Society of Radiographers

Survey of students and recent graduates

2009
Executive Summary

In July 2009, the Society of Radiographers (SoR) surveyed current students and recent graduates from radiography programmes to gather information about their motivations, finances and experiences. Nearly 600 respondents answered a range of questions in an online questionnaire about the reasons they chose radiography, their finances during and after their degree and their experiences in their first job. This document presents an analysis of this survey and the following bullet points highlight the main findings:

- Financial motivations were less important to students when deciding to study radiography than an interest in the career, job security and career development.
- The most common reasons some students did not complete their course were because they had made the wrong career choice or found the course too difficult.
- Student debt continues to be a concern: 78% of respondents had used some form of credit to fund their studies; the average respondent was in debt or was expecting to be by between £5,000 and £10,000 on the date of their graduation; and around 30% said they were or expected to be over £10,000 in debt on graduation.
- Given four options for alternative funding of radiography students, around half of the respondents preferred the option of employing healthcare students in the NHS for the length of their course.
- The job market for recent graduates remains strong: as of July, 76% of 2009 graduates had arranged their first job and 86% of 2008 graduates had started their first job within 2 months of graduating
- 2008 graduates were overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of their first year working as a qualified radiographer; over 90% agreed or strongly agreed that their career was so far consistent with their expectations.

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1. Introduction

This document presents an analysis of an online survey of students and recent graduates run by the SoR in July 2009. The survey was targeted at current radiography students and graduates from radiography degrees since 2008. Respondents were asked about their motivations for studying radiography, details of their finances and their experiences since graduating.

The survey was anonymous and covered as many students and recent graduates as possible. We identified 3705 potential subjects from the SoR membership database and emailed to ask if they would complete the online questionnaire. The survey was also advertised in the SoR email newsletter Student Talk and on www.sor.org. Respondents were offered the option of entering a prize draw if they completed the online survey.

The questionnaire was completed by 573 individuals. It was designed to ask respondents different questions depending on their year of graduation: current students were asked questions about the reasons they chose to study radiography and why some students did not complete the course, and recent graduates were asked their experiences in their first job. All respondents were asked questions about their finances including how they financed their degree and their level of debt on graduation.

2. Pre-registration education

2.1 Reasons for studying radiography

Perhaps unsurprisingly, financial motivations were less important to students when deciding to study radiography than an interest in the career, job security and career development. This is a common feature of the public service where the potential rewards may not be as great as the private sector but where there is greater certainty of employment and career progression.

How important to you were the following reasons for choosing the subject of radiography?

Source: SoR survey of students 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was interested in a career in radiography</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely I will find a job on graduation</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential for career development</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could meet the entry requirements</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support was available</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not need to pay tuition fees</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential starting salary on graduation</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two other factors were mentioned by more than ten respondents in the free text field which accompanied this question. These were:

- Interest in the subject; and
- Caring for patients / contributing to society

“Having the opportunity to contribute to society through work in a hospital - having entered the BSc course as a mature student, I have already experienced much less rewarding work!”
2.2 Reasons for choosing specific course

A decision to enrol on a specific course appears more likely to be determined by the reputation of the course and financial considerations than geographical reasons.

How important to you were the following reasons for choosing your specific course?

Source: SoR survey of students 2009

- The course has a good reputation: 77%
- Financial support was available: 57%
- I did not need to pay tuition fees: 44%
- The course was near my home: 41%
- I wanted to stay near my friends and family: 32%
- I couldn’t afford to move to another area: 21%
- I wanted to move to another area: 15%
- The course was near my work: 10%

2.3 Reasons for not completing the course

Students were asked the reasons why they were considering leaving the course (if they were) and the reason why any others on their course were considering leaving (if they knew). The results were collated according to the course discipline and are shown in separate graphs for diagnostic radiography and therapeutic radiography below. For diagnostic radiography the most common reasons were wrong career choice followed by finding the course too difficult, whilst for therapeutic radiography the two most common reasons were the same but in reverse order.

