

SOCIETY AND COLLEGE OF RADIOGRAPHERS

RETURN TO PRACTICE - ULTRASOUND

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1. Introduction

There is a long standing shortage of sonographers in the UK; the Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR) estimates there to be between a 15% and 20% shortfall. Recent changes to the organisation of the NHS and the time required for any new structures associated with the funding of ultrasound training to take effect mean that this shortage is likely to continue. Many employers have reported difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified sonographers. The SCoR provides advice as part of its professional activities to members who are not currently working and who wish to return to work as a sonographer on a part or full time basis. All enquiries have previously been answered on an individual basis but it was thought that it would be worthwhile making this advice available to a wider range of members. The following is a compilation of advice that has been given to members and covers the major areas of concern. It also highlights documents and websites of particular relevance to the sonographer returning to practice. General advice on returning to the radiography profession is available at <http://www.sor.org/career-progression/return-practice>

2. Registration

It is recommended that you re-register with a statutory regulatory body such as the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) if your registration has lapsed and if you are able to do so. It is a requirement of the HCPC that anyone applying to re-register and who has been out of practice for more than 2 years needs to undertake a period of updating. The HCPC are able to re-register you if your initial training was for one of the professions that it regulates, for example radiographers and clinical scientists. Sonographers with a professional background in nursing or midwifery should investigate whether it is possible for them to re-register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).

The statutory regulators are as flexible as they can be in their approach. The HCPC, for example, will allow a wide range of ultrasound related activities to count towards re-registration requirements.

Further advice can be found at <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/apply/readmission/> The HCPC also produces a helpful booklet on return to practice available from:

http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10001364Returning_to_practice.pdf

Nurses and Midwives should visit <http://www.nmc-uk.org/Registration/Returning-to-the-register/>

Not all sonographers will be able to register or re-register with a statutory regulatory body. The SCoR is supportive of those sonographers who, through no fault of their own, cannot gain statutory registration. A full discussion can be found in its published document on Ultrasound Training, Employment and Registration <https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/ultrasound-training-employment-registration-and-professional-indemnity-insurance-0> This includes a link to advice from NHS Employers.

For those sonographers who cannot register or re-register with a statutory regulatory body, application should be made to the Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers which is administered by the SCoR. Details and on-line application form are available at <https://www.sor.org/practice/ultrasound/register-sonographers>. Applications are also welcomed from those sonographers who have registered with the HCPC or NMC as the voluntary register will help to support the case for statutory registration for sonographers.

3. Clinical Experience

If you have not been working in ultrasound for some time, a return to work can be daunting. It is recommended that you make contact with a local department and see what the local situation is with respect to both possible future employment as a sonographer and also with regards to updating your clinical experience in the current work environment.

i) Updating

This will partly depend on the local situation and how long you have been away. It is possible that an ultrasound department or independent service provider will employ you from the start of your return to practice period. Alternatively, they may agree to help you with gaining clinical experience but will not have a post available. In the latter case they might offer you a voluntary (honorary) contract. If you have any queries regarding contracts or terms and conditions of employment as a returner, you are advised to contact the industrial relations department of the SCoR or equivalent organisation that you may be a member of.

You should have a mentor during your return to practice period and also a properly planned updating scheme. The contents of this will depend on the work you are likely to be doing after your return to practice period is complete and also on any HCPC requirements. As stated previously the HCPC are flexible in their approach and self-study can contribute to the overall hours specified. We recommend that you also spend time in other imaging modalities such as CT, MRI, general radiography, interventional radiography and radio-nuclide imaging on an observer basis. This is so that you are aware of how these imaging modalities currently relate to ultrasound imaging and you can make referrals as necessary depending on departmental protocols. If time is available it would also be a good idea to visit other departments associated with likely patient pathways such as oncology and radiotherapy. You should be given the opportunity to attend any audit sessions, reporting discrepancy meetings and other meetings associated with the delivery of a quality ultrasound service as appropriate.

It is worthwhile visiting the website of the Consortium for Accreditation of Sonographic Education (CASE) website at <http://www.case-uk.org/>. CASE now accredits focused ultrasound courses which may be of relevance to you. Universities also from time to time run return to practice or other short courses; some universities also offer individually negotiated learning pathways. Although these types of courses are not advertised on the CASE website, the contact details for all the CASE accredited universities are given and you can make your own enquiries.

Short courses and study days are also advertised in journals such as Synergy News, on www.sor.org and on the British Medical Ultrasound Society website at www.bmus.org

Employers and service providers may ask or arrange for an assessment of competence at the end of your return to practice period. These should be tailored to the department's and your own requirements and may or may not involve a CASE accredited Higher Education Institution. Assessments should not rely solely on numbers of patients scanned; this can give an indication of experience but not necessarily of competence.

ii) Obstetrics

If you are planning to return to practice in obstetric ultrasound then you are likely to be involved with the screening programme run by the Fetal Anomaly Screening Programme (FASP, England) or equivalent organisations in Scotland and Wales <http://fetalanomaly.screening.nhs.uk/> You will also need to obtain the necessary training to perform the ultrasound measurements (Crown Rump Length and Nuchal Translucency) that form part of the combined test for Trisomy 21, 18 and 13 and obtain a Down's Syndrome Screening Quality Assurance Support Service (DQASS) number. Every participating department has a Screening Support Sonographer (SSS) who will be able to give advice on the full process. Guidance for practitioners can be found in the FASP Programme handbook available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fetal-anomaly-screening-programme-handbook>

