



May 24, 2011

Letter to Employers of Medical Scientists working in Diagnostic Pathology

This is the second in a series of employers in Diagnostic Pathology to keep you up to date with the work force planning activities of the Pathology Associations Council (PAC) over the last twelve months. The Council is actively trying to create a career structure for Australian Medical Scientists. There are complications with trying to develop such a framework as it will necessarily involve both public and private organisations with different industrial relations instruments and with different disciplines. Differences between States and Territories are also well known but these and the above-mentioned factors should not deter us from formulating a structured national career framework for the future.

The first limb of this career structure was to identify the basic competencies that are required by any person working in a pathology laboratory. These competencies, the Competency Based Standards, are now a tier 6 NPAAC document (http://www.aacb.asn.au/web/Current_Issues_-_Workforce/Competency_Based_Standards/) and serve as the foundation for the development of the career structure. Next it was necessary to form a generic role definition for each of the major classifications of staff working in a laboratory, unqualified, technical officer, scientist and senior scientist, and this document, the Role Definition for Australian Medical Scientists, is also now available (http://www.aacb.asn.au/web/Current_Issues_-_Workforce/Scope_of_Practice/). The next body of work in this area will be to adapt these generic role definitions and make them more discipline specific.

The aim of the Career Framework for Medical Scientists is to:

- Introduce a career framework encompassing all disciplines and employment groups within the workforce based on roles and function and linked to transferable skills and competences
- Clearly identify pathways for progression, supported by learning and development
- Provide national flexibility to support local service delivery, and the expansion and extension of current roles;
- Recognition of qualifications/skills/competencies/experience in all States.
- Provide improved opportunities for learning and professional development, supporting recruitment and retention into healthcare science disciplines, and removing the barriers to career progression
- Develop an education and training framework based on a range of academic, vocational and professional qualifications/awards to recognise underpinning knowledge and skill acquisition relevant to functions being undertaken. This would be based on equivalence within each career framework stage irrespective of initial entry point.
- Preserve the science base within the profession such that career progression will not only be on the basis of increased management and financial responsibilities but also on specialised scientific service provision and Research and Development roles.

There would need to be a transition phase for all those currently in the profession. Because of the multiple industrial instruments in different jurisdictions and enterprises it would be necessary for all of these organisations to voluntarily adopt this career structure. There is no tying of pay rates to these classifications, only a desire to make career advancement and transfer easier for scientists and their employers.

The focus on skills and competences related to the service function to be delivered is absolutely fundamental to the success of the proposal. Educational and professional requirements will continue to be important in the design, delivery and assessment of programmes. These will need to be created and administered by the professional associations covering the various disciplines. It is expected that there will be two levels of professional qualification offered, a specialist discipline Membership and a specialist Fellowship. These contributions will be enhanced by added flexibilities so that the skills required to deliver patient and public focused services are able to transcend traditional professional boundaries. Additionally, personal development plans will be required to help individuals who are not from academic backgrounds to identify needs and develop the skills and competences required for working at more senior levels. A variety of learning programmes will be required to help fill gaps.

Registration is currently not available for medical scientists but a component of the successful implementation of this career structure would be the creation of a Certification Board and ongoing Certification of medical scientists. It is envisaged that Certification would mark the end of the 'trainee' phase. An applicant would be required to show that they had the required formal qualification (Bachelor degree in appropriate field) and had been trained in an appropriate facility by suitably trained senior staff. There would need to be evidence of satisfactory achievement against the competencies defined for a scientist in the role definition document. Certification would be an annual or biennial event and would require the applicant to show ongoing CPD and include some data collection on current duties, role, location and possibly future intentions. The model proposed for the Certification Board draws its members from the professional societies and could be administered by a member of the PAC on behalf of Council.

The creation of a Certification register would provide improved workforce planning capabilities into the future and potentially provide added protection for the public as well as providing a mechanism whereby employers could ensure appropriate clinical governance and credentialing of laboratory professionals.

It is hoped that progress will be made in 2011 on the Certification process and further developments will occur in the career framework. At this stage we invite comment via your respective NCOPP or AAPP representative on PAC. Alternately, contact PAC Secretariat as listed in footer.

These changes are intended to produce a more sustainable and attractive career structure for medical scientists in the future. Your feedback is essential.



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