

Preparing for State Registration

Becoming State Registered is a major milestone in the career of any embryologist, the culmination of at least three years hard work. It's an outward sign to patients, colleagues and employers that you meet national standards in terms of training, professional skills and behaviour and can now be called a Clinical Scientist.

Applying for Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registration is straightforward, just complete the application form and post it along with the appropriate fee. However for those of you that completed the ACE Certificate you will first need to obtain the Association of Clinical Scientists (ACS) Certificate of Attainment that is only granted after submission of a detailed portfolio of evidence of training and an interview. An interview that seems to be almost universally dreaded.

I've been both an ACE certificate assessor and I'm a current ACS assessor and I'd like to put the ACS process into some kind of perspective and maybe give a few hints and tips about how to make the whole thing a little less unpleasant if not actually enjoyable.

Right, so let's start with the portfolio of evidence of training. My first tip is start pulling this together well in advance of wanting to apply. There's sample document on the ACS website (www.asclinsci.org/acsapplicants/acsportfolios.aspx). As you'll see, it's a long and detailed document and isn't the kind of thing you can do quickly over a weekend so give yourself at least a couple of months prepare it and don't forget to ask your senior colleagues to look at it too. Ensure that you relate your training and experience to the required competencies and try to make it easy to read so that your experience really stands out. Preparing your portfolio also offers you the opportunity to discover potential gaps where you need further knowledge or experience. It's much better for you to do this before you apply than to have them pointed out after you submit or after the interview.

Assuming that your completed portfolio is accepted you can then start to think about preparing for your interview. The ACS one is very different to the ACE viva. It isn't any more difficult, just different. Remember that since your ACE viva you will (or should) have consolidated your knowledge and formed a better understanding of what it is to be a clinical embryologist. Whilst we do have to make sure you have the required experience, the assessors are not there to trip you up, show how clever they are or just be generally horrible. As embryologists we genuinely want you to pass the interview and go on to be state registered. If you have covered everything that is required in the portfolio you should be able to talk to us about it in a pretty detailed way. We realise that you're going to be nervous from sitting in the waiting room waiting for your name to be called so we'll usually start the interview by asking a few

general questions, a bit like running through your CV at a job interview. My second tip is to make sure you understand why you're applying for state registration (you'd be surprised at the number of candidates that stumble over this question).

The ACS interview is structured around the required competencies. These are: Scientific, Clinical, Technical, Research and Development, Communication, Problem Solving and Professional Accountability and the assessors will normally work their way through these areas one by one. These areas are all included in your job so hopefully won't present too many problems.

So let's have a few examples of questions shall we?

Scientific – which culture medium do you use in your laboratory, do you know why you use it and what its components are?

Clinical – What is AMH and what can it be used for?

Technical – If you perform ICSI what is the maximum number of eggs you have in a dish at any one time?

R&D – When would you use a power calculation? What is a p value?

Communication – what is your approach when talking to patients?

Problem Solving – your lab has a drop in IVF fertilisation rate. How would you begin to identify the problem?

Professional Accountability – when might you get advice from a clinical colleague?

You'll see that many of these questions don't have a single correct answer but are asked in relation to your own experience and training. A bit of swotting up on the basics gained in your ACE certificate won't go amiss and make sure you can talk about the research you've done including its limitations and the statistics you used.

My last tip would be to ask your senior embryologist for a mock interview. Interviews are stressful but having the opportunity to practice can be really useful especially if you're prone to nerves. If you want to make your mock more realistic why not ask your senior to get another embryologist from a different centre to do a mock too?

At the end of the day, knowing that you have completed the requirements for each competency, produced a good portfolio and can perform well in a mock interview will give you the confidence to perform well in the real ACS interview. Very best of luck!