Introducing post-registration training & progression for UK Biomedical Scientists

Victoria Moyle

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Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate approaches to post-registration training, and specifically the use of the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) Specialist Diploma, for the professional development and career progression of Biomedical Scientists in the UK.

The IBMS Registration Portfolio for the Certificate of Competence is the main route to registration with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) for Biomedical Scientists (BMS) in the UK. This is a means of evidence-based assessment to demonstrate a candidate has met the Standards of Proficiency at a threshold level for safe, effective practise.

The critical change between this and the previous requirements for registration is that in the old ‘logbook’ format, elements of generic and some discipline-specific laboratory training must have been completed before a candidate could be registered. In the Registration Portfolio, only the generic elements are covered and discipline-specific training is now demonstrated via the Specialist Portfolio, undertaken after HCPC registration. The aim of the Specialist Portfolio is to support a BMS’s immediate post-registration training; it is “a specialised professional qualification for early career Biomedical Scientists”[1] to demonstrate training, practical skills, specialist knowledge and competency against a benchmark standard.

The IBMS qualification structure is designed to align with Agenda for Change (AFC), a framework for pay in the NHS, which is intended to support career progression. However, person specifications for BMS roles are still set locally and the Specialist Portfolio is not tied to any universal mandatory requirement. Additionally, a growing number of NHS pathology services are now run by private pathology providers who employ HCPC registered BMS, but are not bound by AFC.

A small number of studies have looked laboratory training with respect to the Registration Portfolio rather than the specialist, but identified key factors and issues in the delivery of laboratory-based training that may also be pertinent specialist level training[2][3][4]. There is very little research on this topic and so this study sought to explore the subject and identify variation and factors that shape practice in this area, identify inconsistency and perhaps provide areas for future study.

Findings

Use of the Specialist Portfolio in post-registration training and progression.

There were differences in whether or not a Specialist Diploma is required to progress to the next grade (band six or equivalent), and whether progression is automatic upon completion. This is summarised in Table 2.

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<td>Is there a requirement to progress to band 6 (or equivalent) on completion of the portfolio?</td>
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Research Aim & Objectives

Research Question – What approaches do clinical laboratories take to post-registration training and progression for Biomedical Scientists?

Research Objectives

• To find out whether laboratories use the Specialist Portfolio as a means of career progression, in line with IBMS recommendations, and to estimate how much variation there is regarding this.
• To find out how and why BMSs undertake and complete the Specialist Diploma, or why they have not done this qualification.
• To find out how people feel about their experience of the current system.

Methodology & Recruitment

Qualitative description was chosen to explore the data, due to there being very little background research in this area, and because it can be useful for developing an understanding of potentially complex situations[5].

Invitations to participate in the study were made via an article published in ‘The Biological Scientist’, and via the IBMS e-newsletter. A potential limitation of this is that it may have excluded non-IBMS members, who may be an important demographic to include in a full picture. Those who responded may represent a certain group, or be more actively engaged with the IBMS, which may skew the data.

One-to-one interviews were selected for this study. A semi-structured interview format was used, and interviews were carried out using Microsoft Teams video calls.

Twelve Biomedical Scientists were recruited and interviewed. Participant demographics are shown in Table 1. All participants worked in appropriate training laboratories, which offered the Specialist Portfolio in one or more disciplines. No two participants were from the same laboratory.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

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References