

Making the case for change

Introduction

The Need to Invest in the Radiography Clinical Support Worker and Assistant Practitioner (SWAP) Workforce

The demand for radiography services is escalating due to population growth and shifting healthcare priorities, specifically regarding cancer, heart disease, and stroke. Concurrently, there are persistently high vacancy rates and significant technological advancements that support skill mix and workforce transformation. A shortage of personnel has led to delays and substantial expenditures on overtime, outsourcing, and reliance on bank and agency staff, with NHS imaging services incurring £276 million in 2023.

Excitingly, both Richard's Report and the Radiology GIRFT programme published in 2020 highlighted the necessity to optimise the roles of Clinical Support Workers, Assistant Practitioners, and Mammography Associates. These reports revealed inconsistencies in SWAP utilisation across services, with many services not employing Assistant Practitioners, and recent research continues to reflect these challenges.

Issues to Consider

Enhancing the SWAP Workforce

Many services are aiming to enhance the contributions of their SWAPs while ensuring they maintain fulfilling careers. To effectively consider changes, services should address the following questions:

1. **Role Diversity**: Do you employ SWAPs across a variety of roles and bandings?
2. **Staff Pressure**: Are your registered staff overwhelmed and pressured?
3. **Role Development**: Can you identify areas for developing new SWAP roles to take on tasks that do not require registration?
4. **Role development**: Can you Grow Your Own registered workforce from your SWAP population and better reflect your local community?
5. **Scope of Practice**: Are your current SWAPS utilising their full scope of practice?
6. **Training Needs**: What specific training and support structures are needed for integrating SWAP roles into existing teams?

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7. ****Performance Standards****: How will you ensure SWAP performance meets required patient care and safety standards?
8. ****Success Metrics****: What metrics will be used to evaluate the efficacy of proposed changes within the SWAP workforce?

Considerations for Change

While contemplating any transformations, take into account:

- Regulatory compliance
- Relevant national and professional guidance
- Adherence to organisational policies
- Consultation with staff, union representatives, and Trust/employer personnel
- Completion of governance processes, including securing support from your Chief AHP or equivalent Board-level post holder

Writing a Business Case

Justifying the Investment in SWAP Workforce

Developing the SWAP workforce will likely affect staffing costs, particularly if these roles are not currently utilised. However, this investment can yield returns in patient flow, continuity of care, and liberating registered staff's time.

When writing a business case, consider the following questions:

1. ****Target Audience****:
Who is the business case intended for? Write for your audience.
2. ****Problem Definition****: What specific problem does the business case aim to resolve?
For example, does your service need to reduce waiting lists by training Assistant Practitioners for non-complex scans working under the supervision of a registered radiographer? Or are you aiming to address vacancies, turnover, sickness rates, or enhance workforce diversity? Compile necessary data, including workforce composition, vacancy and turnover rates, sickness statistics, overtime costs, and other relevant financial expenditures.
3. ****Solution Offering****: How does the proposed plan address the identified problem?
Consider the benefits of SWAP optimisation, such as reallocating tasks to boost registered staff efficiency or developing the roles of radiographers into enhanced, advanced, or consultant practice. Can you extend working hours by utilising

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Assistant Practitioners? Assess whether this reduces dependency on agency and bank staff and speeds up the reduction of waiting lists.

4. ****Alignment with Policy****: How does the proposal sync with national, regional, and local policies?

NHS England's national AHP support workforce strategy stresses the importance and benefit of investing in the AHP support workforce including in radiography.

(National Imaging Programme, Wales

National Imaging Programme Scotland

Health and Social Care NI - Three Year Plan)

National AHP Support Worker strategies

10-year NHS plan

5. ****Cost Analysis****: What resources are necessary and what will the financial outlay be?

Identify both one-time costs (training, backfill needs, additional supervision) and ongoing expenses (practice educator support, CPD). Ensure consideration of reduced activity during training periods. Use the Workforce Calculator.

6. ****Risks**** What risks are associated with the implementing the proposal – but also what risk are associated with not implementing the proposal.

You could include a risk to service delivery/activity levels if vacancies are not filled or waiting lists are not reduced. Demonstrate the associated impact of delayed diagnosis on patients regarding treatment costs and outcomes. Can you get data on ED attendances by people on your waiting list who require urgent care for their condition? Consider also the high recruitment and onboarding costs arising from staff turnover, as well as the loss of organisational knowledge. Is there relevant data on incident reports and errors? Are there insights from staff survey feedback?

By systematically addressing these elements, you can create a well-rounded business case that advocates for the vital investment in the SWAP workforce, ultimately leading to enhanced service delivery and improved patient care.

- Consider regulatory compliance
- Identify and consider relevant national and professional guidance
- Follow your organisational policy

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- Discuss and consult with staff, relevant union representatives and Trust/employer level personnel.
- Complete all governance processes, including gaining the support of your Chief AHP or equivalent Board-level post holder.

The exact way that a business case needs to be written will be determined locally, however the above questions will provide the information and insights necessary to make the case for greater investment in SWAPs. Appendix 1 contains an example of a business case developed by one service to support the development of Assistant Practitioners.

Model Health

[NHS England's Model Health website](#) contains a range of data collected from services across England, including service costs, Bank and agency spend, outsourcing and overtime costs, reporting/procedures and staffing, including the level of practice. This data will allow you to include information on how you compare/benchmark with other Trusts, networks and areas.

Similar data should be sought in the devolved nations.

Implementing workforce change

There are a large number of methodologies available to help organisations consider the best way to implement change, [including in the NHS](#). All seek to break the change process down into a series of logical and sequential steps. Your employer may have a preferred methodology and, when you receive approval to invest in your SWAPs, you should use that approach to implement the necessary changes, working closely with staff. If your employer does not use a particular approach one way to consider workforce change is to use the following approach –

1. **Prepare.** Gather all the information that might be required to introduce change, including SoR and CoR resources, Job Descriptions and local policies.
2. **Engage.** Connect with all the stakeholders in your trust and discuss the proposed changes with staff, stressing the benefits that will result.
3. **Analyse.** Consider and plan what changes will be introduced. This might, for example, involve mapping, with staff, existing SWAP roles against the SoR's role and responsibilities guidance to identify not only tasks that they could perform within their scope of practice, they may not currently be undertaking, but also any training and governance needs.
4. **Check.** Review the potential changes with stakeholders.
5. **Change.** Implement the changes.
6. **Review.** Once implemented, assess whether the changes have delivered the expected changes and what, if anything, else is needed.

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References

- [1] Nightingale J, Sevens T, Etty S, Fowler-Davis S, Kelly S, Appleyard R, and Snaith B. (2025). *The role, scope and utilisation of the imaging support workforce in England: A qualitative framework analysis*. Radiography, 31, 254-274.
- [2] Richard R, (2020). *Diagnostics: Recovery and Renewal*. NHS England
- [3] *NHS Radiology GIRFT programme national specialist report*. (2020)