



City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Harrison, G. (2018). Sonographer Workforce Developments. Synergy News, August, pp. 12-13.

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: <https://city-ref-test.eprints-hosting.org/id/eprint/20221/>

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to [City Research Online policy](#).

Sonographer workforce developments

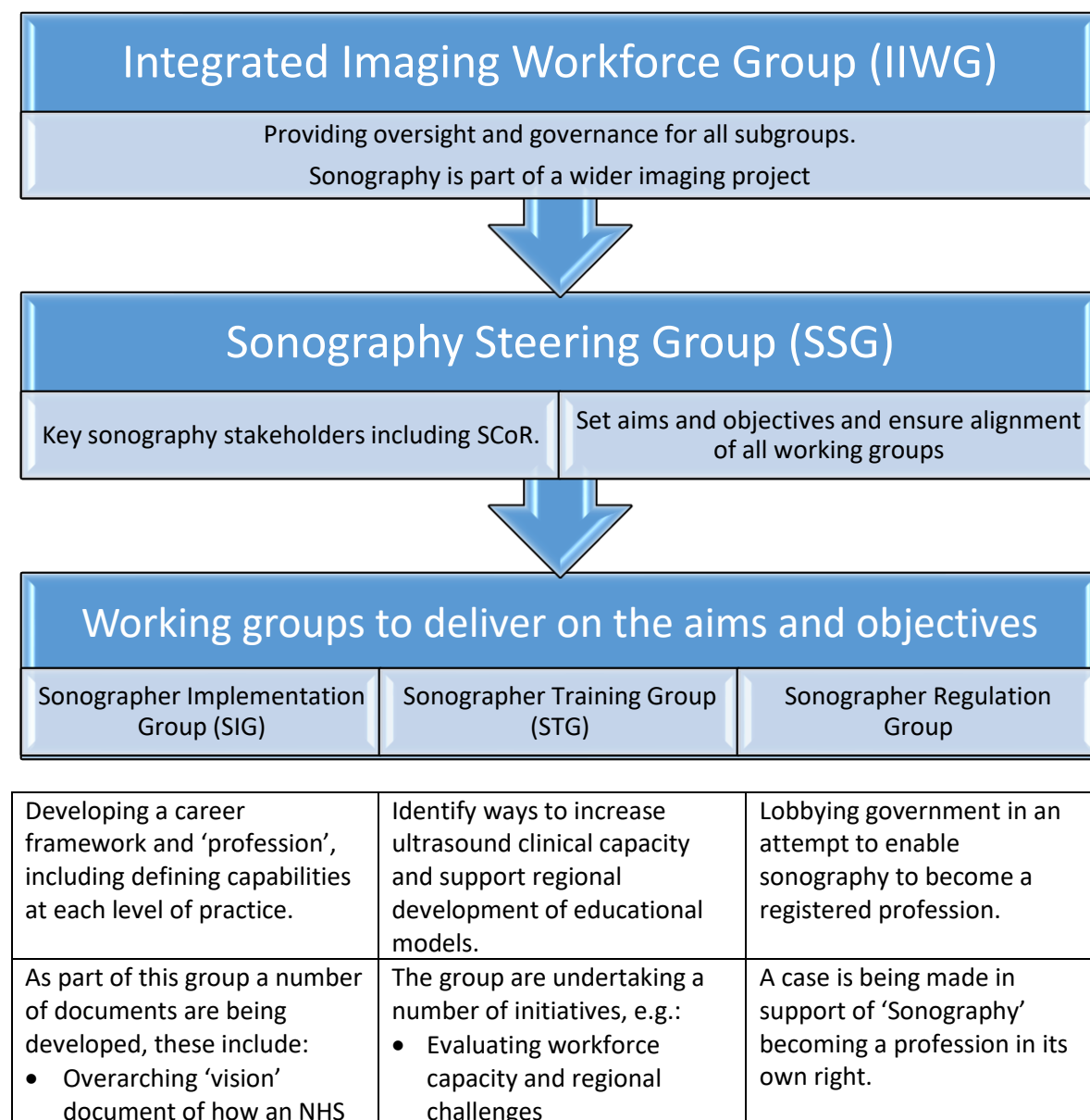
Ultrasound education is undergoing innovative changes. During this process the Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR) continues to be a key stakeholder in national work, establishing a career framework for the 'profession', ensuring that all levels of ultrasound practice can be supported to provide safe, effective services and career development pathways. The SCoR are mindful of the challenges faced during this work and the priority is to support those in existing ultrasound roles throughout these developments. This is in addition to ensuring that any new professional pathways are clearly defined to ensure safe, competent, well-supported sonographers enter the workforce. Effective career pathways should benefit the current sonography workforce to develop skills and competencies to progress within the career framework. Patient protection and safe working practice for future developments is paramount. All proposed developments are reviewed by the SCoR UK council.

