

# Guidance for applicants and employers to the Higher Specialist Scientist Training (HSST) programme

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the HSST Frequently Asked Questions at  
[www.nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/knowledgebase/hssi/](http://www.nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/knowledgebase/hssi/)

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## Introduction

The National School of Healthcare Science manages recruitment to the Higher Specialist Scientist Training (HSST) programme in England and Wales. Health authorities in Scotland and Northern Ireland manage their own recruitment to the programme.

## Purpose and scope

This document outlines the 2020 national recruitment and selection process for entrants to the HSST. It provides information for employers and applicants, on both direct and in-service entry, on subjects such as

- national advertising process
- recruitment and selection process
- allocation of trainees to host training placements

Any employers involved in recruitment should read through this document and send a copy to their HR department. Please email [nshcs.mscrecruitment@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:nshcs.mscrecruitment@hee.nhs.uk) for further advice or guidance.

## Definitions

### In-service

Applicants who are already employed by the NHS in the scientific specialism they are applying for. You will remain employed by your current employer throughout the programme, but your salary will be subsidised by Health Education England. You will be employed at a minimum as a Band 7 Agenda for Change Clinical Scientist, but you will retain your current substantive banding. If you are already at a higher banding than Band 7, your banding will not decrease. You must have been nominated by your employer, with an allocated training post, to be eligible.

### Direct entry

Applicants entering the training programme from outside the NHS. To be eligible, you must already be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council as a Clinical Scientist. If selected, you will follow the programme full-time for five years under a fixed-term training contract with your host organisation at a minimum level of Agenda for Change Band 7 Clinical Scientist. If you are already an NHS employee you can apply for direct entry, but you would have to resign from your existing post when you start the programme.

## Specialisms

The full range of HSST specialisms are shown in Appendix 1. Not all programmes are available in any given year.

## Overview of the process

Appointment to the HSST is through a national selection process which uses multiple station interviewing to assess

- suitability to the course, as detailed in the person specification in Appendix 4
- values and skills to reflect the NHS Constitution
- research, innovation and any scientific experience

The shortlisting and interview stages of the recruitment process are carried out by national panels made up of employers, professional bodies and lay/medical representatives.

## Roles and responsibilities

All information relating to the recruitment process, is initially communicated to employers through the HEE local commissioners.

Employers must ensure that

- any internal recruitment processes for posts, are instigated as soon as the post(s) has been confirmed by the HEE Local Team
- one or more members of the department, are nominated to participate in the shortlisting and interview processes for both direct and in-service applicants
- their HR department is engaged from the beginning of the process, and aware of the national process

## Entry requirements

- To apply to the programme, you must be a registered Clinical Scientist with the Health and Care Professions Council. If you are in the process of applying for Clinical Scientist equivalence, you can still apply. However, you will only be eligible for interview if you can provide evidence, by the interview date, that you have submitted your equivalence portfolio. It is your responsibility to ensure registration is achieved before the start date of the programme.
- If you have graduated from the Scientist Training Programme, you will normally need at least one year of workplace experience, after graduation, before applying to the HSST.

- You should be able to demonstrate that you meet any additional specific selection criteria, required for a specialism.

Please read through the HSST core person specification and make sure that you meet the eligibility criteria before you apply. Additional guidance on applying to the HSST is available in the [FAQs section on our website](#).

### **Applying for the programme**

Applicants apply to the programme through an online application tool. You will be asked to provide details about how you meet the person specification for the programme, including your qualifications, experience and motivation. The information provided is then reviewed by shortlisters against the requirements of the person specification. Any successful applicants are invited to a national competitive interview event.

### **Advertising**

The HSST programme is advertised in the New Scientist magazine, on the School's website, and on the NHS jobs website.

### **Before starting your application**

All application deadlines are listed on our website, where you can also find frequently asked questions, person specification, curricula, application deadlines and all other necessary information.

Plan your time. Work out how long it will realistically take to complete the application form. You will, for example, need to get feedback from colleagues; and that may take time.

Referees should be contacted as early as possible to confirm that they are happy to support your application and provide a reference. Your referees will not be contacted until you pass the interviews.

