



Assistant practitioner workforce survey analysis

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Summary

In January 2012, the Society and College of Radiographers surveyed heads of departments delivering imaging and radiotherapy services in the UK about their assistant practitioner (AP) workforce. Nearly 170 respondents answered a range of questions in an online questionnaire. This document presents an analysis of this survey.

Executive Summary

In January 2012, the Society and College of Radiographers surveyed heads of departments delivering imaging and radiotherapy services in the UK about their assistant practitioner (AP) workforce. Nearly 170 respondents answered a range of questions in an online questionnaire. This document presents an analysis of this survey and the following bullet points highlight the main findings:

- On average there are 2 trainee assistant practitioners (TAPs) for every 100 radiographers in the responding departments. This ratio is significantly higher in breast imaging departments where there are 10 TAPs in a department for every 100 radiographers.
- On average there are 5 APs for every 100 radiographers in the responding departments. This ratio is significantly higher for breast imaging departments where there are on average 24 APs for every 100 radiographers by headcount.
- Responding departments in the NHS in England have a slightly higher proportion of assistant practitioners than the NHS in the other UK countries or independent / private / charitable employers.
- Over half of the TAPs in the responding departments are paid according to agenda for change (AfC) band 3. However, there are also significant numbers of TAPs in AfC bands 2 and 4.
- The vast majority of APs in the responding departments are paid according to AfC band 4.
- 26 (7%) of the APs in the responding departments are accredited by the College of Radiographers.
- Respondents were asked for any general comments about the AP workforce in their departments. The following themes were given most frequently:
 - APs are valuable members of the team.
 - They work to a strict scope of practice.
 - A number of APs go on to train as radiographers.
 - AP training provision should be improved.

1. Introduction

This document presents an analysis of an online survey about the assistant practitioner workforce run by the SoR in January 2012. The survey was targeted at heads of departments delivering imaging and radiotherapy services in the UK. The purpose of the survey was to understand the scale and scope of assistant practitioner employment across the UK. The results will be used to inform the future strategy of the SCoR in relation to the assistant practitioner workforce.

We identified 911 senior department staff from the SoR membership database and emailed to ask if they would complete the online questionnaire on behalf of their department. A reminder email was also sent out a week before the closure of the survey. The questionnaire was answered by 168 departments (18% response rate). Not all respondents answered every question so some questions have different response rates.

The results were analysed by department type determined from the name of the department where possible. The following categories were established: Radiology (79 departments responded); Radiotherapy (37 departments responded); Breast imaging (21 departments); Other / unknown (31 departments responded). The Other / unknown category includes departments the following names: MRI (6 departments); Ultrasound (6 departments); Cardiac catheter (4 departments); Nuclear medicine (2 departments) and Neuroradiology (2 departments).

The results were also analysed by employer type and location. Responses were received from the following types of employers: NHS England (123 departments); NHS Northern Ireland (8 departments); NHS Scotland (13 departments); NHS Wales (5 departments); and Private / Independent / Charity (19 departments).

2. Trainee assistant practitioners (TAPs)

2.1 TAPs by department type

Table 1 - Number of TAPs compared to number of radiographers by department type

	Breast imaging	Radiology	Radiotherapy	Other / Unknown	Grand Total
Number of departments responding	17	74	34	28	153
TAPs (Headcount)	23	37	34	8	102
Radiographers (Headcount)	231	3556	1694	590	6071
Ratio of TAPs to Radiographers	0.10	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02

Table 1 shows that on average there are 2 TAPs in a department for every 100 radiographers. This ratio is significantly higher in breast imaging departments where there are 10 TAPs in a department for every 100 radiographers.

120 of the 168 responding departments have no TAPs. So if we only consider departments with TAPs the ratio increases to an average of 5 TAPs in a department for every 100 radiographers.

2.2 TAPs by employer type and location

Table 2 - Number of TAPs compared to number of radiographers by employer type and location

	NHS England	NHS Northern Ireland	NHS Scotland	NHS Wales	Private / Independent / Charity	Grand Total
Number of departments responding	112	7	12	5	17	153
TAPs (Headcount)	88	4	0	5	5	102
Radiographers (Headcount)	4747	236	522	256	310	6071
Ratio of TAPs to Radiographers	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.02

With the exception of NHS Scotland, Table 2 shows that the proportion of TAPs does not vary with employer type and location. The 13 departments responding from the NHS in Scotland do not have any TAPs.

