



SCoR

THE SOCIETY & COLLEGE
OF RADIOGRAPHERS

Terminology associated with sonographers, sonography education and the ultrasound profession

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction | 3 |
| 2. The Society of Radiographers and the College of Radiographers | 3 |
| 3. Definition of a sonographer | 4 |
| 4. Professional body | 4 |
| 5. Membership | 4 |
| 6. Associated Professional membership of the Society of Radiographers | 5 |
| 7. Statutory regulator and registration | 5 |
| 8. The bid for statutory registration of sonographers | 6 |
| 9. NHS Employers' advice on sonographer registration | 6 |
| 10. British Medical Ultrasound Society (BMUS) | 6 |
| 11. Accreditation | 7 |
| 12. Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education (CASE) | 7 |
| 13. Professional indemnity insurance (PII) | 8 |
| 14. 'Direct entry' | 8 |
| 15. Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers (PVRS) | 8 |
| 16. Accredited voluntary registers | 9 |
| 17. Validation | 9 |
| 18. Revalidation | 9 |
| 19. Apprenticeship | 9 |
| 20. Preceptorship | 10 |
| References | 10 |
| Appendix 1 | 10 |

1. Introduction

The sonography workforce is currently unregulated and the title ‘sonographer’ is not a legally protected one. Sonographers working in the United Kingdom come from many different professional backgrounds, there is a national shortage of sonographers.¹ New training and education routes, along with a complete career framework, are being developed by Health Education England in conjunction with a wide range of stakeholders. Sonography is a shortage profession on the Migration Advisory Committee Tier 2 visa list.²

This document is designed to provide an explanation of some of the terminology associated with sonographers, sonography education and the ultrasound profession. It is hoped that it will be of assistance to managers, educationalists and sonographers in the correct use of what can often be confusing terminology.

The Society and College of Radiographers/British Medical Ultrasound Society ‘Guidelines for Professional Ultrasound Practice’ are also a good reference source, especially sections 1.1 to 1.4.³

A glossary of terms is included in the Royal College of Radiologists/Society and College of Radiographers ‘Standards for the Provision of an Ultrasound Service’ (2014).⁴

A Society of Radiographers guidance document on ultrasound training, employment, registration and professional indemnity insurance can be found at:⁵ <https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/ultrasound-training-employment-registration-and-professional-indemnity-insurance-0>

2. The Society of Radiographers and the College of Radiographers

The Society of Radiographers (SoR) is the trade union and professional body for radiographers and all non-medical members of the workforce in diagnostic imaging and radiotherapy in the UK. It is responsible for their professional, educational and workforce interests.

The College of Radiographers (CoR) is the charitable subsidiary of the Society and it exists for the benefit of the public. The College’s objects are directed towards education, research and other activities in support of the science and practice of radiography.

Together they are known as the Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR): www.sor.org

3. Definition of a sonographer

The following definition is used for the Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers (PVRS),⁶ which is administered by the College of Radiographers (CoR) (ref paragraph 15). A sonographer is:

‘A healthcare professional who undertakes and reports on diagnostic, screening or interventional ultrasound examinations. They will hold as a minimum qualifications equivalent to a postgraduate 2 certificate or diploma in medical ultrasound, BSc (Hons) clinical ultrasound or an honours degree apprenticeship in clinical ultrasound that has been accredited by the Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education (CASE). They are either not medically qualified or hold medical qualifications but are not statutorily registered as a doctor in the UK.’

4. Professional body

A professional body is usually a not-for-profit organisation that aims to further a particular profession, the interests of individuals engaged in that profession and the interests of members of the public using services provided by members of the profession. Examples include the Society of Radiographers (SoR), the Royal College of Midwives (RCM), Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy. Many (including all those mentioned above) have a dual professional body and trade union structure.

5. Membership

Healthcare professionals can apply to become a member of a relevant professional body. Examples of professional bodies are given above, but there are many others. Members of professional bodies gain access to a wide range of professional resources and support; these often include professional indemnity insurance (ref paragraph 13) and on-line tools for recording their continuing professional development.

6. Associated Professional membership of the Society of Radiographers

This is a membership category of the SoR. Sonographers and healthcare professionals who are not diagnostic or therapeutic radiographers by background can apply to join the SoR as Associated Professional members. It is a 'full status' membership category and carries SoR professional indemnity insurance (PII) as one of the benefits of membership (ref paragraph 13).

