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# HIRING GUIDE: QUALITY ASSURANCE 2026–2027

**Life sciences | US, UK, Germany, Switzerland, Spain and Japan**



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# 01.

# INTRODUCTION

Quality Assurance (QA) is one of the most business-critical functions in life sciences. Once viewed as a largely technical, compliance-led discipline, it has become increasingly strategic as companies navigate tighter regulation, global launches, complex manufacturing networks and greater inspection scrutiny.

In smaller and mid-sized organizations, particularly emerging biotech, medtech and diagnostics companies, Quality Assurance and Regulatory Affairs responsibilities are often combined under a single QARA leader. This is especially common in medical devices and IVD, where regulatory compliance is closely integrated with quality management systems, technical documentation, product lifecycle management and post-market obligations.

In larger pharmaceutical and biotechnology organizations, Quality Assurance typically operates as a distinct specialist function with its own leadership team, reflecting the scale and complexity of global manufacturing operations, supplier networks and quality oversight.

The market is not uniformly buoyant. Biotech funding constraints, organizational restructuring and more cautious hiring have made employers more selective. BioSpace's 2026 Employment Outlook Report notes continued concern around the economic climate and biotech funding, while also reporting that 64% of surveyed organizations were actively recruiting and 41% expected open roles to increase in 2026.

This has created a more nuanced hiring environment: there may be more candidates available in some areas, but the supply of genuinely experienced quality leaders remains limited, particularly at VP and SVP level.

Leonid's hiring guide digs deeper into these points and provides current salary data for QA leadership roles (both combined with Regulatory Affairs and standalone roles). Naturally, the levels do vary according to geography, size of organisation and sector.

For bespoke salary benchmarking, please feel free to contact me directly.



**Adam Bond**
Client Director,
Corporate Governance
Leonid Group

# 02.

# MARKET OVERVIEW

**Quality Assurance leadership is becoming increasingly strategic**

Quality Assurance has traditionally been viewed as a technical, governance-led function focused on compliance and risk management. While these responsibilities remain fundamental, the discipline now plays a far more strategic role within life sciences organizations.

Quality Assurance leaders are playing a broader role across manufacturing, operations and organisational transformation. Their remit increasingly includes digital quality systems, manufacturing resilience, supplier quality, validation, inspection readiness, data integrity, remediation programmes and fostering an enterprise-wide culture of quality

We are continuing to see strong demand for experienced Quality Assurance professionals, particularly those with expertise in digital transformation, global quality systems and cross-functional leadership, as the discipline works more closely with other functions than ever before.

Combined QARA leadership remains an important niche within growth-stage life sciences companies

For smaller and mid-sized life sciences companies, particularly biotech, medtech, diagnostics and emerging pharma businesses, dual QARA leadership is increasingly common. These leaders oversee both regulatory strategy and quality systems, often acting as the bridge between development, operations, clinical, manufacturing and commercial teams.

The role is especially valuable where organizations are preparing for first-in-human studies, pivotal trials, market authorization, CE marking, FDA submission, PMDA engagement, commercial launch or geographic expansion.

However, the talent pool is rather limited. Many candidates are stronger in either Regulatory Affairs or Quality Assurance, rather than both. True dual-functional leaders who can operate at executive level across both domains command a significant premium.



# 03.

# SIX KEY SKILLS EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR

**1. Strategic quality judgment**

Employers are seeking Quality Assurance leaders who can shape enterprise quality strategy rather than simply manage compliance. This includes designing scalable quality systems, prioritising quality risk, advising manufacturing and development teams and making judgement calls that protect both patients and timelines.

**2. Inspection-ready quality leadership**

Quality Assurance leaders are expected to build and maintain systems that can withstand regulatory scrutiny. Employers look for experience across quality management systems, audits, inspections, CAPA, deviations, validation, supplier quality, data integrity and GxP governance.

**3. Global quality systems expertise**

As life sciences companies expand internationally, quality leaders must understand how different GxP and inspection regimes interact. Experience across FDA, EMA, MHRA, Swissmedic, AEMPS and PMDA quality expectations is highly valued.

**4. Cross-functional influence and executive communication**

Modern Quality Assurance leaders are increasingly strategic partners to R&D, clinical, manufacturing, supply chain, commercial and executive teams. Employers value leaders who can translate quality risks and compliance requirements into clear business decisions.

**5. Digital transformation and data capability**

Digital transformation is reshaping Quality Assurance, from eQMS platforms and data integrity tools to quality process automation and AI-supported review. Candidates who have led digital quality initiatives are increasingly attractive.

**6. Leadership through change and organisational scaling**

Many senior Quality Assurance hires occur during periods of significant change: first approvals, commercial launches, acquisitions, manufacturing expansion, remediation programmes or global growth. Employers want leaders who can build teams, establish scalable processes and provide stability during periods of uncertainty.