See also the FASP Ultrasound Practitioner's Handbook:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/443865/FASP_ultrasound_handbook_July_2015_090715.pdf

There is also a wealth of information available on the .gov.co.uk website where all screening programme information is located now including links to mandatory on-line training and on-line support tools. <https://www.gov.uk/topic/population-screening-programmes/fetal-anomaly>

E-learning linked to the Fetal Anomaly Screening Programme can be found at <http://cpd.screening.nhs.uk/fasp-elearning>

There are modules available on the screening programme principles, the combined test and on fetal cardiac scanning and anomalies.

iii) Independent providers

There is likely to be an increasing demand for work undertaken in the community and by independent providers who have obtained contracts to provide diagnostic services for NHS patients. In view of the overall shortage of sonographers it may be the case that independent providers will also seek to recruit and assist with the updating of sonographers who are returning to practice.

iv) Supervision/reporting

You should obtain a clear written statement at the start of your return to practice period with respect to what level of supervision will be required and what scans and reports you will need to have reviewed prior to issue. Arrangements for verification of reports should also be set out clearly in advance.

4. On-Line learning

In addition to traditionally published books and journals there is a wide range of on-line learning material that can count towards both HCPC/NMC and your own requirements. College of Radiographers' on-line learning advice can be found via <http://www.sor.org/learning> The menu will show what is available and will allow access to the College's e-learning portfolio. There are also links to NHS 'e-learning for Health' on-line modules which are free to all who hold a valid e-mail address (see below). There are also many other providers of on-line learning in ultrasound. Some websites are free, some make a charge. It is also possible to join other professional or scientific organisations that will then allow access to their own on-line learning material.

'CPD Now' is an on-line tool available to SCoR members in which you can record your CPD in a format that will be acceptable to the HCPC for future registration cycles

<https://www.sor.org/learning/cpd/cpd-now>

e-learning for health (e-LfH)

e-LfH is an award winning Health Education England programme in partnership with the NHS and professional bodies providing high quality content free of charge for the training of the NHS workforce across the UK. <http://www.e-lfh.org.uk/home/>

Formed following a ground-breaking project in Radiology, e-LfH is now in the process of delivering over 300 e-learning projects in partnership with medical Royal Colleges and other healthcare organisations. The on-line training sessions enhance traditional learning, support existing teaching methods and provide a valuable reference point. They are designed and built to be engaging and interactive, using quality images, video, audio and animation to help trainees learn and retain knowledge. Content is presented using various templates such as 'real-life' scenarios, case studies and 'knowledge bites'.

A sample demonstration session is available at: <http://www.e-lfh.org.uk/demo/>

There is a wide range of free e-learning sessions available on ultrasound within the 'image interpretation' section that has been written by expert ultrasound practitioners to match the format used by e-LfH. They are a very valuable learning resource and can contribute to a practitioner's continuing professional development.

In order to access the e-learning sessions, it is necessary to first register with the programme <http://portal.e-lfh.org.uk/Register> This web page gives information on who is eligible to register and alternative access routes for those who are not.

5. SCoR website and the document library

The SCoR website has a wealth of information relating to the radiography profession and ultrasound imaging in particular. The 'news' section at <https://www.sor.org/news> provides an update on issues affecting the imaging workforce in general. It is updated every day, often contains analysis and provides an opportunity to feedback your comments to the SCoR.

Another helpful link is <http://www.sor.org/practice/ultrasound> All ultrasound news stories are 'tagged' and available via this link allowing easy review of what has been affecting the ultrasound community.

The SCoR also publishes a wide range of professional documents which can be accessed through its on-line document library at <https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library> Use 'ultrasound' as a search term to identify those documents specifically relating to ultrasound.

There is also a returners' support network available to help; this is profession-wide and not ultrasound specific. If you would like further details please contact the SCoR via <https://www.sor.org/contact-us>

6. Professional Indemnity Insurance

If you are a member of the SCoR your Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) will be effective provided you remain within its conditions. Full details can be found at <https://www.sor.org/being-member/professional-indemnity-insurance>

If you are an employee on either a substantive or voluntary contract, your employer should take first line responsibility for your work under the principle of vicarious liability but you must ensure that you work within an employer's protocols and procedures. You should confirm all aspects relating to indemnity insurance at the time of signing the contract.

It is now a legal requirement to declare that you have appropriate PII available to you at the time of registration or renewal with the HCPC or other statutory regulator. Full details at <http://www.hcpc-uk.co.uk/registrants/indemnity/>

7. Finding a post

Information to help with finding a suitable ultrasound post can be found in the SCoR document <https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/ultrasound-training-employment-registration-and-professional-indemnity-insurance-0> This also includes links to the on-line 'NHS Jobs' website. Posts are also advertised in Synergy News, the commercial press related to diagnostic imaging, 'Midwives' journal, on the British Medical Ultrasound Society website <http://www.bmus.org/intro/home.asp> and in journals published by other professional groups with an interest in ultrasound. NHS Employers have advice for employers relevant to those sonographers who do not hold statutory registration that can be accessed via a hyperlink in the above SCoR document.

If you have any queries relating to return to practice as a sonographer please contact or telephone 020 7740 7200 and select option 3.

Suggested further reading

Standards for the provision of an ultrasound service. (RCR/SCoR, December 2014)
http://www.sor.org/sites/default/files/document-versions/bfcr1417_standards_ultrasound.pdf

Guidelines for professional ultrasound practice. (SCoR/BMUS, December 2015)
https://www.sor.org/sites/default/files/document-versions/ultrasound_guidance.pdf

