

# Hovione keeps a keen focus on developing its talent pool

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The trend for school-leavers to prefer to automatically opt for college has resulted in a shortage of skilled workers in certain fields, warns Dr Paul Downing, Hovione general manager. “The single biggest challenge we have experienced is in the area of skills,” says Mr Downing.

He says it’s believed the low number of skilled workers such as electricians, fitters, quality control analysts, instrument technicians as well as automation technicians, is a result of the fall-off in popularity of traditional Apprenticeship programmes and increased parental pressure on school-leavers to earn a degree. Yet, he points out, the traditional apprenticeship route offers all participants potentially excellent careers.

“We would like to see more emphasis placed by second-level career guidance teachers on the option of apprenticeships in all of the different trades,” he said, adding that the issue has become a “significant” problem in recent years.

The focus of the Hovione pharmaceutical plant in Cork, at which just under 200 people are employed, is Contract Manufacturing, offering both drug substance and particle engineering capabilities and services.

“Because of the shortage we are having to hire contract resources instead of being able to employ permanent staff members,” Dr Downing explained.

“We are trying to source laboratory technicians for example, who have become skilled through an Apprenticeship route rather than through a third level degree but it is difficult to find such personnel.

“I believe there is a fundamental need for career advisers in second-level schools to put equal emphasis on alternatives to third-level education — such as the extremely well-tried and tested Apprenticeship programmes.”

Hovione, he said, was a member of a working group specifically set up to address this issue within BioPharmaChem Ireland, which is itself under the umbrella of the Irish Business Employers Confederation.

The Apprenticeship programme not only provides participants with the necessary technical and professional skills, Dr Downing states, but it also provides valuable team-work experience.

“What we are also finding is that people can come with the right technical skills, but their team collaboration skills require us to invest in

further training. These skills would be automatically instilled in participants in the Apprenticeships programmes.

“As a fast growing company, we face challenges ensuring that we have the right talent pool of future team members available to us for all the roles we have in the Company,” said Dr Downing. “The apprenticeship route can really offer a career with a purpose.

The company, he says, is a member of the team working with Skillsnet and the local academic institutions to help build capabilities locally that can take advantage of the many career opportunities available.

“Our multi-national locations provide opportunities for staff to also rotate through the facilities in China, USA & Portugal for short, medium-sized and long term durations.”

Hovione, he explains, is a pharmaceutical company dedicated to helping its customers bring new and off-patent drugs to market.

“We do well what is difficult, to give our customers what they cannot find elsewhere,” says Dr Downing, who explains that customers come from the sectors of biotechnology, medium, specialty and large pharmaceuticals and generics pharmaceuticals.

“Our mission is to passionately turn any challenge into a solution, by collaborating with our partners to develop great medicines. Our ambition is to become the Number One innovative, integrated pharmaceutical solution provider to the global pharmaceutical industry by 2028.”

Founded in Lisbon in 1959, Hovione has extensive manufacturing capacity spread over three continents with facilities in Lisbon (Portugal), Macau (China), New Jersey (USA) and Cork (Ireland). The site in Cork was acquired by Hovione in 2009 and boasts extensive manufacturing capacity and people capability. With two Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient facilities alongside a Drug Product Intermediate facility that houses the largest, commercial pharmaceutical spray dryer in operation, the Cork site plays a significant and strategic role within the Hovione network.

“The nature of our business as a CDMO (Contract Development & Manufacturing Organisation) means we are a company and a site with frequent inspections from national bodies (such as HSA, EPA, HPRA), International regulators (such as USFDA), existing customers and potential new customers,” Dr Downing points out.



Hovione employees celebrating the company’s great cultural diversity among the workforce within the Cork facility; the Hovione 2017

International Day took place in February.

The company’s “Safety First, Quality Always” culture is something staff are very proud of, he says, and he adds: “We nurture it each day so that we do not take it for granted.”

The capabilities offered by Hovione are all scales of multi-purpose chemical synthesis; the company specialises in complex chemistry and the use of specialised conditions (e.g. temperature, pressure) and reagents that need special handling conditions.

Since 2014, the local operation has undergone a significant change in terms of increased volume output and increased capacity utilisation. Along the way, the site has further diversified its portfolio, increased complexity, transferred products from sister facilities and increased the number of customers it serves. The growth of new technologies, capabilities and staff numbers on site has also risen accordingly.

These successes, he says, would not have been possible without the continued support of the local businesses, IDA, BiopharmaChem Ireland and the staff working at the facility. Hovione Cork has hired many new starters since October 2014 and as of June 2017 it now employs over 190 full-time team members

with over 30 contractors and service-providers on site each day.

“In the coming years, we will continue to invest in additional capability and capacity, hire additional team members, launch and validate more new products,” says Dr Downing, who points out that the company is an active member of Biopharmachem Ireland, Cork Chamber as well as Business in the Community Ireland.

### Community initiatives

Hovione sponsors and supports local community initiatives as well as establishing crucial links with the academic and training institutions through its support of STEM — initiatives to encourage take-up of subjects such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics — as well as CIT Student placements and the Cork Training Centre.

Hovione Cork recently received a Partnership Award from the Cork Training Center for the support the company has provided to the Cork Training Center Biopharma facility in ensuring its facilities, programmes and learners continue to reflect the ongoing needs of the life sciences companies in the region.

“In line with one of our

core skills and service offerings, the Hovione site welcomed close to 50 people from the Irish Pharma, Biotech and University sectors for a combined seminar with Bioconnect Ireland on the theme of Technical Transfers in the pharmaceutical industry,” he points out.

The company has a solid legacy of Corporate Social Responsibility — as recently as June 22nd last, Hovione became a Certified B Corp — becoming the first facility in Ireland to have received this certification.

“We are the first Chemical/Pharmaceutical Company integrating this inno-

vative community of companies that use the power of business to solve social and environmental problems.

“As a Certified B Corporation we want to contribute to redefine success in business, meeting the highest standards of social and environmental performance, setting our Team Members

for success and personal satisfaction and aspiring to use the power of markets to solve social and environmental problems.

“We believe that B Corps, and especially those that are family businesses, through the power of their collective voice, are competing to be Best for the World® and through them society will enjoy a more shared and durable prosperity.”

To certify as a B Corp, he points out, a set of rigorous social and environmental standards must be met.

“Our certification process began almost a year ago, through the B Impact Assessment process that requires four principle areas to be assessed: governance model, workers, environment protection and community involvement, including the impact on its suppliers.

“B Lab has assessed Hovione’s policies and procedures in all our locations in Portugal, Ireland, United States and Asia. They concluded Hovione follows all appropriate models and can thus be part of this movement. This is a global movement of people using business as a force for good™ with a vision that one day all companies compete not only to be the best in the world, but the Best for the World.” [www.hovione.com](http://www.hovione.com)



A selection of Hovione staff gather in front of the company’s impressive premises in Ringaskiddy, Co Cork.



Several Hovione employees attended the most recent IWish event in the City Hall, Cork, to encourage teenage girls in transition year to consider careers in Science.



Hovione employees participating in ‘Ivan Villax Day’, held on the birth date of company founder, Ivan Villax, the father to the company’s current CEO. On this day across all Hovione sites internationally, employees are encouraged to volunteer to participate in a charity event. In Cork, volunteers cleaned up the beach area fronting onto the Hovione site, where staff also hosted a ‘bring and buy’ charity cake sale.