

A Career Framework for Healthcare Scientists in the NHS

The Healthcare Scientists (HCS) Career Framework aims to provide a guide for NHS and partner organisations on the implementation of an integrated career framework for all healthcare scientists based on the concept of skills escalation and offering flexible career opportunities to meet workforce, service and individual needs. The HCS Framework is a specific presentation of the overarching Career Framework for the NHS introduced by the NHS Modernisation Agency in June 2004, and which is complementary to a range of workforce related initiatives.



Introduction

The Healthcare Science (HCS) workforce provides diagnostic and therapeutic services for most patient episodes and plays an important role in the delivery of national priorities for the health and social care system as outlined in the NHS Improvement Plan (1).

A modernised healthcare science workforce is essential if the NHS is to be improved and a more responsive patient/public centred service delivered. This requires a more flexible workforce possessing the appropriate skills and competences to deliver safe, effective and efficient evidence based services.

The Healthcare Science workforce in the NHS consists of approximately 50 distinct disciplines or sub disciplines (see over page for details) that can be grouped into 3 divisions based on primary work function:

- Life Sciences (including Pathology disciplines and Genetics)
- Physiological Sciences (including Audiology and Cardiac Physiology)
- Physical Sciences (including Medical Physics and Clinical Engineering disciplines)

Healthcare Scientists number approximately 50,000 in England and are employed on a variety of different employment grades until Agenda for Change (2) is fully implemented - with consultant clinical scientists undertaking roles recognised as being similar to medical consultants.

These different employment groups are distinct and differentiated in general by entry qualifications, pre registration education and training programmes (for some) and scope of practice. These differences frequently lead to confusion for employers at a local level.

The field or practical testing phase of the UK wide National Occupational Standards for Healthcare Science (NOS HCS)(3) Project clearly identified overlapping roles and functions undertaken by the different HCS employment groups in some disciplines. This demonstrated the need for an integrated approach to the roles and functions provided by scientific services.

At local and in some instances national level, new healthcare science roles are beginning to emerge. The change required overall however is happening relatively slowly predominantly due to a number of barriers and obstacles to career progression. This provided the imperative to develop an overarching Career Framework for Healthcare Scientists in the NHS, based upon the Career Framework for Health (4).

Overall Aim

The aim of the Career Framework for Healthcare Scientists is to :

- Introduce an integrated career framework encompassing all disciplines and employment groups within the workforce based on roles and function and linked to transferable skills and competences
- Clearly identify pathways for progression and transfer, supported by learning and development providing enhanced opportunities
- Provide national consistency and maximum flexibility to support local service delivery, the expansion and extension of current roles; and the emergence of new roles.

The development of the framework was based on the following working assumptions:

- Provision of improved opportunities for learning and professional development will be provided supporting recruitment and retention into healthcare science disciplines, removing the barriers to career progression.
- An education and training framework will be developed based on a range of academic, vocational and professional qualifications/awards to recognise underpinning knowledge and skill acquisition relevant to functions being undertaken, based on equivalence within each career framework stage irrespective of initial entry point.
- The science base within the NHS will be preserved such that career progression will not only be on the basis of increased management and financial responsibilities but also on specialised scientific service provision and Research and Development roles.
- Access routes into NHS scientific careers will be provided at all levels in the career framework.
- The 'consultant practitioner' career framework stage will be extended across healthcare science employment groups in line with service need.
- The framework will link with and support the implementation of Agenda for Change and encompass the development of healthcare scientists in post and throughout their careers in conjunction with the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework.

The policy context

Making the Change a strategy for professionals in healthcare science (5) introduced the generic term for the workforce of Healthcare Scientist and highlighted the need to improve the supply of healthcare scientists, strengthen and modernise education and training pathways, introduce a robust regulatory framework and value and reward staff for the work they do.

This strategy document recognised that barriers to progression existed and there was a need to introduce a new career framework for healthcare scientists to support a reformed and modernised NHS.