3. Assistant practitioners (APs)

3.1 APs by department type

Table 3 - Number of APs compared to number of radiographers by department type (headcount)

	Breast imaging	Radiology	Radiotherapy	Other / Unknown	Grand Total
Number of departments responding	17	74	34	28	153
APs (Headcount)	55	150	78	19	302
Radiographers (Headcount)	231	3556	1694	590	6071
Ratio of APs to Radiographers	0.24	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.05

Table 4 - Number of APs compared to number of radiographers by department type (WTE)

	Breast imaging	Radiology	Radiotherapy	Other / Unknown	Grand Total
Number of departments responding	16	70	34	26	146
APs (WTE)	48.2	132.48	71.69	26.82	279.19

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Radiographers (WTE)	165.15	2852.75	1522.78	551.25	5091.93
Ratio of APs to Radiographers	0.29	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05

Tables 3 and 4 show that on average there are 5 APs for every 100 radiographers in a department. This ratio is significantly higher for breast imaging departments where there are on average 24 APs for every 100 radiographers when comparing headcount figures and 29 APs for every 100 radiographers when comparing whole time equivalent (WTE) figures.

Three respondents reported that their assistant practitioner workforce included nuclear medicine / radionuclide imaging assistant practitioners and one respondent reported having abdominal aortic aneurysm assistant practitioners in their department.

3.2 APs by employer type and location

Table 5 - Number of APs compared to number of radiographers by employer type and location (headcount)

	NHS England	NHS Northern Ireland	NHS Scotland	NHS Wales	Private / Independent / Charity	Grand Total
Number of departments responding	112	7	12	5	17	153
APs (Headcount)	262	9	14	6	11	302
Radiographers (Headcount)	4747	236	522	256	310	6071
Ratio of APs to Radiographers	0.06	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.05

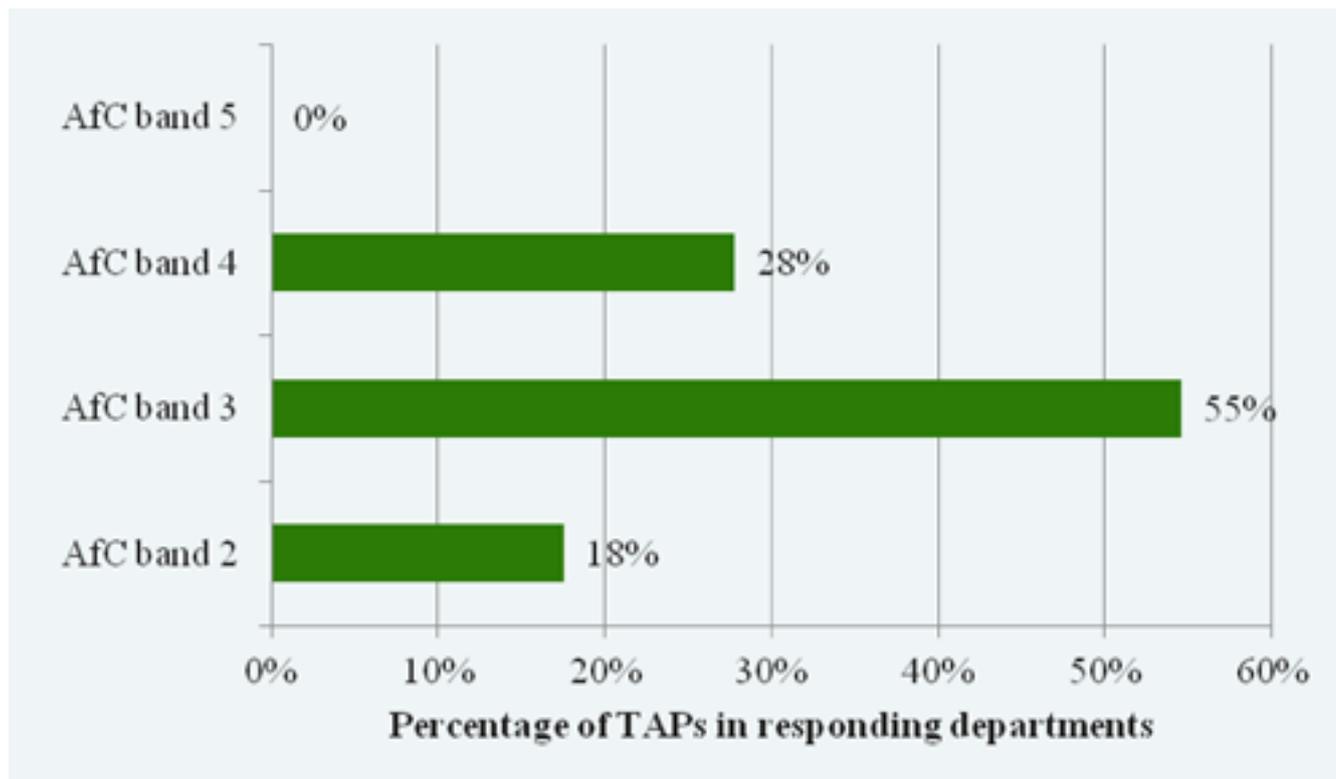
Table 6 - Number of APs compared to number of radiographers by employer type and location (WTE)

