GOOD PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE
GOOD PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) is a standard-setting organisation and the professional body for biomedical science professionals: it sets standards of professional practice and behaviour through its qualifications, Code of Conduct, guidance and policy statements.

Good Professional Practice is a professional best standards policy document produced by the IBMS, whose members include scientists working at all levels in biomedical science, some of whom may be regulated as biomedical scientists through the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) or registered with the Science Council as Registered Technicians (RSciTech), Registered Scientists (RSci) or Chartered Scientists (CSci).

This document has been developed to help those who work in biomedical science to reassure their employers, professional colleagues, service users and the wider general public that any decisions made will be well-informed, reasoned and justifiable. Good Professional Practice also defines a foundation of principles for effective, competent and safe practice that hold true for any changes in science, technology and service delivery.

In this document the generic term “biomedical science professional” is used to describe the full breadth of individuals working within the field of biomedical science, including those who are in IBMS membership. The term “biomedical scientist” is a protected title and refers only to those registered with the HCPC.

WHY WE NEED GOOD PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Those who work in biomedical science require and expect expert guidance from their professional body to provide leadership and to help ensure safe and effective practice. This Institute standard is consistent with comparable statutory or regulatory standards and provides guidance for individuals whose practice is non-regulated.

WHAT THIS POLICY DOES

This document states the standards of professional competence and conduct expected of biomedical science professionals in all aspects of their professional practice. It is intended to support and complement the Institute’s Code of Conduct for members and serves as a benchmark of professional practice in biomedical science. It provides professional recommendations and guidance on standards of conduct, competence and professional standards for biomedical science professionals of all grades and in all areas of professional practice. The standards and recommendations contained herein are the informed opinion of the professional body in respect of best practice and as such are applicable to both members and non-members.

WHAT THIS POLICY DOES NOT

This policy does not attempt to be fully prescriptive or restrictive: unless referring to an Act of Parliament or statutory obligation the recommendations are not legally enforceable, although the deliberate disregard of professional best practice recommendations could be cited as part of a disciplinary case.

Good Professional Practice is the IBMS’ lead policy statement on best practice in biomedical science; for policy and guidance on specific issues please refer to the relevant IBMS Benchmark Policies.
1. STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

1.1 RESPONSIBILITY

- Biomedical science professionals are expected to act and behave in a professional manner at all times, mindful that their actions and conduct represent the standards by which they and the profession are judged.

- As members of a profession individuals are responsible for their actions, their omissions and their behaviours and need to be able to justify any decisions taken within their scope of practice. Individuals should recognise any deficiencies they may have and take appropriate action to rectify them.

- Patient safety and a delivery of high-quality care is the expectation of all biomedical science professionals. Biomedical scientists and other biomedical science professionals are accountable to their professional organisation, the laws and requirements of their practice, their registration authority and the patients they serve.

- Biomedical science professionals must exercise their professional duty of care and work within the legal, ethical and regulatory frameworks that govern and affect practice. Those whose role involves a high degree of autonomy (e.g. biomedical scientists) are required to exercise their professional judgement.

- Notwithstanding the requirements of statutory regulations for professional practice*, all those working and practising in biomedical science should do so first and foremost according to the standards of practice set by their employer, organisation or specialty.

* For those providing a service for the National Health Service the HCPC is the regulatory body responsible for setting and maintaining standards of professional training, performance and conduct of the healthcare professionals that it regulates, including those practising under the protected title of ‘biomedical scientist’.

- The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) externally audits and accredits public and private pathology laboratories against defined standards of practice. The Institute strongly recommends that all laboratories should be accredited in order to provide and ensure a high-quality, safe service.

1.2 RESEARCH

- Ethical clearance must be obtained from an appropriate local ethics committee or similar local body for research work undertaken. If there is any doubt as to whether ethical clearance is required, an assessment of risk should be carried out and if there is any remaining doubt reference should be made, in advance, to the local ethics committee or body.