# 04.

# SIX THINGS THAT CANDIDATES ARE LOOKING FOR

**1. A clear mandate**

Senior Quality Assurance candidates want clarity on what they are being hired to do. Is the priority launch readiness, inspection readiness, remediation, supplier oversight, team build-out, digital transformation or ongoing GxP compliance?

Vague mandates can deter experienced candidates, particularly those who have previously stepped into under-resourced or high-risk environments.

**2. Executive access**

Quality Assurance leaders increasingly expect direct access to the CEO, COO, Chief Medical Officer, General Counsel, Board or relevant executive committee. Candidates are less likely to accept roles where Quality is treated as a downstream operational function.

**3. Realistic resources**

Candidates will assess whether the organization has adequate budget, systems, headcount and executive support. Strong Quality Assurance leaders are wary of companies that want world-class compliance without investing in infrastructure.

**4. Flexibility**

Quality Assurance is variable when it comes to flexibility: GCP and global quality systems roles can often support hybrid or remote models, while GMP, manufacturing and site quality roles usually require more on-site presence.

When we asked life sciences professionals whether flexibility remains a major priority, 60% said they prefer hybrid arrangements and 28% preferred fully remote roles.

**5. Career development and visibility**

Manager and Director-level candidates want roles that provide broader scope, international exposure, inspection and audit exposure, line management responsibility and a pathway into senior leadership.

**6. Competitive compensation**

Compensation remains a major lever, especially for senior quality leaders. In the US in particular, quality leadership salaries have continued to rise, with many VP, SVP and Head of Quality candidates seeking more than $350,000.

# 05.

# HIRING TRENDS BY FUNCTION

### Dual-functional QARA leadership

Combined QARA leadership is particularly common within medical device and IVD organizations, as well as smaller and scaling life sciences companies across biotech, pharma and diagnostics.

**Employers usually look for candidates who can:**

- define global regulatory strategy
- build or scale the quality management system
- prepare for agency meetings and inspections
- oversee submissions and technical documentation
- manage internal and external audits
- lead quality remediation or modernization
- advise executive teams on regulatory and quality risk
- support fundraising, licensing, M&A or transaction readiness

These roles are difficult to benchmark because scope varies significantly. A dual QARA leader in a pre-commercial biotech may operate very differently from a dual leader in a global devices company or manufacturing-heavy pharma business.

### Quality Assurance as a standalone role

Quality Assurance hiring is being shaped by manufacturing complexity, inspection expectations, data integrity, supplier networks and advanced therapies.

**The most in-demand profiles include:**

- global QA leaders
- GMP quality leaders
- GCP and GLP quality specialists
- site quality heads
- quality systems leaders
- supplier quality leaders
- validation and qualification specialists
- audit and inspection readiness leaders
- remediation and data integrity experts

QA leaders with experience in biologics, sterile manufacturing, cell and gene therapy, CDMOs, medical devices and complex global supply chains are particularly difficult to secure.



# 06.

# REGIONAL MARKET COMMENTARY

### United States

The US remains the most competitive and highest-paying market for senior Quality Assurance talent, particularly in Boston/Cambridge, San Francisco Bay Area, San Diego, Research Triangle Park, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

QA leaders with GxP, inspection readiness, remediation, cell and gene therapy, sterile manufacturing or CDMO experience command significant premiums, particularly those who have supported pre-commercial launch or complex global supply chains.

### United Kingdom

The UK market is shaped by biotech, pharma, medtech, clinical research and post-Brexit regulatory complexity. Demand is particularly strong for quality leaders who can maintain GxP compliance across MHRA, EU and US expectations.

The UK remains attractive for global and regional roles, especially where companies want English-speaking quality leadership, strong clinical development capability and proximity to European markets.

### Germany

Germany is one of Europe's most important life sciences markets, with strong pharma, biotech, medtech, diagnostics and manufacturing capability. Hiring demand is strongest for candidates with EU GxP experience, quality systems knowledge, manufacturing quality leadership and cross-border stakeholder management.

German language skills are often important for site-facing quality roles, while global quality systems roles may be more English-led depending on company structure.

### Switzerland

Switzerland remains a premium market because of its concentration of global pharma headquarters, biotech companies, medtech organizations and senior quality leadership roles. Compensation is typically higher than in most European markets.

Quality Assurance candidates in Switzerland are often expected to bring international experience, strong stakeholder management and the ability to work within matrixed global organizations.

### Spain

Spain continues to grow as a life sciences hub, particularly for clinical trials, manufacturing, pharmacovigilance, quality operations and shared services. Salaries are typically lower than in Switzerland, Germany, the UK and the US, but demand for experienced bilingual or multilingual quality talent is increasing.

Spain is particularly attractive for companies building regional EU capability, nearshore quality operations or quality support teams.

