

## HERE TO HELP

# HIGHER SPECIALIST DIPLOMAS

The first of two articles in which **Chris Ward**, the IBMS' Head of Examinations, outlines the latest developments around Higher Specialist Diplomas.

**T**he Higher Specialist Diploma (HSD) replaced the Fellowship exam in 2004. Since that time, around 250 candidates, across nine disciplines, have achieved the HSD with the numbers undertaking it growing in the last few years. Many successful individuals have, as a result, obtained job roles at a higher grade and some have become intrinsically involved in the work of the Institute by joining one of the scientific advisory panels.

As part of ensuring that the qualifications that the IBMS offers are fit for purpose and meet the needs of both its members and the wider profession, the Institute's Education and Professional Standards Committee (E&PSC) commissioned an external examiner to review the HSD and to make recommendations on how it could be improved. This report, along with feedback from each of the scientific advisory panels, formed the basis of a full review of the HSD as part of the Institute's 2020 Strategy.

The importance of this project to the Institute is shown by the fact that the work of HSD Review Group was led by the IBMS Deputy Chief Executive.

The group also included the IBMS Executive Head of Education, the IBMS Head of Examinations, representatives from each of the HSD disciplines and a representative of the E&PSC. The recommendations of the review have been accepted by the Institute's E&PSC and changes to the HSD will be introduced over the next 12 to 18 months.

This article and the one that will follow next month describe who the HSD is aimed at, its learning outcomes, what is covered by the HSD and how it is examined and marked.

## Aims and Learning Outcomes

The HSD is a Master's level professional qualification that enables biomedical and clinical scientists to demonstrate depth of knowledge of a chosen specialism within the wider professional context, which is required for senior roles. It will be available in the following disciplines:

- Cellular Pathology
- Clinical Chemistry
- Cytopathology
- Haematology
- Immunology
- Leadership and Management
- Medical Microbiology
- Transfusion Science
- Virology.

The award of the HSD shows that the candidate has demonstrated the following learning outcomes:

- A comprehensive understanding of a specific field of biomedical science
- The ability to analyse and interpret information critically in order to address practice-based situations
- Skills in leadership and communication within the healthcare environment
- Critical reflection of personal professional practice
- Knowledge and understanding of current issues and developments within healthcare and how they impact on professional practice.

## Eligibility Criteria

In relation to the criteria for those wanting to undertake the HSD, the group decided to remove the recommendation that candidates have a minimum of five years of post-registration experience before they commence the HSD as it was recognised that experience did not guarantee success in the qualification. The more important factor is the ability of the individual to demonstrate that they are operating at an appropriate level and through the completion of the portfolio and passing the exams that they have the knowledge and competence to proceed to more senior roles.

In future, to undertake the HSD, applicants must simply be HCPC registered and have paid membership at Member (MIBMS) or Fellow (FIBMS) grade which must be maintained for the duration of this qualification.

## Portfolio Requirements

There are two stages to the award of the HSD. Candidates firstly submit a portfolio that must satisfy the examiners within their chosen discipline that they have met the standard required. The HSD group reviewed the current portfolio requirements and based on their experience of marking portfolios





## *“The HSD helps candidates demonstrate discipline specific knowledge in a wider professional context required for senior roles”*

agreed to some changes in relation to what should be included in it. From May 2021 the submitted portfolio must contain:

- A 500 words ( $\pm 10\%$ ) personal professional profile that describes the professional experience, current job role and responsibilities of the candidate
- Two cases; one on a clinical issue and one a managerial issue. Each must be

1,500 words ( $\pm 10\%$ ). It must be clear the level of personal involvement that the candidate has had and whether a clinical case or a managerial report they must demonstrate a systematic approach, show insight and wider understanding of the condition or issue, current knowledge and relevance to their scope of practice

- Two essays each of 3000 words ( $\pm 10\%$ )

based on titles on the IBMS website

- Evidence of an oral presentation – with feedback from appropriate colleagues
- One reflective statement of 2000 words ( $\pm 10\%$ ) that articulates how the candidate identified gaps in their knowledge, the actions they took to address these and the rationale behind their choice of action(s). It should also show how their preparation for the HSD has contributed to their professional practice.

Next month, I will explain the HSD exam structure, how it is marked and how unsuccessful candidates will be able to ‘bank’ their results in certain papers ahead of any re-sit attempt. [IBMS](#)