

## Visitors' report

<b>Name of education provider</b>	Association of Clinical Scientists
<b>Validating body / Awarding body</b>	N/A
<b>Programme name</b>	Certificate of Attainment
<b>Mode of delivery</b>	Flexible
<b>Relevant part of HPC Register</b>	Clinical Scientist
<b>Date of visit</b>	10 November 2009

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## Executive summary

The Health Professions Council (HPC) approve educational programmes in the UK which health professionals must complete before they can apply to be registered with us. The HPC is a health regulator and our main aim is to protect the public. The HPC currently regulates 14 professions. All of these professions have at least one professional title which is protected by law. This means that anyone using the title 'Clinical Scientist' must be registered with us. The HPC keep a register of health professionals who meet our standards for their training, professional skills, behaviour and health.

The visitors' report which follows outlines the recommended outcome made by the visitors on the ongoing approval of the programme. This recommended outcome was accepted by the Education and Training Committee (Committee) on 10 March 2012. At the Committee meeting on 10 March 2012, the ongoing approval of the programme was re-confirmed. This means that the education provider has met the condition(s) outlined in this report and that the programme meets our standards of education and training (SETs) and ensures that those who complete it meet our standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register. The programme is now granted open ended approval, subject to satisfactory monitoring.

## Introduction

The HPC visited the programme at the education provider as it was an approved programme which had been brought over on the formation of the HPC and had not been subject to a visit. This visit assessed the programme against the standards of education and training (SETs) and considered whether those who complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register.

This visit was an HPC only visit. The education provider did not validate or review the programme at the visit. The education provider supplied an independent chair and secretary for the visit.

The Association of Clinical Scientists (ACS) awards the Certificate of Attainment which the HPC has approved as a qualification which leads to eligibility to apply for registration and inclusion on the Register. The HPC therefore regard the ACS as an education provider/validating body. The ACS is an umbrella organisation made up of representatives of the modality specific professional bodies. The representatives all work on a voluntary basis as do all the ACS assessors who conduct the specific assessments of each submitted portfolio. There are a variety of routes available for individuals to obtain the Certificate of Attainment which depend on the respective modality of clinical science and the experience of the individual. The two over-arching routes defined by the ACS are called Route One and Route Two.

Route One requires an individual with an appropriate undergraduate degree to undertake a scheme of education and training accredited by the relevant professional body for each modality. Each professional body scheme of education and training is different and may involve the requirement for the attainment of a postgraduate qualification. All schemes are four years in duration but made up of differing durations of practical experience under supervision and academic teaching and learning.

Route Two recognises the experience of individuals who have been in the workplace and in education. Individuals must have an appropriate undergraduate degree and have undertaken three years of appropriate practical experience in the relevant modality under supervision and three years of additional relevant experience and further training such as a PhD, Medical Technician roles or Biomedical Science roles. During either route, individuals will be compiling a portfolio for assessment by the ACS.

The function of the ACS is solely to assess the competencies required for practice as a Clinical Scientist. The ACS does not engage in delivery of the SOPs only assessment. An individual seeking to be assessed by ACS will first become known to the organisation upon submission of a completed ACS portfolio. The ACS view the breadth of the modalities, in terms of education and clinical experience, necessitates the approach of assessing individuals as they approach the point of registration and not quality assuring delivery. The individuals submitting their portfolios are not funded and are instead employed within laboratories and clinical settings.

The ACS have mapped their competencies against HPC SOPs and the assessment process is quality assured through the organisational structure of the ACS. Accordingly, the ACS expresses confidence that anyone holding the ACS Certificate of Attainment will have demonstrated an ability to meet the SOPs for the profession.

The approval process for the reconfirmation of the Certificate of Attainment was formed of two stages. The first stage of the approval process allowed the HPC visitors to review the documentation related to the assessment of the portfolio of evidence used to assess how individuals meet the ACS competencies. Visitors from each of the 12 modalities reviewed the competencies to ensure that they are linked to Clinical Scientist SOPs in ways relevant to the modality. For this first stage, HPC visitors did not attend ACS offices. The outcomes of the Stage 1 Assessment are included as an Appendix to this report.