### Japan

Japan remains a highly specialized market for Quality Assurance hiring. PMDA quality expectations, Japanese language capability, local GxP knowledge and cultural fluency are often essential.

Global life sciences companies need leaders who can bridge headquarters expectations with Japanese quality requirements. Candidates who combine local market credibility with international experience are especially valuable.



# 07.

# SALARY GUIDES

## Methodology and notes

The following salary tables provide indicative annual base salary ranges for Quality Assurance roles, including dual QARA leadership positions, in life sciences. They are designed for benchmarking senior hiring across the US, UK, Germany, Switzerland, Spain and Japan.

The salary ranges are directional and should be adjusted based on:

- company size and stage
- biotech, pharma, medtech, diagnostics or CDMO environment
- public vs. private ownership
- venture-backed or private equity-backed context
- global vs. regional scope
- product complexity
- bonus, equity and long-term incentive structure

The following salary ranges have been informed by 2026 market data from Leonid's own placement data, and calibrated using market differentials, seniority levels and known life sciences compensation patterns.

## United States

| Function | Role | Base salary range |
|---|---|---|
| Dual Functional Leaders | SVP QARA | $375,000—$500,000+ |
| Dual Functional Leaders | VP QARA | $300,000—$450,000 |
| Quality Assurance | SVP / Head of Quality Assurance | $375,000—$450,000+ |
| Quality Assurance | VP / potential Head of Quality Assurance | $325,000—$400,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Director, Quality Assurance | $210,000—$310,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Sr Manager/Associate Director, Quality Assurance | $160,000—$220,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Manager, Quality Assurance | $125,000—$175,000 |

## United Kingdom

| Function | Role | Base salary range |
|---|---|---|
| Dual Functional Leaders | SVP QARA | £200,000—£350,000+ |
| Dual Functional Leaders | VP QARA | £160,000—£280,000 |
| Quality Assurance | SVP / Head of Quality Assurance | £200,000—£300,000+ |
| Quality Assurance | VP / potential Head of Quality Assurance | £150,000—£225,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Director, Quality Assurance | £105,000—£155,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Senior Manager, Quality Assurance | £75,000—£110,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Manager, Quality Assurance | £60,000—£85,000 |

## Germany

| Function | Role | Base salary range |
|---|---|---|
| Dual Functional Leaders | SVP QARA | €230,000—€360,000+ |
| Dual Functional Leaders | VP QARA | €175,000—€270,000 |
| Quality Assurance | SVP / Head of Quality Assurance | €220,000—€330,000+ |
| Quality Assurance | VP / potential Head of Quality Assurance | €165,000—€250,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Director, Quality Assurance | €120,000—€170,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Senior Manager, Quality Assurance | €85,000—€120,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Manager, Quality Assurance | €70,000—€95,000 |

## Switzerland

| Function | Role | Base salary range |
|---|---|---|
| Dual Functional Leaders | SVP QARA | CHF 310,000—CHF 475,000+ |
| Dual Functional Leaders | VP QARA | CHF 240,000—CHF 350,000 |
| Quality Assurance | SVP / Head of Quality Assurance | CHF 295,000—CHF 440,000+ |
| Quality Assurance | VP / potential Head of Quality Assurance | CHF 225,000—CHF 330,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Director, Quality Assurance | CHF 160,000—CHF 235,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Senior Manager, Quality Assurance | CHF 125,000—CHF 170,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Manager, Quality Assurance | CHF 105,000—CHF 140,000 |

### Spain

| Function | Role | Base salary range |
|---|---|---|
| Dual Functional Leaders | SVP QARA | €180,000—€300,000+ |
| Dual Functional Leaders | VP QARA | €150,000—€225,000 |
| Quality Assurance | SVP / Head of Quality Assurance | €160,000—€250,000+ |
| Quality Assurance | VP / potential Head of Quality Assurance | €150,000—€225,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Director, Quality Assurance | €110,000—€160,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Sr Manager/Associate Director, Quality Assurance | €80,000—€125,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Manager, Quality Assurance | €55,000—€80,000 |

### Japan

| Function | Role | Base salary range |
|---|---|---|
| Dual Functional Leaders | SVP QARA | ¥32,000,000—¥52,000,000+ |
| Dual Functional Leaders | VP QARA | ¥24,000,000—¥38,000,000 |
| Quality Assurance | SVP / Head of Quality Assurance | ¥30,000,000—¥48,000,000+ |
| Quality Assurance | VP / potential Head of Quality Assurance | ¥22,000,000—¥34,000,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Director, Quality Assurance | ¥15,000,000—¥24,000,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Senior Manager, Quality Assurance | ¥11,500,000—¥16,500,000 |
| Quality Assurance | Manager, Quality Assurance | ¥9,000,000—¥13,000,000 |

## Skills commanding a premium

Across all six markets, employers should expect to pay more for candidates with:

- FDA, EMA, MHRA, Swissmedic, AEMPS or PMDA agency-facing experience
- GxP quality systems leadership
- data integrity and CSV experience
- eQMS implementation or optimization experience
- multilingual capability, especially in Europe and Japan
- experience working in matrixed global organizations

# 08.

# HOW EMPLOYERS CAN COMPETE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE TALENT

### Define the role clearly before going to market

Quality Assurance roles can vary enormously. A VP Quality role in a preclinical biotech is very different from the same title in a commercial medtech or manufacturing-heavy pharma company. Employers should be clear on product scope, geographic remit, site and supplier exposure, team size, decision rights and expected outcomes.

