the best of these new opportunities.

The North East Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals sector

The Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals sector includes the manufacture of basic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, paints, varnishes and other coatings, printing inks, mastics, soap and detergents, perfume and cleaning preparations. The development of bio-fuels and bio-refining is also becoming increasingly focused in the region.

Job roles across the Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals sector are varied and interesting, and include professional roles such as production and process engineers, works and maintenance managers, chemists and pharmacologists, IT specialists, technical and research specialists, electricians, machine setters, production managers, site managers and technicians.

The North East Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals sector is one of the largest and best developed in the whole of the UK. Teesside in particular is a major centre for the industry, although companies are spread across the region. The North East has a long history of success in the sector.

As with many industries the recession has meant that jobs have been cut in North East Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals companies.



There are promising developments such as the planned new £200 million biomass power station in Tees Valley, which will create new jobs in the Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals sector and also associated sectors like Construction and the Built Environment. Chemicals and (especially) Pharmaceuticals companies often have Government or public sector customers such as the National Health Service (NHS), and there is steady demand for their products. This demand is not heavily affected by the recession.

The sector in the North East has a stable but ageing workforce so it is likely there will be a requirement for new applicants to get involved as many current workers retire.

Skills required in the Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals sector

The skills required in the Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals sector are very diverse and range from office environment skills to 'hands on' trade skills (such as engineering and mechanics). People with science-based skills and qualifications are also highly valued. Management skills and experience are highly sought after, especially in health and safety and in laboratory environments.



Employers in the North East Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals sector look for skills such as:

- Trade skills
- Problem solving
- Numeracy and literacy
- Team working
- Good attention to detail and understanding of technical information
- Data analysis skills

Most types of qualifications are valued in the Chemical and Pharmaceuticals sector, from GCSEs to NVQs to Degrees, depending on their subject. Examples include the NVQ Levels 2 and 3 in Process Operations, NVQ Levels 2 and 3 in Engineering Maintenance, A-levels in Maths or Chemistry, the Foundation Degree in Process Engineering and Degrees in Engineering, Maths and Science subjects.

Previous work experience is also an advantage. Apprenticeships are very highly valued by employers.

Skills needed in the sector are changing in a number of ways. There is an ongoing move towards greener technology, such as biofuel technology, which means that there will be new job openings for applicants. These will typically be at quite a senior level as the technology involved is quite complex, and will require individuals with high skill levels.

Training provision for people interested in the Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals sector is available in the North East and there are opportunities to develop skills which will be in demand in the sector in the future. The region has good provision of degree level courses in related subject areas. For those already employed within the sector, the National Skills Academy for the Process Industries is based in Tees Valley and supports training providers to present flexible, customised high level training to meet the needs of the region's businesses.

For more information about the Chemical and Pharmaceuticals sector please see the following websites:

- The North East Process Industries Cluster – NEPIC www.nepic.co.uk
- The National Skills Academy's Process Industry website www.process.nsacademy.co.uk
- Cogent, the Sector Skills Council for the Process Industries www.cogent-ssc.com