

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE PORTFOLIOS

Q1. What are the biomedical support staff portfolios?

They are a collection of knowledge and skill requirements that when evidenced and achieved can be used to demonstrate practice to the level and standard expected of (by way of reference to Agenda for Change in the NHS) a band 2 or 3 Assistant Practitioner or band 4 Associate Practitioner. There are 2 portfolios: Certificate of Achievement Part I designed for use by bands 2 and 3 staff, and the Certificate of Achievement Part II designed for use by band 4 staff.

Q2. Do I have to complete the portfolios in order to move up a band?

No. Your banding is decided locally by your employer's policies and procedures. Completion of the portfolios may provide you with a mechanism to demonstrate to an employer that you have achieved a recognised standard of performance, although some employers may have additional requirements such as an academic qualification. However, the Certificate of Achievement may be used at internal appraisals, development plan setting, performance monitoring, and interviews to demonstrate your competence in certain areas of practice and allow you progression to a higher band.

Q3. Do I have to be a member of the IBMS to do the qualifications?

You are not required to be a member of the IBMS to complete Part I, BUT you must a member to be eligible to complete Part II.

Q4. Do I have to have a minimum level of qualification to be eligible to do the Certificate of Achievement Part I portfolio?

No. Completion is based on in-house training and assessment relevant to your role. Many staff that have worked in their roles for many years and have gained significant experience in carrying out their duties should be capable of undertaking the portfolio because of their experience. This decision should be made and standardised locally.

Q5. Do I have to have a minimum level of qualification to be eligible to do the Certificate of Achievement Part II portfolio?

You must either complete the Certificate of Achievement Part I or your employer can apply for you to be exempt if you have a Level 3 (6 in Scotland) e.g. NVQ/SVQ 3 qualification or equivalent and experience deemed by the Institute to be relevant.

Q6. I am a registered science technician but do not have a level 3 qualification. Am I eligible to do Part II?

Yes. If you are a Registered Science Technician you have been assessed as having met the required standards that are also evidenced by the Certificate of Achievement Part I and are therefore eligible to do Part II.

Q7. How are the portfolios structured?

The portfolios are structured in a similar way to the IBMS Registration Training Portfolio and Specialist Portfolio, with specific modules of described knowledge, competence and evidence of achievement related to an area of professional practice.

Q8. Do the portfolios cost anything?

Yes. Please see the application form for fee.

ABOUT TRAINING

Q9. Are there any courses to support training?

Your training will take place in your workplace (or similar environment) and is likely to be similar to some of the training you already undertake. Staff induction and mandatory health and safety courses will provide some training and although not essential, your employer may wish to make use of on-line learning modules where available.

Q10. Do I have to collect evidence into a portfolio or is it sufficient to have only the IBMS portfolio signed?

Evidence of training is required through signatures against performance criteria and comments by the line manager. There are also prescribed tasks that need to be completed. These are the only requirements for evidence.

Q11. Who signs off each part of the performance criteria?

The most appropriate person to sign is the person assessing your competence and who has the authority to sign off your training. It does not have to be a senior member of staff; however you should follow local instructions.

Q12. Could work from other portfolios e.g. NVQ portfolios be used as evidence?

Yes, if the individual signing off the element is satisfied it is relevant to the requirements of the performance criteria. However, you do not need to include it in your portfolio.

Q13. Do I have to complete the entire portfolio or only a certain percentage of it?

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The portfolios will have a set number of core modules, all of which must be satisfactorily completed and signed off. Each portfolio will also have a number of optional modules, a minimum number of which must also be completed. The optional modules can be chosen to reflect your own duties and the type of service your employer /laboratory provides.

Q14. How long should it take to complete either of these portfolios?

It is envisaged that Part I should take between 6 and 12 months, Part II a little longer. Depending on ability, experience and local resources they may take more time. However, if the evidence is over 3 years upon completion it will need to be replaced or updated to proceed. For current versions of Part I and II portfolios there is a shelf-life of 3 years following the release of a newer version.

Q15. Must my employer give me dedicated time to complete the portfolio?

It is not an absolute requirement for employers to provide ring-fenced time for portfolio completion. Many laboratories state that a certain amount of time may be provided, that it must be taken by the individual on site (not allowed to 'work from home'), but also that this is not guaranteed and is subject to local discretion. As with the other IBMS portfolios, although the laboratory should support and guide their staff, it is the ultimate responsibility of the individual to ensure the portfolios are completed.

Q16. Are the portfolios assessed by an external person appointed by the IBMS in the same way that other IBMS portfolios are verified and assessed?

No. Once signed off by your internal training manager or coordinator (or person holding this responsibility), an application is made to the IBMS for the award. The IBMS may wish to audit portfolios to ensure standards are maintained.

ABOUT THE AWARDS

Q17. What does successful completion of the Certificate of Achievement Part I portfolio lead to?

Individuals will be awarded a Certificate of Achievement Part I and be eligible to apply to the IBMS to become a Registered Science Technician, provided they are an Associate member of the IBMS and meet the other criteria of professional experience and CPD.

Q18. What does successful completion of the Certificate of Achievement Part II portfolio lead to?

Individuals will be awarded a Certificate of Achievement Part II and be eligible to apply to the IBMS for registration as a Registered Scientist provided meet the other criteria of professional experience and CPD.

.Q19. Are these registers the same as the HCPC register for biomedical scientists?

No. The HCPC is a statutory regulatory and registration as a biomedical scientist is a legal requirement to practice requiring completion of the IBMS Registration Training Portfolio and an honours degree. RSciTech and RSci are voluntary registers.

Q20. Do the awards have academic credits?