The *HR in the NHS Plan* (6) identified the need for a workforce that 'works smarter, not harder' with one of pillars of the Plan being to ensure that the NHS provides a model career. Integral to this was the necessity to understand the current workforce, the skills and competences available and the staff development opportunities to help make best use of the workforce whatever the professional grouping.

Specifically, *Modernising Pathology Services* (7) identified the need for the workforce in pathology to be re-profiled, with a focus on the appropriate use of skills and competences to deliver redesigned services, flexible approaches to staffing and entry routes and the requirement for staff to work in new ways.

The *NHS Improvement Plan* (1), now supported by *Creating a Patient-led NHS* (8), clearly outlined the need to provide improved services and better access for patients and the public. It included a greater focus on improving access to diagnostic tests and procedures and a shift towards provision of services into the community. Healthcare scientists have a key role to play in achieving these goals and this requires a structure to enable their skills and talents to be utilised in the best possible way for the future.

This document draws on all of the different policy initiatives and outlines a nine stage integrated career framework for the healthcare scientist workforce based on functions and roles (both current and emerging).

The development of this framework has been cognisant of policy initiatives for the NHS and healthcare scientists within the devolved health administrations. The steering group has actively sought and where possible included appropriate representation. It is anticipated that the HCS Career Framework will be adopted across all UK Health Departments, which will support UK wide approaches to learning and development, workforce flexibility and transferability of skills and competences. *Getting Results: A Strategy for Diagnostic Services in Wales* (9) has recently recognised the pivotal role played by Healthcare Scientists and the need to introduce innovative career opportunities.

This Career Framework for Healthcare Scientists (10) is based upon the Career Framework for Health which outlined the need for a change in emphasis to ensure that the NHS had a flexible workforce that can respond to strategic challenges. An important element being job design based on the skills and competences required to deliver local service priorities. To guide the introduction of the Career Framework for the NHS as a whole a UK wide steering group has been established, and the development work has now been transferred to the health sector skills council - Skills for Health and an information website established at www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/careerframework.

Key elements of the Career Framework

Definitions

For a Career Framework to make sense there has to be a commonly understood set of definitions for different job roles, currently this is not the case within healthcare science and is confusing for patients, staff and employers alike.

The Career Framework for Healthcare Scientists (HCS) in common with the Career Framework for Health has nine levels and is defined below.

Assistant Healthcare Scientist (Stage 1 and 2). An assistant HCS performs protocol limited tasks in a clinical, scientific or technical HCS discipline under the supervision and direction of more senior staff.

Senior Assistant Healthcare Scientist (Stage 3). A senior assistant HCS performs a range of protocol driven tasks in a clinical, scientific or technical HCS discipline and may work without close supervision and supervise others but with reference to professional advice. Senior assistants may assist in training new staff and look after equipment used by others.

Associate Healthcare Scientist (Stage 4). An associate HCS generally performs a wider range of clinical, scientific or technical procedures (that may have previously been performed by regulated practitioners) but usually under the direction of an appropriately regulated practitioner. Associate HCSs may work independently in some disciplines, but usually as part of a team and organise day to day activities or take on supervisory responsibilities.

Healthcare Scientist Practitioner (Stage 5). A practitioner HCS performing a range of complex clinical, scientific or technical procedures and accountable for their own actions and for the actions of those they direct and/or supervise.

Senior or Specialist Healthcare Scientist (Stage 6). These are HCSs with a higher degree of autonomy and responsibility than practitioners performing a complex scientific/technical role and/or managing/supervising a team. A senior or specialist HCS performs a highly complex clinical, scientific or technical role and supervises a team. Specialist HCS will include clinical scientist in first post registration job who perform a complex clinical and scientific role.

Advanced Healthcare Scientist (Stage 7). An advanced HCS will have developed skills and theoretical knowledge to a very high standard and will be performing an in depth highly complex role, and continuously developing clinical, scientific or technical practice within a defined field and/or has management responsibilities for a section/small department, or be largely involved in research and development.