The second stage took the form of a site visit to ACS offices at Tooley Street, London. This visit reviewed how the standards of education and training are met in the course of someone working towards and obtaining the Certificate of Attainment. As part of the second stage, the visitors considered which standards were not applicable to the ACS given that it does not engage in the delivery of the training necessary to complete the Certificate recommendations have been made to the Education and Training Committee. These standards are listed at the end of the main report.

## Visit details

Name of HPC visitors and profession	Mark Worwood (Clinical Scientist) William Gilmore (Biomedical Scientist) Francine D'Souza (Clinical Scientist)
HPC executive officer(s) (in attendance)	Neil Strevett
Proposed student numbers	N/A
Initial approval	2002
Effective date that programme approval reconfirmed from	January 2011
Chair	Neil Lewis (Association of Clinical Scientists)
Secretary	Graham Groom (Association of Clinical Scientists)

## Sources of evidence

Prior to the visit the HPC reviewed the documentation detailed below, sent by the education provider:

	Yes	No	N/A
Programme specification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Descriptions of the modules	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mapping document providing evidence of how the education provider has met the SETs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mapping document providing evidence of how the education provider has met the SOPs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practice placement handbook	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student handbook	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Curriculum vitae for relevant staff	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
External examiners' reports from the last two years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The HPC did not review the following documentation prior to the visit:

- Programme specifications
- Descriptions of the modules
- Mapping document providing evidence of how the education provider has met the SETs
- Practice placement handbook
- External examiners' reports from the last two years

The HPC did not review any of the above documentation prior to the visit as the documentation does not exist or has not been created for this type of award.

During the visit the HPC saw the following groups or facilities:

	Yes	No	N/A
Senior managers of the education provider with responsibility for resources for the programme	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Programme team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Placements providers and educators/mentors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Specialist teaching accommodation (e.g. specialist laboratories and teaching rooms)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

The HPC did not meet with the programme team or review learning resources as the training necessary to deliver the ACS Certificate of Competence is delivered by a relevant professional body.

The HPC did not see any specialist teaching accommodation as training is delivered in the NHS Trust laboratories where students are employed.

## Recommended outcome

To recommend a programme for ongoing approval, the visitors must be assured that the programme meets all of the standards of education and training (SETs) and that those who complete the programme meet our standards of proficiency (SOPs) for their part of the Register.

The visitors agreed to recommend to the Education and Training Committee that a number of conditions are set on the programme, all of which must be met before the programme can be approved.

The visitors agreed that 42 of the SETs have been met and that conditions should be set on the remaining 9 SETs.

The visitors agreed that 6 of the SETs were not applicable in the context of this visit.

Conditions are requirements that the education provider must meet before the programme can be recommended for ongoing approval. Conditions are set when certain standards of education and training have not been met or there is insufficient evidence of the standard being met.

The visitors did not make any recommendations for the programme.

Recommendations are observations on the programme or education provider which do not need to be met before the programme is recommended for ongoing approval. Recommendations are normally set to encourage further enhancements to the programme and are normally set when it is felt that the particular standard of education and training has been met at, or just above the threshold level.

The visitors did not make any commendations on the programme.

Commendations are observations of innovative best practice by a programme or education provider.

## Conditions

### **1. 1 The Council normally expects that the threshold entry routes to the Register will be the following:**

#### **Masters degree for clinical scientists (with the Certificate of Attainment awarded by the Association of Clinical Scientists, or equivalent).**

**Condition:** The ACS must revisit all of its documentation, particularly its guidelines for application for the Certificate of Attainment, and clarify the threshold of entry on to the Register for those who successfully complete training Route One to show that potential registrants must either have completed a Master's degree during Route One, or that the level of learning required to complete the ACS portfolio is equivalent to Level 7 in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

**Reason:** In the documentation supplied by the ACS the visitors noted the wording under the registration requirements for Route One made no mention of the normal expectation that Registrants would have a Master's degree together with the ACS' Certificate of Attainment. The visitors felt that the current wording was potentially confusing in that it could be interpreted as Registrants could offer a Bachelor's degree in an appropriate science subject together with a Certificate of Attainment. In discussions with the ASC representatives, it was noted that it was common practice for students completing Route One to complete either a taught Master's degree or a research Master's degree other than in very few modalities where an appropriate Master's degree was not available. However, in these circumstances the standard required for registration was met in that the level of learning required to successfully complete the portfolio and pass the ACS Certificate of Competence was equivalent to Level 7 and thus at Master's level.

