

Assistant Practitioner to Radiographer Bridging Programme

The Challenge

Demand for imaging services has been steadily increasing for the last 10 years. At the same time, the radiographic workforce has struggled with a shortage of newly qualified radiographers entering the workforce. Vacancy rates for diagnostic radiography are currently at around 17%. To help mitigate this shortage, Radiology managers have looked at a number of alternative options for upskilling their staff to practitioner level.

In the East Midlands region, a number of NHS Trusts had Assistant Practitioners who had undertaken Level 4 Foundation Degrees, but were unable to progress to complete a BSc Hons in Diagnostic Radiography due to the financial implications of having to leave employment for two years. The Assistant Practitioner to Radiographer Bridging Programme was developed in response to this, as a way to reduce the time required to upskill to 18 months.

What we did

The Assistant Practitioner to Radiographer Bridging Programme was developed in the 2015-2016 academic year. The first stage of the programme development was to map the curriculum of the Foundation Degree for Assistant Practitioner to the curriculum of the BSc Hons Diagnostic Radiography. This provided the development team with a road map of skills and knowledge which assistant practitioners would need to gain during the bridging programme, to ensure that they were ready to join Year 3 of the BSc programme.

The gaps identified centred around practical skills such as undertaking theatre and mobile radiography, paediatric radiography, and cross sectional imaging, plus academic skills such as research skills and critical appraisal skills. As such, two new modules were developed containing the theoretical knowledge required, and providing an opportunity to gain practical skills during placement blocks. Consultation was carried out with local employers to ensure the programme met their needs, as well as professional and statutory requirements.

Outcome and successes

The bridging programme first ran in January 2018, with a cohort of 3 students. Two of these students bridged successfully. They completed the bridging programme in July 2018, and commenced Year 3 of the BSc programme in September 2018. They both achieved a good honours (2:1 or above) in their BSc Hons in Diagnostic Radiography in July 2019. A second cohort of 4 students started the bridging programme in January 2019, and are expected to progress into Year 3 of the BSc programme in September 2019.

Case Study - Kajal Thakrar

I started in my career in radiology as a Radiology Department Assistant (RDA) and soon realised radiography was what I wanted to do. I chose to follow the route of studying to become a Radiology Assistant Practitioner (RAP). On completion of my foundation degree course 14 years ago, and throughout my time working as a qualified RAP, it became more apparent of the necessity to keep abreast of new developments. I also needed to keep my skills at a high level of competence in all modalities, to improve my techniques and adapt in order to provide high quality patient care, as well as progress in my work. Working as an RAP was something I really enjoyed, but my ultimate aim and ambition was always to become a Radiographer as soon as the opportunity presented for me to do this. The experience in modalities like radiography and fluoroscopy I had gained as an RAP gave me a good knowledge base to work under the supervision of radiographers, and looking forward I was ambitious and committed to on-going learning and training that could allow me to progress my career. The opportunity of completing the bridging course to access the third year of the BSc (Hons) Diagnostic Radiography Degree, offered by University of Derby, enabled me to achieve this.



The application process and interviews were very straightforward and after assessment of my previous qualifications confirming eligibility, I was lucky enough to be offered a place on the course. Returning to full-time study as a mature student was something I found incredibly difficult to adjust to, balancing academic work with clinical placement and personal commitments was challenging at first. Having not written academically for such a long time was one of my most challenging tasks as well as using all the online tools such as Blackboard and Turnitin, which were all new things to learn. Resources such as the university library, study skills and tutorials with module tutors helped me get my head around academic writing, researching the correct resources and articles as well as referencing these correctly. The journey from starting out 18 months ago to now completing the course has been a difficult one, but determination and the dedication to put in the time and effort to acquire the knowledge and skills.

UHL - Case Study

The support and help provided by the university and my tutors ensured I managed to stay on track, and study to a higher level than I ever expected to achieve. The whole process and my personal development has been a journey of many highs and lows but the hard work has definitely rewarded me with a great sense of achievement and got me on to the first step of a career that I now hope to excel in.

Quote from UHL

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UHL has always trained and employed a large number of Assistant Practitioners as part of their workforce strategy, and this has worked very well for the Trust and the individuals. However taking the next step to allow career progression has always been difficult for them as they had to give up salary and do the whole 3 year BSc course. The structure of the new course with Derby has allowed us to take this next step and with some creative accountancy and agreement with Kaj we were able to both support her through the course and get the fees paid in a revenue neutral position. Kaj has done really well and we are all proud of her – she has wanted to get her BSc for a long time and now she has achieved that I’m sure a great career lies ahead of her, and the department will be able to make more use of her considerable skills.

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Nick Clark, Radiology Site lead – Glenfield Hospital