

Consultant Clinical Scientist Training in Transfusion Science

A new Higher Specialist Scientist Training Programme in Transfusion Science: Progress Report 2017

Dr Marion Scott

Retired NHSBT Clinical Scientist

Working with BBTS, NHSBT, ACS, AHCS and RCPATH

How we got there:

Consultant Clinical Scientists have been practising in the NHS for many years, in highly complex roles as clinical scientific experts, clinical leaders, directors and innovators. It is estimated that there are 600 such posts in England and Wales, across all scientific disciplines. Consultant status in Haematology /Transfusion has been awarded by the Royal College of Pathologists (RCPATH). However, there has not been a clear route through the Royal College of Pathologists for Clinical Scientists in Blood Transfusion, with most current Consultant Clinical Scientists gaining their Consultant status by publications, rather than examination. This has resulted in a high age range for these posts, as it takes a long time to generate sufficient numbers of publications.

Modernising Scientific Careers (MSC) proposed a new way of training to be a Consultant Clinical Scientist. 11 new Higher Specialist Scientific Training (HSST) programmes were developed, which comprised a five year doctoral level programme developed in conjunction between the professional bodies, the National School for Healthcare Science and the medical Royal Colleges. The programmes included research, leadership and specialism specific clinical scientific content. The HSST training programs were the final part of Modernising Scientific Careers to be implemented in 2014, (the Scientific Training Programmes having been launched in 2009 with the Genetics curriculum).

Concerns were voiced early on in this process as to whether the proposed HSST in Haematology contained enough Transfusion Science to enable sufficiently specialist Blood Transfusion Consultant Clinical Scientists to develop. These concerns were expressed at BBTS Professional Affairs and Education Committee, NHS Blood and Transplant and at the Transfusion Medicine Standing Advisory Committee and Clinical Science Committees of the RCPATH. A joint group was set up to investigate these concerns, with members from BBTS, NHSBT, IBMS (Institute of Biomedical Science) and RCPATH. Support staff were financed by NHSBT, as Senior NHSBT staff were convinced that they needed specialist scientific staff in these consultant roles in the future. The group found that the current Haematology HSST programme was estimated to cover only 40% of what was considered should be in a Transfusion Science HSST. The group proceeded to write a full proposed Transfusion Science HSST Curriculum. After much hard work and lobbying, this new Transfusion Science HSST Curriculum was approved by the RCPATH in 2015 and the National School for Healthcare Science in 2016. The full Curriculum can be obtained from either body.

Two NHSBT HSST students transferred to the new Curriculum. An NHSBT HSST Steering Group was formed to monitor progress, ensure adequate supervision, and organise placements in hospital labs outside NHSBT. Our NHSBT medical Consultants have been very supportive of this new development.

Urgent work then began to form an Examinations Panel to administer the new FRCPATH Transfusion Science exams. Dr Tom Latham, NHSBT medical Consultant, agreed to chair this group. The RCPATH agreed to allow senior transfusion scientists who were not Fellows of the College to be co-opted onto this Panel, providing they attended an RCPATH Examiner training course. The Panel agreed that the Part 1 examination should consist of 20 short answer questions, and 4 essay questions. Due diligence was applied to standard setting for all questions, using the College Delphi system.

Examples of these questions are on the RCPATH website, www.rcpath.org/trainees/examinations/examinations-by-speciality/transfusion-science.html. The Part 2 exam will consist of a portfolio of case reports, a data interpretation paper, evidence of clinical decision making and a viva.

The first Part 1 exams in Transfusion Science were held in March 2017, and both candidates passed. Congratulations to them for successfully being the “guinea pigs” on the new course!

The Exam Panel are now preparing a Part 1 exam for Spring 2018, and a Part 2 exam for Autumn 2018.

How you can get there:

To gain entry to the HSST course: NHSBT runs annual competitions for NHSBT Transfusion Science HSST places – this normally starts in March. Hospital Trusts have equivalent procedures. Please note that HSST places are only available to HCPC registered Clinical Scientists – if you are HCPC registered as a Biomedical Scientist you will need to apply to register as a Clinical Scientist. You can either apply through the Association of Clinical Scientists under route 2, or through the Academy for Healthcare Science STP Equivalence route. Which is most suitable will depend on each individual case. The process can take up to 6 months, so I would advise an early application!

For more Senior Staff, who are already well experienced, you can apply for equivalence to HSST training with the Academy for Healthcare Science. You still must be registered with the HCPC as a Clinical Scientist, so the above advice applies if you have come through a Biomedical Scientist route.

Useful Web sites:

National School of Healthcare Science www.nshcs.nhs.uk/join-the-programme/nhs-higher-specialist-scientific-training

Royal College of Pathologists www.rcpath.org/trainees/examinations/examinations-by-speciality/transfusion-science.html

Association of Clinical Scientists www.assclinsci.org/acsApplicants/acsRegistration.aspx

Academy for Healthcare Science www.ahcs.ac.uk/equivalence