

Top tips from our STP Equivalence Applicants

In September 2023, we asked our current applicants and those who had gained STP Equivalence since September 2021 about their experience of the process.

One question was “what are the two top tips you would share with new applicants”. From the 158 responses we received, these were the most common themes.

Starting

- Start early to build your portfolio
- Just start it
- Start working on your portfolio early even before submitting application
- Start looking through the evidence requirements and gathering evidence before applying
- Have a clear plan for the evidence you will use for the portfolio prior to applying
- Get organised
- Take your time to read through all of the guidance material- everything you need to know is there. EVERYTHING.
- Read all of the guidance documents and refer back to them throughout the process, they are very helpful!
- Read the guidelines and follow to the last detail
- Understanding the Good Scientific Practice (GSP) and how to incorporate it into the portfolio
- Use the mapping template to assess what evidence you have to begin with then highlight what you need to gather.
- Carefully analyse the GSP domains before starting to work on your portfolio
- Plan and mind map evidence for GSP prior to writing portfolio
- Start with the mapping table, and jot down evidence ideas (a lot of evidence you will likely already have), then make a plan for your gaps/evidence that you need to do. Being organised is key.
- Write an overview of everything you have done and then map that to the domains of practice
- Clinical work always takes priority, but make sure you set weekly targets for writing up your portfolio because time flies from submission of the application to the deadline to submit the portfolio!
- Be proactive
- Keep cpd log
- Don't pay for the application until you have everything ready for your portfolio

Initial application

- When writing your personal statement always reflect on the criteria that is needed to be drawn on and bring aspects back to how it impacts the delivery of patient care
- If you need to demonstrate your level of English proficiency – start early and check the website on what tests or evidence you need to provide.

Support

- Enlist a mentor
- Talk to someone who has gone through the process from the same or similar discipline before you start your portfolio, have a look at their portfolio
- Attend AHCS STP Equivalence drop in sessions
- Watch the ANS webinar about equivalence
- ask a couple of experienced CS to proofread your portfolio
- Have somebody non clinical reading your portfolio before submission.
- Reach out for help when needed
- Don't be afraid to reach out to colleagues/peers who have successfully completed STP Equivalence
- Use the equivalence support on social media

Evidence

- Don't overthink it. Most of the evidence needed is what you do day in day out without even realising.
- Be confident and get involved in lots of developments and training opportunities by your employer
- Try and get work placements in other areas to support your portfolio.
- Good evidence shows how your experience has put the patient first
- Constantly collect evidence
- Take your time gathering evidence for your portfolio
- Keep interesting cases/experiences as you go
- Gather evidence and reflections throughout your time as a junior employee / trainee
- Save all communications and presentations for the first few years so they are easily accessible when curating the portfolio.
- Search your old email sent items you will find some gems for evidence (eg: Email flagging an abnormal result) using key words from the GSP mapping template in the portfolio to allow searching and mapping easier
- Don't throw out any CPD - ever!!
- Organise any CPD or certificates in electronic format in date order#
- To keep a log of evidence with a little synopsis of what it is, so that when you go back through it you know if it will be relevant evidence for your portfolio.
- Keep record of all the activities and separate them in domains as you go
- Gather all the info as you go along in your daily work, it will save you so much time
- Collate meaningful evidence prior to application
- Don't include lots of course attendance certificates as evidence
- Don't forget about the basics, make sure you refresh your stat knowledge
- Pick the best evidence and ask for colleagues feedback and help if needed

- Reflective writing is so useful as a resource
- Keep writing reflections and gathering evidences whenever you do working in one of the 5 domains
- Quality and not quantity of evidence is what counts
- Ensure you show how your CPD is used in practice
- Consider quality not quantity of opportunities for reflection
- Have a constant working GSP mapping spreadsheet
- Summarised your entire experience first then look to pull your evidence together - the gaps are more obvious and your portfolio order will be better
- Double check your cross referencing (mapping template and summary)
- Don't number your evidence until you've collected it all - put it in a sensible order first
- Don't start referencing your essay until you have all the evidence in order!
- If you lack any supporting documents for a specific competency write an essay of how you have demonstrated that competency
- Evidence is showing your own work, not links to information
- Make good use of witness statements
- Create a spreadsheet of evidence number 1-x and the point in the mapping template. Tick off which evidence applies to which mapping criteria. This way you don't have to rewrite the mapping template every time you add a new piece of evidence.

