CARROTRECRUITMENT
Concept to Commercial - Pharma | Biotech | MedTech

20 years in Life Sciences

From big pharma to biotech ecosystems

As Carrot Recruitment turns twenty years old, we reflect on two decades of recruitment within life sciences and how the industry has evolved.

in conjuction with The Evidence Base®

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Foreword

Martin founded Carrot Recruitment in 2006 after spending nine years in Pharma and Biotech industry and Consultancy positions. He was later joined by Debbie, who joined the business as it began to grow to help support with the growing client base.

With backgrounds in industry, they brought a wealth of technical and strategic knowledge, specifically from commercial functions:

Martin Anderson:

- European Marketing, Endocrinology: Merck Serono
- UK Sales, Neurology: Merck Serono
- Global Insights: Adelphi International Research

Debbie Anderson:

- Global Market Research, Oncology: AstraZeneca
- UK Sales, Cardiovascular: AstraZeneca
- Global Marketing, Spine & Trauma: DePuy Synthes
- Global Insights: Adelphi International Research

From the outset, Carrot Recruitment differentiated itself through genuine specialism. Leveraging extensive industry experience, the team brought technical and strategic insight into every hire, ensuring clients and candidates alike benefited from recruiters who truly understood their functions, challenges and environments.

This philosophy has remained the backbone of the business for the past two decades; a focus on being fully “plugged in” to the sectors they serve, with consultants who combine strong technical knowledge with real industry credibility.

Reflecting on two decades in Life Sciences

As Carrot Recruitment turns twenty years old this week, it felt like the right moment to reflect on two decades of recruitment within life sciences and how I’ve seen the industry evolve.

When I started the business in February 2006, I was a one-man band, working from my laptop at home, supporting clients in what was then a far more traditional and predictable market. Fast forward to now, Carrot Recruitment has supported hundreds of businesses in securing thousands of candidates across almost every part of the product lifecycle, on both the industry and consulting sides and across 9 separate countries. We’ve remained entirely focused throughout on the delivery of high-quality assignments in highly specialised markets.

Throughout that time, I’ve had a front-row seat to one of the most significant periods of change the global life sciences sector has ever experienced. I’ve watched entire disciplines emerge where none previously existed, seen others fade or fundamentally reinvent themselves, and supported businesses through seismic shifts driven by technology, regulation, and global events. From the rise of biotech and

advanced therapies to the impact of two major recessions, geo-political upheaval, COVID-19 and AI, the pace of change has accelerated beyond anything we could have anticipated in the mid-2000s.

The recruitment landscape back then was less complex, more predictable, and critically more reliable. Fast forward to 2026, and we operate in a far more complex, consultative, and strategic discipline.

The changes in science, technology and business models have fundamentally reshaped how companies hire and how recruiters add value. The need now is for recruitment partners to be seasoned in their field, have deep and genuine knowledge and to work more consultatively, more strategically and in closer partnership with our valued clients. Quality and consistency are now paramount in lean organisations.

Twenty years in an industry which has seen some astronomical changes

In 2006, the life sciences landscape was dominated by large pharmaceutical organisations with vertically integrated R&D models. Drug discovery followed a straightforward path: target identification, laboratory experimentation, preclinical development, clinical trials, and commercialisation. Timelines were long, failure rates were high, and innovation was often concentrated within big pharma's internal research functions.

Since then, the industry has diversified significantly. Biotech companies, University spinouts, contract research organisations (CROs), contract development and manufacturing organisations (CDMOs) and of course digital health businesses now form an interconnected ecosystem. Collaboration has replaced isolation, with partnerships between academia, startups, large pharma, and biotech's playing a significant role in innovation.

Technology as the defining catalyst

The most significant driver of change over the last twenty years has undoubtedly been the advancement of technology. In 2006, laboratory work was still largely manual, datasets were relatively small, and computational biology sat firmly at the margins of drug development. Today, automation, artificial intelligence, and advanced analytics are embedded across R&D- and increasingly across regulatory and market access functions- fundamentally reshaping how medicines are developed, approved, and reimbursed.

AI and machine learning are now routinely used in target identification, molecule design, and predictive toxicology, enabling companies to shortlist viable drug candidates in months rather than years and significantly reducing early-stage development costs. In parallel, high-throughput screening, robotics, and lab automation have transformed experimental science; where teams once ran dozens of experiments manually, they can now run thousands simultaneously using automated platforms.

