

THE LATEST ON HIGHER SPECIALIST SCIENTIFIC TRAINING

Lisa Ayers and Professor Berne Ferry outline recent development with the HSST programme.

The Higher Specialist Scientific Training (HSST) programme is the most senior-level funded training provision specifically for healthcare scientists, managed and delivered by the National School of Healthcare Science (NSHCS) and funded by Health Education England (HEE). Its purpose is to prepare healthcare scientists for the role of consultant scientist in the NHS, and it is supported by an underpinning part-time, doctoral-level academic programme, delivered by the Manchester Academy of Healthcare Science Education (MAHSE).

Programme overview

HSST offers a blend of training for essential skills, including professional development, leadership, innovation, research and development, higher specialist scientific knowledge and clinical skills. Trainees also benefit from training alongside other HSSTs outside their specialism and have opportunities to collaborate with experts in their field.

It provides trainees with full funding of £3000 per year for the academic element, which can consist of a Professional Doctorate (DClinSci), including a very highly regarded PgDIP in Leadership and Management. In addition, trainees benefit from a £13,000

annual training budget for five years, which can be used to support other training costs of the programme.

The HSST programme gives trainees protected 20% study time in addition to time spent attending academic workshops and undergoing professional assessments. The majority of HSST trainees are in-service candidates, although a small number are directly recruited to new posts each year. The trainees' job roles complement the aims of the programme, providing practical experience and opportunities.

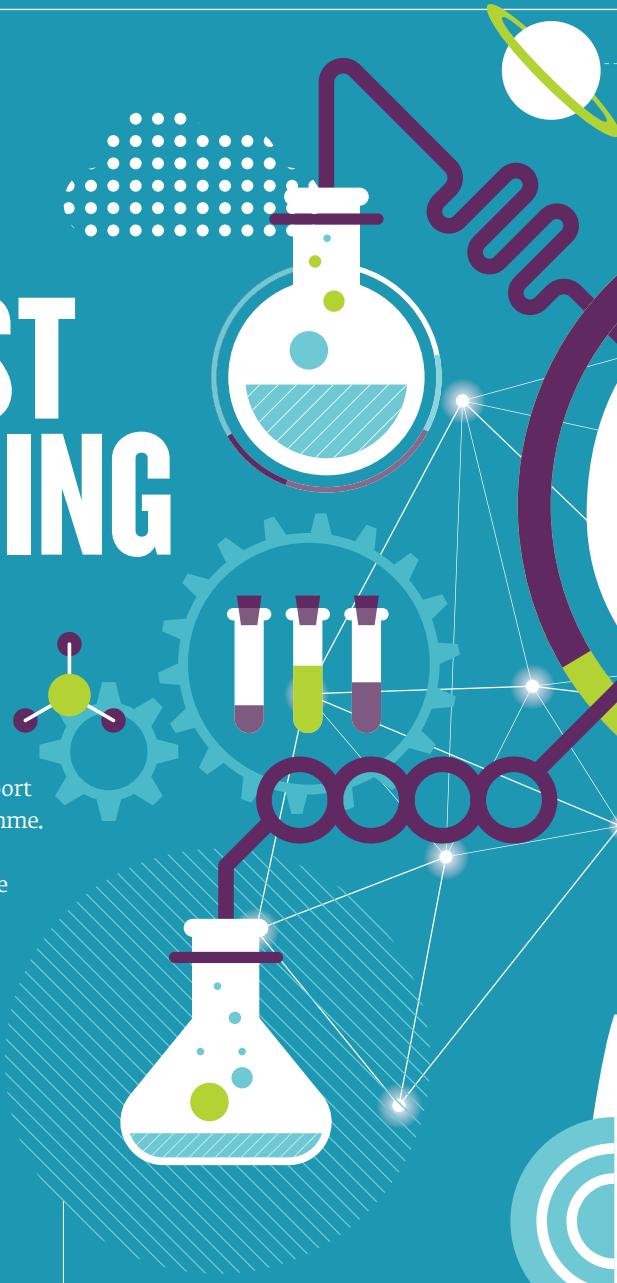
Remedy the situation

Traditionally, HSST has only been open to HCPC-registered clinical scientists and, therefore, biomedical scientists wishing to undertake the programme would have to seek equivalence as a clinical scientist via three pathways – the IBMS, Academy for Healthcare Science (AHCS) or Association of Clinical Scientists (ACS) prior to commencing. This requirement restricted some senior biomedical scientists from undertaking the programme in the past. The NSHCS has sought for some time to remedy this situation.

The school recognises that the role of the scientist as leader within the context of the future multidisciplinary teams in pathology has never been more important.

With the advent of new technology in pathology that scientists will be not only central to, but will be driving in their own scientific specialties and in multi-professional teams, they will need to be capable of working confidently and supportively to inspire their colleagues and build patient trust. To achieve this will require that more healthcare scientists be trained to consultant level across pathology.

The NSHCS recognises that there are many senior biomedical scientists who wish to enter the HSST programme and have the relevant qualifications and experience, as well as aspirations.






Standardising

If training and education for consultant Healthcare Scientist roles could be standardised, as far as possible, across all pathology disciplines this would ensure confidence and assurance for employers and provide training and education equity for clinical scientists and biomedical scientists to ensure all healthcare scientists have a career pathway to a consultant grade in all pathology disciplines.

In addition, workforce shortages in consultant-level scientists have been noted in a range of specialisms and this has been further highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, in September 2020, the NSHCS released a joint statement with the IBMS, RCPATH, AHCS and MAHSE regarding a change to eligibility for entry to HSST from 2021, allowing entry for the first time to senior biomedical scientists with appropriate experience and qualifications. See box, left, for the new criteria.

Clinical scientists and biomedical scientists on HSST will both be subject to the same recruitment and interview process, as well as their department demonstrating that they can deliver the training via accreditation. All HSSTs will have to complete the same academic and professional components, and achieve Fellowship of the RCPATH by examination, to complete the programme and join the Higher Specialist Scientist register with the AHCS. Therefore, all healthcare scientists will exit the programme with the same consultant-level skills. It is hoped that the new criteria will allow for wider participation in the programme and will support recruitment in specialties with the greatest workforce needs, including haematology, transfusion and microbiology. 

THE NEW CRITERIA INCLUDE

- ✓ HCPC registration as a biomedical scientist, IBMS Specialist Diploma and relevant MSc
- ✓ HCPC registration as a biomedical scientist, IBMS Specialist Diploma and IBMS Higher Specialist Diploma or IBMS two-part Fellowship Special Exam
- ✓ HCPC registration as a Biomedical Scientist, IBMS Specialist Diploma and IBMS Diploma of Expert Practice.

The full joint statement and FAQs can be seen at nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/news/joint-statement-on-hsst-eligibility

Lisa Ayers is HSST Training Programme Director at the NSHCS and **Professor Berne Ferry** is Head of the NSHCS.