- The obtaining of data and its presentation/publication must be unbiased and responsible. Validity, objectivity and reliability are key principles and caution should be exercised with the interpretation and explanation of test results.

- Biomedical science researchers should seek to maximise the accessibility of research findings and, wherever appropriate, publish them in the interest of biomedical science.

1.3 DATA PROTECTION

- Storage and use of individually identifiable data must be in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. (General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) will apply from 25 May 2018).

- Publication of data must not disclose the identity of, or means to identify, any individual patient or staff member unless the prior written consent of the individual is obtained.
2. PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

2.1 REGULATION AND REGISTRATION

- Registration, whether through statute (i.e. through the HCPC) or voluntary (e.g. Science Council Registered Scientist or Registered Science Technician) indicates that a professional standard has been achieved. Those individuals that are not registered on either a statutory or voluntary register still have a professional duty of care to achieve and maintain a standard of professional competence commensurate with their scope of practice.

- Those who work in biomedical science must abide by the legal and statutory requirements regulating the profession. For HCPC-registered individuals failure to do so could result in them being suspended or removed from the HCPC’s register.

- As HCPC standards are based on statutory and legal requirements they take precedence in any professional conflict of interest. The IBMS supports all HCPC standards and expects all biomedical scientists to be aware of and practice to the standards accordingly.

- Institute members should note that failure to adhere to legal requirements of practice and recommended principles of professional good practice could affect an individual’s cover under the Institute’s medical malpractice insurance scheme, and may result in expulsion from the Institute’s membership.

- Biomedical science professionals that are registered with the Science Council (RSciTech, RSci, CSci), or who have statutory regulation as a biomedical scientist, must continuously develop and demonstrate their knowledge and skills to reflect professional and scientific advances and guide best professional practice. They are expected to do this through reflection and self-management processes such as continuing professional development.

- Knowing one’s limit of practice is essential and biomedical science professionals are always encouraged to seek advice from, and offer support to, fellow professionals and colleagues. The IBMS is always available for professional advice, as part of its function as a professional body.

2.2 CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

- CPD is a process of lifelong learning, which enables biomedical science professionals to expand and fulfil their personal and professional potential, as well as meet the present and future needs of patients and deliver health outcomes and priorities. It assures that biomedical science professionals meet the requisite knowledge and skills levels that relate to their evolving scope of professional practice. The IBMS offers a CPD scheme that covers a wide range of activities to help and encourage its members to maintain, improve and extend their knowledge and skills through a process of reflective practice.

- The HCPC and the Science Council have set standards for continuing professional development and all registrants have a professional responsibility to adhere to these standards for CPD in order to remain on the HCPC register (to practise as a biomedical scientist) or on the Science Council registers as a Chartered Scientist, Registered Scientist or Registered Science Technician.

- All members of the IBMS are automatically enrolled on the Institute’s CPD scheme as a direct benefit of membership and to support the responsibility of regulated and registered members of their responsibility to undertake CPD as an integral part of their professional practice.

2.3 SUPERVISION AND TRAINING

- All those who work in biomedical science should engage in the training and mentoring of other staff as required, not just to help with career development, but also to ensure skills, standards of practice and values are maintained and disseminated throughout the profession.

- Biomedical science professionals involved in any such activities must demonstrate the skills, attitudes and practices of a caring and competent teacher/trainer. They should be objective and honest when supervising, appraising, mentoring, evaluating or assessing the performance of others and be aware that service users will be at risk if someone is described as competent who has not yet met or maintained a satisfactory standard of practice.

