



Therapeutic Radiography Career Choice Factsheet

Background

This study forms part of a wider project between Health Education England and the University of Winchester exploring Allied Health Professions (AHP) career choices.

An online questionnaire was disseminated to current AHP students in England (undergraduate and postgraduate) for four weeks between February and March 2021. The aim was to explore and understand key motivations, sources of influence and barriers to choosing their specific profession.

The information and findings from the questionnaire will be shared via profession specific factsheets to help shape targeted careers information and guidance. This factsheet focuses on therapeutic radiography as a career of choice.

Therapeutic Radiography student population in England

There are currently approximately 983 active students on therapeutic radiography courses in England.

Survey sample

- 62 therapeutic radiography students completed the questionnaire.
- 76% of participants were female and 24% were male.
- This finding was fairly representative of qualified therapeutic radiographers. In May 2018, there were 3794 female therapeutic radiographers (82%) and 821 male (18%) registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

Ethnicity

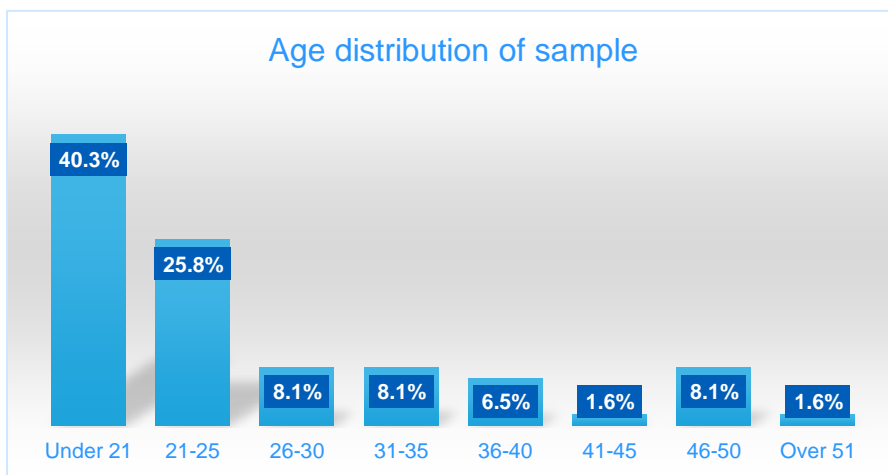
Ethnicity	Percentage of sample
White background	58.1%
Asian background	21%
Mixed or multiple ethnic background	9.6%
Black, African and Caribbean background	6.4%
Other	4.8%
Arab background	1.7%

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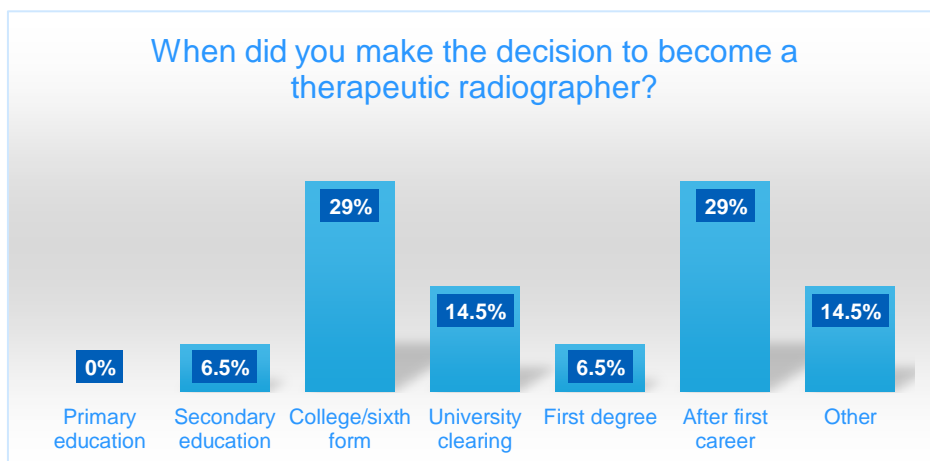
Non-white students in therapeutic radiography courses accounted for 52.7% of new enrolments in 2016/17 (Office for Students, 2019). This is in keeping with our findings of a relatively more diverse sample (41.9% were non-white participants) than for most other allied health professions.

Age and stage at which participants made the decision to become a therapeutic radiographer

- In our sample, 66.1% of students were under 25.
- The Office for Students (2019) found that the numbers of mature applicants to undergraduate therapeutic radiography courses have been reducing over recent years: the number of mature applicants fell from 121 for 2014/15 to 40 for 2017/18.
- Only 11.3% of the sample were over 40 years of age.