	NHS England	NHS Northern Ireland	NHS Scotland	NHS Wales	Private / Independent / Charity	Grand Total
Number of departments responding	108	7	12	5	14	146
APs (WTE)	244.49	7.7	12.6	6	8.4	279.19
Radiographers (WTE)	4048.8	199.92	442.93	210.77	189.51	5091.93
Ratio of APs to Radiographers	0.06	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.05

Tables 5 and 6 show that the NHS in England have a slightly higher proportion of assistant practitioners than the other employer types.

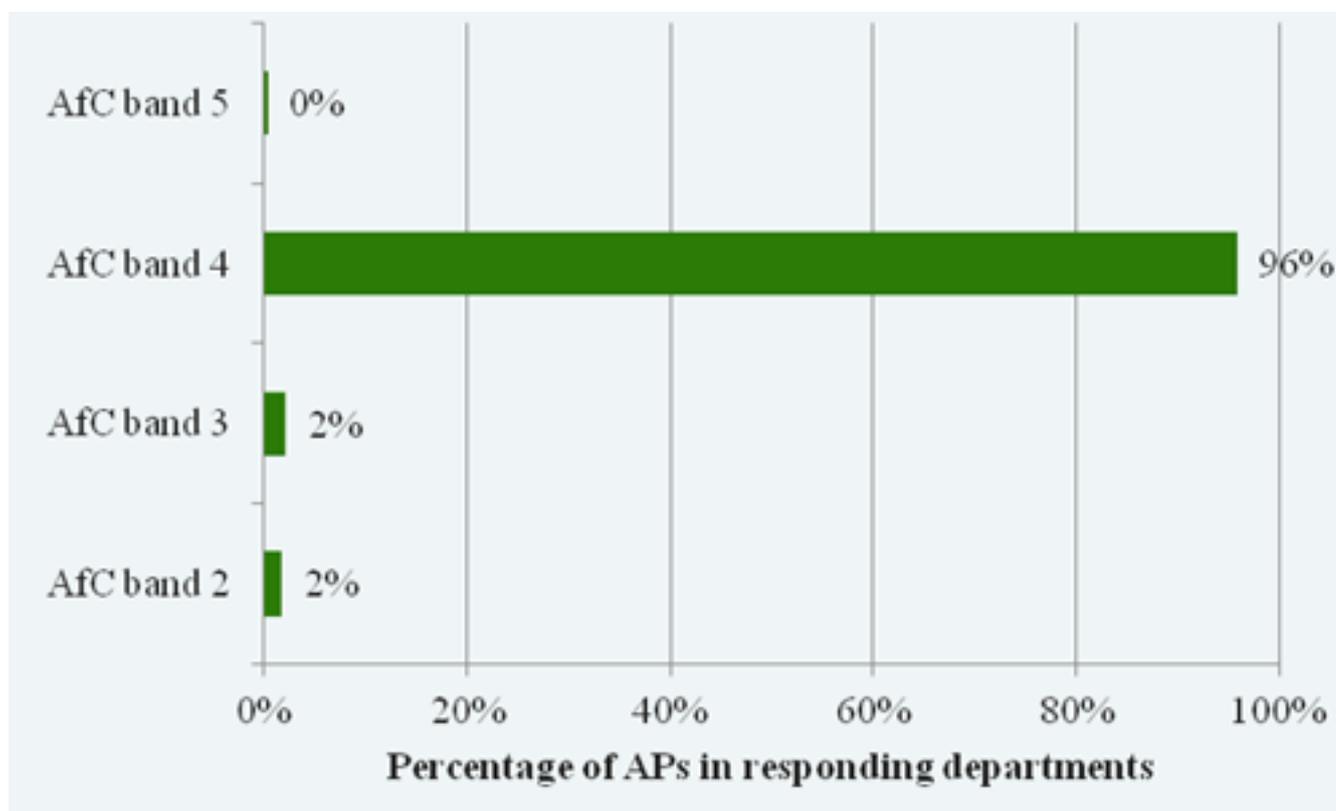
4. Agenda for Change (AfC) bands

Figure 1 - Percentage of trainee assistant practitioners in each agenda for change pay band



Over half of the TAPs in the responding departments are paid according to AfC band 3. However, there are also significant numbers of TAPs in AfC bands 2 and 4.

Figure 2 - Percentage of assistant practitioners in each agenda for change pay band



The vast majority of APs in the responding departments are paid according to AfC band 4.

5. Accreditation of assistant practitioners

26 (7%) of the AP in the responding departments are accredited by the College of Radiographers.

6. General comments

Respondents were asked for any general comments about the AP workforce in their departments. The table below displays the themes which were mentioned by two or more respondents.

Theme	Number of respondents	Illustrative comment
APs are valuable members of the team	43	<i>"Very well trained, well regarded, essential part of the workforce."</i>
Strict scope of practice	16	<i>"They work to a strict scope of practice."</i>
A number of APs go on to train as radiographers	11	<i>"We trained our first 2 AP's 7 years ago and they have recently qualified as radiographers after following a part time top up course."</i>
AP training provision should be improved	10	<i>"Course based in London. This is expensive for travel and accommodation. However, there was a very varied selection of courses out there. These need to be standardised."</i>
No APs employed in department	9	<i>"No assistant practitioners employed."</i>
Would like more APs	8	<i>"This has been of great benefit to the service and we are keen to recruit further to these posts."</i>
Financial challenges	8	<i>"We would like to have more - however lack of funding for salary during training and course fees makes this prohibitive."</i>
Valuable in mammography	8	<i>"Vital in delivering the breast screening program."</i>