### **3.10 The learning resources, including IT facilities, must be appropriate to the curriculum and must be readily available to students and staff.**

**Condition:** The ACS should provide documentary evidence to show how it liaises with professional bodies, particularly with regard to the processes that it follows when students identify and raise issues with ACS over the opportunities they have to complete the ACS portfolio.

**Reason:** In discussions with the visitors the ACS representatives explained that they did not directly provide the training to students necessary for them to complete the portfolio for the Certificate of Attainment. The ACS outlined how the training was delivered by the relevant professional body for each modality and how the ACS acted as a final assessment body. However, it was noted that part of the remit of the ACS was to feedback any issues to the professional body, where students had raised them in relation to learning resources, and where these issues may have impacted on the students' ability to complete their portfolio. The visitors judged that in the context of the amended approval process, this standard would be met by the ACS acting in this capacity. However, the visitors noted that there was no evidence or articulation of this liaison role in the documentation supplied ahead of the visit and required the ACS to provide documentary evidence to that effect.



### **3.12 There must be a system of academic and pastoral student support in place.**

**Condition:** The ACS must revisit and clarify its documentation to make it clear where students can expect to receive academic and pastoral support while completing the ACS portfolio, given that the actual training is delivered by the relevant professional body for each modality.

**Reason:** In discussions with the visitors the ACS representatives explained that academic and pastoral support to students completing their portfolio was the responsibility of the relevant professional body delivering the training. However, the ACS noted that it saw its role in this context as one where it raised issues with the professional body, where students had identified them with the ACS in relation to the academic and pastoral support that may have received while training. The visitors judged that in the context of the amended approval process, this standard would be met by the ACS acting in this capacity. However, the visitors noted that there was no evidence or articulation of this liaison role in the documentation supplied ahead of the visit and required the ACS to clarify its procedures to ensure that students completing the ACS portfolio knew where they could obtain academic and pastoral support.

### **3.12 There must be a system of academic and pastoral student support in place.**

**Condition:** The ACS must provide documentary evidence on the training schemes delivered by the professional bodies which allow students to complete the ACS portfolio, in order to demonstrate how students are provided with academic and pastoral support during their training.

**Reason:** In discussions with the visitors the ACS representatives explained that academic and pastoral support to students completing the Certificate of Attainment was the responsibility of the relevant professional body delivering the training necessary to complete the portfolio. However, the ACS noted that it saw its role with regard to the professional bodies as one where it provided a channel of communication back to the professional body in circumstances where students had raised issues with the ACS in relation to the academic and pastoral support that they may have received while training. The visitors judged that in the context of the amended approval process, this standard would be met by the ACS acting in this capacity. However, the visitors noted that there was no evidence or articulation of this liaison role in the documentation supplied ahead of the visit and required the ACS to provide documentary evidence to that effect.

### **3.13 There must be a student complaints process in place.**

**Condition:** The ACS must provide documentary evidence to show that the professional bodies delivering the training that allow students to complete the ACS portfolio have complaints processes in place in order to allow them to address any issues that students may raise with them.

**Reason:** In discussions with the visitors, the ACS representatives explained that where a student raised an issue or made a complaint during the course of their training, it was the responsibility of the professional body delivering the training to

address that issue. However, the ACS noted that it saw its role with regard to the professional bodies as one where it provided a channel of communication back to the professional body in circumstances where students had identified any issues with the ACS. In discussions with the students, the visitors were told that when an issue had occurred, the students had relied on either the professional body to deal with the problem or colleagues at their work place. Overall, the visitors were satisfied that a system was in place to allow students to articulate complaints and issues and for these to be acted upon appropriately during their training. They were also content that the primary responsibility for dealing with any issues raised by students rested with the professional bodies in respect of the training and with the employers with regard to the workplaces. However, the visitors judged that the ACS should provide documentary evidence of the process and procedures that it follows when issues are raised with it by students completing the ACS portfolio.

