



ULTRASOUND TRAINING, EMPLOYMENT AND REGISTRATION

The Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR) receives many enquiries that relate either to training in ultrasound, employment or registration. 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

Ultrasound is currently taught at a postgraduate level in the UK with most sonographers having come from a healthcare background such as radiography or midwifery. Ultrasound courses in the UK are accredited by the Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education (CASE) <http://www.case-uk.org/>, courses leading to a postgraduate certificate (PGC) or diploma (PGD) last between 12 and 18 months. Courses may be offered with day release or block release patterns of study depending on the individual institution. There are approximately 18 universities or colleges offering 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.

In 2009 CASE agreed that it would accredit shorter, focused, courses that would allow, for example, a midwife to train specifically in first trimester techniques or a nurse to train in ultrasound techniques applicable to work in an Early Pregnancy Unit. These courses must meet certain criteria and will be developed by individual universities and colleges.

For all ultrasound training it will be 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 continuous professional development. Details can be found on the various websites of the organisations concerned.

For those who are medically qualified and can register with the General Medical Council (GMC) the Royal College of Radiologists has published a document entitled 'Ultrasound Training Recommendations for Medical and Surgical Specialties' which is available from their website at www.rcr.ac.uk

There is no formal system by which qualifications obtained outside the UK can be compared to the UK's awards. There is a body called UK NARIC who may be able to advise with regards to the academic level but they 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.

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/workingwithus/mac/first-review-lists1/>

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 continuous professional development (CPD) tools and offers professional indemnity insurance for its members. Full details of membership benefits are available via www.sor.org

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 not an agency or 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

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 Professions Council (HPC), 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 HPC if working as a radiographer.

There is currently no statutory (legal) requirement for sonographers to be registered with a regulatory body such as the HPC or NMC. Many employers do prefer their sonographers to be registered but this is something that you can discuss with them, for some sonographers who may otherwise be very well qualified it is impossibility. The HPC, for example, cannot register you unless you can meet the standards for one of the professions it regulates such as radiography.

SCoR expects those of its members who are able to register with a regulatory body such as the HPC or the NMC to do so although it recognises that through no fault of their own this will not be achievable for some.

Sonographers from the EU/EEA or Switzerland may be able to register with, for example, the HPC as a temporary registrant (although not as a sonographer as that is not yet a regulated profession in the UK). Details can be obtained from <http://www.hpc-uk.org/apply/temporary/>

If you trained as a doctor overseas it would be worthwhile seeing if you can be registered 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.

There is also information available on the British Medical Ultrasound Society website at <http://www.bmus.org/ultrasound-training/ut-sonoreg.asp>

SCoR hosts the 'Public Voluntary Register of Sonographers' (PVRS) details of which can be found at http://www.sor.org/public/ult/ult_search.php

All qualified sonographers are encouraged to join but we can only accept applications from those sonographers who are already working in the UK and can provide UK employment references.

SCoR has made an application to the HPC for sonography to become a regulated profession This is progressing but it is not expected to become a reality for several years.

Any questions or comments should be directed to Nigel Thomson, Professional Officer (Ultrasound), NigelT@sor.org Tel 01473 310978

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