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# Career Progression Framework:

Radiography support workforce

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R A D I O G R A P H Y

# Career Progression Framework: Radiography support workforce

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## Introduction

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The support workforce within the radiography setting currently embraces a broad church, encompassing helpers with minimal or no qualifications, through to staff working within the National Breast Screening Programme, who are now recognised as assistant practitioners, having undertaken an NVQ3/BTec qualification with an additional specialist unit in mammography.

Additionally, other members of the support workforce are in training to become recognised as assistant practitioners in, for example, treatment delivery in radiotherapy departments, or plain film radiography of adult ambulant patients in clinical imaging departments. Some of these are in training as part of two nationally established and funded projects (by the Department of Health), and some through local schemes.

The Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR) recognises the important contribution that support staff make to current service delivery, as well as the importance of enhancing that further to assist in both meeting the workforce shortfall in clinical imaging and radiotherapy, and in maintaining effective, high quality services.

In acknowledging this contribution and the diversity of the support workforce, the SCoR also recognises that these staff require underpinning education, training and development to support them in their current and future roles.

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## **General support workforce**

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The concept of support staff working in clinical imaging and radiotherapy departments is long established, as is the valuable contributions such staff make. It is also recognised that the range of tasks and duties carried out by support staff varies considerably according to locally determined needs. However, despite the role played by support staff, their education and development needs have been largely neglected.

### **Education Requirements**

In recognition of the importance of the general support workforce and the importance to the provision of quality services of a properly educated workforce, the SCoR has reviewed its education and training requirements for the support workforce. As a minimum, the SCoR expects all support staff in clinical imaging and radiotherapy departments to hold or gain an S/NVQ level 2 in Care, or equivalent. Normally, however, such staff should hold or be enabled to obtain an S/NVQ level 3 in Diagnostic and Therapeutic Support.

It is the SCoR's view that this accords well with the knowledge and skills framework associated with the NHS Job Evaluation Scheme that describe the roles of the general support workforce in radiography. Additionally, ensuring that the whole of the general support workforce has a relevant qualification provides these staff with access to the skills escalator and the opportunity to develop further, if they so wish, into assistant practitioner or practitioner roles.

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## **Support workforce - Assistant Practitioners**

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### **Scope of practice**

This part of the support workforce is a relatively new development, resulting from the modernisation drive within the National Health Service (NHS). It is appropriate, therefore, to describe the SCoR's expectations and requirements in some detail.

Assistant practitioners, like general support staff, are also likely to be diverse but they will differ from the general support workforce in that, as part of their duties, they will perform limited clinical imaging examinations or treatment procedures in concert with, and under the supervision of, state registered radiographers. The range of such examinations or treatments will vary in accordance with locally identified need but is likely to be confined to standard examinations or treatments carried out on ambulant adult patients, and conducted in accordance with locally agreed protocols.

The SCoR supports the need for the particular roles of assistant practitioners to be identified and agreed locally, in accordance with identified service requirements. However, while the duties of assistant practitioners will vary according to local need, effective use of registered staff, proper risk management, and good clinical governance procedures are likely to preclude the use of assistant practitioners in settings outside of the clinical departments, such as in operating theatres, or on the wards, or in oncology outreach clinics.

Similarly, assistant practitioners are unlikely to undertake radiographic examinations or radiotherapy where the expected patient groups are less predictable, or more dependent. For example, paediatric patients, patients with major or complex injuries, the very ill or elderly, or where protocols frequently need to be adapted, amended or departed from as in out of standard hours working and emergency duties.

The SCoR has established that the Job Evaluation profile for an assistant practitioner will place them in Band 4 of the new NHS pay spine.

### **Accountability and responsibility**

As outlined above, assistant practitioners will work under the supervision of registered radiographers. Responsibility for proper supervision of assistant practitioners rests with the registered supervising radiographer.

The standard of work of the assistant practitioner must conform to the required competency standards for the work being undertaken. The assistant practitioner is accountable for this to the supervising radiographer. It is expected that clear lines of responsibility and accountability will be drawn up locally to ensure this. It is also expected that assistant practitioners, like all other staff, will be engaged in clinical supervision.

