



Ultrasound Training, Employment, Registration and Professional Indemnity Insurance

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Summary

The Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR) receives many enquiries that relate to ultrasound training, employment, registration and professional indemnity insurance. Many of these enquiries are from sonographers who trained overseas or would like to undertake ultrasound training in the United Kingdom (UK). It is hoped that the following will answer many of the more common queries.

1) Training

Medical ultrasound is usually taught at postgraduate level in the UK with many sonographers having come from a healthcare background such as radiography or midwifery.

Most ultrasound courses in the UK are accredited by the Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education (CASE) <http://www.case-uk.org/> and lead to a postgraduate certificate (PgC) or diploma (PgD) lasting between 12 and 18 months. Courses may offer day release or block release patterns of study depending on the individual institution. There are approximately 17 universities or colleges offering CASE accredited ultrasound courses in the UK. Entry requirements are usually a healthcare related first degree in radiography or midwifery or similar science or health related subject and confirmation of adequate access to clinical ultrasound practice.

CASE also accredit shorter, focused courses that allow, for example, a midwife to train specifically in third trimester growth scans or a nurse to train in ultrasound techniques applicable to work in an Early Pregnancy Unit. These courses must meet certain criteria and are developed by individual universities and colleges.

<http://www.case-uk.org/course-directory/>

A BSc (undergraduate) course in medical ultrasound has recently been developed by Birmingham City University. Application is via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). There are also proposals to develop an apprenticeship route into medical ultrasound. If also accredited by CASE such courses will be listed in the CASE directory which is available from the above address.

For all ultrasound training, it is necessary to have a clinical placement approved by the university or college responsible for the student's overall training. These can be difficult to find and are often specifically arranged by Trusts or Health Boards for existing employees who they wish to train. SCoR cannot help with obtaining clinical placements. The individual universities and colleges will help if they can but there is a general shortage of clinical placements and they often cannot be of direct

assistance.

There are many short courses and study days in ultrasound that are run by professional bodies such as the SCoR, The Royal College of Radiologists, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the British Medical Ultrasound Society. These do not usually carry any formal qualification or award, although they may contribute to an individual's continuing professional development. Details can be found on the various websites of the organisations concerned.

For those who are medically qualified and are eligible to register with the General Medical Council as a doctor with a licence to practise, the Royal College of Radiologists has published a document entitled 'Ultrasound Training Recommendations for Medical and Surgical Specialties' (3rd edition, 2017) which is available from their website at:

<https://www.rcr.ac.uk/publication/ultrasound-training-recommendations-medical-and-surgical-specialties-third-edition>

There is no formal system by which qualifications obtained outside the UK can be compared to the UK's awards. A body exists (UK NARIC) that may be able to advise with regards to the academic level but it cannot help with the clinical aspect of training <http://www.naric.org.uk/>

2) Employment

If you are qualified in ultrasound with a UK or overseas award, it will be necessary to apply directly to a potential employer. Qualified sonographers from the European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA), or Switzerland should also apply directly to potential employers where EU regulations relating to the free movement of professionals may be relevant.

If you are from outside the EU/EEA or Switzerland, you will need to be able to satisfy an employer that your qualifications and experience are equivalent to those of a sonographer who trained in the UK and holds a CASE accredited award.

There is currently a shortage of sonographers in the UK and sonography is listed as a shortage specialty by the UK Government Migration Advisory Committee (MAC).

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257241/mac-report.pdf Page 100 for commentary.

Although it is not a requirement for employment, all qualified sonographers can apply to join the SCoR as an Associated Professional. There are many benefits of membership including access to advertised vacancies on the website and in Synergy News. The SCoR also publishes a wide range of professional documents, provides access to continuing professional development (CPD) tools and when applicable offers professional indemnity insurance for its members. Full details of membership benefits are available via www.sor.org

Membership of the SCoR is separate to registration with the Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers (see section 3). The terms *membership* and *registration* are often confused.

Vacancies in the National Health Service are also advertised via <http://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>: use search terms such as 'sonographer' and 'ultrasonographer'.

Companies providing independent ultrasound services in the UK can be found via the SCoR website, Synergy News or an internet search.

There are also several agencies that employ qualified sonographers who, again, can be found via the SCoR website, Synergy News or an internet search.

SCoR is neither an agency nor an employer and cannot directly help with regards to employment.

If you are from overseas and have any contacts in the UK working within ultrasound, this can be of great help. Your embassy, for example, may be able to put you in contact with sonographers from your own country already working in the UK.

3) Registration, including advice to service managers

There is often confusion between a professional body and a regulatory body. SCoR is a professional body, not a regulatory one. Examples of regulatory bodies are the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and the General Medical Council (GMC). These provide statutory registration for their registrants. In the UK it is, for example, a statutory requirement to be registered with the HCPC if working as a radiographer.

There is no legal requirement for sonographers to be registered with a statutory regulatory body such as the Health Professions Council (HCPC) or the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Sonography is not a regulated profession and 'sonographer' and 'ultrasonographer' are not protected titles. Many employers prefer their sonographers to be statutorily registered but for some otherwise very well qualified sonographers it is an impossibility. The HCPC, for example, cannot register a sonographer unless they meet the standards for one of the professions they regulate such as radiography. If a sonographer trained overseas (for example) they may be very well qualified and competent but may be unable to register with the HCPC or NMC. Similarly, sonographers who have trained as sonographers in this country from a scientific or other first degree are unable to register.