- Laboratories are required by accreditation services to have named training officers/managers and a written training policy to direct staff training and development. The Institute recommends that all training managers should have an appropriate qualification such as the Institute’s Certificate of Expert Practice in Training. The Institute’s Guidance on the Management of Training and the Role of the Pathology Training Manager provides further information on the duties, responsibilities and authority of a training manager/co-ordinator.
2.4 RETURNING TO PRACTICE

- Biomedical science professionals returning to practice have a responsibility to undertake a period of re-familiarisation and, if necessary, retraining. Those responsible for the supervision or retraining of staff have a responsibility to ensure an appropriate period of re-familiarisation and training is undertaken and competence assessed and documented prior to full resumption of duties.

- The HCPC has published a guidance document Returning to Practice for regulated health professionals who have taken a break from practising, and who wish to start practising again. The IBMS makes the additional recommendation:

- Individuals wishing to return to practice in a clinical laboratory should use the Institute portfolios as a framework for updating their knowledge and skills, for example, the Specialist Portfolio in discipline specific areas.

- A self-assessment of knowledge and skills achieved prior to a break in practice should be conducted against the portfolio to identify training needs (Gap Analysis).

- Training should be carried out in an Institute approved training laboratory and in accordance with these IBMS Good Professional Practice guidelines.

- The period of updating should be signed off by a registered biomedical scientist as a record of the areas of the specialist portfolio completed and whether competence to practice was achieved.

2.5 MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

- Biomedical science professionals are encouraged, and have a professional responsibility, to offer advice and expertise to individuals, teams, committees or working groups where their input can contribute positively to a service or project outcome.

- Managers should ensure that the good professional practice of individuals, teams and the service are balanced with the needs of the employer and the users of the service.

- Managers will ensure that all staff are appropriately recruited, trained, qualified, supervised and competent to practice. They will also seek to ensure that the performance and quality of laboratory services reaches the highest possible standards by implementing policies and protocols, training and quality management systems.

- Managers will ensure clear communication, systems for raising concerns, opportunities for staff engagement, transparency, good governance, a secure working environment, support and career development for all staff.

- Managers must make themselves familiar with the laws and regulations relevant to their workplace and working practices and keep up to date with best practice.

- The Institute recommends that all managers should have an appropriate management qualification such as the Institute’s Higher Specialist Diploma in Management and Leadership or the Certificate of Expert Practice in Management and leadership.

- The Institute recommends that all quality managers should have an appropriate qualification such as the Institute’s Certificate of Expert Practice in Quality Management. The Institute’s Guidance on Quality Management in Laboratories provides further information on the duties, responsibilities and authority of a quality manager.
3. PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOUR

3.1 CONDUCT

- Biomedical science professionals must adhere to appropriate standards of personal as well as professional conduct and must not act in a dishonest, indecent, violent or inappropriate manner that could bring the profession into disrepute, irrespective of whether such behaviour is directly connected with their professional practice or not.

- Use of alcohol or medication must not adversely affect professional performance or bring the profession into disrepute.

- Biomedical science professionals must not make statements or announcements in connection with their practice (or induce others to do so) that are untrue, misleading or unethical and must not carry out any other act or omission in connection with their practice that is liable to mislead the public or other professionals.

- False claims regarding qualifications or membership of organisations to which an individual does not belong must not be made. Biomedical science professionals must not use titles protected by statute referring to particular specialisms, which they are not qualified or eligible to use.

3.2 PARTNERSHIPS AND COOPERATION

- Biomedical science professionals operate in many diverse roles as members of a team providing multi-disciplinary and multi-professional healthcare across different care pathways. They must be able to consult and work in partnership with other professionals in the interests of patients and users of their services.

- Good communication skills are vital for relaying clear and concise information, advice, instruction and professional opinion to colleagues and service users to inform decisions on the care of a patient.

- Those who practice biomedical science should be aware of their employer’s mission statement, objectives and standards. They should be clear about the personal contribution expected of them in support of these aims. In return the employer should provide all staff with clear roles, responsibilities, training, communication mechanisms and accessible operating procedures.

