

Medical Laboratory Assistant

Introduction

Medical laboratory assistants help and support scientists in medical laboratories. They have duties such as making up chemical solutions, labelling specimens, cleaning and sterilising equipment, and using computers to record and study experiment results.

Also known as

- Laboratory Assistant, Medical
- Clinical Support Worker: Healthcare Science
- Assistant Technical Officer (Healthcare Science)



Work Activities

As a Medical Laboratory Assistant, you will support the work of Biomedical Scientists. You will be helping them to analyse medical samples, for example, of blood and tissue. This helps Doctors to diagnose disease and decide on treatment.

You have tasks such as:

- making up chemical solutions
- sorting blood and tissue samples
- carefully removing chemical and biological waste
- labelling tubes and bottles
- looking after equipment stocks and ordering replacements when needed
- cleaning and sterilising equipment

You also record and analyse information from experiments, often on computers.

Clerical duties include recording the arrival of specimens and sending results to hospital departments.

You can specialise in one area of work. With experience, you can train and supervise other staff, or have increased responsibility for tasks such as controlling stock.

Some Medical Laboratory Assistants specialise as Phlebotomists. This involves taking blood from patients, labelling it accurately, protecting it from damage, and delivering it promptly and safely to the right laboratory.

Being able to read, write and speak Welsh may be an advantage when you're looking for work in Wales.

Personal Qualities and Skills

To become a Medical Laboratory Assistant, you will need:

- an interest in science (especially biology and chemistry), health care and laboratory work
- practical skills, for example, to handle specimens and small instruments
- to be willing to learn new technical skills
- attention to detail and a thorough, careful approach to your work
- number skills to check results, take measurements and make calculations
- accurate record-keeping skills
- written skills to produce reports
- computer skills to record and analyse information from tests and experiments, and to monitor stock levels
- concentration - some of the work involves repeating the same short tasks
- teamwork skills

- the ability to work under pressure

Some Medical Laboratory Assistants have contact with patients so you have to be friendly, sympathetic and able to reassure anxious people. You must also not be afraid of needles or blood.

Pay and Opportunities

Pay

NHS employees are paid on a rising scale within defined pay bands, according to their skills and responsibilities. The pay rates given below are approximate.

- Starting - Band 3: £18,813 - £20,795

Hours of work

Medical Laboratory Assistants usually work 37.5 hours a week, Monday to Friday, with occasional Saturday and bank holiday work.

Where could I work?

Employers include:

- NHS hospital medical laboratories and NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT)
- The Health Protection Agency (part of Public Health England)
- private hospitals
- charities
- the pharmaceutical industry
- government scientific research departments
- The Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratory Agency
- forensic laboratories

Opportunities for Medical Laboratory Assistants occur in laboratories in towns and cities throughout the UK.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Vacancies are advertised on the NHS Jobs website, in local/national newspapers, at Jobcentre Plus, on the Find a Job website, and on job boards.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes

You can apply directly for vacancies and then receive training on-the-job.

It's possible to enter and train through an Intermediate, Advanced Level or Degree Apprenticeship. Take a look at our information article 'Apprenticeships – How do I apply', for more details about applying for apprenticeship positions.

Training

This covers the job role and safety procedures. You can then gain certificates of competence for doing certain tasks properly and safely. These will help if you want to move on to another hospital during your career. Training can also be towards a level 2 or 3 qualification.

Progression

With experience, staff working in healthcare science support roles can apply for more senior posts, such as 'Healthcare Science Associate', also known as 'Assistant Practitioner'. At this level, employers might support them to work towards a relevant level 3 qualification, higher national qualification or foundation degree.

Work Experience

Previous experience working in a medical environment would be really useful for this career.

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act

Working in contact with patients as a Medical Laboratory Assistant can be an exception to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

This means that you must supply information to an employer about any spent or unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings, if they ask you to. This is different from other careers, where you only have to reveal information on unspent convictions if you are asked to.

Qualifications

To get onto an Intermediate or Advanced Level Apprenticeship, you'll usually need five GCSEs at grade C/4 or above, possibly including English and maths.

To get onto a Degree Apprenticeship, you will usually need at least 2 A levels.

Adult Opportunities

Age limits

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

Training

It is possible to enter and train through an Intermediate or Advanced Level Apprenticeship in Health - Clinical Healthcare Support.

Statistics

- 18% of laboratory assistants, including medical laboratory assistants, work part-time.
- 17% have flexible hours.

Further Information

Contacts

- **Apprenticeships: Get In. Go Far**
National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)
Tel: 0800 015 0400
Email: nationalhelpdesk@findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk
Website: www.apprenticeships.org.uk
- **Skills Development Scotland - Modern Apprenticeships**
Tel: 0800 9178000
Email: info@skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk
Website: www.myworldofwork.co.uk/modernapprenticeships
- **Health Careers**
Website: <http://www.weds.wales.nhs.uk/contact-nhs-wales-careers/>
- **NHS Wales Careers**
Publisher: National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare
Email: abm.wedsteam@wales.nhs.uk

Website: www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/829/page/36090

- **NHS Jobs**

Website: www.jobs.nhs.uk

- **Step into the NHS**

NHS careers

Tel: 0345 6060655

Website: www.stepintothens.nhs.uk

- **Skills for Health**

Skills for the health sector

Address: Goldsmiths House, Broad Plain, Bristol BS2 0JP

Tel: 0117 9221155

Email: office@skillsforhealth.org.uk

Website: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk

- **Careers Wales - Welsh Apprenticeships**

Tel: 0800 028 4844

Website: ams.careerswales.com/

Related Careers

- Sterile Services Technician
- Operating Department Practitioner
- Audiologist
- Cardiac Physiologist
- Clinical Technologist
- Clinical Neurophysiologist
- Orthotist/Prosthetist
- Medical Physicist
- Diagnostic Radiographer
- Respiratory Physiologist
- Therapeutic Radiographer
- Perfusionist
- Radiography Department Assistant
- Radiographer
- Newborn Hearing Screener
- Hearing Aid Dispenser
- Physician Associate
- Nano-Medic