



SCoR

THE SOCIETY & COLLEGE
OF RADIOGRAPHERS

Ultrasound Training, Employment, Registration and Professional Indemnity Insurance

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1. Introduction

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

2. Education and training

Medical ultrasound is usually taught at postgraduate level in the UK with many sonographers having come from a healthcare background, such as radiography or midwifery.

Most ultrasound courses in the UK are accredited by the Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education (CASE).¹ Courses typically last between 12 and 18 months, and lead to a postgraduate certificate (PGC) or diploma (PGD). Courses may offer day release or block release patterns of study depending on the individual institution. There are approximately 16 universities or colleges offering CASE-accredited ultrasound courses in the UK. Entry requirements usually include a healthcare related undergraduate degree in radiography, midwifery or a similar science or health related subject, and confirmation of good access to clinical ultrasound practice.

CASE also accredit shorter, focused courses that allow, for example, a midwife to train specifically in first trimester techniques or a nurse to train in ultrasound techniques that are applicable to work in an Early Pregnancy Unit. These courses must meet certain criteria and are developed by individual universities and colleges.²

An undergraduate course (BSc) in medical ultrasound has recently been developed and is being delivered by one university in England. Application for the course can be made via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). There are also proposals to develop an apprenticeship route into medical ultrasound. If also accredited by CASE, such courses and routes will be listed in the CASE directory.²

All ultrasound training must include a clinical placement that has been approved by the university or college responsible for the student's overall education and training. These can be difficult to find and are often specifically arranged by Trusts or Health Boards for existing employees. SCoR cannot help with obtaining clinical placements. Individual universities and colleges will help if they can, but often cannot be of direct assistance due to a general shortage of clinical placements. Student sonographer vacancies are sometimes advertised on the NHS Jobs website.³

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

For those who are medically qualified and are eligible to register with the General Medical Council as a doctor and hold a licence to practise, the Royal College of Radiologists has published a document entitled *Ultrasound Training Recommendations for Medical and Surgical Specialties*, which is available from their website.⁴

There is no formal system by which qualifications obtained outside the UK can be compared to the UK's awards. A body exists (UK NARIC⁵) that may be able to advise with regards to the academic level, but it cannot help with the clinical aspect of training.

3. Employment

If you hold a qualification in ultrasound, whether awarded in the UK or overseas, 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, but should be aware of EU and EEA regulations relating to the free movement of professionals.

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

There is currently a shortage of sonographers in the UK, and sonography is listed as a shortage specialty in a review by the UK Government Migration Advisory Committee (MAC)⁶. (See page 100 of the review for commentary.)

Vacancies in the NHS are advertised on the NHS Jobs website.³ Search terms such as 'sonographer' and 'ultrasonographer' should be used to find relevant vacancies.

Companies providing independent ultrasound services in the UK can be found via the SCoR website, in the SCoR publication *Synergy News*, or via internet search engines.

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

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 who are already working in the UK.

4. Registration and advice to service managers

There is often confusion between a professional body and a statutory regulator. The Society of Radiographers is a professional body, not a statutory regulator. Examples of statutory regulators 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, for example, it is a statutory (legal) requirement to be registered with the HCPC in order to work as a radiographer.

There is often also confusion between the terms 'membership' and 'registration'. A sonographer can be a **member** of a professional body or scientific society and also be **registered** with a regulatory body.

There is, however, no legal requirement for sonographers to be registered with a statutory regulator, such as the HCPC or the 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 regulated by the HCPC, such as radiography. A further example would be a sonographer who has trained overseas and may be very well qualified and competent but may not meet the registration requirements of the HCPC or NMC. Similarly, sonographers who have trained in the UK after completing a scientific or other undergraduate degree are unable to register with the HCPC.

NHS Employers have published advice relating to registration for sonographers on their website.⁷

The SCoR expects those of its members who are able to register with a statutory regulator 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 the GMC and able to obtain a licence to practise; 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 perform on the background, English proficiency, and likely competence of an employee need to be carried out before any offer of employment. The comparative standard of qualification is a UK Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma in Medical Ultrasound that has been accredited by CASE. 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 who may be eligible for statutory registration (depending on their professional background) should visit the HCPC website for information on procedures. There are two possible routes: the European Mutual Recognition route⁹, or temporary registration.⁹

If you trained overseas and outside the EU/EEA or Switzerland, it may be possible to obtain statutory registration with, for example, the HCPC via 'International' application routes. This will depend on your primary professional experience and qualifications. Details can be obtained from the HCPC website.¹⁰ There is also information available on the British Medical Ultrasound Society website.¹¹

The SCoR has made an application to the HCPC for sonography to become a regulated profession and for '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 HPC in October 2009, this application did not proceed following the publication of a command paper by the Department of Health in February 2011.¹²

In the absence of statutory registration, the SCoR maintains the 'Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers' (PVRS).¹³ This voluntary register was set up several years ago 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 for registration on the voluntary register, whether statutorily registered or not. Information for employers, voluntary registrants and members of the public can be found in a SCoR publication covering the policy and processes of the PVRS.¹⁴ Voluntary registration is limited in the extent to which it can protect the public when compared with statutory registration; the SCoR will continue to argue for sonographers to become statutorily registered. It is important to note that the PVRS is not a Professional Standards Authority accredited register.¹⁵

Sonographers who are not statutorily registered face the following legal restrictions:

- i) They cannot act under Patient Group Directions for the administration of drugs and medicines and cannot train to become supplementary prescribers. They are allowed to act under Patient Specific Directions, but employers requiring them to act under these directions must ensure they are competent to do so safely.
- ii) They cannot act as a referrer for clinical imaging examinations involving the use of ionising radiation. However, a sonographer who is statutorily registered 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 the SoR website using the following link <https://www.sor.org/contact-us>

5. Professional indemnity insurance

In 2014 the government introduced legislation that requires those professionals who hold statutory registration (except social workers) to hold professional indemnity insurance (PII). This legislation became effective on 1st April 2015.

Full advice (including frequently asked questions) is provided on the HCPC website.¹⁶

The equivalent NMC advice can be found on the NMC website.¹⁷

In most cases the requirement for PII will be met by working in an employed environment, but sonographers are advised to read the advice given by the HCPC and/or NMC as appropriate. It is particularly important to establish your PII situation if you are statutorily registered and self-employed, or work on a part self-employed/part employed basis.

If you are not statutorily registered it is still strongly recommended that you ensure you have PII available to you as above.

Professional Indemnity Insurance can also be obtained via membership of professional bodies such as the SCoR, or from commercial insurers.

It is important to note that there is no PII provided by the action itself of registering with the HCPC or NMC. The requirement is to make a professional declaration at first application for registration, or at renewal, that PII is sought in conjunction with the registration.

There is also no PII provided by the action itself of registering with the PVRS or of being listed on the voluntary register.

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