

The Scientist Training Programme (STP) Equivalence Process – My Experience and Top Tips

ERICA HENRY, LEAD CARDIAC CLINICAL SCIENTIST –
STRUCTURAL / VALVE ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY,
MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



Erica Henry

The Academy for Healthcare Science (AHCS) states that ‘the STP Equivalence process enables you to demonstrate that the knowledge, skills and behaviours that you have developed through your experience and professional development are comparable with those of someone who successfully completes the formal Scientific Training Programme’.

Introduction

I trained as a cardiac physiologist via the BSc (Hons) clinical physiology degree. As a trainee physiologist, I often listened to my more experienced colleagues talking about the way they qualified and it was clear to me how much our profession and our training process had evolved over the preceding 30 years. Then it was my turn to see our training process transformed with the introduction of the PTP and the STP and subsequently the ETP and apprenticeships. At first we wondered if the new scientist training programme and the introduction of cardiac scientists would last or would we just end up with a handful of staff from those initial cohorts; but soon enough it was clear that the future of our profession would prominently include cardiac scientists.

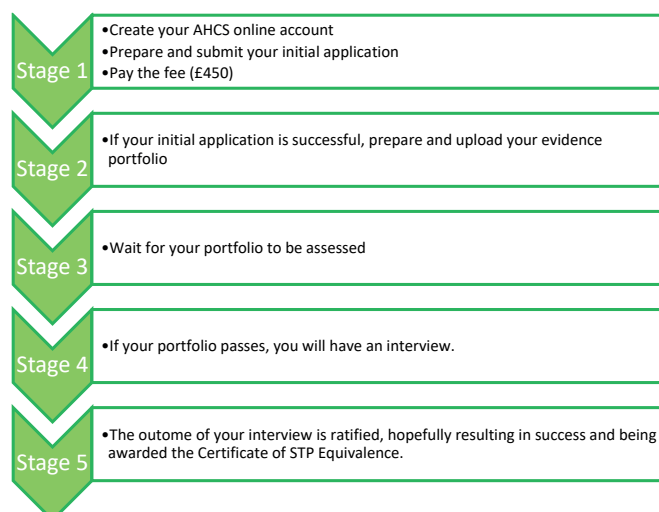
As soon as I heard that there was going to be an equivalence process for the STP I knew it was something I wanted to achieve; but after studying for something, whether it be degrees or BSE accreditations, for virtually my entire adult life, I was putting off tackling what I expected to be yet another large scale commitment I'd need to juggle with work and my family life. I got the push I needed when Health Education England opened applications to apply for funding for the STP Equivalence process. An opportunity that I didn't want to pass up, I got my application submitted within days and once I was awarded funding, there was no turning back.

The STP Equivalence process

I began my STP Equivalence journey in early 2021. An updated online application template and guidance has subsequently been introduced in February 2025 but the process is largely the same, just some changes to the way you present and submit your portfolio. All the information is available for you on the AHCS website which provides you with everything you need to know and I mean everything!

Before you formally start the process, consider if you're at the right point in your career to meet the required criteria. The AHCS states that you're unlikely to have had the opportunity to achieve a comparable level of knowledge, skills and behaviours if you have less than 3 years of experience. Have a read of the AHCS Good Scientific Practice (GSP) mapping template and think about how you could show you meet those points. Don't forget to chat to your colleagues who've been through the process to see what evidence they used.

Remember, once you submit your initial application, you've started the clock!



What you need to know about each stage

Stage 1:

This stage is to prove your eligibility to apply for the process. It takes more work than you think!

You need to provide:

- Details of all your education and training that you intend to use as evidence, including certificates
- Career details
- Certified proof of identity
- DBS Check
- Professional references
- Proof of any change of name
- Proof of English language proficiency if you're not a UK citizen
- A personal statement summarising your professional experience (500-1000 words)

Stage 2:

This is the really big task. It can feel overwhelming but don't put it off. The AHCS gives you 6 months for this stage and you'll need all that time.

Essentially your portfolio is a maximum 5000 word text (including some shorter specific statements) discussing how you meet the standards of GSP and the learning outcomes of the STP curriculum along with your evidence. Once you get your head around that concept, it's a lot easier to take on.

Your portfolio must be no more than 150 pages and less than 60 pages is unlikely to contain sufficient information. Don't waste pages on weak evidence and don't worry, you can use the same evidence to support more than one domain. Make sure you have a good range of evidence though. Try searching your e-mails for key words, review old CV's, job applications, professional references and appraisals; you'll be surprised what you've forgotten you've done. Evidence doesn't have to be recent, just as long as you did it and it's relevant.