The shortage of sonographers and the increasing demand on the ultrasound workforce have been highlighted in many documents, such as the 2017 Centre for Workforce Intelligence (CfWI) report.¹ In 2014, the Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR)² reported that a third of sonographers were over the age of 50, in a sample of 59 departments who employ sonographers. Similar findings were reported in the CfWI report in 2017,¹ although some regions were more affected than others, with, for example, Wessex predicting that 20% of the sonographer workforce were expected to retire in five years.¹ In 2016 the first direct entry BSc (Hons) programme in ultrasound was launched in the UK³, with sonographers from this programme due to qualify in summer 2019. Additionally there is an apprenticeship standard being written for medical ultrasound⁴, this is due to be offered at academic level 6 [BSc (Hons)]. The challenge of Sonography not being recognised as a profession has been highlighted in surveys,^{5,6,7} as a concern when considering new models of education.

In a survey this year by the SCoR⁷, 72 departments responded and suggested that there was an average of 2.65 sonographer vacancies within the Trusts. The mean predicted shortfall of sonographers needed to provide the service in 5 years was 4.6, with some departments suggesting they would need an additional 20 sonographers to meet the increasing demands. New career pathways have been discussed for some time^{8,9} and Health Education England (HEE) are working with stakeholders to look at possible ways to increase the sonographer workforce to meet the demands. At the 2017 Society of Radiographers (SoR) Annual Delegates Conference¹⁰ a motion was carried to *'ensure that there is an appropriate career progression route in ultrasound ... without reducing the quality of service, job satisfaction or dumbing down of the role'*. The SCoR are actively involved in all the various work streams with other professional groups, such as the British Medical Ultrasound Society (BMUS), the Royal College of Radiologists (RCR), the Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education (CASE), Society for Vascular Technology of Great Britain and Ireland (SVT) and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP). These stakeholders are focussing on developing a career progression framework to meet current demands and changes within sonography education. Initiatives from HEE include commissioning education to train 200 health care professionals to undertake third trimester pregnancy scans¹¹ and statutory registration for sonographers. Additionally the Department of Education Apprenticeship Standard for medical ultrasound is being developed by employers working closely with education providers and a range of key stakeholders, including the SCoR. The ambition is for this standard to be aligned with the HEE work and CASE learning outcomes. This article aims to provide an update on one of these projects, which is the work led by HEE to develop a safe and effective sonography career framework (figure 1).

The HEE documentation when it is published will refer to various ‘levels’, including career levels and academic levels. It will not however refer to Agenda for Change (AfC) pay bands, as this is not part of HEE’s remit. AfC is a system which “allocates posts to set pay bands, using the Job Evaluation Scheme”¹² which is separate to the career and academic levels referred to by HEE. Also involved with HEE’s work are Skills for Health (SfH), who are the Sector Skills Council for Health in the UK and publish National Occupational Standards for ultrasound practice,¹³ which are linked to the Knowledge and Skills Frameworks (KSF) for different professional activities for anyone working in that area of practice. The SfH use ‘career framework levels’, these relate to levels of autonomous practice, responsibility and decision making within the role¹⁴. Any reference to career level relates to the SfH definitions of career level, for example the newly qualified radiographer will be career level 5, moving to career level 6 as they develop more autonomous practice and increase the level of responsibility and decision making¹³. Academic levels relate to the Quality Assurance Agency academic levels in England,¹⁴ which include level 6, BSc (Hons); level 7, Master’s level qualifications and level 8, doctoral level.¹⁵

