

REFLECTIONS ON TRAINING

We present four reflections on one biomedical science training programme in the south east of England and how it has coped during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Simonne Weeks – Senior Lecturer for Biomedical Scientist Placements at University of Brighton

Throughout my biomedical science career I have held positions as a training officer and quality manager and am acutely aware of the pressures training officers and trainees encounter. From a quality perspective, the right training is paramount for patient safety. In my current role as a Senior Lecturer, I redesigned the University of Brighton's training programme to effectively support training officers and trainees to create original and innovative pieces of evidence for the IBMS Certificate of Competency portfolio. I ran monthly seminars that covered the key concepts for each module and through interactive sessions trainees could apply this knowledge into practice, thereby demonstrating their competency. My secret ingredient was supporting and allowing trainees to practise their critical reflective writing.

When trainees engaged with this new format, they produced outstanding pieces of evidence that demonstrated their competency, capacity and confidence to join the bank rota as verified biomedical scientists because it showed their commitment to continually seek to

improve their practice. This was the preferred outcome for all parties; the trainees gained verification, training officers could focus on the competency in practice now the knowledge, skills and critical reflective practice was being supported by the university, and the pathology management could be reassured the new generation of trainees were fit for practice.

Maimoona Naz – University of Brighton student and trainee at East Surrey Hospital

My placement year was life changing. It was my first full-time job and I found the work environment a completely different lifestyle. I did my placement as a part of University of Brighton's Clinical Placement for Biomedical Scientist module where I attended monthly seminars. My university tutor covered the key concepts of professional conduct and practice in order to become an HCPC-registered biomedical scientist. Every month we discussed lab-based tasks that would meet the HCPC standards. These tasks became evidence for my registration portfolio. My tutor was very keen for us to produce reflective statements for each piece of evidence, because it allowed us to think about our roles and responsibilities as future



biomedical scientists and the impact of our job in the delivery of patient care. At the beginning it was quite difficult to produce good reflective statements but over time and continual practice it became natural to reflect upon daily tasks in the lab.

I faced many other challenges in my training, including working during a global pandemic. In the lab we were constantly adapting to new government guidelines. Social distancing made it harder to meet with my training officer in small rooms. We had to reduce the number of meetings and tried to link up via email as much as possible.

I used all the resources that were available to me, for instance attending seminars on MS teams, asking how to improve my evidence with my academic tutor and discussing issues with my training officer, who also helped me finish my portfolio on time. I cannot thank my tutor and training officer enough for their support and willingness to help me achieve my goal in such a challenging time.

I believe strong willpower and a team that supports you as a trainee are vital for success. What I have learnt through this experience is that being able to adapt quickly, develop problem-solving skills

and being resilient are key skills for a biomedical scientist.

Lesley Stewart – Senior Biomedical Scientist at East Surrey Hospital

I have been a haematology training officer for approximately 15 years. This role can be very rewarding, particularly seeing how a trainee's knowledge, skills, competence and confidence develop and blossom into a state-registered biomedical scientist. However, it can be challenging to find enough time to perform the training officer role with the additional demands and responsibilities of the senior biomedical scientist role.

Under COVID-19 pressures, the University of Brighton switched to a virtual format to continue with its programme of monthly seminars and the students were able to submit evidence electronically for guidance and feedback from their university tutor. As training officer, I felt that the university maintained its level of support, despite the COVID-related difficulties. It worked well because the university continued coordinating all the evidence, which made it easier for the students to keep on track.

I consider a portfolio to be exceptional when the trainee demonstrates real

insight into the requirements of the portfolio by relating the standards to their day-to-day practice in the lab and to the bigger picture of the trust and service users. They also need to be able to express themselves clearly and present information in a concise manner and use an appropriate format. I really liked how the university offered a more structured approach to complete the portfolio work for the students. The evidence became more directly linked to their actual lab experience. Both the lab competency and knowledge components of the portfolio worked very well together, rather than feeling separate as they have done in the past. I also liked the reflective statements and the embedding of reflective practice within the training programme.

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engagement with their training officers and colleagues. This type of portfolio tracks the transitional development from trainee to biomedical scientist and it is this reflection, as well as practical competency, that creates an outstanding candidate.

Paul Laurance-Young – IBMS Verifier and Lecturer in Biomedical Science at University of Plymouth

I simply love teaching students – giving them the basic tools to set them on the path toward a career that can be at times both frustrating and incredibly rewarding. As a former biomedical scientist, it is a chance to provide the next generation of students with real-world experience, coupled with text-book knowledge. The challenges are different, but certainly nothing that working for the NHS in my role as training officer has not amply prepared me for.

The IBMS portfolio is incredibly personal. The trainee decides what format of evidence to include under the guidance of their training officer or university tutor. The average portfolio includes 30 pieces of evidence that demonstrate meeting the HCPC standards of proficiency. I have been an IBMS verifier for two years and am well versed in what constitutes good and bad evidence. So, when I had a comprehensive viva with a trainee at East Surrey Hospital, I was particularly impressed with how both the trainee and training officer made particular reference to the quality and skill with which University of Brighton conducted itself in helping to deliver an effective training programme.

An exceptional portfolio documents both reflective practice and personal development throughout the training programme. There must be examples of their own practice and vivid

engagement with their training officers and colleagues. This type of portfolio tracks the transitional development from trainee to biomedical scientist and it is this reflection, as well as practical competency, that creates an outstanding candidate.