Consultant/Principal Healthcare Scientist (Stage 8). A consultant/principal HCS provides clinical and scientific expertise and leadership within an area/discipline/s, bringing strategic direction, innovation and highly developed and specialised skills and/or has management responsibilities for a discipline/service/team and/or initiates or leads formal research activities.

Consultant Director Healthcare Scientist (Stage 9). A consultant director HCS provides clinical, scientific or management leadership across a number of areas/disciplines, bringing strategic direction, innovation and influence through practice, research and education and having ultimate responsibility similar to consultant medical staff.

Role and function specifications

Each of the 9 stages represents an increasing skill and knowledge requirement associated with increasing complexity, autonomy of practice and responsibility that have been incorporated into a HCS Career Framework functional guide (see over page) to support local utilisation and guide workforce planning.

This functional guide is not designed to replace any Agenda for Change or NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) documentation but merely to outline the functions that are likely to be delivered to inform local workforce planning and development and includes the following

- Knowledge, training and experience
- Analytical and Clinical Skills
- Patient care and public health
- Financial, Physical and Human Resources;
- Organisational skills and Autonomy/Freedom to Act;
- Planning, Policy and Service Development;
- Research and Development.

The functions at each career framework stage are generally based on work activity that reflects the knowledge, training and expertise required, to undertake specific roles within each stage. It is recognised however that within a given career framework stage it is possible that for some job roles some functions may be delivered from a higher or lower career framework stage.

Skills and competences

Increasingly, it is recognised that skills and competences should determine job design as a means of delivering the best possible care and service to patients. Considerable progress has been made in this area for healthcare scientists as part of the UK wide Healthcare Science National Occupational Standards (NOS) Project which completed in April 2005 (see www.noshcs.com for more details).

A total of 64 sets of NOS have been developed comprising of nearly 1000 individual standards in 51 healthcare science disciplines and 13 generic and common areas representing elements of function and covering all levels of practice from assistants to consultant directors. The NOS have been approved by the UK Coordinating Group for award and qualification purposes with ownership of the standards now residing with Skills for Health.

The complete NOS framework has been mapped against this 9 stage career framework for each of the constituent disciplines and indicative roles identified (both current, emerging and potential). This will form part of the phase 2 Career Framework implementation documentation and will be taken forward by a Modernising Healthcare Science Careers Programme within Skills for Health.

Consistency with reward systems

On December 1st 2004 Agenda for Change the new pay system for the NHS was introduced. This radical reform of NHS pay has been shaped by partnership arrangements between management and staff side representatives and the experience of 12 early implementer (EI) sites. It is expected that complete implementation in the NHS, including full use of the KSF, will be achieved by October 2006.

Healthcare scientists will be placed on pay spine two (within the extended remit of the Nursing and other Health Professions Review Board) which consists of 9 pay bands.

Job evaluation and job profiles

One strand of the new pay system is the NHS job evaluation scheme. This is a structured method of fairly rewarding people by measuring their job related skills, knowledge and responsibilities in order to allocate jobs within the 9 band pay structure.

National job profiles have been published including ones for healthcare scientists available on the Department of Health's Agenda for Change web pages (www.dh.gov.uk select the link to 'Policy and Guidance' and follow the links to Human resources and training/Modernising pay/Agenda for Change). Jobs that match national profiles will slot across onto the new system and pay band. Where a job does not match a national profile, local evaluation will take place using the NHS job evaluation scheme to ensure that the job is placed in the correct pay band.

To support the introduction of the Healthcare Scientist Career Framework, generic job profiles have been developed based on job statements that reflect the functional guide (see over page). These generic profiles are provided in an accompanying Agenda for Change guidance document for Healthcare Scientists (this is available from: <http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HumanResourcesAndTraining/ModernisingPay/AgendaForChange/fs/en>).

The Healthcare Scientist generic profiles reflect a range of 'expected' jobs across the 9 stages of the healthcare scientists career framework and include profiles to support the introduction of new healthcare scientist roles particularly at stages 4, 7, 8 and 9.

Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) and Development Review

Another strand of Agenda for Change is the NHS KSF which provides a means of recognising the skills and knowledge that a person needs to apply to be effective in a particular NHS post. The KSF applies to all posts which come under Agenda for Change and forms the basis of career and pay progression in the service. It will also help to ensure that there are effective links between the individual and service development and related education and training.

The KSF is a broad generic framework which covers the functions that need to be carried out by most NHS staff. It links directly to more detailed competences developed by Skills for Health and the HCS NOS Project. The work that has been undertaken to map the HCS NOS to the NHS KSF will be made available on the Skills for Health website.

Guidance has been developed to help organisations apply the NHS KSF to healthcare science posts using the healthcare scientists career framework. The guidance shows how the dimensions and levels in the KSF might be used to describe healthcare science posts and hence inform the development of healthcare scientists. These are detailed in the accompanying Agenda for Change guidance document for Healthcare Scientists (available from: <http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HumanResourcesAndTraining/ModernisingPay/AgendaForChange/fs/en>).

Education, learning and development

It is absolutely crucial that the career framework is underpinned by learning and development programmes that are fit for purpose. To achieve this there will need to be a shift in emphasis to ensure commissioning is driven by the competences that employers' require for service delivery. Education and training applicable to each stage of the Career Framework needs to relate closely to skills and competences associated with job roles and will need to include appropriate and robust assessment methods. This work will be taken forward by the Skills for Health Team working on Modernising Healthcare Science Careers (further details available on the DH CSO website at www.dh.gov.uk/cso).

There will be a process for recognition and assessment of existing competences. Personal development plans will help individuals who are not from academic backgrounds to identify needs and develop the skills and competences required for working at more senior levels. There will be a number of different kinds of learning programmes to help fill gaps.

The focus on skills and competences related to the service function to be delivered is absolutely fundamental to the success of the Healthcare Scientists Career Framework. Educational and professional requirements will continue to be important in the design, delivery and assessment of programmes. These contributions will be enhanced by added flexibilities so that the skills required to deliver patient and public focused services are able to transcend traditional professional boundaries.

As part of this initiative, we need to overcome historical difficulties and make qualifications and educational credit more accessible and transferable. Work on recognising different forms of achievement e.g. gaining credit for work based learning is underway in a number of different sectors. Further work on this is being undertaken by Skills for Health and the Modernising Healthcare Science Careers Programme team. The aim of this work is to develop a national awards and qualifications framework which will integrate vocational and more traditional learning routes.

In order to direct future education and training programmes in the healthcare science workforce the NOS HCS Project has identified learning outcomes for each stage of the career framework for all healthcare science disciplines and assembled these into a range of learning and development modules. These modules will ensure that the appropriate knowledge is delivered to underpin practical skills. They will also help inform the commissioning of more fit for purpose education and training programmes, and the requirements for flexible awards and qualifications and academic credits.

The clear identification of training needs nationally will facilitate a more strategic future approach and will support engagement with local organisations to ensure the needs of the healthcare scientist workforce are known and addressed.

Registration and regulation

Patient safety is paramount and as independent statutory regulator the Health Professions Council (HPC) seeks to ensure that healthcare practitioners have the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to provide healthcare safely. HPC currently regulates 13 professions and maintains a public register of professionals who are safe and competent to practise using a protected title.

There are already two parts of the existing HPC register which relate to Healthcare Scientists: Clinical Scientists and Biomedical Scientists.

In the interests of public protection, the HPC can recommend to the Secretary of State the regulation of other healthcare professions. The Council has already recommended the regulation of some groups of healthcare scientists as set out below.

The HPC sets agreed standards of proficiency for the professions it regulates and in the case of healthcare scientists, those standards will be informed by the HCS NOS.

Proposed Future Arrangements

It is expected that the following healthcare science groups will achieve statutory regulation in 2006:

clinical physiologists, clinical perfusion scientists, clinical technologists, clinical photographers and maxillofacial prosthetic technologists.

Further groups aiming to achieve statutory regulation at a later date may include: anatomical pathology technicians, cervical cytology technologists, tissue bank technologists, ophthalmic and vision scientists, technologists in genetics (cyto and molecular), critical care technologists, technologists in andrology and embryology and sleep physiologists.

Entry to the register

With the development of the healthcare scientist Career Framework it has become clear that practitioners seeking entry to the HPC register will fall into 3 categories:

- I. practitioners with a limited scope of practice in a particular specialism will usually have been awarded an HNC/HND/Dip HE, Foundation degree or equivalent vocational qualification
- II. practitioners who perform a broad range of clinical, technical or scientific procedures will usually have been awarded a first degree (vocational) or equivalent
- III. practitioners who provide a range of specialist services will usually have been awarded a post graduate qualification and equivalent to Masters level,

These three points of primary regulation will be required usually for entry to levels 4, 5 and 6 on the 9 stage HCS Career Framework. These will not necessarily be progressive regulation points and any change in regulation status would only need to be considered if individuals moved into the scope of practice of another regulated practitioner.

New and extended roles

A person already registered with one regulatory body will sometimes move into a new role regulated by a different regulator, or extend their scope of practice to include such a role. A model for the future is under consideration by the Review of Non Medical Regulation. However it is unlikely that there will be a need for dual registration.

Introducing the Healthcare Scientists Career Framework locally

The Healthcare Scientists Career Framework has been developed in full partnership with inputs from key stakeholders (including professional representatives, the Federation for Healthcare Science, employers, staff side organisations, the Royal College of Pathologists, devolved administrations and SHA/WDC representatives). This means that managers and HR professionals can encourage staff to think about new roles and new ways of working that will support the recruitment and retention of staff; and will develop the capacity and capability of the workforce to deliver improved patient outcomes.

The development of the Healthcare Scientists Career Framework will assist managers and HR professionals to deliver the key elements of *HR in the NHS Plan* for the healthcare science workforce and to achieve greater integration with other staff groups by:

- working in new ways, in extended roles and using skills flexibly,
- working with others, developing service delivery models and influencing care,
- challenging established practice,
- supporting learning opportunities, CPD and commitment to education and training,
- developing leadership capacity,
- being recognised and represented in local NHS structures,
- actively participating in healthcare planning for local communities.

Building the workforce

The healthcare science workforce is very diverse and as such faces many challenges in delivering high quality patient care. These include:

- Workforce pressures – including the impact of the European Working Time Directive
- Scientific and Technological advancement
- Growing demand – particularly for the provision of diagnostics services in both the acute and primary care sectors
- Changing clinical practice
- Changing public perceptions and expectations
- Governance and Regulation

The above challenges offer many opportunities for NHS Trusts and NHS Foundation Trusts who, by working in partnership with staff organisation representatives, will be able to bring about real improvements to patient care utilising the Healthcare Scientists Career Framework.

Planning the workforce

Workforce planning should be developed at a local level taking account the range of national initiatives and priorities that will impact on the healthcare science workforce.

Healthcare scientists should be clearly identified within NHS Trusts and NHS Foundation Trusts and other organisations, ensuring good quality data is provided for the Department of Health Workforce Census and as part of the Local Delivery Plan (LDP) process. This will inform national strategic decisions and assist in planning the learning and development requirements of the healthcare science workforce.

