

# Therapeutic radiography pre-registration admissions in England

26<sup>th</sup> September 2017

## 1 Overview and background

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In February this year, the College of Radiographers sought to collect application data from all UK education institutions with a pre-registration diagnostic or therapeutic radiography programme. The data and qualitative responses indicated that there were significant concerns about the number of applications for therapeutic radiography in England. The data was published and distributed to both education institutions, placement commissioners and other stakeholders. Concern about the number of applications continued throughout the summer and into the clearing period.

This second report presents data collected in mid-September, after the majority of education providers have commenced their pre-registration programmes. Only therapeutic radiography data in England was collected as the previous survey highlighted that this was where there were significant concerns regarding recruitment of students.

### Key findings

- 7 % of available student places remain unfilled in England.
- Recruitment ranged from 38 % under recruitment to 9 % over recruitment, with four programmes under recruiting and seven recruiting to or above capacity.
- There has been a significant drop in applications to therapeutic radiography programmes in England both during the UCAS cycle and clearing.
- Many prospective students had low awareness of what radiotherapy was and what therapeutic radiographers do.
- Fewer applications were received than previously from mature students and those changing careers.
- Education providers have had to reduce the entry requirements to aid recruitment. This could impact on student support and the number of students who successfully complete.
- Those who accept places on programmes do not always turn up so final numbers of students could be lower than reported<sup>1</sup>.
- There has been an increase in the number of non-UK students admitted onto therapeutic radiography programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> The College of Radiographers reports the number of students starting and completing programmes in the annual Approval and Accreditation Board Report

## 2 Total number of student places available on the programme

There are ten education institutions that deliver pre-registration therapeutic radiography programmes in England. All deliver BSc (Hons) programmes. One education institution who responded also delivers a postgraduate pre-registration qualification. Responses were received from all education institutions.

There was a total of 335 places reported to be available for therapeutic radiography students in England. Some education institutions reported increasing the number of students they could take as a result of Health Education England's placement funding increases<sup>2</sup>. Qualitative comments provide some insight into the recruitment strategies that universities adopted in order to fill places.

Data has been anonymised. Codes used are the same as those used in College of Radiographers' annual Approval and Accreditation Board reports.

Education institution	Number of student places available	Total number of students started	Number of EU <sup>3</sup> students started	Number of international <sup>4</sup> students started
T1	23	16	0	1
T2	55	60	0	1
T4	17	17	0	0
T5	39	24	0	0
PT5	12	12	0	0
T6	41	42	4	1
T8	30	30	0	0
T9	32	32	1	0
T11	23	18	1	0
T12	33	30	0	2
T14	30	32	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Higher Education al Institutions from Health Education England, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2017, Reforming education funding for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals.

<sup>3</sup> European Union (EU) students, excluding UK students.

<sup>4</sup> Non-UK and non-EU students

### 3 Qualitative comments

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Most respondents provided further comments about their institutions' recruitment experience this year. Comments have been summarised in five themes.

#### Applications and applicants

Applications were significantly reduced compared to previous years. One respondent stated total applications were down by about 30% on previous years

Several respondents indicated that there was a clear drop in the number of high quality/suitable applications compared to previous years.

The profile of applicants' qualifications has changed this year:

- Reduction in grades for science A' Levels.
- More applications from those with BTEC and access qualifications. One education institution reported that most applicants did not have A' Levels.

The number of mature students and those changing careers has decreased. One education institution reported that most applicants were school or college leavers.

This year, the postgraduate pre-registration programme was still commissioned by Health Education England. Students enquiring about this programme after it was full were told to apply next year. However, some commented that they did not think they would be able to afford it.

#### Clearing

Some universities who have not traditionally had to enter clearing have done so this year. One education institution reported they had gained 70% of their cohort through clearing. Other institutions accepted a higher number of students through clearing than they have in previous years. The suitability of clearing applicants was low due to lack of awareness of the profession and qualifications below the entry requirements.

The number of clearing applications has been lower than in previous years and some programmes have remained in clearing although the programme has already started.

Respondents stated that many applicants through clearing wanted diagnostic radiography. Awareness of therapeutic radiography was low.

#### Entry qualifications

Several education institutions reduced their entry requirements to recruit sufficient students. However, respondents expressed concern about having to do this as it was felt that students who only met the reduced requirements could struggle with the programme requirements and learning outcomes.

There is a significant amount of atomic and radiation physics in therapeutic radiography programmes and traditionally students can struggle with these subjects, even when they do have good A' Level grades in science or a single science subject. The reduction in the grades of the applicants, in conjunction with education providers dropping the entry requirements is concerning. It could lead to students requiring more support with the science elements of the programme and ultimately, fewer students completing the programmes.

## Placements

Some respondents reported that they had placement capacity but were not able to recruit enough suitable students. However, other universities were able to utilise previously unused placements due to Health Education England funding further placements. One programme which had previously had a significant reduction in commissioned places was able to increase the number of students back to the 2014-2015 level.

## Possible reasons for reduced applications

Without further research, it is impossible to be certain about the reasons for the lower number of applications and failure to fill all places available. Possible reasons were suggested by respondents based on their recruitment and interview experiences this year. The biggest change to therapeutic radiography programmes has been the removal of the means tested bursary and payment of tuition fees. Respondents felt that this was the main reason for the recruitment difficulties. Other reasons cited were:

- Lack of public awareness about radiotherapy and therapeutic radiographers.
- Poor careers advice in schools and colleges.
- Negative and inaccurate portrayal of radiotherapy and therapeutic radiographers in the media
- Drop in the birth rate 18 years' ago. This trend will continue for another three years<sup>5</sup>.
- Medical schools have entered clearing this year and they draw the top students out of the allied health professions. This has a knock-on effect for the smaller specialised health professions such as therapeutic radiography.

Respondents suggested ways of raising the profile of therapeutic radiographers and radiotherapy. Suggestions will be passed on to the therapeutic radiography Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) funded recruitment project lead, once the project starts.

## 4 International and European Union students

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There have been 6 EU (non-UK) students accepted on programmes in England, and 5 international (non-UK, non-EU) students. This is an increase compared to previous years. Six universities could accept EU or international students whereas in previous years only one university has accepted non-UK students.

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<sup>5</sup> Office for National Statistics,  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsummarytablesenglandandwales/2016>