

Scientist Training Programme

Guidance for Trainees and Training Officers on preparing for the Independent Assessment of Clinical Competence

Background

As you will be aware, the live OSFAs for final year STPs were cancelled due to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and introduction of the public health measures of social distancing.

The OSFA was the independent (to TOs and department assessors) validity check of the trainee's clinical competence and fitness to practice, integral to the STP. Due to the current exceptional circumstances, an alternative assessment has been designed to provide that independent assessment of the trainee's clinical competence and readiness to practice as a safe and competent Clinical Scientist.

Rationale

The OSFA was one of the three summative elements that the trainee must achieve in order to complete their programme and be eligible for entry to the HCPC register:

1. Award of the Master's in Clinical Science (specialty specific)
2. Portfolio evidence of workplace development via achievement of all assessments and competencies
3. Pass in the OSFA

During their programme, trainees are extensively assessed: via the academic assessments within their MSc in Clinical Science and via Direct Observation of Practical Skills (DOPS), Observed Clinical Events (OCE), Case Based Discussions (CBD) and Multi Source Feedback (MSF) in the workplace. Data shows that the pass-rate following the live OSFAs each year is around 85% indicating that trainees reaching this stage of the programme have already achieved very high standards of training and development.

The alternative assessment recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic has had significantly variable disruption to training for individual trainees across different specialties. Therefore, it is highly critical for the individual trainee, themselves, to recognise and understand in fine and personally specific detail, their own stage of development in relation to the requirements of a newly qualified Clinical Scientist and the ways in which they must be prepared to practise as a safe and competent member of the workforce.

The Independent Assessment of Clinical Competence (IACC), described below, will assess the trainee's insight to their readiness to practice. This aligns with the first Standard in the HCPC Standards of Proficiency¹:

1. be able to practise safely and effectively within their scope of practice
 - 1.1 know the limits of their practice and when to seek advice or refer to another professional

¹ The HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Clinical Scientists can be accessed here; <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-of-proficiency/clinical-scientists/>

The IACC, developed in conjunction with stakeholders including a representative group of OSFA Lead Station writers across all three Healthcare Science divisions, employers, and Trust Lead Scientists, has been approved by the Academy for Healthcare Science (AHCS) and Health Education England Executive leading on Covid-19 programme amendments for commissioned programmes.

The AHCS is the HCPC's approved educational provider for the Scientist Training Programme and issues the Certificate of Attainment which confers eligibility for entry to the HCPC statutory register for Clinical Scientists.

Independent Assessment of Clinical Competence (IACC)

Trainees must critically reflect and write a narrative focusing on their clinical competence and **readiness to practise as a safe and competent Clinical Scientist**. This must be grounded in the AHCS Good Scientific Practice (GSP) Standards, which underpin the STP and must be referenced to signed-off evidence from their portfolio. The AHCS GSP standards have been closely mapped to the HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Clinical Scientists and describe the expectations of practice under five principal domains:

Domain 1: Professional Practice

All patients and service users are entitled to good standards of professional practice and probity from Healthcare Science workforce including the observance of professional code of conduct and ethics.

Domain 2: Scientific Practice

Healthcare Scientists are expected to keep their scientific and technical knowledge and skills up to date effectively.

Domain 3: Clinical Practice

Healthcare Scientists are expected to keep their clinical skills up to date and undertake clinical duties appropriate to their role in order to be effective.

Domain 4: Research, Development and Innovation

Undertaking research, development and innovation is a key part of the role of Healthcare Scientists; to support the NHS to address the challenge of meeting the needs of an ageing population, chronic disease, health inequalities and rising public expectations of the NHS.

Domain 5: Clinical Leadership

Patients and service users have a right to expect that Healthcare Science services are delivered efficiently and effectively managed to meet service needs.

These domains should be viewed and applied in the context of the [HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Clinical Scientists](#).

Trainees should give equal weighting and emphasis to each principle GSP domain.

As a conclusion to their narrative, the trainee must also critically reflect and write a global statement on their on-going practise as a safe and competent clinical scientist, bringing together the threads of their critical reflections on meeting the GSP domains.

The IACC trainee submission template, provided by the School to receive the trainee's submission, will be structured to ensure that trainees cover all expected aspects in their narrative.

The word limits for the submission are an expectation of 2500 words and must not exceed 3500 words. No artefacts and appendices should be added. For detailed guidance on what will and what will not be accepted, please refer to the 'Requirements for the IACC submission' document.