Good Scientific Practice (GSP) Domains

Domain 1: Professional Practice	•Patient-centred care •Scope of practice •Communications •Professional responsibilities •Working with others •Safety
Domain 2: Scientific Practice	•Data and reporting •Technical proficiency •Quality Assurance
Domain 3: Clinical Practice	•Clinical activity •Clinical investigations and therapeutics
Domain 4: Research, Development and Innovation	•Research Activity •Service Development and Innovation
Domain 5: Clinical Leadership	•Developing self •Leading others

Examples of types of evidence		
Audits	Case Based Discussions	Reflective accounts
SOP's written / amended	Patient information leaflets	Witness statements
Patient feedback	NIHR Good Clinical Practice	Incident reports
Training plans	Formal teaching delivered	Service developments
Meeting minutes	Certificates	Quality Assurance / Peer review
Appraisals	Clinical Governance meetings	Trainer or trainee feedback
Escalation of findings	Specialist clinical reports	Evidence of mentoring
Specialist clinical advice	Risk Assessments / Register	Mandatory training
Publications	Management duties	MDT involvement
Service evaluations	Departmental Accreditation	Developing guidelines

Stage 3:

Be aware, due to a shortage of assessors, you can wait a long time for your portfolio to be assessed and to subsequently get an interview date. I submitted my portfolio in February 2022, was notified it had passed in November 2022, was notified of my interview date in January 2023 and given an interview date one month later in February 2023. For me, just the process from portfolio submission to interview date took 12 months almost to the day so be patient.

Stage 4:

The interview is via video call so don't worry about having to travel to somewhere else in the country at short notice. It's a panel of 3 assessors and lasts approximately an hour. They're asking questions and scenarios based on everything you've submitted so make sure you know it all well as it will have been a long time since you did your portfolio. Just as long as you actually did/do everything you said in it you'll be fine.

Stage 5:

I waited one month for ratification of the outcome then I could apply for HCPC registration. HCPC registration is not automatic so don't forget you have to sort that too!

What did my colleagues and I worry about before we started the process?

When STP Equivalence was first introduced, I was advised by a previous manager that, without 20 years or more of experience, I would really need a Masters degree to help me achieve equivalence. So, I went and did an MSc in Advanced Practice part-time. The AHCS are now very clear that a Masters degree is not a necessity and I can tell you that although it may have helped give an overall impression that I have worked at the same post-graduate level as STP students, I don't think anything from my MSc made a vital contribution to my portfolio.

Research. That's the main one I hear lots of people worry about and I did too. I don't work 'in research' and I never have. However, you'd be amazed how you will find that you can tick those boxes. Do the NIHR Good Clinical Practice module for a start – it's free. Have you scanned or done any other cardiac physiology procedure for a published research project? Did you recruit for the BSE N-STEP stress echo trial? Do you have an in-house research team who can do consent for research training with you? Have you ever done an audit or a service evaluation? Before you know it, you've got plenty to talk about and if the assessors think there's a gap, they can ask you some research related questions at interview to help you demonstrate your knowledge. They didn't ask me any questions about research so as an echocardiographer who wouldn't describe myself as working in research, I must have demonstrated enough.

Publications – again this is a big worry for lots of people but how many STP students/new graduates do you know with a back catalogue of publications? The AHCS clearly states that publications are not part of the STP. They can't hurt but don't worry if you're not published.

The other big concern is often that STP students rotate through other specialities, something that we never did or at least not on the same scale. I did a little basic respiratory testing as a trainee physiologist but certainly nothing in sleep science or vascular. However, for me this didn't appear to be a problem. I think an understanding of relevant diagnostic testing by other specialities will be enough.

Why did I apply for STP Equivalence?

Personally, I applied for STP Equivalence because I was determined to keep up with the changing face of our profession and not find one day that I'd been left behind by the next generation of the workforce. If the STP had existed when I trained, as a science graduate already I would have been

My Top Tips

- You don't need to be the future President of the BSE to achieve STP Equivalence but before you pay the fee, think if you've done enough yet to demonstrate all the required aspects of each domain.
- Even if you're not thinking of starting the process for a few years, start keeping everything that might be potential evidence in one place.
- Be patient – it's a long process and for a lot of it, there is nothing you can do to hurry things along.
- EVERYTHING you need to know is on the AHCS website.
- Commit to doing the portfolio – it's a big piece of work and with only 6 months to complete it there's no time to put it off.
- Get organised at the start – begin with gathering your obvious evidence then map it to the GSP domains and see where the gaps are.
- Learn the GSP – once you know it well the whole process will be much easier. This will come with consistent time spent on your portfolio. I would recommend working on it at least once a week every week for a good chunk of time.
- Make sure you follow the guidance on style and format of your portfolio or it could be returned.
- Be detailed – if they need to ask you for more information that can delay the process by months.
- Don't put every bit of evidence you can find in your portfolio, just use the best examples.
- Do the test video call with the Equivalence Administrator prior to your interview.
- Try to relax in the interview. You're talking about your own experiences and work – you know this stuff!

eligible to apply and I would have, but it didn't exist and I took the opportunity of the only training route available to cardiac physiologists at that time. With 2-3 decades left of my career, I didn't want to find one day that I was unable to apply for a new role or participate in a new service development because I was a cardiac physiologist and not an HCPC registered Cardiac Scientist.