### **Oriel, the online application portal**

Applications to the HSST are made through the online application portal, Oriel. You can access Oriel through the School's website. Minimum browser requirements are available in Appendix 3.

## **How to register**

Click 'Account Registration' and create a user account. You can register on Oriel as early as you wish but you will not be able to apply until the application window for the vacancy opens.

When you have your account, click on 'Proceed to Applicant Registration'. Here, you can fill in some of your details which will be used to populate parts of the application form, for any vacancy you apply for.

## **Employment history**

Follow the prompts to enter your employment history; these details will also be used to automatically populate your applications. Oriel requires you to enter an end date for your current employment. If you are currently employed and will need to leave your job to join the programme, enter the date 31st August 2020.

We use Oriel's direct messaging option to contact you about applications in progress. Make sure to check your Oriel account regularly to stay informed. We may also use the email address you give us, but your main source of information will be through Oriel.

## **How to apply**

To apply for a vacancy in the location and specialism you want

- go to the 'vacancies' menu on Oriel
- under 'Training Programme' search for 'Higher Specialist Scientist Training'
- select the vacancy you want to apply for and click 'To Apply'

There will be two HSST vacancies displayed, one for direct entry and one for in-service. See the definitions at the beginning of this guide to understand the difference between the two. Make sure you select the correct one for you. This will usually be 'direct entry' unless you are applying through your NHS employer.

If you are a direct entry applicant, you can only apply for a direct entry vacancy. However, if you are an in-service applicant, you can apply for both vacancies. When applying for an in-service vacancy, your employer will send you a code which you will need in order to complete your application form.

## Overseas applicants

Please refer to national guidance from Health Education England and UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) to confirm whether you are eligible to apply. Search the [HEE website](#) and the [UK Borders Agency website](#) if you need further information.

## The application form

The application form has initial screening questions. You must meet the minimum eligibility criteria in order to be able to proceed with the application. You must provide personal, academic, work experience, general employment and equality and diversity data. You may have already provided some of this data when completing the full registration process, and this will be auto populated within your application form.

You will then complete a series of short answer questions to demonstrate your suitability, understanding and motivation for the programme. You will also be asked to choose your specialism.

Add any work experience, for example, any voluntary work to the supporting information section.

## Saving partially completed applications

You can save and return to your application as many times as you like before completing and submitting it.

## False declarations

Any false declarations will invalidate your application.

## Employers/locations

In the period between your invitation to interview and allocation to a training place, you will be asked to specify where in the country you wish to train. In Oriel this is referred to as 'sub-preferences'. Your interview score will be ranked, and this will be used, together with your sub-preferences rank, to determine which training location you are allocated.

You will normally complete the whole programme in your current place of employment. If, however, you have applied for a **direct entry** post there may be a choice of employers/locations open to you. In that case, you will have an opportunity to select preferences in the period between your invitation to interview and allocation to a training place. You can view the advertised training post locations and specialisms on our website. The posts are displayed by region. Details may change during the recruitment process, so keep checking the website for the latest position. You can only make one

application per vacancy. If you try to submit more than one application for a single vacancy, you will be removed from the recruitment process.

If you are an **in-service applicant** you do not have a choice of specialism or location as you are being sponsored by your current employer and must only apply for that post. You will need to provide evidence that you have obtained permission from your employer to apply. You will also be asked for evidence of your qualifications.

### **Shortlisting and allocation to interview**

**Direct entry** applications are shortlisted by a panel who score it against each of the criteria in the person specification. Shortlisters do not have access to the equal opportunities, fitness to practise or employment history sections of the application form, or to your personal data. Shortlisting dates are published on our website.

To succeed, you must score at least two against each criterion. Applications are ranked in order of their total score. In the event of tied scores an algorithm is applied, and the highest scoring applicants go through to interview.

There are usually three interview places for each post, plus any applicants on the Guaranteed Interview Scheme (see below). There is also a reserve list in case shortlisted applicants withdraw.

**In-service** applicants apply through the same process as direct entry applicants. However, the application does not go through shortlisting because they are not competing for a post. Once the application has been submitted, you will move directly to the interview process.

