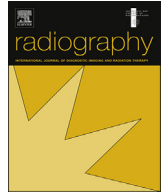




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## Radiographers as doctors: A profile of UK doctoral achievement

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Radiography aspires to be a research active profession, but there is limited information regarding the number of individuals with, or studying for, a doctoral award. This study aims to profile UK doctoral radiographers; including their chosen award, approach and employment status.

**Method:** This was a prospective cohort study utilising an electronic survey. No formal database of doctoral radiographers existed therefore a snowball sampling method was adopted. The study sample was radiographers (diagnostic and therapeutic) based in the UK who were registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and who held, or were studying for, a doctoral award.

**Results:** A total of 90 unique responses were received within the timescale. The respondents comprised 58 females (64.4%) and the majority were diagnostic radiographers ( $n = 71/90$ ; 78.9%). The traditional PhD was the most common award, although increasing numbers were pursuing Education or Professional Doctorates. An overall increase in doctoral studies is observed over time, but was greatest amongst those working in academic institutions, with 63.3% of respondents ( $n = 57/90$ ) working solely within a university, and a further 10% employed in a clinical–academic role ( $n = 9/90$ ).

**Conclusion:** This study has demonstrated that radiography is emerging as a research active profession, with increasing numbers of radiographers engaged in study at a doctoral level. This should provide a platform for the future development of academic and clinical research.

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## Introduction

Since the transition of radiographer training into higher education in the early 1990s, the profession has strived to develop its academic and research identity. Incremental steps have been taken to embed research within academic and clinical roles but a perceived apathy and resistance to undertaking research has been noted.<sup>1–3</sup> Although there are some very research active radiographers the profession has struggled to establish a research culture in practice. Measuring the success of research strategies is not straightforward but traditional metrics are valuable and include publication productivity and the number of doctoral awards. A number of bibliometric studies have confirmed that radiography publication activity is increasing but that the majority of articles originate from a relatively small number of authors and centres.<sup>3–5</sup> To date there is limited knowledge of doctoral

achievement within the radiography profession; Davies and Rolfe<sup>6</sup> suggested that nursing had been slow to pursue doctoral status, but it is unknown whether this is replicated in the allied health professions. Previous studies have shown greater academic advancement amongst radiographers in Australia compared to the United Kingdom (UK),<sup>7</sup> yet the reasons for this are unclear. In addition, a previous survey of radiographers in the United States (US) identified that 0.3% held a doctoral award; however, this study also confirmed that multiple barriers to undertaking research existed.<sup>8</sup>

In 2015 a new 5-year strategy for research<sup>9</sup> was launched by the UK professional body, the Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR), with increasingly ambitious expectations. One factor likely to stimulate debate is that 1% of the radiography workforce will be expected to hold, or be working towards, a doctoral level award. Importantly, the strategy proposes that this should include *all* those in consultant radiographer roles. Although there is an understanding that the academic community is expected to undertake scholarly activity and increasingly progress their research skills to such a level,<sup>7,10</sup> there is ongoing debate regarding the relevance of doctoral study for clinicians.<sup>11–15</sup>

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The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) award is synonymous with the term 'doctoral'; however a number of alternative routes are available both in the UK and internationally, including the PhD by published work, the Doctorate in Education (EdD) and Professional, or Clinical, Doctorate (DProf or DClin). Indeed, the professional doctorate has been suggested as a more appropriate route for those in leadership roles, whether in academia or clinical practice.<sup>12</sup>

This article presents the results of a study aiming to profile UK doctoral radiographers; including their chosen award, approach and employment status. This will add to the international debate regarding the research preparedness of the profession and how future capacity can be influenced.

## Method

This was a prospective cohort study utilising an electronic survey tool (Bristol Online Survey<sup>®</sup>, Bristol, UK). The survey comprised of a number of closed and open questions related to qualification route and funding, doctoral status, employment and basic demographic data. An initial pilot study using a small cohort of radiographers with, or registered for, a range of doctoral award types resulted in minor amendments to the questions.

No formal database of doctoral radiographers existed therefore a snowball sampling method was adopted. This utilised direct contact with all Heads of Radiography Education in universities providing undergraduate and/or postgraduate courses for diagnostic and/or therapeutic radiographers. Additional recruitment was sought through a notice in the monthly radiographer professional journal (Synergy News) and via social media. All mailings provided a link to the survey and an introduction to the purpose of the research. The survey remained open for 6 weeks in December 2015 and January 2016.

