Accredited Specialist Scientific Practitioner (ASP) Training Programme

The Accredited Scientific Practitioner (ASP) training programme is one of only two approved entry level GI Physiology courses in the UK. It provides a structured and intensive pathway for healthcare professionals seeking to gain Independent Practitioner status in Gastrointestinal (GI) Physiology. This programme is ideal for those who wish to specialise in either Upper GI (UGI) or Lower GI (LGI) Physiology while continuing their professional practice.

Background and Context

GI Physiology is a highly specialised and niche field of Healthcare Science that focuses on the assessment and diagnosis of functional gastrointestinal disorders. Common investigations performed by Clinical Scientists and GI Physiologists include:

- **High Resolution Oesophageal Manometry (HRM):** This test measures the pressure and muscle activity within the oesophagus, assessing swallowing function and identifying disorders such as achalasia and ineffective oesophageal motility.
- **High Resolution Anorectal Manometry (HRAM):** Evaluates the function of the anal sphincter muscles and rectal sensitivity. Used to diagnose conditions such as faecal incontinence and dyssynergic defecation.
- **Multichannel Intraluminal Impedance-pH:** An ambulatory investigation which objectively assesses acidic reflux, non-acidic reflux, and gaseous events. Typically used to characterise suspected Gastro-oesophageal Reflux Disease, Chronic Cough and belching disorders
- **Endoanal ultrasound**: Primarily evaluates anal sphincter integrity, but can also be used to identify abscesses and fistulas.
- **Breath testing**: Identifies carbohydrate malabsorption, small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO).

To ensure competency, the ASP programme provides a structured training route that enables practitioners to develop expertise in a specific aspect of GI Physiology. The training is particularly beneficial for those working in departments that focus exclusively on either Upper GI or Lower GI investigations, as well as for healthcare professionals looking to extend their scope of practice into one of these areas of specialty.

Programme Overview

The ASP is a one-year programme that combines workplace training, academic study, and independent assessment to ensure that trainees develop the necessary knowledge and skills to perform GI Physiology investigations competently. The programme is designed for:

- Individuals with a BSc in Physiological Science or a related field.
- Professionals with prior Independent Practitioner status in other physiological disciplines.

- Healthcare practitioners, such as nurses, who wish to extend their scope of practice into GI Physiology.
- Private practitioners who may not have access to traditional Scientist Training Practitioner (STP) funding.

The ASP training programme is approved by:

- The Association of GI Physiology (AGIP)
- The Academy for Healthcare Science (AHCS)

Upon successful completion, trainees will be eligible to apply for AGIP accreditation as an Independent Practitioner in GI Physiology (provided other eligibility criteria which can be found on the AGIP section of the British Society of Gastroenterology website are met).

Programme Structure

The ASP is built upon three key pillars: Robust workplace training, University Education and Independent End Point Assessment. The trainee must pass all of these three components of the training in order to pass the ASP, and be eligible to attain accredited status.

1. Workplace Training

Trainees will gain hands-on experience in performing, analysing, and reporting GI Physiology investigations under expert supervision. This practical experience is crucial to building competency and confidence in the field. Key features of workplace training include:

- Supervised clinical practice in a relevant GI Physiology area.
- Structured mentoring from an AGIP-accredited training officer.
- Evidence-based documentation of practical experience in an online portfolio

Workplace training modules can be found on the National School of Healthcare Science (NSHCS) 'Curriculum Library' website. Here is a breakdown of the modules and their criteria:

- **Upper GI Physiology 1 (UGI1)** – https://curriculumlibrary.nshcs.org.uk/stp/module/S-GI-S2/
- **Upper GI Physiology 2 (UGI2)** – https://curriculumlibrary.nshcs.org.uk/stp/module/S-GI-S4/
- **Lower GI Physiology 1 (LGI1)** – https://curriculumlibrary.nshcs.org.uk/stp/module/S-GI-S1/
- **Lower GI Physiology 2 (LGI2)** – https://curriculumlibrary.nshcs.org.uk/stp/module/S-GI-S3/
- **Introduction to GI Physiology (GI01)** – https://curriculumlibrary.nshcs.org.uk/stp/module/S-GI-R1/.

If an AGIP-accredited supervisor is not available at the trainee's workplace, the AGIP education secretary must be consulted to arrange suitable mentorship.

2. University Education

Academic teaching is delivered by **Newcastle University** using selected modules taken from the GI Physiology STP programme. These modules are selected to ensure that trainees are only enrolled onto modules which are relevant to their role. Credits will be awarded using an MSc-level micro-credentialing approach, ensuring that trainees receive formal recognition for their academic

achievements. University modules will follow the criteria set by the NSHCS syllabus, which are detailed in the curriculum library links above.

University teaching will follow a hybrid format, incorporating both online and in-person lectures and workshops. The specific dates will be determined by the university and communicated closer to the time.

Each module is assessed through a combination of written assignments and examinations. The overall module performance is aggregated to determine a passing grade.

