

# THE HSD

## DEVELOPING SPECIALIST SKILLS



Specialist Biomedical Scientist **Naveed Sadia** outlines her preparations for the Higher

Specialist Diploma and her hopes for how it will benefit her career.

**T**he IBMS Higher Specialist Diploma (HSD) is a professional qualification equivalent to master's level. It is designed for the biomedical scientist who would like to develop their skills and take up a more advanced role. It enables the building of knowledge within a chosen specialist area. For me, this specialism was transfusion science. Other specialist areas that can be pursued include clinical chemistry, cellular pathology, haematology, immunology, leadership and management, microbiology and virology. Biomedical scientists who are HCPC registered and members or fellows of the IBMS can apply for such programmes.

I am a Specialist Biomedical Scientist working in the Blood Transfusion

Laboratory for the Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust (LTHT). We are one of the largest NHS trusts in the UK, offering a range of general, acute and elective services. We are a Regional Trauma Centre and Specialist Children's Hospital and one of the largest providers of solid organ transplant services in the UK. Consequently, the Blood Bank receives patient samples from a wide range of clinical cases. The testing of samples and interpretation of test results requires an in-depth understanding of blood group serology.

### Undertaking the HSD

My work on the HSD has enabled me to develop my expertise within blood transfusion. I have done so by becoming more engaged in quality-orientated duties, such as calibration of equipment,

and associated paperwork.

Developing further skills through clinical case studies enabled me to resolve complex cases, such as autoimmune haemolytic disease and investigations into passenger lymphocyte syndrome. This has improved my decision-making, which may ultimately promote better patient care.

It may help me progress into more advanced roles and I will also be able to support the training needs of fellow colleagues, which in turn can promote my engagement skills.

The HSD is my first experience of a self-taught programme since university. This diploma requires significant access to a wide range of literature, including books, research articles from accredited journals, guidelines and informed

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laboratory procedures. I undertook a short informational course, on how to access online resources to assist with the research and collation of information.

### Gaining confidence

I began to develop greater confidence in evaluating information from journals and articles. But I had a sense of low self-confidence when conveying theoretical knowledge to others. This was due to moving out of my comfort zone. I have overcome this by taking the lead in opportunities for clinical engagement, such as oncology day unit presentations, and actively inputting into management meetings, which improved my confidence. This has formed a bridge between laboratory management and clinical teams, giving both sides an opportunity to

engage and improve service delivery.

The HSD portfolio has helped me to understand the management side of pathology. The management report enabled me to appreciate the importance of a quality management system in maintaining effective service delivery for patient care. This, alongside my clinical case study, has allowed me to understand the importance of clinical and transfusion history in serological testing and better informing safe transfusion practice.

### Improving knowledge

During completion of my HSD Portfolio and exam preparations I have attended various internal and external courses. These were provided by bodies such as Serious Hazards of Transfusion, NHS Blood & Transplant, UK Transfusion Laboratory Collaborative, LTHT Blood Transfusion and Hospital Transfusion teams. This not only increased my knowledge and understanding, but helped me identify and promote best practice in transfusion. I undertook other activities in order to improve my knowledge, for example reading articles and books, participating in CPD activities, giving lab tours and presentations for clinical staff.

Actively looking to apply what I had learned helped greatly to reinforce my learning. Recently, I joined the NHS Wayfair conversation, which is a helpful discussion platform that enable members to share new learning. Other resources include internal newsletters, such as those provided by our Hospital Transfusion and Blood Stock Management teams. These provide awareness around the challenges in transfusion science and are a really helpful resource in managing those challenges. Through this additional CPD, I believe I am better prepared to undertake the HSD exams next year.

### Benefits to my career

This educational activity has greatly enhanced the depth of my specialist skills and knowledge. The training will also enhance my standing as a specialist. As a scientist who has completed registration and specialist portfolios, I would be keen to build upon my supervisory skills for trainees. My enhanced specialist knowledge in serology can help broaden lab services, which will be positive for patient care.

When I started the HSD I felt anxious about preparing for senior tasks, such as managerial reports and those elements covered within the generic exam. My experience and knowledge in these areas was limited. But I was determined to build on my existing skills and by attending HSD Candidate Preparation Events, I have overcome some of these hurdles.

Through these I received useful tips for improved essay writing and this has given me a clearer idea of the portfolio requirements, including structural guidance. I also recognise that similar anxieties will likely be prevalent amongst other candidates. This has helped reduce my own anxieties and relieved feelings of isolation.

I am thoroughly enjoying the learning during the HSD. As mentioned above, I am keen to develop my professional knowledge in order to embark on more complex lab investigations.

I would recommend this programme to biomedical scientists who are interested in developing specialist skills. However, from my own experience, I would say that the learning process can be stressful as it requires a lot of juggling with the everyday workload. The extra funding now available for HSD candidates will help with this immensely.

On balance, I would say the benefits far outweigh the negatives. 

