

"I really enjoy being able to use my experience and knowledge to help patients."

Ines swapped from biology to a degree in biomedical sciences because of her interest in how the scientific aspects of the body work. Find out about her career as a biomedical scientist.

Ines de Jesus

Biomedical scientist

Employer or university

Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Salary range

£25k-£35k

Ines de Jesus

How I got into the role

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I grew up in Portugal and after leaving school I applied to study biology at university. However, after one year on the course I realised that this wasn't the right choice for me. I'd always been interested in the scientific aspects of how the human body works, with its intrinsic biological mechanisms. After some research, it became clear that the next step for me would be a degree in biomedical sciences.

After graduating I moved to the UK with a view to gaining experience before applying for biomedical science jobs in the NHS. My first job was as a medical laboratory assistant in microbiology (band 2) at Doncaster Royal Infirmary. This job was perfect, as it provided the opportunity to gain specific experience, and I was able to demonstrate my

enthusiasm and ambition to my managers.

After eight months I successfully applied for a position as a biomedical scientist (band 5), which was a great opportunity. While working in this role, I also signed up for a specialist diploma portfolio in microbiology. This experience helped me get my next job as a specialist biomedical scientist (band 6).

What I do

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Work in the laboratory is organised by means of a weekly rota, divided into various sections such as blood cultures, urine and faeces. Each biomedical scientist and medical laboratory assistant (MLA) is assigned to a particular section. Setting up specimens is normally done by the MLA, whereas interpreting and writing up reports on the results is the responsibility of the biomedical scientist.

I sometimes work late shifts and on calls, when I run the lab alongside another biomedical scientist and two medical laboratory assistants. When you are on call ^[1], you may get called out at any time to process an urgent sample, for example cerebral spinal fluid for suspected meningitis.

It's my responsibility to find out which organism, such as the type of bacteria, fungi or parasite that might be causing an infection. If necessary, I'll perform antibiotic sensitivity testing on the organism and report the results to the consultant microbiologist.

A typical day includes analysing culture plates with the help of tools such as simple biochemical tests, microscopes and state of the art automated specimen analysers to identify the infectious organisms. Antibiotic testing follows, to determine which antibiotic can be used to fight the infection.

It's important to keep in close touch with the microbiology consultants, for example where we detect the presence of bacteria in the bloodstream. This condition, known as sepsis ^[2], can be fatal if not treated urgently with the appropriate antibiotic.

The best bits and challenges

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I really enjoy being able to use my experience and knowledge to help patients. I also like liaising with the microbiology consultants to find out more about the patient's condition. Knowing that you have contributed to a patient's improvement is very rewarding.

Attending meetings and conferences to update my knowledge in this ever-changing area is also enjoyable.

The workload can seem daunting at first, but, as you gain more confidence in each section of the lab, the job becomes easier. It can be challenging when you know that you are processing specimens for a very sick child, an HIV positive pregnant patient, or even a patient who has died.

Life outside work

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My main hobbies are reading and cinema. I also have a keen interest in science and wildlife documentaries, which are always good for building up general knowledge.

Career plans and top tips for others

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I'd very much like to study at Master's level. Because I'm unlikely to be sponsored to do this, I'll probably aim for the higher specialist diploma in microbiology instead. This qualification will help if I choose to apply for senior biomedical scientist jobs at band 7 in the future. Senior roles involve supervising and training staff, quality control and leading specific sections of the lab.

My top tips are choose a career that you are passionate about. I loved microbiology from the start. This is the job for you if you enjoy working as part of a team. And try to get some work experience in a hospital laboratory. You'll find out it's not all about pressing buttons and working with machines all day!

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[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#On_call [2]
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