

# **The Benefits and Challenges of Employing New Sonography Graduates: Key Stakeholder Views**

## **Abstract**

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The impetus for this work was the increasing concern over the national sonographer workforce deficit. Despite this, demand for ultrasound services continued to increase with current educational models only facilitating small numbers of trainees at any given time. At the time of writing this first line investigative modality was nearing crisis and there was an urgent need for different education models and service reconfiguration.

**Aim:** This study explored the perceptions of key stakeholders in relation to employability of a new sonographer graduate after proposed completion of a direct entry, undergraduate programme of study. The aim of the research was to gain a deeper understanding of the current perceptions of key stakeholders related to employing new sonography graduates.

**Method:** Semi structured interviews were used and a total of thirteen participants interviewed. The data collected was analysed using a constructivist Grounded Theory approach and emerging theory tested. The qualitative approach allowed rich and detailed exploration of the participants' perceptions.

**Findings:** An overarching theory emerged related to 'striving for professional identity' with three categories; achieving professionalism, being in control and managing change. Much resistance to change and protection of their own roles emerged as did the lack of clarity for the role, career structure and pay. Some of this was attributable to the historical development of radiography and sonography and associated with maintaining professional boundaries. The findings also suggested that the challenges of employing a new sonographer graduate were much more deeply rooted. It highlighted sonography lacked some of the key requirements for professionalisation and the professional identity and recognition were weak.

**Conclusions:** Patterns and subsequent theory emerged from which potential solutions and recommendations were made. The research identified there was an urgent need for change and proposed this could be achieved through clear leadership to manage and implement the changes. The key aspects related to professionalisation and professional identity needed to be strengthened through the introduction of a direct entry programme, robust entry requirements and curriculum, career structure, registration and leadership.