In 2014 NHS Employers published advice relating to sonographers that can be found at:

<http://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/retain-and-improve/standards-and-assurance/professional-regulation/medical-radiography-and-ultrasound-workforce>

The SCoR expects those of its members who are able to register with a regulatory body such as the HCPC or the NMC to do so but recognises that for some, through no fault of their own, this will not be achievable. We are aware of a number of organisations in which well qualified, non-statutorily registered sonographers are employed as advanced practitioner sonographers and are working very effectively, with their expertise highly regarded.

If you trained as a medical doctor overseas, it would be worthwhile seeing if you are eligible for registration with a licence to practise by the GMC, you can then apply for employment via a medical route. If you wish to work as a non-medically qualified sonographer then you will not need to register with the GMC.

In the absence of statutory registration for sonographers the SCoR fully supports departments considering applicants for sonography posts who are unable to gain statutory registration but are otherwise well qualified. Clearly the normal checks that an employer must make on the background and likely competence of any employee need to be made before any offer of employment. The comparative standard is a UK Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma in Medical Ultrasound that has been accredited by the Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education. There is, however, no simple way to compare ultrasound qualifications from different countries and each applicant will need to be assessed on their merits.

Sonographers from the EU/EEA or Switzerland who may be eligible for statutory registration (depending on their professional background) should visit the website of the Health and Care Professions Council for information on procedures.

European Mutual Recognition route: <http://www.hcpc-uk.co.uk/apply/emr/>

Temporary registration: <http://www.hcpc-uk.co.uk/aboutregistration/declaration/>

If you trained overseas outside the EU/EEA or Switzerland it may be possible to obtain statutory registration with, again for example, the HCPC. This will depend on your primary professional experience and qualifications. Details can be obtained from <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/apply/international/>

There is also information available on the British Medical Ultrasound Society website at:

<https://www.bmus.org/careers-training/>

The SCoR has previously made an application to the HCPC for sonography to become a regulated profession and 'sonographer' and 'ultrasonographer' to become protected titles. This application was made with the support of the United Kingdom Association of Sonographers which merged with the College of Radiographers in January 2009. Despite statutory registration being recommended by the then HPC in October 2009, this application is now unlikely to proceed following the publication of a command paper in February 2011.²

In the absence of statutory registration, the SCoR maintains the 'Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers' (PVRS) <http://www.sor.org/practice/ultrasound/register-sonographers> This voluntary register was set up several years ago to support the application for statutory registration and to help protect the public. Although not a requirement for working in the UK, all sonographers residing in the UK are encouraged to apply, whether statutorily registered or not. Information for employers, voluntary registrants and members of the public can be found in the Policy and Processes document at the above web address. Voluntary registration is limited in the extent to which it can protect the public when compared to statutory registration and the SCoR will continue to support the application for sonographers to become statutorily registered.

There are legal restrictions on sonographers who are not statutorily registered although for the majority of posts it is not expected that these will present a problem. These are:

- i) Sonographers who are not statutorily registered cannot act under Patient Group Directions for the administration of drugs and medicines, or train to become Supplementary Prescribers. They are allowed to act under Patient Specific Directions but those requiring them to act under these directions must ensure they are competent to do so safely.
- ii) Sonographers who are not statutorily registered cannot act as a referrer for clinical imaging examinations involving the use of ionising radiation. Sonographers who are statutorily registered may act as IR(ME)R Referrers under the Ionising Radiations (Medical Exposure) Regulations (IR(ME)R 2017, IR(ME)R NI 2018) provided they are entitled to do so by their Employer within a specified scope of practice.^{3,4}

If you have any questions or comments these can be made via <https://www.sor.org/contact-us>

4. Professional Indemnity Insurance

In 2014 the government introduced legislation that requires those professionals who hold statutory registration (except social workers) to hold professional indemnity insurance (PII). This became effective on 1st April 2015.

Full advice including Frequently Asked Questions is given by the HCPC at <http://www.hpc-uk.org/registrants/indemnity/>

The equivalent NMC advice can be found at

<http://www.nmc.org.uk/registration/staying-on-the-register/professional-indemnity-arrangement/>

In most cases the requirement will be met by working in an employed environment but sonographers are advised to read the advice given via the links above. It is particularly important to establish your professional indemnity insurance situation if you are statutorily registered and self-employed or work partly on a self-employed and partly on an employed basis.

If you are not statutorily registered it is still strongly recommended that you ensure that you have professional indemnity insurance available to you as above.

Professional Indemnity Insurance can also be obtained via membership of professional bodies such as the SCoR or from commercial insurers. You should carefully check the terms and conditions of any indemnity insurance obtained.

It is important to note that there is **no** professional indemnity insurance provided by the action itself of registering with the HCPC or NMC, the requirement is to make a professional declaration at first registration application or renewal that you have it available to you.

There is also **no** professional indemnity insurance provided by the action itself of registering with the Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers or of being listed on the voluntary register.

References

- 1) Royal College of Radiologists. Ultrasound Training Recommendations for Medical and Surgical Specialties. London: Royal College of Radiologists, 3rd edition, 2017.
- 2) Department of Health. '*Autonomy and Accountability for Healthcare Workers, Social Workers and Social Care Workers*'. London: DH, 2011
- 3) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/1322/contents/made>
- 4) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2018/17/contents/made>

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