What's the benefit for me of having STP Equivalence?

For me, it's not as much about the STP Equivalence but about the HCPC registration that comes with it. 'Is it within your scope of practice?' is something that I heard a lot when I took over leading our established cardiac physiologist-led valve surveillance clinic. With the ambition of moving to an even more independent and advanced model of clinical practice, from a clinical governance perspective holding registration with an overarching regulatory body like the HCPC puts quality, patient safety and accountability at the forefront and supports our new cardiac scientist-led valve surveillance clinic model.

This is a level that our whole profession is capable of working at but patient safety is paramount and we need to ensure high quality clinical and professional practice. STP Equivalence and HCPC registration are not just certificates to add to our CPD files, they're vital.

What do my colleagues say about their experience of the STP Equivalence process?

"Sitting down to write a 5000 word portfolio is daunting, and initially I just couldn't work out where (or how) to start. A chat with a colleague helped me to come up with a structure and break it down into sections and just like that, the task felt much more manageable. Each week I'd set myself the task of completing a particular section, it really helped me to recognise that I was making progress, and very soon, I had a document I could work with and refine."

"Don't panic about what you 'haven't done!' As someone who remembers the good old days of 'Principles of Physiological Measurements,' long before the Clinical Physiology degree, I was unsure if I would be eligible to apply for STP Equivalence, especially as I haven't gone on to complete an MSc. But when you sit down and start to pull together everything you 'have done,' you realise it's actually quite a lot, and you will be able to demonstrate equivalence!"

Wendy Gamlin
Principal Cardiac Scientist
Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust

"Reflecting on the work I undertook throughout the STP Equivalence process, I have no regrets."

"It is undeniably a lengthy and demanding journey, made more challenging in my case by the fact that my personal records were not as well organised as I would have liked. STP graduates benefit significantly from the structure and documentation provided by OneFile, and I would strongly recommend that anyone considering the equivalence route begin logging their achievements, milestones, and non-clinical contributions—such as audits, service evaluations, and quality improvement projects—from an early stage."

"A common concern among applicants is the expectation around research. While I had not been involved in research in the traditional sense, this did not present a barrier. The requirement is not to have published original scientific work, but rather to demonstrate a sound understanding of scientific principles, an ability to critically appraise evidence, and to apply relevant guidelines in practice. Clinical audits, for example, serve as excellent evidence of these competencies."

"I was fortunate to have some protected time during my working week to focus on the portfolio; however, it is important to acknowledge that a portion of the work will inevitably need to be completed outside of regular working hours. Planning for this additional commitment is essential."

"I understand that the process seems daunting and difficult however the benefits are immense. Not only you will be able to demonstrate your expertise, experience and achievements; you will also take the first step in the journey to autonomous practice. You will be able to demonstrate to your peers and, more importantly, to your patients that you work to a high standard, you are accountable for your work, and you strive for scientific and clinical development."

Ivo Ferreira de Andrade
Consultant Cardiac Clinical Scientist – Echocardiography
Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust

"I did my equivalence to future-proof myself. Despite having had a 20 year career already, I felt it would allow me to increase and widen my options for personal development."

"The portfolio is a hefty piece of work and some of the evidence, for example infection control, felt unnecessary."

"I was worried about the interview but actually the questions were workplace scenarios that any individual with common sense and professionalism could answer."

Caroline Green
Lead Cardiac Physiologist – CRM Remote Care
Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust

Conclusion

The process of achieving STP Equivalence feels like a daunting task but once you get going you realise that it really is achievable for us all. It is simply an enormous admin task and since it will potentially take two years to complete, I advise everyone to stop putting it off! Cardiac physiologists are an incredibly capable profession so let's demonstrate our potential to help our patients in new and more advanced ways and also feel like we are developing ourselves as healthcare professionals. Just remember to collect your evidence as you go along and ask for help – those of us that have gone through the process are here to support you.

You can do it!

References / Resources

<https://www.ahcs.ac.uk/equivalence/equivalence-guidance/>
[https://documents.ahcs.ac.uk/docs/322/-024-AHCS-Guide-for-Applicants-CoE-Scientist-Training-Programme-\(Clinical-Scientist\)-v19.1-April-2025.pdf](https://documents.ahcs.ac.uk/docs/322/-024-AHCS-Guide-for-Applicants-CoE-Scientist-Training-Programme-(Clinical-Scientist)-v19.1-April-2025.pdf)
<https://documents.ahcs.ac.uk/docs/305/-023-Good-Scientific-Practice-v1.7-January-2025.pdf>

This article was first published in issue 130 of the ECHO Journal, June 2025.
BSE members can access past issues of ECHO [here](#)