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Who would be a Radiographer in the NHS?

By

Crispin Coombs, Jenny Park, John Loan-Clarke, John Arnold, Diane Preston and Adrian Wilkinson.*

*The Business School
Loughborough University*

**The Business School
Open University*

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Mailing Address:

Dr Crispin Coombs
Research Associate
Business School
Loughborough University
Loughborough
Leics
LE11 3TU

Telephone: 01509 223649
Fax: 01509 223960

Email: c.r.coombs@lboro.ac.uk

Who would be a Radiographer in the NHS?

Loughborough University Business School have been commissioned by the Department of Health to study the attractiveness of the NHS as an employer to potential radiography, physiotherapy and nursing recruits. The two-year project commenced in September 2000 and aims to help the NHS improve its recruitment of radiographers, physiotherapists and nurses.

The project is based on an extensive literature review and will report on 24 focus groups and up to 60 individual interviews. The project is specifically targeting those groups that may wish to enter the professions of interest. In the case of radiography the sample groups include school children; people currently in training (including Access and degree courses); people working for the NHS but not qualified (for example, radiography assistants); and people who are already qualified but have chosen not to work for the NHS (for example, agency and independent sector radiographers). This stage of the study will be of particular interest because it will allow people to describe their experiences and perceptions of the NHS in their own terms.

Following the completion of the initial qualitative stage of the study the findings will be used to inform a questionnaire survey. This survey will collect the views of larger numbers of people so that a clear picture is obtained of the various factors drawing potential staff towards or away from the allied health professions and nursing in the NHS. Care will be taken at both stages of the study to ensure inclusion of people from ethnic and other groups currently under-represented in the AHPs and nursing in the NHS.

Currently, approximately 75% of the interviews and focus groups have been completed and the project team have been particularly pleased with the level of interest and participation from the different sample groups that have been approached.

Although data collected from the sessions has not yet been fully analysed, a number of interesting themes seem to be emerging. For example, diagnostic radiography students felt that there was a lack of understanding of the profession by the public and fellow healthcare professionals. The role was not considered 'sexy' and radiographers were perceived to be simple 'button pushers' by the public. School children thought that the working environment may be dangerous because of regular exposure to radiation and radiography assistants also mentioned this concern. However, on a more positive note the students indicated that radiography was considered to be interesting and rewarding work with good levels of job security and variety.

Particular areas that could be improved to make the profession more attractive included greater recognition and understanding of the role performed by radiographers, increased career promotion opportunities (both mentioned by diagnostic radiography degree students and radiography Access students) and more financial support during training (radiography Access students).

Perceptions of the NHS as a whole were often negative with issues such as stress, over work, lack of recognition and, generally a lack of funding, being highlighted across the different sample groups and professions. There were various sources for these impressions such as, the media, TV medical dramas, friends and family and personal experiences. There was a

general feeling among the interviewees that the media tended to focus on negative aspects of the NHS and that this was quite demoralising for potential and existing professionals.

These themes will be further explored and validated through the second survey based stage of the project. A target response rate of 1100 completed questionnaires across the different sample groups has been set for this stage of the project. It is envisaged that the findings provided in the final report, planned for August 2002, will help and inform the focus of educational and marketing campaigns; customise applicant attraction efforts to specific groups of potential staff; identify changes in employment practice that would strengthen the positive features of working in the NHS; and highlight the barriers that prevent potential staff from translating an intention to enter radiography work into actual behaviour. Further information about the project is available from Dr Crispin Coombs at Loughborough University Business School.