

Mr Gerard Hayes
Secretary
Health Services Union
Level 2
109 Pitt Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

9 August 2022

Dear Mr Hayes,

Re: Award Definitions for Hospital Scientists and Technical Officers, and Accelerated Progression for Technical Officers

I am writing to advise you that NSW Health Pathology (NSWHP) is commencing consultation with our staff regarding suitable qualifications for scientific and technical positions for shortlisting for interview during recruitment.

A suitable Qualifications for Scientific and Technical Positions for Recruitment policy has been drafted, which we will be seeking feedback on (and is attached to this email).

The qualifications for Hospital Scientists as set out in the *Hospital Scientists (State) Award* (the Scientist Award) and the qualifications for Technical Officers (the Technical Officers Award) as set out in the *Health Employees Technical (State) Award* are thoroughly out of date. All the qualifications for employment listed in the Technical Officer Award are now discontinued. The Scientist Award prescribes a degree in Science as the minimum qualification for employment but does not require qualifications with relevance to pathology. This leaves open the risk of employing applicants with non-pathology qualifications, and increased risk medico-legally and clinically. As you know, the Ministry is seeking to address these issues relating to the Scientist Award in its amended application to the Industrial Relations Commission of NSW.

These anachronistic provisions are out of alignment with international and national practice, the pathology accreditation framework, and recommendations of pathology professional bodies. They need to be updated to reflect current pathology qualifications for Medical Scientists and Medical Laboratory Technicians. Ensuring scientific and technical staff are appropriately qualified is an important part of ensuring and promoting the professionalism and expertise of NSWHP.

An added complicating factor is that scientific and technical staff in NSWHP are health professionals who, uniquely, are not subject to the same sort of regulatory oversight that applies to other health professionals. There is no national registration board for scientific and technical staff with AHPRA.

As there is no suitable industrial or regulatory framework defining what is an approved pathology related qualification for employment of scientific and technical staff, NSWHP has developed its own draft policies about which qualifications are appropriate for employment in the relevant classifications. This policy would provide guidance on suitable qualifications for shortlisting scientific and technical staff for interview during NSWHP recruitment processes, provide a standardised benchmark across the agency and minimise the scope for applicants proceeding to preferred applicant stage with unsuitable qualifications.

NSWHP Managers and recruitment convenors have been seeking guidance for some time in shortlisting scientific and technical staff for interview. This draft policy seeks to address the difficulties the present lack of clarity is causing and provide a clear transparent standardised approach for everyone.

The draft qualifications policy has been tested with a small number of staff. Staff have so far indicated that they are satisfied that it provides adequate guidance and flexibility for use during the recruitment process without being overly prescriptive. It provides adequate flexibility to deal with specialised positions and positions to which it has proven difficult to recruit. The policy also will articulate which qualifications will place staff in the best possible position for being successful for a higher position or increase their pathology knowledge should they be interested in undertaking further study.

The policy will not disadvantage any NSWHP staff member in their current position. NSWHP employees applying for a position at the same level as their current position will be eligible for shortlisting regardless of their qualifications.

A transitional arrangement for existing staff will be developed as part of the planned consultation with staff.

The redrafted qualifications policy now includes a table of recognised qualifications in pathology (which is wider than just AIMS accredited qualifications). Qualifications included on this list are from universities in NSW or from universities where professional practice placement students are taken in NSWHP laboratories, including CSU, UTS, RMIT, UTAS, Griffith, Southern Cross, as well as many others from across Australia. The policy recognises successful completion of examinations by pathology professional bodies. It also outlines the process for assessment of qualifications not recognised as pathology qualifications but which may make an applicant suitable for appointment.

Over the last year, two new bridging courses have been established to support our NSWHP staff in their career development. These courses are available online and can be completed on the job to ensure all staff, including those working in regional areas, have access to career opportunities. The Clinical Scientist trainee program also supports ten of our staff to undertake a rigorous Fellowship program, supporting career progression. A career pathway strategy, currently in development, will provide a map that will enable NSWHP staff to more easily understand how to progress in their profession and discipline of choice in the future.

The design of the qualifications policy is intended to expedite the recruitment process and reduce time to recruit. Other initiatives underway to support Managers and staff in the laboratories are targeted bulk recruitments (staff can be chosen for interview from an established e-list), review of the professional placement program and work with the universities to modernise pathology courses.

Choosing applicants with a suitable qualification in pathology or the relevant analytical or forensic science discipline, and appropriate experience in the relevant scope of practice of the role applied for, sets our staff up for a fulfilling career with NSWHP. It also provides confidence to the public that NSWHP staff are appropriately qualified and suited to undertake the critical and complex nature of pathology work and keep patients safe.

NSWHP would also welcome discussing this policy with the HSU, as we proceed with the consultation with our staff.

Finally, we also attach the draft updated policy in relation to Appointment and Accelerated Progression for Technical Officers, as this will be discussed as part of the upcoming consultations with staff.

Yours sincerely



Vanessa Thomson
Director Scientific and Technical Strategy
NSW Health Pathology