### Benchmark compensation early

Senior Quality Assurance candidates are well-informed and often have multiple options. Employers should benchmark base salary, bonus, equity and benefits before launching the search.

### Be honest about risk

If the organization has inspection findings, open CAPAs, weak systems or under-resourced teams, candidates need to know. Experienced Quality Assurance leaders are not necessarily deterred by complexity, but they are deterred by surprises.

### Move quickly for high-value candidates

The strongest Quality Assurance candidates are rarely active for long. Slow interview processes, unclear feedback and shifting requirements can cause employers to lose strong candidates. At Leonid, we pledge to fill all roles with our 30-day 'Magic Month' timeframe — and QA roles are often filled ahead of this schedule.

### Sell the impact

Senior Quality Assurance professionals are heavily motivated by meaningful work. Employers should be ready to explain how the role contributes to patient safety, product quality, business growth and organizational maturity.

### Offer flexibility where possible

Global quality systems roles can often be structured with remote or hybrid models. GMP and site quality roles may require more on-site presence, but employers should still consider flexible arrangements where business needs allow.



# 09.

# ADVICE FOR CANDIDATES

**Position yourself as a strategic partner**

Technical expertise is expected. What differentiates senior candidates is the ability to influence decisions, manage risk and support business objectives.

**Show measurable outcomes**

Candidates should be ready to demonstrate impact, such as:

- successful FDA, EMA, MHRA or PMDA interactions
- shortened batch release and review timelines
- successful inspections
- improved CAPA closure rates
- implementation of eQMS platforms
- strengthened quality systems and data integrity

**Be clear on your functional depth**

For dual QARA roles, employers will want to know whether your strength is primarily regulatory, quality or genuinely balanced across both. Being clear about this helps build credibility.

**Build international exposure**

Quality Assurance career progression increasingly rewards global experience. Candidates who understand multiple regulatory and quality regimes and can work across cultures are more competitive.

**Stay close to technology change**

AI, automation, digital quality systems and data integrity are, unsurprisingly, becoming more important. Candidates who can demonstrate high levels of technology fluency will stand out.



# 10.
# OUTLOOK BEYOND 2026

The Quality Assurance hiring market in life sciences is likely to remain selective, but competitive.

Employers are becoming more disciplined in hiring, yet the demand for experienced quality leaders remains strong.

The highest-value candidates will combine technical credibility with commercial awareness, international fluency and change leadership. Quality Assurance leaders who can strengthen systems, prepare for inspections and support complex manufacturing environments will continue to command premium compensation.

For employers, the challenge lies in finding leaders who can help the organization move faster while protecting patients, products and reputation.

For candidates, the opportunity lies in demonstrating that Quality Assurance is not just about compliance. It is about enabling responsible growth.

### Key takeaways

- Quality Assurance roles are becoming more strategic, global and commercially influential.
- Dual-functional QARA leaders are in high demand, but the talent pool is limited.
- Quality Assurance hiring is being driven by inspection readiness, remediation, manufacturing complexity and digital quality transformation.
- The US and Switzerland remain the highest-paying markets, while Germany, the UK, Spain and Japan each have distinct local hiring dynamics.
- Candidates want clear mandates, executive access, realistic resources, flexibility and competitive compensation.
- Employers should benchmark early, move quickly and be transparent about the scale of the challenge.



At Leonid, we hire across all areas of corporate governance, including legal, privacy, compliance, ESG, risk & audit. All of our global hiring guides for these sectors can be found here on our website.

## Talent Intelligence — your secret weapon in hiring, retaining and future-proofing your team

As well as search-based hiring, Leonid Group is a talent advisory business with a consulting arm which can offer proprietary data and insights to help teams optimize their organisational design and help build a business case for change, such as unlocking budget for more hires.

If you would like to find out more about our Talent Intelligence service and book a FREE 'lite' presentation on your firm's attrition vs competitors, talent flow and an overview of what candidates in your industry really want — please contact Adam Bond to book a no-obligation meeting.



leonid

**T** +1 646 974 9821

**E** info@leonid-group.com

**W** www.leonid-group.com

**HEAD OFFICE**
Tintagel House, 92 Albert Embankment,
London SE1 7TY