3.3 RAISING CONCERNS

- Raising concerns or whistleblowing about the poor performance of healthcare professionals or a laboratory service, or being asked to practice in a way that could compromise patient safety, can be one of the most delicate and difficult things to do as it can involve friends and work colleagues and therefore must be done in good faith and for clear reason.

- Patients’ and other service users’ safety is paramount and must override personal and professional loyalties. All biomedical science professionals have an obligation to uphold the reputation of the profession: this extends to taking action to protect patients when there is reason to believe that another individual’s conduct, performance or health is putting patients at risk.

- All biomedical science professionals regulated by statute, as part of their duty of care to the public, have the legal obligation and moral responsibility to raise concerns without delay if individual or service performance could compromise patient safety. There may be circumstances where not raising concerns could be breaking national laws as well as breaching the terms of HCPC registration.

- Where biomedical science professionals work as part of a wider professional team, they must work in a collaborative and co-operative manner with other members of the team with a view to achieving the best possible service or outcomes.

- If those who practice biomedical science are in a situation where they need to raise concerns they must do so via local procedures but may also contact the IBMS for advice and support.

- The key role of diagnostics services in healthcare means that those who practice biomedical science need to be involved at all levels of the organisation as leadership and management will help deliver service or influence change to improve patient care. Part of the professional role of biomedical scientists is to work with healthcare science colleagues or groups to enhance networking, workforce planning and clinical engagement.
IBMS AND DEVELOPING STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

The Institute through its Council, its advisory panels and its network of representatives is fully involved in the development of many of the external standards and guidance referenced in this document. The Institute’s involvement in developing standards includes representation on external committees and working groups, expert responses to consultations and partnership with other bodies and organisations.

In addition, a professional qualification framework supports lifelong learning to enhance scope of practice throughout a career pathway.

The role of the IBMS is to support the development of biomedical science, both nationally and internationally, and develop professional standards to guide those who practice biomedical science for the benefit of service users and the wider general public.

HELP AND SUPPORT FOR GOOD PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Good Professional Practice reflects and outlines standards and practice that in the modern professional and scientific environment are constantly evolving. One set of guidance or standards cannot fully embrace the diversity and complexity of biomedical science and these should be used in conjunction with other organisational, regulatory and professional standards. Individuals working in biomedical science are therefore encouraged to communicate with the Institute with suggestions and feedback on Good Professional Practice to further develop and enhance professional guidance for the benefit of colleagues and the profession.

The Institute can provide professional advice and support for its members in a number of ways.

- Institute members can directly contact the IBMS, either by telephone on + 44 (0)20 7713 0214 or by email on mail@ibms.org.

- Institute members can contact their local national or regional Council member for advice and support. Contact details are available in the IBMS diary or by contacting the IBMS office.

- Specialist support and professional representation is also available in the devolved home countries of the United Kingdom – please contact the IBMS office for further information.

- The IBMS is a multidiscipline organisation with members working in a diverse range of specialties. Specialist advisory panels provide scientific and professional expertise, knowledge and advice to guide the IBMS. The panel members are recognised for their experience and expertise, which is used to develop biomedical science and the work of the Institute. The panels also provide expert advice for members on request. Please contact the panels on examinations@ibms.org.

- Web discussions forums are available in the members’ area of the Institute’s website that enables biomedical science professionals to provide support, exchange information and post questions and comments.
FURTHER INFORMATION

IBMS GUIDANCE AND STANDARDS PUBLICATIONS

The Institute’s BenchMark series of professional policies and guidance are available to download at www.ibms.org/resources/professional-guidance/

Articles, resources and further information on the biomedical science profession and getting involved in promoting the profession are available at www.ibms.org/getinvolved/

Information on the Institute’s Continuing Professional Scheme is available at www.ibms.org/cpd/

ABOUT THIS POLICY DOCUMENT

Title: Institute of Biomedical Science
Good Professional Practice
Produced by: Education and Professional Standards Committee
Version: Version 5
Active date: April 2018
Review date: June 2021
Contact: Education Department
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