Beyond discovery, technology has also transformed regulatory strategy. Digital regulatory platforms are now widely used to manage global submissions, track variations, and ensure compliance across multiple regions in real time. Structured content authoring tools, eCTD automation, and AI-assisted dossier preparation have streamlined submission processes, reduced error rates, and accelerated approval timelines. Regulators themselves are increasingly embracing digital frameworks, with data-driven reviews and greater reliance on real-world evidence becoming more commonplace.

Market access has undergone a similar shift. Advanced analytics platforms are now used to model pricing and reimbursement scenarios, assess payer impact, and simulate health economic outcomes across different markets. Real-world evidence drawn from electronic health records, claims data, and patient registries is increasingly central to value dossiers, HTA submissions, and payer negotiations. Cloud-based infrastructure enables global market access, HEOR, and medical teams to collaborate seamlessly, aligning evidence generation with evolving payer and regulatory expectations.

Together, these advances have made technology a core enabler across the entire product lifecycle.

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The rise of genomics and precision medicine

In 2006, genome sequencing was expensive, slow, and largely confined to research settings. By 2026, it is a cornerstone of modern medicine. The UK has played a leading role in this transformation, particularly through national initiatives that embedded genomics into clinical care.

Precision medicine has fundamentally changed how diseases are understood and treated. Rather than developing therapies for broad patient populations, companies increasingly target genetically defined subgroups, improving efficacy and reducing adverse effects. Oncology has been at the forefront of this shift, but rare diseases, immunology and neurology have also benefited significantly.

This has had a knock-on effect across clinical development, regulatory strategy and commercialisation, requiring new expertise and new ways of working.

New modalities brought new possibilities

Two decades ago, small-molecule drugs dominated pipelines. While they remain important, the last twenty years have seen a rapid expansion in therapeutic modalities. Biologics, monoclonal antibodies, cell and gene therapies, RNA-based medicines and advanced vaccines are now central to innovation.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a pivotal moment, accelerating the development and acceptance of mRNA technology and demonstrating how quickly science can move when supported by funding, collaboration, and regulatory flexibility.

These scientific advances have increased the complexity of development and manufacturing, but they have also opened entirely new treatment possibilities that were inconceivable in 2006.

Roles evolving to fit the new landscape

As the science has evolved, so too has the workforce. Many roles that barely existed twenty years ago are now critical.

Bioinformaticians, computational biologists, data scientists and AI specialists have become integral to drug discovery and development. Clinical operations professionals now manage increasingly complex, adaptive, and decentralised trials. Regulatory specialists must navigate advanced therapies, digital endpoints and evolving global frameworks.

Beyond R&D, entirely new commercial and evidence-led functions have emerged over the last two decades. In 2006, areas such as Market Access, Pricing, Real-World Evidence (RWE) and Health Economics and Outcomes Research (HEOR) were either peripheral or reactive. Today, they are central to whether a medicine or medical device reaches patients at all. These functions now shape development strategy well before launch, underpin value demonstration to payers and regulators, and support long-term commercial sustainability.

We have also seen the rise of specialist healthcare compliance and governance roles, reflecting increased regulation, transparency requirements and the shift towards digital and omnichannel engagement. What was once largely managed locally or informally is now a defined discipline, critical to protecting both patients and organisations.

At the same time, we have seen some

traditional roles completely diminished or transformed. In many cases, manual laboratory work has been reduced by automation, while administrative functions have been reshaped by digital tools and AI. Rather than disappearing entirely, many roles have evolved to focus more on data interpretation, strategic oversight, and cross-functional collaboration.

Soft skills have also grown in importance. Communication, adaptability, and the ability to work across disciplines are now as valuable as technical expertise, reflecting the collaborative nature of modern life sciences.

Drug development in a faster, more connected world

Drug development timelines have shortened, though remain challenging. Digital tools, adaptive trial designs, and improved patient recruitment strategies have increased efficiency, while global collaboration has become the norm. CROs and external partners now manage significant portions of development programmes, allowing companies to scale rapidly and focus on core innovation.

Real-world evidence has become increasingly important, supporting regulatory decisions, market access strategies, and post-launch optimisation. This reflects a broader shift towards understanding how therapies perform in real clinical settings, not just controlled trials.

The UK industry does not operate in isolation. Pharma and biotech R&D has become truly global. International collaborations, cross-border clinical trials, and global regulatory alignment have increased, while competition for investment and talent has intensified.

Venture capital and private equity investment in biotech has grown, particularly during the 2010s and early 2020s, fuelling the rise of innovative startups and scale-ups. UK government policy has also played a crucial role, with life sciences recognised as a strategic priority for economic growth.

At the same time, ethical considerations, sustainability, and access to medicines have moved higher up the agenda, shaping both public perception and corporate strategy.

