



A picture of radiography education across Europe



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To establish an understanding of radiography education across Europe by surveying higher education institutions registered as affiliate members of the European Federation of Radiography Societies (EFRS).

Method: An online survey was developed to ascertain data on: curricula, duration, credit load, accreditation requirements, staff qualifications, staff and student exchange opportunities, and availability of postgraduate programmes. Responses were identifiable in terms of educational institution and country. All 46 affiliated educational institutions were invited to participate in the survey. Descriptive and thematic analyses are reported.

Results: A response rate of 89.1% (n = 41) was achieved from educational institutions representing 21 countries. The majority of institutions (63.4%) offer a combined Medical Imaging, Radiotherapy and Nuclear Medicine programme; dedicated Medical Imaging programmes are offered by 14 institutions (34.2%); dedicated Radiotherapy programme by one institution (2.4%), and a dedicated Nuclear Medicine programme by only three institutions (6.5%). The Bologna (Bachelor) cycle has been adopted by 90.2% of responding institutions. The majority of institutions (53.7%) indicated programmes of 3 years in duration, others stated 3.5–4 years. Only 14.6% of institutions require 'International Level' accreditation for the Bachelors radiography programme. Postgraduate programmes were not offered by 26.8% of institutions and a deficit in Doctoral status for radiography educators was identified.

Conclusions: The Bologna (Bachelor) cycle for radiography education has been adopted across the majority of institutions, however, full alignment remains a priority. Postgraduate radiography education opportunities across Europe appear to be insufficient and further investigation of radiography accreditation processes is justified to ensure harmonisation of practice.

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Introduction

The European Federation of Radiographer Societies (EFRS) was founded in 2008 and currently represents in excess of 100,000 radiographers and 8000 student radiographers across Europe

through 37 national societies and 48 educational institutions. According to Article 2 of the EFRS Constitution, the role of the EFRS is to:

“represent, promote and develop the profession of radiography in Europe, within the whole range of medical imaging, nuclear medicine and radiotherapy and moreover everything that is directly or indirectly related or beneficial to this role, everything in the broadest meaning.”¹

The educational wing of the EFRS is comprised of all of the educational institutions that are affiliate members of the EFRS. The

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aim of the educational wing is to promote and develop all levels of radiography education and research across Europe. Objectives of the educational wing include: the development and advancement of educational standards for radiographer education in Europe (based on the World Health Organization European Region); the development of European Qualifications Framework (EQF) benchmarking documents for radiographers at levels 6 (Bachelors) and 7 (Masters)^{2,3}; to research, disseminate and publish materials and knowledge generated by the educational wing; and to provide assistance to those institutions wishing to develop or enhance their radiography programmes. This is echoed in Article 2 of the Constitution which references the development of European standards of professional practice, the harmonisation of the initial and postgraduate education, and the facilitation of free movement of radiographers.¹

European Qualifications Framework

The purpose of the EQF is to aid Member States, educational institutions, employers and individuals to compare qualifications across the European Union's diverse education and training systems.^{2,4} It encourages countries to relate their National Qualifications Framework to the EQF to facilitate this. Prior to the implementation of the EQF, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Qualifications Framework was launched.⁵ Although closely related to this overarching framework, the wording used within the EQF differs, however, the two frameworks are compatible.⁶ The EQF is learning outcome-based in the domains of knowledge, skills and competence.^{2–4,6}

With this in mind, the EFRS published the EQF benchmarking document: radiographers in 2014.⁴ The purpose of this document is not to impose curricular content on European educational institutions but rather to act as a reference for institutions to benchmark their existing programmes, develop their programmes to EQF level 6 (Bachelors), or to serve individual radiographers who hold qualifications at EQF level 5 to seek recognition at level 6 through recognition of their prior experiential, non-formal and informal learning.^{4,6,7}

Radiography education in Europe

In the 2010 EFRS education survey 90% of respondents indicated that radiography education in their country was at Bachelors level (EQF level 6). Despite the vast majority of the programmes being delivered at level 6, wide variations in the duration, format and curricula were identified in the same survey.⁸ As a consequence radiography graduates in some countries are emerging with qualifications in Medical Imaging, Radiotherapy or Nuclear Medicine only, while others graduate with combined qualifications in Medical Imaging and Radiotherapy or Medical Imaging, Nuclear Medicine and Radiotherapy. As such a graduate from one country having completed a four year, 240 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) Bachelors programme may only be qualified to work in one area whereas another graduate, having also completed an equivalent four year programme may be qualified to practice in all areas. It remains at the discretion of the relevant authority in each Member State to establish the minimum level of education, often in consultation with professional societies, and, together with these societies and employers, to outline the professional role for radiographers in their country.^{9,10}

Similar differences are evident outside Europe as reported by Cowling (2012) on behalf of the International Society of Radiographers and Radiological Technologists (ISRRT).¹¹ In their survey of 85 member countries responses were received from 32

countries from across all four ISRRT regions (Europe, Africa, Americas and Asia/Australasia) with 94% indicating that radiographers were educated to Bachelors level, however, these Bachelors programmes varied considerably from 1.5 years to 5 years in duration.^{11,12} Aside from the duration of these Bachelors programmes, as was the case in the EFRS survey, graduates from these programmes were qualified to practice in anything from one discipline to multiple disciplines (Medical Imaging, Nuclear Medicine, Radiotherapy and also Ultrasound).

In Europe there are a range of providers of radiography education, including universities, universities of applied sciences, technical institutes and vocational colleges but there remain a few countries where those working in these areas undertake very limited or even no formal training in diagnostic radiography or radiotherapy.^{4,10}

Purpose of the study

As suggested by Cowling¹² there remains a significant body of study and research to be undertaken to gain a true understanding of the radiography profession internationally. The current study aims to build on the earlier education surveys and to provide an up-to-date snapshot of radiography education across Europe.

Methods

Design

The research design was an online survey using a questionnaire developed by the EFRS pertinent to key issues of importance to radiography education in Europe. The questionnaire included open and closed questions and consisted of sections designed to ascertain data on: programme type and curricula (three questions), duration (two questions), credit load (two questions), accreditation requirements (one question), student numbers (one question), staff-student ratio (one question), staff qualifications (one question), staff and student exchange opportunities (two questions), and availability of postgraduate programmes (one question). All respondents consented to data being identifiable in terms of educational institution and country.

Participants

All 46 educational institutions, that were EFRS affiliate members, were invited to complete this online survey between the 21st of November 2014 and the 31st of January 2015. An initial response deadline of two weeks was stated and two follow-up emails were sent to non-responding institutions, one on the 16th of December 2014 and a final reminder on the 7th of January.

Data analysis

All data was uploaded to IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20. Descriptive statistics are reported for most analyses while open questions were examined using thematic analysis.

Results

Responses were received from 41 of the 46 educational institutions giving a response rate of 89.1% and representing 21 countries. The educational institutions that participated in this survey are listed in [Table 1](#).

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