

HOT TOPIC: MODERNISING SCIENTIFIC CAREERS: PRACTITIONER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

"Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success." - Henry Ford

As described in the Hot Topic article published in January ([Modernising Scientific Careers: Workforce Evolution in Progress](#)), Modernising Scientific Careers (MSC) provides a UK-wide education and training strategy for the whole healthcare science (HCS) workforce in the NHS and associated bodies.

This article focuses on the (MSC) Practitioner Training Programme (PTP). This programme is to develop the healthcare science practitioner workforce, the work of which underpins the delivery of many healthcare science services. Bearing in mind that the HCS workforce inputs into 80% of all diagnosis made in the NHS, this article poses the question – what are you doing to support the development of the healthcare science practitioner workforce in your organisation?

Background

Innovations in science and technology present new opportunities and will result in new roles and functions for the HCS workforce. Defined career pathways along with a standardised national framework for education and training will prepare the HCS practitioner workforce for new roles in the future.

Prior to the implementation of MSC there was a complex mix of programmes. The development of national curricula (developed in partnership with clinical leaders in each of the HCS divisions – Life Sciences, Physiological Sciences and Medical Physics and Clinical Engineering), along with accreditation of education and training programmes to ensure consistency of standards will enable the HCS practitioner workforce to deliver high quality, effective and safe care. In summary, MSC will deliver high quality education, training and scientific services, fit for the 21st century healthcare system.

HCS practitioners (career level 5) are now trained through NHS approved and accredited BSc honours degrees in various themes of healthcare science. A practitioner training programme is normally a three-year full-time Bachelor's degree in Healthcare Science, which integrates academic and workplace based learning (for a minimum of 50 weeks), by utilising extended academic years. Within the first year it is expected that the workplace based learning component will provide broad experience with short 'tasters' in groups of specialisms within the division. This will give the student a wide appreciation of the many specialisms and a more holistic view of the areas that contribute to high-quality care.



Context

Academic providers in the North West have embraced the Practitioner Training Programme meaning that the following are all currently available in the region. Approximately 230 students are enrolled on PTPs in the North West but it is expected that this number will rise to just over 300 once programmes are fully embedded.

| Practitioner Training Programmes available in the North West | Academic providers delivering Practitioner Training Programmes |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Audiology) • BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Cardiac Physiology) • BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Respiratory and Sleep Physiology) • BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Neurophysiology) • BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Cellular Science) • BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Infection Science) • BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Blood Science) • BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Radiotherapy Physics) • BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Nuclear Medicine) • BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Radiation Physics) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Central Lancashire • University of Cumbria • University of Manchester • Manchester Metropolitan University |



Benefits

The curricula for new programmes (commencing 2014/15) have now been published and there is a good possibility that we will see some of these new programmes (Anatomical Pathology Technology and Clinical Photography) being delivered in the North West in future.

The first out turn from Cardiac, Respiratory and Sleep Practitioner Training Programme (delivered by Manchester Metropolitan University) took place in 2013. All 12 students found employment extremely quickly. In fact, the majority were interviewed and secured employment offers prior to the official end date of the programme – accolade indeed to the quality academic programme but perhaps even more so to the excellent role North West services played in delivering the workplace clinical education and training. One of the students offered the following feedback to their placement provider:

"I thought I should let you know about how fantastic my final year placement has been. My two work based assessors were absolutely fantastic and they couldn't have been any more supportive and helpful with everything we did. Any student who gets a placement at the Royal Oldham Hospital is extremely lucky to have an opportunity to work in such a fantastic department with extremely friendly staff and two fantastic work based assessors."

The benefits of providing quality education and learning experiences for learners on Practitioner Training Programmes are widely recognised; they include:

- The opportunity for Trusts to raise the profile of their organisation
- Provides mentoring, learning and development opportunities for existing staff
- Exposure to the future workforce and the opportunity for Trusts to promote themselves with a view to becoming the employer of choice
- Exposure to new perspectives to working practices
- Students can offer research skills appropriate to the setting

The HCS Practitioner Training Programme has a strong emphasis on adopting new and emerging technologies. Scientific and technological advances mean that new opportunities to improve the quality of care are constantly being provided. Evolving and new technology, combined with a flexible workforce provided through the PTP, also offers the means of how and where care is delivered.

Modernising Scientific Careers means we can equip the healthcare science workforce with the right set of knowledge and skills to fully benefit from these advances and deliver the services fit for the 21st century.

Innovations in science and technology present new opportunities and will result in new roles and functions for the HCS workforce. For example:

- Robotics and automation are likely to both free up time and require a different skill mix
- Miniaturisation and point of care devices with remote monitoring capabilities are likely to promote opportunities to change where services are delivered and how the scientific workforce can contribute to immediate clinical decision-making to inform early treatment
- Complex and advanced scientific tests and procedures will be introduced, requiring greater expertise in both performance and interpretation

Areas of Risk

The programmes delivered under the MSC programme represent partnership working at all levels to ensure the NHS, working with academia and industry, supports the timely and systematic adoption of scientific and technological advances to improve patient care.

The key to sustaining the North West's position as a leader in the delivery of HCS Practitioner Training Programmes is ensuring that we have sufficient placement capacity to support the development of the future workforce. With the positioning of [Organisation Scientific Leads](#) within Trusts the HR community now has direct links into this important workforce. It is essential that organisations continue to adopt and support the Practitioner Training Programmes to ensure sufficient provision of work-based learning and the supply of their future workforce.

Useful Tools/Activities

Academic providers delivering the PTP have all established employer liaison groups. Any employers not yet involved in the delivery of work-based learning for the Practitioner Training Programmes can access these groups for support and information on how they can fulfil their role within the partnership for developing the future HCS Practitioner workforce. Anyone interested in joining the groups should contact Nick Fowler-Johnson (details in contacts section).

Key Dates

Currently there are no engagement events planned for the HR workforce community, however, please do contact us if you would like to discuss the provision of such an event at your organisation.

Useful Links/Resources

- North West Healthcare Science Network website
www.nwhcs.nhs.uk
- North West Healthcare Science Workforce Lead
Helen.Liggett@srft.nhs.uk
- NHS Networks
www.networks.nhs.uk/nhs-networks/msc-framework-curricula/ptp-1
- NHS Employers
www.nhsemployers.org/planningyourworkforce/modernising-scientific-careers/MSC/Pages/MSC.aspx
- NHS Careers
www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/explore-by-career/healthcare-science/modernising-scientific-careers
- HCS Careers Framework
www.nhsemployers.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/MSC%20career%20and%20training%20pathways%20framework_sl_211010.pdf

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