Timeline for the IACC

Please refer to the IACC webpage for indicative timeline including submission period and date of outcome release: <https://nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-information/stp-independent-assessment-of-clinical-competence/>

As with the OSFA, final year trainees are scheduled to submit their narrative for their IACC during the indicated submission period. Requests for exceptional arrangements including deferrals based on exceptional circumstances only e.g. statutory leave such as maternity/paternity leave or exceptional demand on their time due to the response to COVID-19 can be made to the School by email and must be accompanied by supporting evidence.

The IACC has been designed to recognise the disruption to training provision and trainees should develop their narrative based on their own stage of development at the scheduled time for their submission. Requests for deferrals due to not having completed all of their workplace training is counter to the expectations of the IACC and therefore, will not be accepted.

Help with writing to the assessment task

Trainees are advised to familiarise themselves with the standards described in the AHCS Good Scientific Practice: [Good Scientific Practice, version 1 December 2012](#).² They should seek the support of their Training Officer to ensure they have understood the expectations set out in the GSP.

The narrative must identify how they would use their insight, gained through critical reflection on their own stage of development, to ensure competent, safe practice as they enter the workforce in the role of Clinical Scientist. Trainees are asked to provide examples drawn from and referenced in their Onfile portfolio. Only evidence signed off by assessors should be cited as this indicates that the evidence was accepted and at the expected

² Academy of Healthcare Science, Good Scientific Practice (v.1, 2012) available from <https://www.ahcs.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/AHCS-Good-Scientific-Practice.pdf>

standard. In the narrative, the trainee should consider these and explain how the skills developed at this time can be expanded to encompass other areas within their own specialty that are not yet signed off, and how they can recognise the limits of their scope of expertise to inform their continuing professional development and practice as a newly qualified Clinical Scientist.

Trainees are encouraged to focus their narrative on the essential and central tasks that would be expected of them on day 1 as a registered professional and emphasise how they will self-regulate to ensure they are able to meet the responsibilities of their role and expectations of their future employer to deliver the service.

The citations to the portfolio evidence should be of the following format:

ModuleID:CompNumber

The STP is at an academic level 7 and the narrative must also demonstrate that the trainee has achieved the expectations to the level of the programme. The L7 advanced practitioner as described in the Skills for Health level descriptors may be helpful to understand the level:

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Career Framework Level 8

People at level 8 of the career framework require highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work, which they use as the basis for original thinking and/or research. They are leaders with considerable responsibility, and the ability to research and analyse complex processes. They have responsibility for service improvement or development. They may have considerable clinical and/or management responsibilities, be accountable for service delivery or have a leading education or commissioning role.

Indicative or Reference title: Consultant

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Career Framework Level 7

People at level 7 of the career framework have a critical awareness of knowledge issues in the field and at the interface between different fields. They are innovative, and have a responsibility for developing and changing practice and/or services in a complex and unpredictable environment. Indicative or Reference title: Advanced Practitioner

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Career Framework Level 6

People at level 6 require a critical understanding of detailed theoretical and practical knowledge, are specialist and / or have management and leadership responsibilities. They demonstrate initiative and are creative in finding solutions to problems. They have some responsibility for team performance and service development and they consistently undertake self development. Indicative or Reference title: Specialist/Senior Practitioner

As this critical reflection is an independent assessment, Training Officers will not be asked to assess or mark this work. However, Training Officers are expected to advise trainees on how to approach the assessment (as they would assist in their trainee's preparation for the OSFAs), with formative feedback on the critical reflection.

The IACC critical reflection is an assessment of clinical competence, not academic/scientific writing ability (which has been extensively assessed during their Masters). Therefore, writing style does not form part of the marking criteria. However, the critical reflection should be logical and easy to follow for the independent assessor. Trainees are advised to sense-check their narrative prior to submitting.

The IACC will be assessed by an independent specialist expert, nominated by the specialty's OSFA Lead Station Writer and trained in assessing this type of assessment. The outcome for

the assessment will be pass or fail. An Examination Board will be convened to review the results and moderate as appropriate. All trainees (pass or fail) will receive a Candidate Report with constructive developmental comments from the assessor.

Please refer to the IACC Regulations and IACC policies and also to the 'IACC Requirements for submission' which set out the operating terms for the IACC.

Critical Reflection

This assessment is a critical reflection, a skill that you will have developed throughout the STP. To assist you with preparing, we have provided some guidance and resources:

- Guidance on critical reflection with examples

Resources:

The AHCS Good Scientific Practice: <https://www.ahcs.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/AHCS-Good-Scientific-Practice.pdf>

The HCPC Standards of Proficiency: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-of-proficiency/clinical-scientists/>

The HCPC Standards of conduct, performance and ethics: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-of-conduct-performance-and-ethics/>