

Higher Specialist Scientist Equivalence route

BY SUSANNAH GOGGINS

Navigating the path to Higher Specialist Scientist Equivalence can be challenging. Susannah Goggins shares her experience, insights and tips for a successful application.

Professional background

After a BSc degree in physiology through the University of Leeds in 2002, I knew I wanted a science-based, patient-facing career and this led me to look into audiology. I started a clinical scientist national training post at Wrexham in North Wales. This included completing my MSc in audiological science in 2003 at the University of Manchester, followed by in-house training to gain the Certificate of Audiological Competence. I gained registration with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) in 2006 by completing my portfolio and interview through the Association of Clinical Scientists. I currently work for Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board as a principal clinical scientist and lead the adult hearing and balance services for sites across North Wales.

Motivation for equivalence

Despite being in audiology for over 20 years, I may still have a long way to go in my audiology career! I wasn't sure where I wanted my future career to take me and I didn't want to limit my options by not having the right qualifications or evidence of experience. Since December 2022, Wales has required applicants for consultant clinical scientist positions (unless already in a consultant role) to be registered on the Higher Specialist Scientist (HSS) register. This was another motivation as, if I wanted to apply for anything more senior in Wales, I would be limited if I wasn't on that register.

In my role, I've gained experience in advanced practice clinical areas, including vestibular assessment and rehab and adult diagnostics. I wanted to find out if my leadership experience was enough to gain entry onto the HSS register through equivalence, rather than completing the five-year Higher Specialist Scientist Training (HSST) programme.

Process and tips

When I went through the process in 2021, the Academy for Healthcare Science had



some guidance documents online. These have since been updated, but much of the content remains the same. All applicants go through stage one of the application process and, depending on the outcome of that, you may or may not need to complete stage two.

Stage one involved supplying:

- Job description and person specification
- An extended CV
- Two professional references
- Qualification certificates
- Payment of the equivalence process fee

Extended CV

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actually had. I was also unsure how to structure the extended CV as there was no template to use. The guidance states “careful thought should be given to the structure of the CV”. It should include a summary of my career to date and reference how the five domains of good scientific practice (GSP) had been met. I decided to start with the domains and, against each element, consider what experience or responsibilities I had as evidence of achieving these. The limited word count made it difficult to include all the relevant information in the extended CV. However, the guidance also specified certain key elements that should be included in addition to the summary. Therefore, I took the approach of covering everything briefly in the summary and then adding an expanded section to include further detail.

The additional information requested in the guidance is very specific and includes:

- Details of the number of people in the team and how you lead the team.
- Responsibilities for setting strategic direction, wider roles in external committees and service accreditation.
- Research involvement and service innovation work.
- Contribution to education and training.
- Budget responsibility.

TRAINEE MATTERS

One area of concern for me was that I hadn't published any research in some time. However, presentations at conferences (oral and poster), articles in magazines and, in particular, supervising STP research projects helped with evidence in this domain. Other elements that were particularly useful as evidence were external roles with organisations such as the British Academy of Audiology, examining roles and involvement with Wales Quality Standards and their external audit processes.

Possible outcomes

There are several potential outcomes of stage one:

- Applicant has demonstrated equivalence and can be awarded the Certificate of Equivalence.
- Applicant may be able to demonstrate equivalence, but further evidence is required.
- Applicant has not demonstrated equivalence.

If further evidence is needed, there is a template on the website. I looked at this template to help me factor in what I needed to include at stage one in the extended CV.

Additional tips

- If you know of anyone who has completed the process, I would ask if they'd be happy to share their approach and any guidance.
- I would suggest mapping out any gaps that might appear early on so you know what to get involved in and work on while you're building your evidence for your extended CV. Once I'd started to map things out against the GSP domains, the extended CV wasn't actually as much work as I'd anticipated.
- Whilst there is a fee to apply for equivalence, there are some schemes that support the funding for the equivalence process. For example, in Wales there is a scheme through the Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) where applications can be submitted for support with the equivalence process. This might include funding for the application or funding for a course or qualification that would add to your evidence for equivalence.

So far, I haven't put the equivalence to 'use' but to know I'm on the HSS register, without the need to complete the five-year HSST programme was definitely worthwhile for me.

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Declaration of competing interests:
None declared.

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