



# The role of scientists in histopathology reporting

## An updated Joint Statement from the Royal College of Pathologists and Institute of Biomedical Science, to reflect developments regarding advanced roles for biomedical scientist reporting since May 2017

### Introduction

The ongoing pathology workforce transformation and the forecast gap in reporting capacity in histopathology has presented both a need and an opportunity to consider the development of scientist roles, particularly those of biomedical scientists.

The increasing range of opportunities for scientists to be employed in advanced and consultant level roles is now well established in cellular pathology. Biomedical scientist reporting of abnormal cervical cytology screening cases has been accepted practice for 20 years. This has been followed by the biomedical scientist reporting of selected ophthalmic pathology samples, and malignant non-gynaecological cytology. More than 110 scientists have now passed the cytopathology examinations to be eligible to undertake cytopathology reporting.

A more recent development that represents a major and significant new role for these scientists is the extension of opportunity and training to include the histopathological reporting of cases from pre-determined body systems (gynaecological and gastrointestinal tracts and skin). Since the introduction of the joint Royal College of Pathologists (RCPath) and Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) reporting qualification 7 years ago, 16 biomedical scientists have undertaken and successfully completed the rigorous training



course and 72 more are in various stages of training and are expected to qualify over the next 4 years.

The success of all these training programmes and role developments has been dependent on the strength of the collaborative relationship between the RCPATH and the IBMS – working together through the establishment of our conjoint examination boards. A joint professional model has been developed and used to support a standardised and structured approach to the delivery of the training and assessment of the biomedical scientists who wish to undertake histopathological reporting.

## **Eligibility**

The training programme is open to biomedical and clinical scientist members or fellows of the IBMS who meet the eligibility requirements and who have the support of their employer and clinical head of department. The training is available to all pathology departments able to support training, either wholly inhouse or with periods of secondment if considered necessary.

## **Training programme and qualification**

The training is a rigorous 4 stage process (A to D) that requires significant commitment from the candidate, the pathologist mentor(s) and the employer. Experience has demonstrated that it is essential for individuals accepted on to the training programme to be released from a proportion of their duties to permit the accommodation of sufficient reporting training time. It is important to appreciate that the time commitment for Stages B and C is significantly greater than that for Stage A. To attempt to combine the necessary training for histopathology reporting without any change to an existing job role is highly discouraged and will almost certainly compromise the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Success in the final examination at the end of Stage C leads to the award of the RCPATH/IBMS Advanced Specialist Diploma in Histopathology Reporting (gynaecological/gastrointestinal/skin pathology). Stage D is a post-qualification 'preceptorship' stage that involves the development of a supervised specific independent reporting plan. The purpose of this is to support the individual to achieve a level of post-



qualification competence and confidence consistent with that of a qualified medical consultant histopathologist to independently report defined and agreed specimen types. Successful completion of the training and examination does not confer automatic eligibility to practice as this remains the decision of the employer and the clinical head of department.

## **The scientist reporting role**

Scientists undertaking histopathology reporting will work alongside medically qualified pathologists as part of an integrated reporting team and will be able to dissect, independently report and present cases at multidisciplinary team meetings in their specialism of gynaecological, gastrointestinal or skin histopathology. These roles are not replacements for medically qualified pathologists, but a key part of an integrated clinical pathology team that is able to deliver a flexible and efficient service.

Additionally, these individuals will play an integral part in teaching and clinical audit as part of an overall service delivery and improvement strategy. Individuals appointed to a reporting role would be clinically responsible to the clinical head of department and must participate in the relevant interpretive external quality assurance (EQA) schemes as required for all staff undertaking histopathology reporting.

The exact job role is for local determination and the decision on job title and grade is an issue for the employer and employee to agree. However, both must be commensurate with the level of responsibility.



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