Associated Professional membership and membership in general of the SoR is completely separate to voluntary registration on the PVRS (ref paragraph 15) and there are different application pathways.

7. Statutory regulator and registration

Statutory regulators are set up by legislation to protect the public. They keep a register of professionals who meet published standards for education, training, professional skills, behaviour and health. Statutory regulators are able to take action against registrants who breach these standards; this can include removal from the register. Statutory registration includes legal protection of title, and healthcare professionals must be registered to use them e.g. radiographer, midwife, physiotherapist.

There are nine statutory regulators. The most relevant ones for healthcare professionals working in ultrasound are the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and the General Medical Council (GMC). A list of all nine statutory regulators is given in Appendix 1.

Overseeing the activities of the nine statutory regulators is the Professional Standards Authority (PSA). <https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/home>

The PSA also assesses organisations that register health and social care practitioners who are not regulated by law and accredits the voluntary registers that they run.

There is no statutory registration available for sonographers and the title is not protected. Many sonographers are statutorily registered as radiographers, midwives, registered nurses or physiotherapists, but not as sonographers.

Healthcare professionals register with a statutory or voluntary regulator; they are not members of a regulatory body.

8. The bid for statutory registration of sonographers

Statutory registration for sonographers was first recommended by the then Health Professions Council to the Secretary of State for Health in 2009 following a submission by the SoR and the United Kingdom Association of Sonographers (UKAS), which merged with the SoR in January 2009. Following the election in 2010 and a change in government policy there has been no real progress. The SoR continues to argue and present the case for statutory registration for sonographers. It is expected that Health Education England will make a new submission to the Department of Health and Social Care for the statutory regulation of sonographers in the spring of 2019. This submission is supported by stakeholders including the SoR, CASE and the British Medical Ultrasound Society (BMUS).

Current government policy relating to statutory registration can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-excellence-autonomy-and-accountability-for-health-and-social-care-staff> ⁷

9. NHS Employers' advice on sonographer registration

Advice on sonographer registration and employment published in July 2015 can be obtained from the NHS Employers website (see link below). Recent developments have seen a cohort of students commence training at undergraduate degree level. Proposals are being developed by Health Education England that include both undergraduate degrees and degree apprenticeship educational pathways within a full sonography career framework.

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/retain-and-improve/standards-and-assurance/professional-regulation/role-of-the-employer/medical-radiography-and-ultrasound-workforce>

10. British Medical Ultrasound Society (BMUS)

BMUS is a multi-disciplinary charitable society supporting the advancement of science, technology, education and research of ultrasonics as applied to medicine. Its membership is drawn from a wide range of disciplines and includes medical and allied health professionals, physicists, nurses, midwives, vets, technicians, clinical application specialists and equipment manufacturers. www.bmus.org

11. Accreditation

This is a process by which certification of competence, authority or credibility is presented. As far as ultrasound is concerned, it is possible to accredit an individual, education programme, register or department. Examples are:

- i) Accreditation of an individual. The Society for Vascular Technology of Great Britain and Ireland (SVT) and the British Society of Echocardiography (BSE) both accredit individuals who meet their published criteria. The CoR can accredit an individual's advanced and consultant practice. <https://www.sor.org/career-progression/advanced-practitioners/advanced-practitioner-accreditation> and <https://www.sor.org/career-progression/consultants/consultant-practitioner-accreditation>
- ii) Accreditation of an education programme or focused course by the Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education (ref paragraph 12).
- iii) Accreditation of a voluntary register by the Professional Standards Authority.
- iv) Accreditation of departments by the Imaging Services Accreditation Scheme (ISAS) which is jointly owned by the Royal College of Radiologists and the College of Radiographers. ISAS accreditation is supported by the Care Quality Commission, NHS England, NHS Northern Ireland and NHS Wales. <https://www.sor.org/about-radiography/imaging-services-accreditation-scheme-isas>

12. Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education (CASE)

CASE is a not-for-profit organisation that exists to accredit sonographic education programmes and courses delivered within the UK. CASE works closely with universities and other higher education institutions to ensure that the highest standards are met. CASE accredits education programmes and focused courses; it does not accredit the individual. It consists of six member organisations: the CoR, BMUS, SVT, the Institute of Physics in Engineering and Medicine, the College of Podiatry and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists. Not all ultrasound education programmes and focused courses are CASE accredited. <http://www.case-uk.org/>

13. Professional indemnity insurance (PII)

Healthcare professionals who are statutorily registered must, as a condition of their statutory registration, declare that they have suitable PII in place. Voluntary registrants on the PVRS must declare that they have suitable PII in place at application and renewal. For those who are in direct employment, their first-line insurer is their employer, who carries vicarious liability for the acts and omissions of their employees. This is usually sufficient, but the additional PII provided by the professional bodies' insurers is considered important by many sonographers. Those sonographers who cannot be statutorily registered should ensure that they also have effective PII.