Figure 1: The current work stream to develop a Sonographer Career Framework



ultrasound service should be delivered ¹⁶ • Learning outcomes and educational standards for CASE accreditation of programmes of education¹⁷ • Updating the CASE handbook • Preceptorship standards	• Investigating innovative methods of clinical ultrasound education • Developing case studies to showcase some of the different educational models that might be used.	
--	---	--

In conclusion, the SCoR are working with other stakeholder, on behalf of members and service users, to ensure that current developments support all levels of sonographic practice and provide a clear framework for advancement of sonographers, whilst maintaining a safe and effective ultrasound service.

References:

1. Centre for Workforce Intelligence, 'Securing the Future Workforce Supply – Sonography Workforce Review', March 2017. [Online]. Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/597697/Sonography_workforce_review.pdf
2. The Society and College of Radiographers, 'Sonographer Workforce Survey Analysis'. 2014. [Online]. Available: <https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/sonographer-workforce-survey-analysis>
3. Birmingham City University, 'Medical Ultrasound – BSc (Hons)', 2018. [Online]. Available: <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/courses/medical-ultrasound-bsc-hons-2019-20>
4. White, H. 'Apprenticeships are here'. *Radiography*, 23 (S1), pp.S5 - S6
5. Parker, P. C. & Harrison, G. 'Educating the future sonographic workforce: Membership survey report from the British Medical Ultrasound Society'. *Ultrasound* 2015; 23(4); 231–241. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4760598/>
6. Waring, L. Miller, P. and Sloane, C. 'The future of sonographic education', 2015. Health Education North West. [Online]. Available: [http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/2949/1/Waring,%20Miller%20&%20Sloane%20\(2015\)%20-%20Ultrasound%20Futures.pdf](http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/2949/1/Waring,%20Miller%20&%20Sloane%20(2015)%20-%20Ultrasound%20Futures.pdf)
7. The Society and College of Radiographers, 'Sonographer Clinical Teaching Capacity Survey', 2018. [Unpublished].
8. The Society and College of Radiographers, 'Developing and Growing the Sonographer workforce: Education and Training needs', 2009. [Online]. Available: <https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/developing-and-growing-sonographer-workforce-education-and-training-needs>

9. The Society and College of Radiographers, 'Direct Entry Undergraduate Ultrasound Programmes (with competency to practise): a briefing from the Society and College of Radiographers', 2009. [Online]. Available: <https://www.sor.org/learning/document-library/direct-entry-undergraduate-ultrasound-programmes-competency-practise-briefing-society-and-college>
10. Motion 62. 'Sonography career progression,' 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.sor.org/trade-union-support/annual-delegates-conference/adc-2017-motions>
11. The Department of Health and Social Care mandate to Health Education England April 2017 to March 2018. 2018. [Online]. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674419/HEE_mandate_2017-2018.pdf
12. NHS Employers. 'About Agenda for Change'. 2017. [Online]. Available: <http://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/pay-and-reward/agenda-for-change/how-agenda-for-change-works>
13. Skills for Health. 'National Occupational Standards'. 2017. [Online]. Available: <http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/standards/item/215-national-occupational-standards>
14. Skills for Health. 'Roles directory tool'. 2009-2018. [Online]. Available: https://tools.skillsforhealth.org.uk/roles_directory/
15. Quality Assurance Agency, "The UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards – The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies." 2014. [Online]. Available: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code>
16. Health Education England. 'The Future for NHS Ultrasound Service Provision,' 2018. [Unpublished draft].
17. The Consortium for the Accreditation of Sonographic Education. 'Assertions of the Standards to be met within through Sonographic Education,' 2018. [Unpublished, in draft].