### **Shortlisting outcomes**

When shortlisting is complete, your status on Oriel will change to

- Shortlisted – you will be invited to interview
- Shortlisted reserve – you will be invited to interview (possibly at short notice) if a candidate in your chosen specialty withdraws
- Shortlist unsuccessful – your application will not progress further

You will have five working days from the date of receiving the notice for interview, to confirm acceptance of the interview by booking a time online. [Further information on the interview process can be found on our website.](#)

## Special circumstances

We have a special circumstances policy for applicants who may qualify for priority allocation of training places. Further details on the policy are in Appendix 2.

## Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS)

Applicants with a disability as defined by the Equality Act (2010), and who are confirmed through shortlisting as meeting the criteria in the person specification, will automatically be offered an interview. If you have declared in your application that you have a disability and wish to be considered for the Guaranteed Interview Scheme, you must contact [hcsapplicants@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:hcsapplicants@hee.nhs.uk) with further information and supporting evidence no later than the end of the shortlisting window.

## Fitness to practise

The application form has questions about fitness to practise, covering things as criminal convictions. If you answer 'yes' to any of these questions you must provide further information, no later than the closing date, to [hcsapplicants@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:hcsapplicants@hee.nhs.uk) Please mark your email as 'confidential'. If you are successful in the interviews, the information you provide will be considered by a panel, who will consider whether the information you have provided makes you unsuitable for the programme.

## Interview

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to interview. [Guidance on the interview process is available on our website.](#)

The interviews are conducted at one national event. You will not have a choice of interview date, so when you apply to the programme make sure you will be available on the date advertised. You will have multiple mini interviews at a series of interview stations, each one evaluating a different aspect of your knowledge, skills and experience. The interviewers will give you a score at each interview station.

## Interview outcome and allocation process

After your interviews your Oriel status will change to 'interview complete'. All the interview scores are then reviewed; this can take up to two weeks. When we are ready to notify you of the outcome, your Oriel status will change to one of the following

- Offer made
- Interview unsuccessful

- Interview complete – for **direct entry applicants** this means your status stays at 'interview complete' if you are appointable but not ranked high enough to be allocated to a training centre at this stage. You will be placed on a reserve list.

If you are an in-service applicant and score over the minimum threshold at interview, you are automatically on the programme. We will email you and your manager with next steps.

If you are a direct entry applicant and your status says, 'offer made', we will allocate you to a training centre. Only one centre is offered to you. If it is not your first choice, you can 'hold' for a fixed period to see if something preferable becomes available. However, once you accept a post your acceptance is final. Further guidance about the allocation process will be available on our website before the interviews take place.

Once you accept an offer of allocation to a training centre, your details will be sent to them and they will begin their employment processes. The School does not employ trainees. You will be an employee of the training centre you are allocated to and will stay in their employment during your training. Once your details have been sent to your allocated employer, our role is over.

### **Interview feedback**

You can obtain your interview feedback free of charge by emailing [hcsapplicants@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:hcsapplicants@hee.nhs.uk) and attaching photographic ID. This usually takes approximately one month, as we cannot start to process requests until all the outcomes have been released. Feedback consists of interview station outcomes and any additional comments.

### **Employment status and grade**

All direct entry trainee healthcare scientists will be employed on a five-year, full time, fixed term training contract. This is funded at no less than AFC Band 7.

### **Contacts and useful information**

Applicants should ensure that they have read this guidance and the FAQs available, prior to submitting a query. For any additional queries regarding the national recruitment process please email [hcsapplicants@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:hcsapplicants@hee.nhs.uk)

## Appendix 1

### HSST specialisms

Not all the specialisms will have posts for 2020. Current post information will be [available on our website](#).