The study sample was radiographers (diagnostic and therapeutic) based in the UK who were registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and who held, or were studying for, a doctoral award. HCPC registrants were chosen as the study sought to identify those who were able to practice, and, therefore, influence radiography focused research. International students who were not registered to practice in the UK were excluded from the study. Prospective participants were provided with a contact email address for a member of the study team if there was any uncertainty about eligibility.

The survey sought to collect anonymised data, with only basic demographic information to assist in generating a profile. UK Health Research Authority (HRA) processes<sup>16</sup> were followed and the study did not require ethical approval. Respondents' consent was considered to be implied by reading the study explanatory introduction and by completion of the survey.

The response data were downloaded into Excel<sup>®</sup> (Microsoft Corporation, USA) to allow for descriptive analysis. Further

**Table 1**  
Geographic location of doctoral radiographers.

Geographic region	Completed No. (%)	In progress No. (%)	Total No. (%)
England	37 (84.1)	39 (84.8)	76 (84.4)
East	5	11	16
London	4	6	10
North	19	9	28
South	9	13	22
Northern Ireland	3 (6.8)	2 (4.3)	5 (5.6)
Scotland	3 (6.8)	2 (4.3)	5(5.6)
Wales	1 (2.3)	3 (6.5)	4 (4.4)
Total	44	46	90

**Table 2**  
Doctoral route undertaken by radiographers.

	Completed No. (%)	In progress No. (%)	Total No. (%)
EdD	5 (11.4)	10 (21.7)	15 (16.7)
PhD	26 (59.1)	21 (45.7)	47 (52.2)
PhD by published work	5 (11.4)	3 (6.5)	8 (8.9)
Professional doctorate	8 (18.2)	12 (26.1)	20 (22.2)
Total	44	46	90

statistical analysis was performed using the Social Science Statistics website ([soccstatistics.com](http://soccstatistics.com)).

## Results

A total of 90 unique responses were received within the time-scale. The respondents comprised 58 females (64.4%) and the majority were diagnostic radiographers ( $n = 71/90$ ; 78.9%). Ages of the respondents varied between those who had completed a doctoral award and those whose studies were in progress (Fig. 1). Over half of those with a doctorate were over the age of 50 ( $n = 25/44$ ; 56.8%).

The highest numbers of doctoral radiographers were based in England; further analysis confirmed differences across the English regions, where National Health Service (NHS) boundaries were used (Table 1).

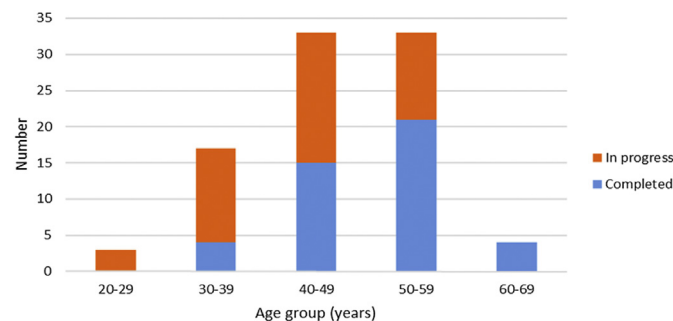
The traditional PhD was the most common award, both with those having already completed and those in progress, although increasing numbers were pursuing the EdD and professional doctorates (Table 2). Seventy-seven (85.6%) undertook, or were undertaking, their studies part time, only the traditional PhD award had been undertaken on a full time basis.

There were different research approaches taken in the doctoral studies and these varied between the diagnostic and therapeutic branches of the radiography profession (Table 3). Therapeutic radiographers were statistically more likely to be undertaking qualitative research than their diagnostic colleagues ( $z = 2.1619$ ;  $p = 0.0308$ ).

The greatest numbers of graduations are expected to be within 2016, however an overall increase in doctoral studies is observed over time (Fig. 2).

**Table 3**  
Research approach taken by doctoral radiographers by branch.

	Diagnostic No. (%)	Therapeutic No. (%)	Total No. (%)
Mixed methods	24 (33.8)	5 (26.3)	29 (32.2)
Qualitative	22 (31.0)	11 (57.9)	33 (36.7)
Quantitative	25 (35.2)	3 (15.8)	28 (31.1)
Total	71	19	90



**Figure 1.** Age categories of the respondents by doctoral status.

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