#### **4.1 The learning outcomes must ensure that those who successfully complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency for their part of the Register.**

**Condition:** The ACS must bring forward proposals, a timescale for implementation and evidence on how the generic and modality specific competencies in the ACS portfolio will be amended to take into account the outcomes of the Stage 1 Assessment of the amended approval process.

**Reason:** The Stage 1 Assessment had been conducted prior to the visit and the evidence was considered by the visitors. The full outcomes of the Stage 1 Assessment can be found as Appendix 1 to this report. The visitors judged that the outcomes of the Stage 1 Assessment required the ACS to amend their generic and modality specific competencies in order to ensure that the HPC SOPs were fully met. The visitors were satisfied that the risk to the public was low as the current ACS competencies were judged to be delivering the SOPs. However the visitors also judged that the main issue to emerge from the Stage 1 Assessment was that the standards were being delivered implicitly rather than being addressed explicitly within the ACS competencies.

#### **4.8 The range of learning and teaching approaches used must be appropriate to the effective delivery of the curriculum.**

**Condition:** The ACS must provide documentary evidence to how it assures itself that the training delivered by the different professional bodies is appropriate to enable students to complete the portfolio required for Route One and Route Two, and thus be assessed for the ACS Certificate of Attainment.

**Reason:** In discussions with the visitors, the ACS representatives explained that the curriculum and training that enabled students to complete the ACS portfolio was delivered by the relevant professional bodies. Part of the remit of the assessors appointed by the ACS to examine candidates' portfolios was to ensure that the training necessary to complete the portfolio had been delivered. Furthermore, discussions with the student representatives revealed that the professional bodies undertook a yearly appraisal of students and their progress towards completing the ACS portfolio. From the discussions held with the ACS representatives and the students, the visitors were content that students received

appropriate training and were thus able to complete the portfolio. However, the visitors judged that this was not clearly articulated in the documentation supplied ahead of the visit and required the ACS to provide documentary evidence of how it assures itself that students received appropriate training from the professional bodies.

#### **6.1 The assessment strategy and design must ensure that the student who successfully completes the programme has met the standards of proficiency for their part of the Register.**

**Condition:** The ACS must bring forward proposals, a timescale for implementation and evidence on how the generic and modality specific competencies in the ACS portfolio will be amended to take into account the outcomes of the Stage 1 Assessment of the amended approval process.

**Reason:** The Stage 1 Assessment had been conducted prior to the visit and the evidence had been considered by the visitors. The full outcomes of the Stage 1 Assessment can be found as Appendix 1 to this report. The visitors judged that the outcomes of the Stage 1 Assessment required the ACS to amend their generic and modality specific competencies in order to ensure that the HPC SOPs were fully met. The visitors noted that the risk to the public was minimal as the current ACS competencies were delivering the SOPs however they also judged that the main issue to emerge from the Stage 1 Assessment was that these were being delivered implicitly rather than being addressed explicitly within the ACS competencies.

#### **6.10 Assessment regulations must clearly specify requirements for a procedure for the right of appeal for students.**

**Condition:** The ACS must bring forward proposals on how their appeals process for students who have been judged to fail the final assessment for ACS Certificate of Attainment can contain an independent representative from outside of the ACS.

**Reason:** In discussions with the ACS representatives, the visitors were informed that the ACS allowed a right of appeal for students judged to fail the final assessment for the Certificate of Attainment, but this process was based only on procedural issues arising from the final assessment process. The final assessment of students' portfolios was conducted by two assessors. In instances where the assessors could not agree on a final decision and third assessor would be used to reconcile the difference of opinion. All appeals arising from the assessment procedures are heard by members of the ACS. Though the visitors noted that a low number of appeals had actually been raised by students, they remained concerned that the appeals process was concerned with ACS processes and conducted entirely by ACS members. Therefore, in order to ensure continued objectivity and to add a degree of protection to the ACS in this process the visitors required the ACS to bring forward proposals for a representative independent of the ACS to be involved in the appeals process.