### **Education requirements**

Support staff who aim to become assistant practitioners will need additional education and training, both in order to undertake the broad range of general tasks associated with the role, and the limited clinical imaging or radiotherapy tasks they may be required to undertake.

The SCoR believes that the general educational requirements for assistant practitioners are provided for by the S/NVQ 3 Diagnostic and Therapeutic Support, or its equivalent. However, additional education related to specific national occupational standards (NOS), and to the safe use of ionising radiation, is required to enable them to perform identified diagnostic imaging examinations, or radiotherapy procedures. Shortly, SCoR is publishing its curriculum framework for the profession and this will describe its broad educational expectations regarding the assistant practitioner workforce.

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The SCoR will encourage the development of a range of education and development opportunities and is currently setting up mechanisms to approve and accredit these. It is expected that these will be established by September 2003. As part of this, SCoR is also establishing a voluntary register for support staff using ionising or non-ionising radiation.

It is anticipated that the range of education provision for assistant practitioners will include:

- Additional S/NVQ 3 units, similar to the one recently introduced in mammography; these are likely to be developed following approval of the national occupational standards and to be available to the NHS later in 2003 or early in 2004
- Work-place based learning units, developed locally to meet specific service needs, preferably in conjunction with a local FE or HE provider, or an NHS Trust's training unit and based on the NOS. These would need to be of a similar or higher standard to that of an S/NVQ 3 unit
- Higher education qualifications, for example, Certificates or Diplomas of Higher Education, or Foundation Degrees, again embedding NOS within them. Where such qualifications are offered, they are expected to provide a broad higher education experience that is relevant to the role and function of the assistant practitioner, but also supports some advanced standing in the context of a BSc/BSc (Hons) degree in radiography.

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## **Further development of the support workforce**

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It is expected that the whole of the support workforce in radiography will have access to further development, and will be able to build a career in radiography via the skills escalator, if they so wish. For those with the S/NVQ 3 and additional radiography specific level 3 units, or accredited work based learning, and who want to progress, it is expected that this would provide entry into professional level education. Advanced standing with this level of qualification is unlikely to be appropriate unless it can demonstrate learning outcomes equivalent to those within BSc/BSc (Hons) programmes in radiography.

For those holding a Cert HE, Dip HE or FD, some advanced standing is appropriate. However, a higher education institution seeking to offer advanced standing will need to demonstrate that it has mapped the outcomes of the qualification offered against the qualification to be pursued. Notwithstanding, claims for advanced standing of more than 50 per cent are unlikely to be considered favourably, in line with current standard practice in higher education.

It should be noted that the SCoR believes that where the decision is made to develop a Cert HE, Dip HE or FD, these are expected to be aimed at meeting the needs of the assistant practitioner. As such, caution needs to be exercised in embedding these in current or future programmes aimed at producing registered radiographers. Where such an approach is intended, the development will need to demonstrate clearly how the needs of both groups - assistant practitioner trainees and student radiographers - are to be met.

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## **Accreditation of the support workforce in radiography**

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The Society and College of Radiographers already accredits the professional level workforce in radiography through validation and approval of both pre- and post-registration education programmes, and through accreditation of the individual as they enter membership of the professional body.

The Society and College is extending the scope of these procedures to include the support workforce with effect from September 2003. Detailed documentation on these procedures will be issued separately during the Spring and Summer of 2003.

Importantly, however, all support workers undergoing S/NVQ 2 or 3 level qualifications are expected to register with the SCoR, and all those developing work based learning programmes, Cert HE, Dip HE or FD for assistant practitioners, will need to gain approval of these programmes prior to admitting learners (or students) to them, and will need to ensure that the learners/students are registered with the SCoR.

On gaining the S/NVQ, or on qualification from recognised and approved programmes, individuals may seek accreditation and membership from the SCoR and admittance to a voluntary register.

Further information will be issued in due course.



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