Modules include:

- CVR8026 Upper Gastrointestinal Physiology 1 (E-Learning.) (10 credits)
- CVR8501 Upper Gastrointestinal Physiology ASP 2 (10 credits)
- CVR8017 Lower Gastrointestinal Physiology 1 (E-Learning.) (10 credits)
- CVR8500 Lower Gastrointestinal Physiology ASP 2 (10 credits)
- CVR8005 Introduction to Gastrointestinal Physiology (10 credits)

The provisional cost of each 10-credit module for the academic year of 2027-2028 is £730.00 for UK residents, and £1,760.00 for international students. Fees will need to clear prior to the course start date.

Recommended Module Combinations

The choice of academic modules will determine the specialist pathway an ASP trainee follows. For those wishing to specialise in specific gastrointestinal investigations, the following module combinations are recommended:

- **Upper GI Physiology 1 (CVR8026) and Upper GI Physiology 2 (CVR8501)** – Suitable for those focusing on High Resolution Oesophageal Manometry and Multichannel Intraluminal Impedance-pH monitoring.
- **Lower GI Physiology 1 (CVR8017) and Lower GI Physiology 2 (CVR8500)** – Ideal for practitioners specialising in High Resolution Anorectal Manometry, Endoanal Ultrasound, and Biofeedback Therapy.
- **Introduction to GI Physiology (CVR8005)** – Recommended as an additional optional background module, which provides a solid base for trainees' GI Physiology knowledge. Note: this is not a suitable standalone module, and must be taken in conjunction with either UGI1 and UGI2, or LGI1 and LGI2

3. End-Point Assessment (EPA)

Towards the end of their training, in order to complete the ASP programme, the trainee will be required to sit an independent **End-Point Assessment (EPA)**. The EPA evaluates the trainee's clinical competencies through professional discussions and practical assessments.

Trainees will be assessed through four professional discussions. Assessment materials will be provided, and questions will be based on these materials. Each professional discussion will last 15 minutes, consisting of 5 minutes of undisturbed pre-reading followed by a 10-minute assessment.

To pass the End-Point Assessment, the trainee must successfully complete at least three of the four professional discussions. If this threshold is not met, they will be required to resit the End-Point Assessment. Once an End-Point Assessment has been initiated, trainees have a two-year window from their original assessment date to pass, with a maximum of three attempts (including the initial attempt).

There are two assessment periods per year, typically held in June and October. If a trainee is unsuccessful in one assessment, it will be assumed that they intend to reattempt at the next available sitting. Should they wish to defer, they must inform the AGIP Education Secretary as soon as possible.

Each End Point Assessment attempt will incur a fee of £300 to cover the travel and accommodation costs of assessors.

Guide Timeline

Below is a guided timeline of the key administrative dates for the ASP programme. Please note that this is intended as a general reference for applicants and their supervisors, and some variation may occur.

- **31st July** – Course registration deadline
- **September** – University teaching
- **February/March** – University teaching
- **June/July** – End-Point Assessment.
- **August** – Final portfolio submission.
- **September** – Certification issued.

Please note that while the 31st of July represents the final possible date for course registration, registering at this stage is likely to result in administrative delays that could impact September teaching arrangements. To avoid these risks, registration at the earliest opportunity is strongly advised.

Entry Requirements

To enrol in the ASP programme, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- **Academic:** BSc in Physiological Sciences, Biomedical Sciences, Biology, or a closely related scientific discipline (normally at a 2:1 level or above). A Level 6 undergraduate degree in a healthcare-related field will also be considered.
- **Professional:**
    - Clinical experience in a Gastroenterological, Upper GI surgical or Colorectal surgical setting
    - Clinical experience in a GI Physiology setting, with a rudimentary awareness of GI Physiology investigations (preferable).
- **Supervision:** Access to a qualified AGIP-accredited training officer or mentor.

Application Process

The first step in applying for the ASP programme is to contact the AGIP Education Secretary to register your interest. You will need to provide details about the trainee's hospital, their background and experience, their highest level of formal education, and the training environment, including the level of support they will receive. This information will help the AGIP Education Secretary determine whether the ASP programme is suitable for the trainee's needs.

Once this has been completed, you should contact Newcastle University via the email address provided below to register your interest. You will then be directed to an application form, and Newcastle University will manage the process from that point onwards.

Certification and Career Progression

Upon successful completion of the ASP programme, trainees will receive a **Certification of Completion**, qualifying the individual for **Independent Practitioner status in GI Physiology** as recognised by AGIP. This certification enables professionals to work independently in GI Physiology and may open opportunities for further career advancement.

Further Information and Contacts

For additional details and application guidance, please contact:

- **National School of Healthcare Science (NSHCS):** www.nshcs.hee.nhs.uk
- **Newcastle University:** pgclinsci@newcastle.ac.uk
- **AGIP Education Secretary:** John Gallagher (john.gallagher6@nhs.net)
- **Health Education England (HEE):** www.hee.nhs.uk