Reasons why some students do not complete the course

Diagnostic

Source: SoR survey of students 2009

- Wrong career choice: 56%
- Finding the course too difficult: 50%
- Dissatisfaction with the clinical placement: 37%
- Dissatisfaction with the course content: 34%
- Personal or family reasons: 34%
- Financial problems: 32%
- Dissatisfaction with the Education Institution: 16%
- Travel difficulties: 15%
- Ill health: 10%
- Maternity / Paternity break: 7%
3. Student finances

3.1 Types of finance

Respondents were asked to select all the types of finance they relied on to fund their studies. Less than three-quarters of students selected an NHS bursary, presumably because the remainder of the students were not eligible for one. 78% of respondents had used some form of credit to fund their studies: 67% had a student loan; and 46% had used an overdraft facility.

39% of respondents said they relied on income from paid employment to help fund their studies. We considered that this may have an effect on the quality of study and rate of attrition. However there was no significant difference between the degree classifications obtained by those who worked during term-time and those who did not. There was insufficient data to analyse whether having to work made a student less likely to complete the course.
3.2 Access to information about financial support

Survey respondents were asked to describe in their own words how they thought access to information about financial support could be improved. Some thought there was already sufficient information available (23 respondents). However, the following main themes emerged from the remainder of the responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information about financial support should be:</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Example comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• clear and simpler to understand;</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>“Step by step instructions and CLEAR information.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• described in one place with details or links to all potential sources;</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>“I believe that someone needs to explain that even though the course is paid for and that bursaries are available not everyone can get this bursary. Also that because of this the student loan available for you to get is considerably less than most other students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• available both as a printed leaflet and online;</td>
<td>31 30</td>
<td>“A booklet and/or website highlighting all possible sources of funding available would be helpful”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• given to potential students before they start the course;</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>“NHS bursaries could not give any advice until the application form was sent in but by that stage you had to commit to the course. I really needed a one to one with someone at the time of the open day to help me determine whether we could afford it or not.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• emailed;</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Email rather than post as you often move about as a student.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• provided by or through the university; and</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>“Information could be passed to the Universities and then passed directly to the students”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• supported by sufficient telephone helpline staff.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“It is very difficult to contact the NHS to discuss NHS Bursaries. Phones were constantly engaged and staff not always very helpful.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Student debt

Student debt continues to be a concern. The average respondent was in debt by between £5,000 and £10,000 on the date of their graduation, or was expecting to be. Even more worryingly, around 30% said they were over £10,000 in debt on graduation, or expected to be.

**Level of student debt (not including mortgage)**

Source: SoR survey of students and recent graduates 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Debt</th>
<th>Percentage of Survey Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£0</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£1 - £5,000</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£5,001 - £10,000</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£10,001 - £15,000</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£15,001 - £20,000</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£20,001 - £25,000</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£25,001 - £30,000</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £30,000</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After graduation, 30% of recent graduates responding had monthly debt / loan payments of more than £150 per month (not including mortgage payments).

**Monthly debt/loan repayments (not including mortgage)**

Source: SoR survey of graduates 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Debt/Loan Repayments</th>
<th>Percentage of Survey Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£0</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£1 - £50</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£51 - £100</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£101 - £150</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£151 - £200</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£201 - £250</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£251 - £300</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than £300</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4 Ideas for future financing of radiography students

Given four options for alternative funding of radiography students, around half of the respondents preferred the option of employing healthcare students in the NHS for the length of their course.

Which of the following proposed options would you have preferred to fund your study?

