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Entry and training (genomic counselling)

You can enter a career in genomic counselling through the NHS Scientist Training Programme (STP [1])

At the moment individuals trained in this area work under the professional title of ‘genetic counsellors’. Previous training programmes for genetic counsellors have been called genetic counselling, but the title genomic counselling in this programme reflects the increased focus on the use of genomic information and technologies in healthcare.

Entry requirements

You can apply for a place on the graduate-entry NHS Scientist Training Programme [2] for which you must have a 1st or 2.1 either in an undergraduate honours degree or an integrated master’s degree in a pure or applied science subject relevant to the specialism for which you are applying.

If you have a 2.2 honours degree or better in any subject, you will also be considered if you have a higher degree* that is relevant to the specialism for which you are applying.

(*Higher degree as defined on page 17 of The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies [3] Please note this does not include postgraduate diplomas or postgraduate certificates.)

Because of the extensive variation in degrees available it isn’t possible to provide a definitive list of relevant degrees for entry to the STP.

For STP positions in the life sciences, the most commonly accepted degrees will be in biomedical sciences, biology, microbiology, genetics or biochemistry. Psychology, nursing and midwifery degrees are also very relevant to genomic counselling. If your degree did not include a genetic module we would advise you to complete a short course in genetics [4].

For all candidates, evidence of research experience (e.g. in the form of a higher degree or equivalent evidence of scientific and academic capability) is considered desirable.

You need to be sure that you’ve reviewed the job description and person specification for the training (on the National School of Healthcare Science’s website [5]), and the information on this page. You then need to be sure to match the skills and knowledge required to the content of your degree and the specialism you wish to apply for.

Experience of working in a caring role is imperative for genomic counselling as it helps applicants to appreciate the impact of inherited conditions on individuals and their families, understand their own responses to this and decide whether they are suited to the role. As genomic counselling involves working with individuals in emotive circumstances, it can be helpful to spend some time working in similar settings

prior to training to help determine whether this is the right career for you. Many people find their work as genetic counsellors both interesting and rewarding but it is also demanding emotionally and so is well suited to those who are comfortable with emotions including people who are sometimes upset.

Caring experience may be gained through previous professional work (e.g. nursing/social work) or in a voluntary capacity and should be equivalent to at least 6-months full-time work. Genetic and Genomics [6] centres cannot usually accommodate requests for work experience but related care work, work with charities supporting those with inherited conditions or providing telephone counselling support more generally would be relevant. Your application will be strengthened if you use your personal statement to talk about your experience working in a caring role (including the duration of experience) and the insights it has given you which are relevant to genomic counselling. Awareness of, or basic training in, counselling may also be advantageous to understand the principles and skills which are used in genomic counselling.

Entry to the programme has been very competitive in recent years. Candidates are unlikely to be shortlisted onto the STP in genomic counselling without caring and/or counselling knowledge and experience so it is important to spend some time focusing on gaining this additional experience before applying.

For full details of entry requirements for the STP [1], including qualifications, scientific skills, transferable skills and physical requirements, please see the person specification on the National School of Healthcare Science's website [7].

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Skills required

A career in genomic counselling is well suited to those with a strong interest in genetic and genomic science but also with well-developed people skills who would prefer to work in a patient-facing role to combine genomics [6] education and counselling.

Many of those who apply for the training for genomic counselling have undertaken short counselling courses and worked in a caring field (often in a voluntary capacity) to help them to appreciate the impact of a genetic diagnosis on individuals and families and their own responses to such situations.

You'll need excellent communication and counselling skills to support and empower people at emotionally difficult times as they adjust to the genetic condition in them or their family.

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Training

As a graduate entering the NHS Scientist Training Programme (STP) [8] you will be employed in a fixed-term, salaried training post and will study towards a Master's degree qualification in clinical science

Programmes are often supported by the development of workplace-based assessment tools, assessment of equivalent learning and the development of academic careers.

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Continuing

Continuing professional development

No matter what level you are working at, as part of your development you will be expected to do continuing professional development (CPD) to show that you are keeping yourself up to date with the policies and procedures in your area of work.

Find out more general information about professional development [9]

Accredited Scientific Practice- development opportunities for healthcare science staff

Accredited Scientific Practice (ASP) provides an additional route for your ongoing professional and scientific development as part of the healthcare science (HCS) workforce. ASP allows employers to develop bespoke, responsive, short course programmes to meet training needs within the HCS workforce. ASP programmes provide you with a quality assured, rigorously assessed qualification which can lead to voluntary professional registration with the Academy for Healthcare Sciences (AHCS).

An ASP programme involves work based learning with academic study of modules from the National School of Healthcare Science (NSHCS) portfolio programmes. Access to an e-portfolio is provided to record learning in the workplace while associated academic study is completed independently through an accredited university provider. In some cases, completion of academic study may also lead to an award of a postgraduate qualification from the university provider.

Read more about ASP on the NSHCS website [10].

Source URL:<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/healthcare-science/roles-healthcare-science/life-sciences/genomic-counselling/entry-and-training-genomics-counselling/entry-and-training>

Links

- [1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#STP> [2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/study-and-training/graduate-training-opportunities/nhs-scientist-training-programme>
- [3] <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>
- [4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Genetics> [5] <http://www.nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/>
- [6] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Genomics>
- [7] <https://nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/programmes/stp/applicants/> [8] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/considering-or-university/not-studying-health-related-degree/nhs-scientist-training-programme>
- [9] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/working-health/professional-development>
- [10] <http://www.nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/join-a-programme-asp/accredited-scientific-practice>