#### Clinical Bioinformatics

- Clinical Bioinformatics (Genomics)
- Clinical Bioinformatics (Physical Sciences)
- Clinical Bioinformatics (Health Informatics)

**Life Sciences** (completion of HSST will include the requirement to achieve the Fellowship Examination of the Royal College of Pathologists by examination)

- Clinical Biochemistry
- Clinical Immunology
- Reproductive Science
- Haematology
- Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics
- Genetics
- Microbiology
- Molecular Pathology of Acquired Disease
- Virology

#### Physical Sciences

- Medical Physics (which includes diagnostic imaging sciences and radiotherapy physics)
- Clinical Biomedical Engineering

#### Physiological Sciences

- Audiological Science
- Cardiac Science
- Respiratory and Sleep Physiological Sciences
- Neurophysiological Science

## Appendix 2

### How the special circumstances policy works

*This policy only applies to direct entry applicants. In-service applicants cannot apply for special circumstances under this policy.*

You can be considered under the special circumstances policy, if you need to be in a certain geographical area if one of the following applies to you

1. you are the primary carer for someone who is disabled, as defined by the Equality Act 2010
2. you have a medical condition or disability, and follow-up for the condition in the specified location is an absolute requirement

### Applying for special circumstances

So that we can apply this policy, please tick the relevant box in your application form to indicate that you wish to declare special circumstances. Once you have ticked this box, please complete the special circumstances request form which is available on our [website](#). Email it, together with the supporting evidence, to [hcsapplicants@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:hcsapplicants@hee.nhs.uk) after your application has been submitted and before the application closing date.

### Supporting evidence

If you are a primary carer as in number 1 above, please provide

- a written statement from a general practitioner or social services professional, who you have known for at least 6 months, confirming your role as a primary carer
- a care plan
- proof of your current address, for example a driving license or utility bill dated within the last 3 months

If you have a medical condition or disability as in number 2 above, please provide

- a report by the current medical specialist treating your condition or Occupational Health physician, in which they
  - describe the current medical condition or disability
  - describe the nature of the ongoing treatment and frequency
  - explain why the follow-up must be delivered in a specific location rather than by other treatment centres in the UK
- proof of current address, for example a driving license or utility bill dated within the last 3 months

Your application will be reviewed by an eligibility panel and you will be notified of the decision by email. If you are dissatisfied with the decision, you will be notified of your right of appeal.

### **Allocation for applicants with special circumstances**

If your application to the training programme is successful and you have been ranked highly enough to receive an offer, and you have also been approved under the special circumstances policy, we will try to ensure, as far as possible, that you are offered a post in your specified region.

We cannot guarantee that the offer will be with your first choice of employer, but we will do our best to accommodate your needs.

For example, our approach would be

- You must be within 20 miles of your home in Camford
- You have applied for a training post in cardiac science within that area
- A post in the Camford Hospital cardiac department is available. You have identified it as your first preference.
- Another applicant, Miss A, has identified the same post as one of her preferences.

In these circumstances

- If you ranked higher than or equal to Miss A in the interview outcomes, you would be offered the Camford post
- If Miss A ranked higher than you, but does not have special circumstances, we will offer Miss A her next preference lower on the list, and we will offer you the Camford post

However, there are some circumstances when we could not offer you the Camford post. For example, if Miss A in the scenario above did not have a lower preference to fall back on.

Offers are allocated based on sub-preferences; this is when you choose your preferred combination of employers/locations. It is most important to select only employers/locations that you are willing to accept. So, in the fictional example above, you should not select anything more than 20 miles from Camford.

## Appendix 3

### Browser requirements for Oriel

| Browser product                    | Version |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| BlackBerry                         | >=6     |
| Apple Safari                       | >=7     |
| Google Chrome                      | >=30    |
| Microsoft Internet Explorer        | 9, 10*  |
|                                    | 11      |
| Microsoft Internet Explorer Mobile | 11      |
| Microsoft Edge                     | all     |
| Mozilla Firefox                    | 24-26*  |
|                                    | >=27    |