*Source: SoR survey of students and recent graduates 2009*

Survey respondents were asked to comment on their answer if they wished. The following main themes emerged from their responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding of radiography students should:</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Example comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• not be means tested against parental income;</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>“I lived in my own home with my own mortgage and was supported by my partner, yet because I was under 25 the bursary was means tested on my parents, therefore I received £0 and ended up in a lot of debt that I am now struggling to repay!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reward students for the work they do on placements;</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“Certainly during the third year, we were treated as staff more than students, and used to cover breaks and staff shortages - all unpaid of course.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• pay at an assistant rate for the time they spend on placements;</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Given that half the course was spent working on clinical placement in NHS Trusts, as a 37 year old, I would have liked to have been paid for the work I had done (at whatever rate). “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• be equitable with the funding given to nurses;</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“I think student radiographers should get the same as student nurses.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• recognise the nature of the course allows little time for a part-time job.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Other students may well be able to get part time jobs, indeed many do, but when we work 8 hour days, and then have to come home and study until bedtime, there is just not the capacity for it.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. First job

4.1 Arranging first job

As of July, 76% of 2009 graduates who responded to the survey had arranged their first job. The two main reasons why some respondents did not have jobs arranged were that they were restricted to a specific geographical area or had been so far unsuccessful at interview.

86% of 2008 graduates who responded to the survey started their first job within 2 months of graduating, confirming that the job market for recent graduates continues to be strong. (The figures for 2007 graduates from a similar survey last year are shown in the graph below for comparison.)

![Number of months after graduation before starting first job](chart.png)

4.2 Starting first job

The vast majority of recent graduates started their first job in the NHS at Band 5 earning just over £20,000. 8% of respondents started on temporary contracts, all of whom indicated they would actually prefer to be on permanent contracts. 31% of respondents said their first post was not in the same geographical area as their degree, mostly because they had chosen to relocate.

91% of graduates in 2008 said they felt their course had prepared them sufficiently for their first job. Around half of the respondents who added a free text comment on preparedness talked about the importance of clinical placements in their training: some were pleased that they’d had so much time in clinical placements; others wished they could have had more. The next most common comment was that although the respondent felt sufficiently prepared they were still nervous or not fully confident about starting their first job.

“Elective placements and placements in general were the most valuable component to my education.”

“I feel prepared - the knowledge and skills are there, I just need the confidence to apply them.”
5. Career expectations

Recent graduates were asked how important certain career attributes were to them in terms of their expectations of a career in radiography. The graph below illustrates the different expectations of those more than £10,000 in debt. They are more likely to value a fair salary and career progression, possibly because they are thinking of how they are going to repay their debt.

![Graph showing career expectations](image)

**Expectations of a career in radiography**

*Source: SoR survey of recent graduates*

- **Job satisfaction:**
  - Respondents more than £10,000 in debt: 79%
  - All respondents: 83%

- **Enjoyment:**
  - Respondents more than £10,000 in debt: 76%
  - All respondents: 79%

- **Fair salary:**
  - Respondents more than £10,000 in debt: 63%
  - All respondents: 68%

- **Job security:**
  - Respondents more than £10,000 in debt: 62%
  - All respondents: 69%

- **Career progression:**
  - Respondents more than £10,000 in debt: 76%
  - All respondents: 78%

- **Skills and knowledge development:**
  - Respondents more than £10,000 in debt: 62%
  - All respondents: 64%

- **Role expansion:**
  - Respondents more than £10,000 in debt: 62%
  - All respondents: 64%

- **Opportunities to specialise:**
  - Respondents more than £10,000 in debt: 42%
  - All respondents: 46%

- **Challenging work:**
  - Respondents more than £10,000 in debt: 52%
  - All respondents: 55%

- **Variety:**
  - Respondents more than £10,000 in debt: 48%
  - All respondents: 50%
2008 graduates were overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of their first year working as a qualified radiographer: over 90% agreed or strongly agreed that their career was so far consistent with their expectations.

Radiography as a career is so far consistent with my expectations

*Source: SoR survey of recent graduates*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of survey respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“*I feel particularly lucky to go home at the end of the working day and tell people that I really enjoy my job.*”

“*Every Patient provides new opportunities, which is exciting and the opportunity to train further is very rewarding.*”

6. Membership of the Society of Radiographers

The vast majority of respondents were already members of the Society of Radiographers. However, 36 respondents said they had yet to apply for membership. Ten of these respondents said they did intend to apply. The main reasons given by the other respondents for not joining were that they could not afford the expense; they did not know the benefits of joining; they did not know how to join; or they could not access the website.