Approach

- Do everything to the letter as things get returned very easily (from speaking to several people who have been through the process)
- Try to combine multiple competencies/standards into one piece of evidence
- Complete portfolio using guidance BEFORE starting application to prevent deadline being triggered.
- Write down all your ideas as you think of them.
- Little and often! Don't be overwhelmed with workload
- Slow and steady progress is good, start early
- It's a long process but don't panic about it. Take everything step by step.
- Remember the word count (I forgot and did a wonderful 9k version that I had to cut back)
- Make sure you work hard on obtaining relevant clinical experience
- Don't forget confidentiality requirements
- Try to be succinct and accurate when writing the portfolio
- Give a demonstration of how every day activities can be viewed from STP Equivalence perspective
- Review the criteria/standards first as you may need to do additional course to meet all the standards.
- Do not think that you have to be an expert in all clinical fields. I went into it thinking that because I don't really do CPET that I wouldn't be able to obtain equivalence. I did some shadowing experience and understood it a little and this was sufficient.
- Set time aside close to hand in date to go over everything
- Don't worry of you have to submit more than once

- Break the portfolio down into small sections and just concentrate on one at a time, makes it feel less daunting
- Attention to detail
- Complete it in stages so you don't feel overwhelmed and have a cup of tea ready when completing the mapping template!
- Relax, we all want the same thing, listen to advice and follow it up
- Think back over your career as a lot of things you may not think are applicable can be useful pieces of evidence
- Build connections within your hospital
- *If you are not sure ask.*

Time

- Make sure you dedicate time specifically for the portfolio work
- Carefully consider if it is worth the time, energy and the impact it will have to your future career to ascertain it's value.
- Submit as soon as possible because it can take forever to get assessed
- Expect it to take a long time
- Allow plenty of time to prepare your portfolio
- Make sure you keep an eye on deadlines
- Dedicate plenty of time towards this, both for writing the portfolio and gathering evidence
- Don't leave it until the last minute
- Plan ahead as it will take longer than you think
- Give yourself plenty of time to do it, but don't waste time making it "perfect" just do what is necessary to justify why you deserve STP Equivalence.
- Leave enough time for your portfolio to be proofread.
- Be prepared for how long it will take
- Take the process seriously and set aside proper time to compile your portfolio
- Reflect upon all the areas of your job role that meet the standards You have probably ticked off more GSPs than you realise already.
- Give yourself goals to achieve by certain dates, otherwise the process can take years
- It takes longer than you think to collate your final PDF - give yourself time
- Accept it takes time, you will not have a social life for a while
- Be patient and prepare your employer to be patient - the process can take a lot longer than expected

Reflection

- When reflecting think what you did, the impact and how it changed your practice
- Reflect on your activity now
- Make sure you include samples of reflective practice
- Write up reflective practice throughout your career so it is at hand for your application
- Write reflections on your experiences.

Portfolio Summary

- Focus on the expected programme outcomes of your specialism as detailed on the NSHCS website
- Be clear and concise
- Proofread at least three times 'out loud' your document and ensure your pages / evidence match
- Remember the mapping template is including in the number of pages when you submit your portfolio

Interview

- Allow plenty of time to prepare for your interview.
- Do as many practice Vivas/interviews with senior colleagues as possible.
- It is good to know your portfolio very well when preparing for your interview, I've found the mock viva (organised locally with my supervisors) helpful
- In the interview they aren't trying to catch you out!
- Practice interview questions with your colleagues.
- Understand the interview process and answer the questions in a scientific level by not just focusing on your specialities.
- Prepare for scenario based questions for interview. Ask previous people who have gone through the process
- Don't be frightened of the interview it is what you do day in and day out, relate the questions to occurrence's in your career.