## Appendix 4

### Core Person Specification for Higher Specialist Scientist Training

| Entry requirements  | Core Person Specification for HSST Trainee  | Assess by  |
|---|---|------------|
| <b>REGISTRATION</b>   | <p>Registration with the HCPC as a Clinical Scientist.</p> <p><i>Note: applicants who are eligible for such registration, and have their application underway, may apply for the HSST programme but if appointed are not eligible to commence an HSST training position until registered.</i></p> <p>This registration requires education to the level of MSc in Clinical Science, or equivalent.</p> | A          |
| <b>SCIENTIFIC SKILLS</b><br>Demonstrated in a work or study context | A passion for (committed, in-depth interest in and enjoyment of) clinical scientific practice and its application to patients and healthcare in a clinical environment.   | A & I      |
|   | Ability to analyse and critically evaluate scientific, technical, educational and medical literature.<br>Ability to identify opportunities for research and innovation and successfully complete and disseminate findings.<br>Ability to make judgments, including clinical judgments involving facts or situations that impact on patients.  | A & I      |
|   | Have a detailed understanding and experience of quality assurance in a science or laboratory context.   | A & I      |
|   | Proficiency in the performance of routine and complex techniques currently in use within the specialism (including following Standard Operating Procedures accurately) and the ability to develop, validate and implement new techniques.   | A, & I & R |
|   | Able to identify problems associated with scientific equipment, inappropriate testing and incompatible results and to investigate these, plan corrective action confirming appropriateness with senior colleagues and follow up, e.g. ability to use, maintain and troubleshoot scientific equipment.   | A & I      |
|   | Evaluates the current and future role of their chosen specialism in providing patient centred healthcare and can debate current issues and future challenges and the strategic direction of the specialism.   | A & I      |
|   | Excellent IT skills and knowledge of common computing packages for word processing, spreadsheets, presentation packages, databases, reference management and handling of clinical data sets.  | A & I      |
|   | Ability to analyse complex information comprising laboratory or workshop data, images and clinical information. Knowledge acquired through study and experience to formulate appropriate advice and make appropriate judgments.   | A & I      |

| Entry requirements  | Core Person Specification for HSST Trainee   | Assess by  |
|---|--|------------|
| <b>TRANSFERABLE SKILLS</b><br>Demonstrated in study, work or non-work contexts                              | Excellent interpersonal and communication skills, both written and verbal, in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explain analytical, scientific and clinical aspects of the work to a variety of people including scientific colleagues, clinical professionals, service managers, patients and the public, listen and respond to their concerns, questions and needs</li> <li>• present scientific research, innovation and new developments to groups of colleagues</li> <li>• be involved in curriculum review and further development, teaching and assessment using a range of a methods</li> </ul> | A & I      |
|   | Good active listening skills to build rapport in order to encourage an open discussion and ability to use questioning to maximise exchange of information.   | A & I      |
|   | Self-aware and flexible enough to adopt a range of evaluative and empathising communication styles reflecting a wide range of needs.   | A & I      |
|   | Ability to work autonomously in the planning and execution of their own work and training and development.   | A & I      |
|   | Evidence of the ability to lead others and contribute to the leadership and strategic direction of the service in which they work.   | A & I      |
|   | Demonstrably excellent interpretative skills in the formulation of advice to multi-disciplinary team members on diagnosis and appropriate treatment of patients and where appropriate the ability to explain findings to patients.   | A & I      |
|   | Good personal organisational and project management skills, knowledge of finance, budgets, business case and service development, change management, managing and appraising staff.  | A & I      |
|   | Effective team worker, willing to adopt a role working in collaboration with others or as team leader. Provide training for internal/external individuals or groups.   | A & I      |
|   | Ability to handle patient samples, hazardous reagents and chemicals in a safe manner in accordance with Health and Safety regulations.   | A & I      |
|   | Ability to support distressed patients (or their carers) including those with a range of acute or chronic clinical conditions, perhaps terminal, and disabilities in a variety of healthcare settings.   | A & I      |
| Demonstrates values and principles of the NHS Constitution as a whole, with a focus on patient centred care | A  |            |
| <b>PERSONAL QUALITIES</b>   | Ability to be non-judgmental and work within an ethical framework respecting the views of colleagues and patients.   | A & I      |
|   | Must be able to demonstrate and practice the values, behaviours and attitudes which support those set out in the NHS Constitution.   | A & I, & R |

| Entry requirements   | Core Person Specification for HSST Trainee   | Assess by |
|--|--|-----------|
| <b>PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS</b><br>Reasonable adjustments will be made in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 | Ability to work under pressure (emotional resilience and ability to prioritise and plan work) and tenacity.                                    | I & R     |
|  | Highly developed physical skills where accuracy is important for manipulation of fine tools, materials/high degree of precision, coordination. | A         |
|  | Ability to meet the travel requirements of the training role and any clinical rotations.   | A & R     |