## **SETs Judged to be not applicable**

As part of the preparations for stage 2 of the approval visit, the visitors reviewed all the standards and judged the following not to be applicable to the ACS in the context of this visit.

### **4.9 When there is interprofessional learning the profession-specific skills and knowledge of each professional group must be adequately addressed.**

**Reason:** In considering whether to apply this standard, the visitors noted that though inter-professional working is included in the SOPs, they judged that the wording of this standard of education was designed to protect profession-specific skills delivered in a multi-professional training context. The visitors judged that the ACS portfolio was centred upon both profession specific and modality specific competencies and students completing the portfolio were both employees of NHS Trusts and worked in *de facto* multi-disciplinary contexts. Therefore, the visitors concluded that these circumstances meant that this standard should not be applied to the ACS in the context of this visit.

### **5.3 The practice placement settings must provide a safe and supportive environment.**

**Reason:** In considering whether to apply this standard, the visitors noted that the students completing the ACS Certificate of Attainment were employed directly by NHS Trusts and worked in laboratories governed by relevant health and safety legislation. Furthermore, the training that students received came from the relevant professional bodies. In both circumstances the visitors judged that the ACS could not reasonably be expected to approve all the settings in which students completing the ACS portfolio worked. Therefore, the visitors concluded that these circumstances meant that this standard should not be applied to the ACS in the context of this visit.

### **5.4 The education provider must maintain a thorough and effective system for approving and monitoring all placements.**

**Reason:** In considering whether to apply this standard, the visitors noted that the students completing the ACS Certificate of Attainment were employed directly by NHS Trusts and worked in laboratories governed by relevant health and safety legislation. Furthermore, the training that students received came from the relevant professional bodies. In both circumstances the visitors judged that the ACS could not reasonably be expected to audit all the settings in which students completing the ACS portfolio worked. Therefore, the visitors concluded that these circumstances meant that this standard should not be applied to the ACS in the context of this visit.

### **5.5 The placement providers must have equality and diversity policies in relation to students, together with an indication of how these will be implemented and monitored.**

**Reason:** In considering whether to apply this standard, the visitors noted that the students completing the ACS Certificate of Competence were employed directly

by NHS Trusts and worked in laboratories governed by relevant equality and diversity legislation. Furthermore, the training that students received came from the relevant professional bodies subject to equality and diversity legislation. The visitors were happy that the processes the ACS followed on submission of a portfolio would meet this standard. However, given that the students were employees of NHS Trusts and subject to training from professional bodies, the visitors judged that the ACS could not reasonably be expected to have responsibility for meeting this standard. Therefore, the visitors concluded that these circumstances meant that this standard should not be applied to the ACS in the context of this visit.

**5.10 There must be regular and effective collaboration between the education provider and the practice placement provider.**

**Reason:** In considering whether to apply this standard, the visitors noted that the students completing the ACS Certificate of Attainment were employed directly by NHS Trusts and received training from the relevant professional body. The ACS did not have any contact with the Trusts directly during the period in which students completed the portfolio and liaison between the ACS and the relevant professional bodies responsible for delivering the training to students was judged to be covered by other, more appropriate standards. Therefore, the visitors concluded that these circumstances meant that this standard should not be applied to the ACS in the context of this visit.

**6.9 Assessment regulations must clearly specify requirements for an aegrotat award not to provide eligibility for admission to the Register.**

**Reason:** In considering whether to apply this standard, the visitors noted ACS assessment regulations made no provision whatsoever for this type of award to be offered as only successful completion of the whole assessment process would lead to an award being offered by the education provider. Therefore, the visitors felt the risk exposed by this type of award did not exist for this particular qualification and therefore no further information is required to provide assurance against incorrect entries onto the Register.

Francine D'Souza  
Mark Worwood  
William Gilmore