Additional PII can be obtained by virtue of membership of professional bodies such as the SoR, RCM, CSP and RCN. It can also be obtained directly from insurers and medical defence unions. It is important that any conditions or restrictions associated with the policy are understood and followed. <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/registrants/indemnity/>
<https://www.nmc.org.uk/registration/staying-on-the-register/professional-indemnity-arrangement/>

SoR PII information at <https://www.sor.org/being-member/professional-indemnity-insurance> (member log-in required)

14. 'Direct entry'

'Direct entry' is a term used to refer to entry to programmes of ultrasound education where a student may not have trained previously as a radiographer, midwife or nurse as was traditionally the case. 'Direct entry' can be at either undergraduate or postgraduate level, depending on the individual university and programme.

15. Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers (PVRS)

The PVRS is a voluntary register administered by the CoR. It has published application procedures that include a review panel. There are currently (March 2019) 615 voluntary registrants, of whom 190 have no statutory regulatory 'home'. It is not accredited by the PSA (ref paragraph 16).

<https://www.sor.org/practice/ultrasound/register-sonographers> (Scroll down for PDFs associated with the voluntary register, including FAQs. There is a search facility to confirm voluntary registration status.)

16. Accredited voluntary registers

The PSA has an accreditation scheme for voluntary registers. PSA-accredited voluntary registers are the government's preferred method for the protection of the public unless there is compelling evidence of a level of risk that can only be managed by statutory registration.

The Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers administered by the CoR is not accredited by the PSA. There are no plans to apply for this due to the resources and costs involved, although the situation is kept under review. PSA-accredited voluntary registers: <https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/what-we-do/accredited-registers>

17. Validation

In an ultrasound education and training context, this refers to the processes leading to the acceptance of an ultrasound education programme by a university with degree-awarding powers as being of an appropriate standard. An ultrasound programme leading to an undergraduate or postgraduate award can be validated by a university with degree-awarding powers and also be accredited by CASE (ref paragraph 12).

18. Revalidation

Revalidation is the process that sonographers who are registered with the NMC as a nurse or midwife must follow to maintain their registration with the NMC. Registration is for a three-year period. <http://revalidation.nmc.org.uk/welcome-to-revalidation.1.html>

19. Apprenticeship

There are proposals to establish an integrated degree apprenticeship at undergraduate level leading to qualification as a sonographer. A trailblazer group has been established working under the rules and procedures of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFA). The IFA is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Education. As of March 2019, the apprenticeship Standard has been approved and the end point assessment (EPA) has been consulted on. Further information is available at: <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/sonographer-degree/>

20. Preceptorship

The Department of Health and Social Care defines preceptorship as ‘a period of structured transition for a newly registered practitioner during which he or she will be supported by a preceptor to develop their confidence as an autonomous professional, refine skills, values and behaviours and to continue on their journey of life-long learning’.⁸ Health Education England will be including proposals for preceptorship and capability development within the new career framework for sonographers that is being developed. Further information is available at: <https://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/plan/workforce-supply/education-and-training/preceptorships-for-newly-qualified-staff>

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4. Royal College of Radiologists/Society and College of Radiographers (2014). Standards for the provision of an ultrasound service. Available at: <https://www.rcr.ac.uk/publication/standards-provision-ultrasound-service>
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6. College of Radiographers, Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers. Available at: <https://www.sor.org/practice/ultrasound/register-sonographers>
7. UK Government (2011). Enabling Excellence: Autonomy and accountability for health and social care staff. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-excellence-autonomy-and-accountability-for-health-and-social-care-staff>
8. Department of Health (2010). Preceptorship framework for newly qualified nurses, midwives and allied health professionals (PDF).

All links accessed 23 March 2019

Appendix 1

The nine statutory regulators

General Medical Council
Health and Care Professions Council
Nursing and Midwifery Council
General Chiropractic Council
General Dental Council
General Osteopathic Council
General Pharmaceutical Council
Pharmaceutical Council of Northern Ireland
General Optical Council



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