

FAQs about careers in healthcare science

This page has some frequently asked questions about careers in healthcare science

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What do scientists do in the NHS?

Healthcare scientists help prevent, diagnose and treat illness using their knowledge of science and their technical skills. They use their expertise to help save lives and improve patient care in a supporting role or in direct contact with patients. They work in four main areas - life sciences [1], physiological sciences [2], physical sciences & biomechanical engineering [3] and bioinformatics [4].

Aren't all scientists based in laboratories, and spend their time looking down microscopes?

Not at all. There are scientists who use a variety of highly specialised equipment to analyse body tissue, blood and other bodily fluids. However, many healthcare scientists such as those in the physiological sciences [2] and some in physical sciences and biomechanical engineering [3] will have a lot of direct patient contact and work in clinics or on wards.

How do I train to work as a scientist in the NHS?

The training you'll need depends on the particular role you are working in. Training for support staff in healthcare science e.g. cervical cytology screener [5], phlebotomist [6], newborn hearing screener [7] or healthcare science assistant/associate [8] is usually on-the-job. So you'll be training while you're working, maybe towards a QCF qualification, such as a foundation degree.

A number of universities are providing healthcare science degrees for undergraduates to enter through the Practitioner Training Programme [9]. Use our course finder [10] to search for accredited degrees in healthcare science.

There is the NHS Scientist Training Programme [11] for graduates who train by working and studying towards professional postgraduate qualifications.

Qualified and experienced registered clinical scientists can develop their career further through Higher Specialist Scientist Training [12].

What can I do with my degree in sports science/fitness?

A degree in sports science/fitness will not qualify you for any particular role in the NHS, but there may be other roles where it could be advantageous, including physiotherapist [13], physiotherapy assistant [14], cardiac sciences [15], respiratory physiology and sleep science [16] and in public health promotion. [17]

You'll need to check the training requirements in the person specification when applying for vacancies in these roles as this will tell you what skills, qualifications and experience are required/preferred.

How do I become a clinical photographer?

Visit our page about working as a clinical photographer [18].

What sort of roles are there in a mortuary?

Two roles that you could consider are working as an anatomical pathology technologist [19] or as a doctor - specifically a pathologist specialising in histopathology [20].

Will the NHS fund my undergraduate science degree?

No, the NHS does not fund students on full-time undergraduate healthcare science degrees in England. There is financial support for students taking healthcare science degrees in Wales. You should check directly with the university to see if any funding is provided from other sources.

What is the NHS Scientist Training Programme (STP)?

The NHS Scientist Training Programme [11] is for graduates who train by working and studying towards professional postgraduate qualifications. Visit the National School for Healthcare Science [11] for more details about the STP [21].

Do I have to have a degree to work in healthcare science?

No you do not need a degree to work in healthcare science. Examples of support roles using science that you might want to consider include cervical cytology screener [5], phlebotomist [6], newborn hearing screener [7] and healthcare science assistant/associate [8]

I have a degree, masters and PhD, what can I do? Can I register as a scientist?

It depends on what your qualifications are in and the role you wish to work in. Some healthcare science careers (specifically biomedical scientists and clinical scientists) require statutory registration with the Health and Care Professions Council [22].

For others, there are voluntary registers. Visit the websites for the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care [23] and the Academy for Healthcare Science [24].

In order to register with any of these organisations, you will need to meet their requirements, which may well include relevant experience as well as recognised qualifications.

What are healthcare science assistants and associates?

They are support roles in healthcare science. You do not necessarily need a degree for these roles and it could be your first step into a healthcare science career. The work that you do will depend on the role. Examples include working as a cervical cytology screener [5], phlebotomist [6], and newborn hearing screener [7].

As a starting point, have a look at our information on the work of healthcare science assistant/associates [8].

Where can I find more information about a career in healthcare science?

You can find more information about careers in healthcare science by visiting our explore roles [25] section.

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/healthcare-science/faqs-healthcare-science>

Links

- [1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/life-sciences>
- [2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/physiological-sciences>
- [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/physical-sciences-and-biomedical-engineering>
- [4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/clinical-bioinformatics>
- [5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/life-sciences/cytopathology>
- [6] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/clinical-support-staff/phlebotomist>
- [7] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/clinical-support-staff/newborn-hearing-screener>
- [8] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/clinical-support-staff/healthcare-science-assistant-and-associate>
- [9] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/considering-or-university/studying-healthcare-science>
- [10] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/looking-course>
- [11] <http://www.nshcs.org.uk/nhs-scientist-training-programme>
- [12] <http://www.nshcs.org.uk/higher-specialist-scientific-training>
- [13] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/physiotherapist>
- [14] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/clinical-support-staff/physiotherapy-assistant-support-workers>
- [15] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/physiological-sciences/cardiac-sciences>
- [16] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/physiological-sciences/respiratory-physiology-and-sleep-sciences>
- [17] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/public-health/health-trainer>
- [18] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/physical-sciences-and-biomechanical-engineering/clinical-photography>
- [19] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/life-sciences/anatomical-pathology>
- [20] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/pathology/histopathology-doctor>
- [21] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#STP>
- [22] <http://www.hcpc-uk.org>
- [23] <http://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/>
- [24] <http://www.ahcs.ac.uk/the-register/join-the-register/>
- [25] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles>