



Ultrasound Training, Employment, Registration and Professional Indemnity Insurance

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Published: Wednesday, July 16, 2014

Edition: Third Edition, June 2014

Summary

The Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR) receives many enquiries that relate either to training in ultrasound, employment or registration. Many of these enquiries are from sonographers who have trained overseas or would like to undertake ultrasound training in the United Kingdom (UK). It is hoped that the following will answer many of the more common queries.

1. Training

Medical ultrasound is currently taught at postgraduate level in the UK with many sonographers having come from a healthcare background such as radiography or midwifery. Most postgraduate qualificatory ultrasound courses in the UK are accredited by the Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education (CASE) <http://www.case-uk.org/> and lead to a postgraduate certificate (PGC) or diploma (PGD) lasting between 12 and 18 months. Courses may offer day release, block release, distance learning and other modes of delivery depending on the individual institution. There are approximately 16 universities or colleges offering postgraduate ultrasound courses in the UK. Entry requirements are usually a healthcare related first degree in radiography or midwifery or similar science or health related subject and confirmation of adequate access to supervised clinical ultrasound practice.

At the time of publishing this third edition there is no primary degree (BSc Hons) in medical ultrasound available although it is possible that such a course may become available in the future.

CASE also accredits shorter, focused courses that allow, for example, a midwife to train specifically in first trimester techniques or a nurse to train in ultrasound techniques applicable to work in an Early Pregnancy Unit. These courses must meet certain criteria and are developed by individual universities and colleges.

For all ultrasound training, it is necessary to have a clinical placement approved by the university or college responsible for the student's overall training. These can be difficult to find and are often specifically arranged by Trusts or Health Boards for existing employees who they wish to train. SCoR cannot help with obtaining clinical placements. The individual universities and colleges will help if they can but there is a general shortage of clinical placements and they often cannot be of direct assistance.

There are many short courses and study days in ultrasound that are run by professional bodies such as the SCoR, The Royal College of Radiologists (RCR), the Royal College of Obstetricians and

Gynaecologists (RCOG) and the British Medical Ultrasound Society (BMUS). These do not usually carry any formal qualification or award, although they may contribute to an individual's continuing professional development (CPD). Details can be found on the various websites of the organisations concerned.

The Society for Vascular Technology of Great Britain and Ireland has information relating to vascular ultrasound and their accreditation scheme at <http://www.svtgbi.org.uk/education/>

For those who are medically qualified and are eligible to register with the General Medical Council as a doctor with a licence to practise, the Royal College of Radiologists has published a document entitled 'Ultrasound Training Recommendations for Medical and Surgical Specialties' (2nd edition, 2012) which is available from the RCR website at:

<https://www.rcr.ac.uk/publications.aspx?PageID=310&PublicationID=385> ¹

There is no formal system by which qualifications obtained outside the UK can be compared to the UK's awards. A body exists (UK NARIC) that may be able to advise with regards to the academic level but it cannot help with the clinical aspect of training <http://www.naric.org.uk/>

Student/trainee sonographer posts are occasionally advertised on the NHS jobs website <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>. Use search terms such as 'sonographer' and 'ultrasonographer' along with 'trainee' and 'student' as necessary.

2. Employment

If you are qualified in ultrasound with a UK or overseas award, it will be necessary to apply directly to a potential employer. Qualified sonographers from the European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA), or Switzerland should also apply directly to potential employers where EU regulations relating to the free movement of professionals may be relevant.

If you are from outside the EU/EEA or Switzerland, you will need to be able to satisfy an employer that your qualifications and experience are equivalent to those of a sonographer who trained in the UK and holds a CASE accredited award.

There is currently a shortage of sonographers in the UK and sonography is listed as a shortage specialty by the UK Government Migration Advisory Committee (MAC).

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257241/mac-report.pdf Pages 100-101 for commentary.

Although it is not a requirement for employment, all qualified sonographers can apply to join the SCoR as an Associated Professional. There are many benefits of membership including access to advertised vacancies on the website and in Synergy News. The SCoR also publishes a wide range of professional documents, provides access to continuing professional development (CPD) tools and offers professional indemnity insurance for its members. Full details of membership benefits are available via www.sor.org

Vacancies in the National Health Service are also advertised via <http://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>: use search terms such as 'sonographer' and 'ultrasonographer'.

Companies providing independent ultrasound services and independent/private hospitals in the UK can be found via the SCoR website, Synergy News or an internet search.

There are also several agencies that employ qualified sonographers who, again, can be found via the SCoR website, Synergy News or an internet search.

SCoR is neither an agency nor an employer and cannot directly help with regards to employment.

If you are from overseas and have any contacts in the UK working within ultrasound, this can be of great help. Your embassy, for example, may be able to put you in contact with sonographers from your own country already working in the UK.

3. Registration, including advice to service managers

There is often confusion between a professional body and a regulatory body. SCoR is a professional body, not a regulatory one. Examples of regulatory bodies are the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and the General Medical Council (GMC). These provide statutory registration for their registrants. In the UK it is, for example, a statutory (legal) requirement to be registered with the HCPC if working as a radiographer.

There is no legal requirement for sonographers to be registered with a statutory regulatory body such as the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) or the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Sonography is not a regulated profession and 'sonographer' and 'ultrasonographer' are not protected titles. Many employers prefer their sonographers to be statutorily registered but for some otherwise very well qualified sonographers, it is an impossibility. The HCPC, for example, cannot register a sonographer unless they meet the standards for one of the professions they regulate such as radiography. If, for example, a sonographer trained overseas they may be very well qualified and competent but may be unable to register with the HCPC or NMC. Similarly, those who have trained and qualified as sonographers in this country with a scientific or other first degree are unable to register.

NHS Employers has recently (2014) published advice relating to sonographers that can be found at: <http://www.nhsemployers.org/EMPLOYMENTPOLICYANDPRACTICE...>

The SCoR expects those of its members who are able to register with a regulatory body such as the HCPC or the NMC to do so but recognises that for some, through no fault of their own, this will not be achievable. We are aware of a number of organisations in which well qualified, non-statutorily registered sonographers are employed as advanced practitioner sonographers and are working very effectively, with their expertise highly regarded.

If you trained as a medical doctor overseas, it would be worthwhile seeing if you are eligible for registration with a licence to practise by the GMC; you can then apply for employment via a medical route. If you wish to work as a non-medically qualified sonographer then you will not need to register with the GMC.

In the absence of statutory registration for sonographers, the SCoR fully supports departments considering applicants for sonography posts who are unable to gain statutory registration but are otherwise well qualified. Clearly, the normal checks that an employer must make on the background and likely competence of any employee need to be made before any offer of employment. The comparative standard is a UK Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma in Medical Ultrasound that has been accredited by the Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education. There is, however, no simple way to compare ultrasound qualifications from different countries and each applicant will need to be assessed on their merits.

Sonographers from the EU/EEA or Switzerland may be able to register with, for example, the HCPC as a temporary registrant depending on their primary qualifications (although not as a sonographer as that is not yet a regulated profession in the UK). Details can be obtained from <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/apply/eeaandswitzerland/>

If you trained overseas outside the EU/EEA or Switzerland it may be possible to obtain statutory registration with, again for example, the HCPC. This will depend on your primary professional experience and qualifications. Details can be obtained from <http://www.hpc-uk.org/apply/international/> There is also information available on the British Medical

Ultrasound Society website at <http://www.bmus.org/ultrasound-training/ut-sonoreg.asp>

The SCoR has made an application to the HCPC for sonography to become a regulated profession and 'sonographer' and 'ultrasonographer' to become protected titles. This application was made with the support of the United Kingdom Association of Sonographers which merged with the College of Radiographers in January 2009. Despite statutory registration being subsequently recommended by the then Health Professions Council (HPC) in October 2009, this application is now unlikely to proceed following the publication of a command paper by the coalition government in February 2011.²

In the absence of statutory registration, the SCoR maintains the 'Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers' (PVRs) <http://www.sor.org/practice/ultrasound/register-sonographers> This voluntary register was set up to support the application for statutory registration and to help protect the public. Although not a requirement for working in the UK, all sonographers residing in the UK are encouraged to apply, whether statutorily registered or not. Information for employers, voluntary registrants and members of the public can be found in the Policy and Processes document at the above web address. Voluntary registration is limited in the extent to which it can protect the public when compared to statutory registration and the SCoR will continue to support the application for sonographers to become statutorily registered.

There are legal restrictions on sonographers who are not statutorily registered although for the majority of posts it is not expected that these will present a problem. These are:

1. Sonographers who are not statutorily registered cannot act under Patient Group Directions for the administration of drugs and medicines, or train to become Supplementary Prescribers. They are allowed to act under Patient Specific Directions but those requiring them to act under these directions must ensure they are competent to do so safely.
2. Sonographers who are not also statutorily registered cannot act as a referrer for clinical imaging examinations involving the use of ionising radiation. When also statutorily registered, the professional involved must be entitled to act as referrer under the Ionising Radiations (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2006 and be authorised to do so.

If you have any questions or comments these can be made via <https://www.sor.org/contact-us>

Publishing history: First edition February 2010; Second edition March 2012; Third edition June 2014.

References

1. Royal College of Radiologists. Ultrasound Training Recommendations for Medical and Surgical Specialties (2nd edition) London: RCR, 2012.
2. Department of Health. Enabling Excellence, Autonomy and Accountability for Healthcare Workers, Social Workers and Social Care Workers'. London: DH, 2011

(All web links accessed 15/05/14)

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