

# Tackling equivalence in audiology

**BY ROSALYN PARKER**

Ros Parker talks about her experience of going through the Scientist Training Programme (STP) equivalence process to register as a clinical scientist with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC). She also provides some tips for applying.

## Professional background

After realising that dreams of fame and fortune were unlikely, I considered options for university courses, where it became clear that audiology is a profession that combines the intrigue of science with human care and compassion in a really life-changing way for those with hearing and balance conditions. After completing my BSc in Audiology through both the Universities of Southampton and Manchester in 2010, I started my clinical career within a large comprehensive service within the North East of England. Missing academic development, I was fortunate to complete my MSc in Rehabilitative Audiology through Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, alongside clinical work. During this time, I also took a career move to work as a research audiologist in an NHS department within the West Midlands in 2019.

## Motivation for STP equivalence

It was during my time working in research that it became apparent that certain funding streams were only available to specific recognised professionals; for example, those registered as a clinical scientist with the HCPC. For those familiar with research processes, you will know that these can take a long time from conception to dissemination of results, so considering undertaking a further masters programme to even be eligible to apply for such funding schemes seemed a frustrating and unnecessary step. Since first registering as an audiologist with the Academy for Healthcare Science (AHCS)

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I had gained experience in a range of clinical specialisms, including vestibular assessment and rehabilitation and bone-anchored hearing implants as well as in research, management and leadership, so surely my background and experience could count for something? This was when my manager (to whom I am eternally grateful) suggested applying for STP equivalence so that I could be eligible for registration as a clinical scientist with the HCPC. Another consideration for obtaining STP equivalence was that this meant that I would be eligible to apply for the HSST. While I had no immediate plans for this, it was a possible future opportunity I was reluctant to ignore.

## Process

Going through the equivalency process with the Academy for Healthcare Science (AHCS) is actually very straightforward; however, the work associated with the application should not be underestimated.

### Stage one: the initial registration

The first stage involves making an account with the AHCS and confirming some essential eligibility criteria requirements. This stage also includes submission of two supporting professional references. There is a fee associated with equivalence (currently £380) that is paid at this stage, although it is worth noting that Health Education England occasionally runs funding schemes through the National School of Healthcare Science to support applicants in their equivalence process.

### Stage two: the portfolio

Following these initial checks, providing the eligibility criteria are met, there is an invitation to submit the second stage of the application: the portfolio. This is a submission of evidence outlining your academic and professional career and experience including aspects of clinical, leadership and research activities. This evidence is ‘mapped’ to the standards of Good Scientific Practice (GSP) that underpins the Scientist Training Programme and working as a clinical scientist. This is largely the most intensive step; however,

you have six months to submit the portfolio and there are ways to ease the process. Following review, you may proceed to interview (stage three), be required to submit more evidence, or your application can be rejected.

### Stage three: the interview

Once the portfolio has been reviewed, you may be invited to review or amend the content, resubmit a portfolio or be invited to a panel interview. My interview was conducted virtually with a panel of three professionals registered with the HCPC, one of them from the field of audiology. The questions focused on more general aspects of scientific practice, such as audit, leadership, documentation, and maintaining registration. Relating examples of personal experience were encouraged.

### Stage four: the outcome and what comes next

At the end of this stage, you may have demonstrated equivalence and be awarded the STP Certificate of Equivalence, you may be required to show more evidence, such as provide additional experience, or undertake further training and attend a second interview, or equivalence has not been demonstrated. Once successful, the final step is completing paperwork to apply to register with the HCPC as a Clinical Scientist with your Certificate of Equivalence.

## Tips for applicants

While the process can seem challenging at times, there are some tips to make the stages more manageable and support you when you’re feeling overwhelmed:

- **Ask!** My first and foremost piece of advice is to get information from someone who has been through the process before. Even if you do not know them very well, it is so helpful to have some advice on how to approach the stages.
- **Prepare.** Getting into the habit of writing reflective accounts of case studies we see in clinical practice and filing certificates and evidence of CPD

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activities is an undertaking in itself. The portfolio will require including these pieces of evidence, so organising an electronic folder for suitable documents is hugely beneficial.

- **Mapping first.** Consider the GSP standards and list the evidence that you have that would support each criteria. This will help you focus on areas where evidence may be stronger or lacking and consider how to address any gaps in experience prior to submission of the portfolio. This exercise can also help later when you need to reference the evidence in the document with the GSP table.
- **Start early.** While there is a six-month window to submit the portfolio, this time seems to pass extremely quickly when juggling the commitments of work and life, so even starting the mapping exercise, filing and sorting of documents or drafting the outline of a portfolio before applying or during stage 1 can be beneficial. This ensures that you are confident on meeting the STP criteria but also means you are closer to that third stage shortly after starting that initial application step. Tip caveat: If you are someone who works better with a deadline you may find it better to ignore this one!

- **Breathe.** There are different stages of the application, and you will receive guidance and support during each step. If you need to alter your approach – for example, change aspects of the portfolio or redo an interview due to nerves getting the better of you – try not to worry. We all like to succeed on our first attempt but this is not always possible. You are more than likely already a very competent and caring clinician; remember that this process is to recognise your expertise and likely to continue to develop your career, so have faith and focus on how to address any concerns from the review.

### Worth it?

Despite the initial motivation of being eligible for certain research funding schemes, I must admit that I have since not had to apply to any that would not have been open before undertaking equivalency. Nor have I applied to the HSST. Despite this, I would not say that the process was not worthwhile, and it has still opened professional opportunity doors and has allowed me to reflect on how audiologists meet the professional standards set out in the GSP, including thinking more scientifically and critically.

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