Recruitment, Retention and Workforce Utilisation

There have been increases in the numbers within the healthcare science workforce and this has been achieved by:

- Raising the profile of healthcare science and healthcare scientists within the NHS and the public domain
- Increasing the number of training commissions
- Utilising pay flexibilities and continuing to make the NHS a model employer
- Attracting those on career breaks and those who have left the NHS to come back to work in the NHS and in the interim recruiting internationally
- Working with Workforce Development teams to tackle specific areas of recruitment difficulties
- Promoting healthcare science as a career option for younger people

In order to sustain the growth required to meet national priorities and local health economy requirements, the recruitment and retention of the healthcare science workforce should be a key component of all Human Resource strategies utilising the healthcare science recruitment resource centre toolkit. Further details available on the CSO website at: www.dh.gov.uk/cso

The Diversity Agenda

The full utilisation of the Career Framework will open up greater learning and career opportunities for all staff regardless of their background. This will support the Government's agenda of investing in a workforce that has the skills and commitment to deliver health services to an increasingly diverse society and to enable the NHS to make the best use of the available pool of talent. The Career Framework is built on the principle of offering career development that is fair and open to all and where everyone has the chance to progress and to achieve their full potential.

NEXT STEPS AND ACTION

At a national level the work programme will focus on:

- a) Supporting implementation of the NOS HCS project outputs across the 9 stages of the career framework
- b) Identifying education and training pathways to inform learning design and course development that can be tailored for local or more geographical or national approaches to delivery
- c) Modernising pre registration education and training programmes to ensure that they are fit for practice and the needs of the NHS
- d) Developing an award and qualification framework
- e) Determining requirements for higher specialist training
- f) Influencing workforce planning, commissioning and development
- g) Supporting recruitment and retention strategies, NHS Careers and raising the healthcare scientists profile
- h) Continuing with the work programme to extend regulation to relevant healthcare science professional groups
- i) Bringing a UK wide perspective to the healthcare science workforce and policy development

At a local level

It is suggested that NHS organisations assess themselves against the action plan detailed below in order to identify the key areas on which they need to focus.

- a) Undertake a review of the healthcare science workforce – identifying both current staffing and future demands related to what is required in terms of skills and competences rather than more of the same.
- b) Undertake a training and development needs analysis of the healthcare science workforce, using all relevant documentation including the NHS KSF and the development review process.
- c) Engage with commissioners/planners and others involved in the Local Delivery Planning process to ensure the required workforce expansions of the healthcare science workforce across the career framework are known and funded .
- d) Establish a Healthcare Scientist network within Trusts; working in partnership with representatives from staff organisations and professionals from the 3 divisions of the HCS workforce.
- e) Ensure the healthcare science workforce is reflected within local HR Strategies and there is representation on key groups/committees
- f) Utilise service design/re-design projects to identify the skill mix requirements and effective/efficient patient pathways, including expanded and new roles, for the healthcare science workforce.
- g) Maintain an awareness of and at the appropriate time utilise the outputs of the NOS HCS project to inform individuals' development and to develop and manage the local healthcare science workforce and others who undertake scientific functions.
- h) Undertake an audit of the regulation status of the healthcare science workforce – ensuring all eligible staff are on the relevant voluntary registers to enable smooth transfer to a statutory register.

This is a very large and complex piece of work. However, this document gives a much-abbreviated synopsis of the progress that has been made so far. Views are invited on any of the issues raised by this document and should be addressed to:-

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A PDF version of this document and ongoing developments related to this career framework will be posted on the Department of Health CSO web pages at:www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Bulletins/ChiefScientificOfficerBulletin/fs/en and on the Skills for Health website at: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/careerframework

A Healthcare Scientist Career Pathway Group (HCS CPG) was established in January 2003 led by the Department of Health Chief Scientific Officer with all major stakeholders represented which has taken forward the first phase of this overall work programme in a collaborative partnership based approach.

Department of Health/MA representatives

Sue Hill, Chief Scientific Officer, Chair
Foluke Ajayi, HCS Recruitment & Retention
Ian Barnes, National Pathology Advisor
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5. **Making the Change**
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9. **Getting Results: A Strategy for Diagnostic Services in Wales**
www.wales.gov.uk/subihealth/index.htm
10. **Career Framework for Healthcare Scientists**
www.dh.gov.uk/cso

Other related websites

CSO Website
www.dh.gov.uk/cso

Positively Diverse

www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HumanResourcesAndTraining/ModelEmployer/EqualityAndDiversity/PositivelyDiverseIntro/fs/en