No. Academic credits are awarded by further and higher education institutions that provide academic programmes of learning. The IBMS Certificates of Achievement Part I and Part II are based on vocational training (similar to an NVQ) that is delivered in the workplace and leads to the assessment of knowledge and skills in a particular area of professional practice.

Q21. What academic level is the Certificate of Achievement Part I training portfolio equivalent to?

It represents a similar level of achievement as academic level 3 (6 in Scotland) for 'A' levels, ONC, NVQ/SVQ 3 for example.

Q22. What academic level is the Certificate of Achievement Part II training portfolio equivalent to?

It represents a similar level of achievement as academic level 5 (8 in Scotland) for BTEC diplomas, and foundation degrees. The portfolio has the potential to overlap with many vocational elements of a foundation degree. Please note: As there are no 'taught' elements your training will be entirely work based and this is not equivalent to academic modules taught in a Further or Higher Education Institution. For this reason some employers may also require a taught academic qualification for certain (more senior) support staff roles.

ABOUT EMPLOYMENT

Q23. Employers are re-profiling their skill mix in the NHS and employing more support staff (assistant and associate practitioners) in preference to biomedical scientists. Support workers are perceived to be taking their jobs from them so isn't this "dumbing down" the profession?

Whilst acknowledging that this is a sensitive area it is important to recognise the difference between the respective roles of support staff and biomedical scientists. Assistant and associate practitioners will most likely have (or need to acquire) basic laboratory skills that biomedical scientists gain during their initial training. However, their scope of practice is limited to skills that are applied without significant elements of autonomous practice, underpinning scientific knowledge or critical evaluation.

Biomedical scientists on the other hand must meet a threshold level of scientific knowledge and skill for registration with the Health and Care Professions Council

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(HCPC) that is based on an accredited biomedical science honours degree and represents the lowest level of practice for biomedical scientists. At the point at which registration applies an individual has a level of autonomous practice that requires personal responsibility to ensure their actions do not compromise the safety of patients.

Q24. Do we need to define the scope of practice of support workers to identify their 'difference' from HCPC registered biomedical scientists?

The IBMS Certificates of Achievement Part I and Part II qualifications for biomedical science support staff are based on national occupational standards that have been modified to represent functional categories in which support staff can demonstrate competence. Scopes of practice defined by employers can be based on these categories but remain limited to the level of competence. This will help distinguish the support roles from those of biomedical scientists which require a greater depth of knowledge and understanding.

In addition, biomedical scientists must be registered with the HCPC and have a wider scope of practice with much more independence.

Q25. Will there be a dilution of professional status if support staff are accepted into professional body membership?

Support staff can already become non-corporate members of the IBMS. However, IBMS support staff qualifications provide an opportunity to evidence their scope of practice against defined standards of practice and Biomedical scientists will have a crucial role in ensuring these standards are maintained. The standards are linked to Science Council Technician registers (Registered Science Technician and Registered Scientist).

Q26. Can the qualifications be used to progress towards HCPC Registration?

The scope of practice in the modules in the Certificate of Achievement Part II capture some elements of the HCPC standards of proficiency (e.g. professional relationships) and vocational practice of foundation degrees/HND qualifications. They could therefore aid professional development towards the requirements of a biomedical scientist (Honours degree in biomedical science and IBMS Registration Training Portfolio to evidence HCPC standards of proficiency).

Q27. Will the IBMS have clear recommendations as to what roles support workers should do and what roles they should not do in order to address the wide inconsistencies in practice throughout the UK?

The Institute has in the past defined areas of practice for biomedical support staff through its *Manual for Training and Competence Assessment of Medical Laboratory Assistants 1994*. This document recognised that each role will consist of a number of work activities according to local requirements. A similar approach has been

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taken with its replacement, the new qualifications for biomedical support staff (Certificate of Achievement Part I and Part II), in order not to constrain the flexibility of employers. However, through the composition of modules the scope of practice is limited primarily to technical skills and underpinning technical knowledge and requires the professional input from biomedical scientists for training and supervision.

Q28. But isn't this lowering Institute standards and professional knowledge?

No. The IBMS is setting standards for the whole of the biomedical science workforce as it has always done. By describing standards of education and training, and where levels of knowledge and skill apply, the IBMS can recognise professional development in the context of specific roles and responsibilities that protect standards and the unique body of knowledge that defines biomedical science.

Q29. Will there be a difference in support staff roles between different pathology disciplines?

The roles will be defined by generic elements that are felt to be mandatory to good laboratory practice and core elements that represent the requirements of particular scopes of practice that may cross over disciplines. Discipline specific modules will enable technical skills to be recognised in discrete areas of laboratory practice.

Q30. How will this fit in with the future configuration of pathology services?

The Institute acknowledges the changes that service will undergo but as it is not a trade union its role in this context is to promote professional standards through the education and training of the biomedical science workforce. Whilst the numbers of support staff may increase against the number of biomedical scientists, it must be emphasised that the biomedical scientist section of the workforce is regulated by statute and has professional roles that encompasses technical, scientific, managerial and leadership aspects of service delivery crucial to patient safety. This does not try to ignore or counter the cost improvement targets being imposed on pathology services but rather, together with IBMS qualifications for support staff, provides a reference point for establishing the appropriate skill mix for the technical and scientific workforce.

Biomedical scientists are known for their adaptability and innovation. Technology and its advancement has always been a part of what we do and we have used it to our advantage by enabling biomedical scientists through our qualification framework to apply their skills at the highest level. Our education and training products were developed to support 'advanced practice' and whilst austerity measure will drive pathology reconfiguration, ultimately the role of the biomedical scientist will be strengthened by increasing demand for, and advances in, screening tests due to ageing population and people living longer.