

"I chose biomedical science because I can quietly help people in the background but it's a key role in patient care."

Always keen to have a career in science, Louise started in a medical laboratory assistant role before jumping at the chance to do a degree apprenticeship in biomedical science. Read her story.

Louise Tredwin

Trainee biomedical scientist (degree apprentice)

Employer or university

North Devon Healthcare NHS Trust



How I got into the apprenticeship

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I've always been career driven and initially ran a local business. But I felt I needed a career change into something that would help people and give back to my community.

I was keen to have a career in science. At school I had been good at it, but I didn't have any qualifications apart from GCSE science. After a couple of attempts, I got a job as a medical laboratory assistant (MLA) in the microbiology department at North Devon Healthcare NHS Trust.

I applied for the apprenticeship scheme as soon as it became available! I was keen to maintain my role, alongside studying for an accredited degree and learning on the job. I chose biomedical science because I can quietly help people in the background but it's a key role in patient care.

What I do

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Since becoming a trainee, my role has changed significantly from processing specimens to interpreting and reporting results. I am currently training to read cultures to check for pathogens that are causing infection, so my day begins by reading the cultures on a specific bench (the lab has different benches, depending on the samples we receive). I identify what organisms have grown and report my findings to the consultant medical microbiologist.

Once my read is completed and no one else in the team needs any help, I try and get a couple of hours studying done before lunch.

After lunch, I complete any follow up work from my morning read and spend the afternoon helping to process specimens coming into the lab. The afternoons are our busiest time of the day.

The best bits and challenges

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My favourite part of my role is the investigative work and identifying what cultures have grown!

Being an apprentice brings challenges such as ensuring I have enough study time and working multiple roles. I've taken on extra shifts recently too when we've been short staffed or to help deal with the extra work caused by COVID.

I've come to realise how few people understand what we do or what it takes to become a qualified and accredited biomedical scientist. Laboratories are generally tucked away out of sight, but we play an important role and it would be nice ^[1] for people to understand what we do. I sometimes think our colleagues think we put specimens on a machine which pings at us a few minutes later with the results! They don't always understand the manual process involved and that bacteria needs time to grow.

I think the speed of PCR is incredible (the process of amplifying DNA [2] or ribonucleic acid so it can be measured and detected). But there can be pressure to produce results even more quickly.

Life outside work

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Outside work, I enjoy tailoring and couture sewing which helps with dexterity and an eye for detail for the technical side of my role.

I also like reading popular scientific literature, hiking, running, yoga, pilates, photography, illustration, music, gardening, and observing wildlife.

All my hobbies and interests have helped in small ways, either to give me balance in my work and home life or in the way I approach my work. Without them, I wouldn't be a successful scientist!

Career plans and top tips for others

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Training as an MLA gave me a solid foundation and an initial understanding of how laboratory investigations work, and allowed me to pick up my new role as a trainee biomedical scientist very quickly. As an MLA I completed my part one Institute of Biomedical Science portfolio which I can put towards my accreditation. And my apprenticeship is giving me essential knowledge to both perform my role and study for a degree.

I'm really proud of the progress I've made in a short space of time, considering I had no previous experience or relevant qualifications. Taking to my role so well made me realise my career change was the right one!

I'm focused on my role and degree apprenticeship at the moment, but, once I am qualified, I will complete my specialist portfolio and apply for a Master's degree. Who knows what opportunities will arise and what the future will hold!

If you're thinking of a career in healthcare science, my advice is to try and gain some experience or understanding of what happens in a medical laboratory. There's nothing like learning on the job in a clinical setting; learning at university doesn't compare!

To be a biomedical scientist, you need to be practical, adaptable and organised.

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Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#NICE> [2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#DNA>