Speciality issues	6	<i>"Being a small department it would be difficult to employ staff whose abilities were limited. All staff rotate into specialities as well as working as a general radiographer."</i>
Number of APs has reduced	6	<i>"Numbers have reduced due to lack of training course locally."</i>
Employ helpers / support workers	5	<i>"They have added a new dimension to our team and</i>

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		<i>bridge a gap between health care assistants and radiographers being flexible throughout the shift."</i>
Retention issues	5	<i>"The only issue we have is maintaining the skill mix in the department as most of the AP's have progressed to BSc."</i>
Supervision issues	5	<i>"In general radiography there is limited flexibility of this grade due to the need for 24/7 working and limited supervision on some shifts."</i>
Career progression for APs	5	<i>"We have had qualified AP's for a good number of years now, many of whom worked with us as dark room techs but with the changes in imaging technology we have been able support them and support their development into their extended role as AP's."</i>
Resistance from other staff	4	<i>"There was and remains some resistance to the concept of APs in the department but due to good support and excellent performance of the APs this will be resolved."</i>
Recent recruits	3	<i>"Currently have a trainee assistant practitioner just started training with view to full implementation of 4 tier structure in 2 years time."</i>
TAPs are paid under Annexe U	2	<i>"Trainee assistants are paid at Band 4 Annexe U."</i>
Cost efficient	2	<i>"Worth their weight in gold. In the current financial climate they allow is to optimise room staffing and equipment usage."</i>
Should be paid at band 5	2	<i>"The 2 qualified assistant practitioners are capable of working beyond the scope - I have applied for upgrade to band 5 for a 'Senior' AP grade to no avail as yet."</i>
Impact of shortage of jobs for qualified radiographers	2	<i>"One of our APs has left us for full radiographer training. As market forces for recruiting radiographers have turned full circle, with multiple applications for every vacancy advert, we could not justify sponsoring her training directly."</i>

Appendix A - Questionnaire

[Click here to download the questionnaire PDF.](#)

Source URL:

<https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/assistant-practitioner-workforce-survey-analysis>