The commercialisation of medicines has changed

The commercialisation of medicines and medical devices has changed just as dramatically as their development. Twenty years ago, commercial success was often driven by large, field-based sales teams, high-frequency face-to-face detailing, and relatively linear brand strategies. Today, those models have largely disappeared.

Modern commercial teams are leaner, more specialised, and increasingly data-driven. Remote and hybrid customer engagement is now the norm, supported by omnichannel marketing, personalised content journeys and sophisticated customer insight. The emphasis has shifted from scale and activity to relevance, evidence and quality of engagement.

Crucially, evidence now sits at the heart of commercial strategy. Market access, medical affairs and commercial teams work far more closely than they did in the past, with real-world data and outcomes playing a growing role in value demonstration, reimbursement decisions and lifecycle management.

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So how has all this impacted the way businesses now recruit?

Over the past twenty years, recruitment in life sciences has transformed alongside the industry itself. In 2006, most scientific hires were focused on wet lab research, clinical development, and regulatory affairs. Today, the roles we recruit for span bioinformatics, AI and machine learning, data science, digital health, real-world evidence, advanced manufacturing, and cell and gene therapy, many of which barely existed two decades ago. With this expansion, clients often rely on recruitment partners not just to fill positions, but to help define them and shape the teams needed to deliver innovation.

The same is true on the commercial side. Demand has grown for specialist talent across market access, pricing, HEOR, real-world evidence, compliance and omnichannel marketing, roles that are often highly specialised, scarce, and business-critical. In many cases, organisations now rely on recruitment partners not just to fill these positions, but to help define them and build teams capable of supporting successful commercialisation.

Hiring models have also shifted. Demand is now strongest for interdisciplinary talent capable of bridging biology, technology, data,

and regulatory expertise. Flexible workforce approaches, including contract, interim, and project-based roles have become commonplace, reflecting the rise of virtual biotech, milestone-driven funding, and scalable team structures. Remote and hybrid working, once rare, are now widely adopted, broadening talent pools geographically but also intensifying competition for skilled professionals.

The candidate market itself has evolved dramatically. Professionals are more mobile, selective, and informed, evaluating employers on culture, flexibility, purpose, and progression, as well as compensation. Recruiters must navigate this candidate-driven environment, ensuring organisations can compete effectively for scarce, specialised talent while maintaining a positive candidate experience.

Technology has reshaped how we find, engage, and place candidates. In the mid-2000s, recruitment relied heavily on phone calls, databases, and in-person networking. Today, digital sourcing, social media, and data-driven tools allow recruiters to reach talent faster and with greater precision, making hiring processes more transparent and competitive. Though I am a huge proponent of the human touch which has remained central to our service ethos and will always continue to do so.

Globalisation and policy changes, including Brexit, have added further complexity. Talent mobility, visa requirements, and location strategy are now key considerations for UK life sciences employers. Recruiters increasingly provide advisory support on workforce planning and international hiring, moving well beyond the transactional approach of the past.

Two decades on, the core principle of recruitment, which should always be about connecting great people with meaningful work, remains unchanged. What has transformed is how we do it: the expertise required, the strategic insight we bring, and the value we deliver to both clients and candidates navigating a rapidly evolving industry.

What the next decade may bring

If the last two decades have been defined by digital transformation and scientific diversification, the next decade is likely to see even deeper integration between biology and technology. AI-designed drugs, fully decentralised clinical trials, personalised cell therapies, and data-driven healthcare systems are no longer speculative concepts, they are already emerging realities.

For the UK, maintaining global competitiveness will depend on continued investment in skills, infrastructure, and innovation, as well as the ability to attract and retain top talent in an increasingly competitive market.

For those working in the industry, whether as scientists, commercial leaders or hiring partners, understanding this evolution, and staying ahead of the curve and adapting are essential.

Staying ahead in a competitive market

The last twenty years have shown just how quickly the pharma, biotech and MedTech landscape can evolve and how critical the right people are at every stage of growth. Whether you are scaling a biotech, building specialist capability in advanced therapies, or strengthening commercial and regulatory teams, access to the right talent has never been more important.

Having supported the life sciences sector since 2006, we've grown alongside the industry itself. Our longevity is built on deep sector knowledge, long-standing relationships and a network that spans scientific, clinical, regulatory, and commercial talent across pharma, biotech, and MedTech globally. Many of the professionals we work with today are people we first placed earlier in their careers, and who now lead teams, build businesses, and drive innovation across the sector.

If you are looking for a recruitment partner who understands the complexity of today's life sciences market and brings the insight that only comes from two decades in the industry, we'd love to talk. Get in touch to discuss how we can support your hiring plans now and as your business evolves.

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