- 35.5% of the sample had chosen therapeutic radiography during their school education with an additional 14.5% choosing the profession during university clearing. 43.5% of the sample chose to become therapeutic radiographers after their first career or at other stages (for example during a gap year after school).

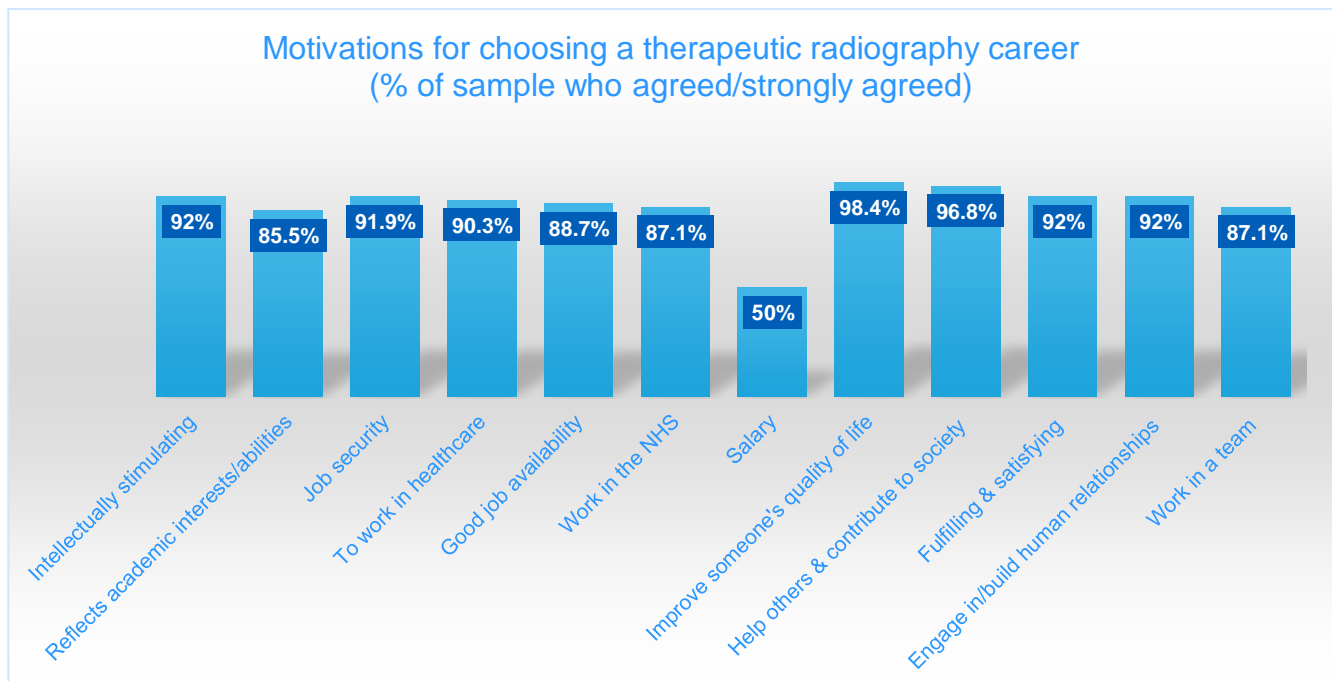


Motivations

Participants were asked to what extent different motivations impacted their therapeutic radiography career choice.

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- Choosing a career ‘where I can use my skills to improve the quality of life for a patient/service user’ was the most popular motivation for choosing therapeutic radiography (98.4% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed with this statement).
- The most commonly cited motivations are shown in the graph below on page 3.
- Across the 35 motivations in the questionnaire, only eight had less than 50% agreeing/strongly agreeing with the importance of the motivation.
- Altruistic reasons had the highest percentages of responses; professional motivations were also important.



- Choosing a profession that is ‘intellectually stimulating’ was important for 92% of this sample and one that ‘reflects my academic interests/abilities’ (85.5%). This finding highlights the importance of career advisors (explored below) having knowledge of therapeutic radiography to encourage school/college students down this career path.
- Participants were asked about the influence of the opportunity to work in the public and private sector. The public sector scored markedly higher: 72.6% to 29.1%. It was interesting that working in healthcare (90.3%) and work in the NHS (87.1%) scored noticeably higher than the motivation to work in the public sector more generally.
- Job security (91.9%) and job availability (88.7%) scored very highly – to the extent that they were almost as important motivations as a ‘fulfilling and satisfying career’ and ‘engaging in and building human relationships’.

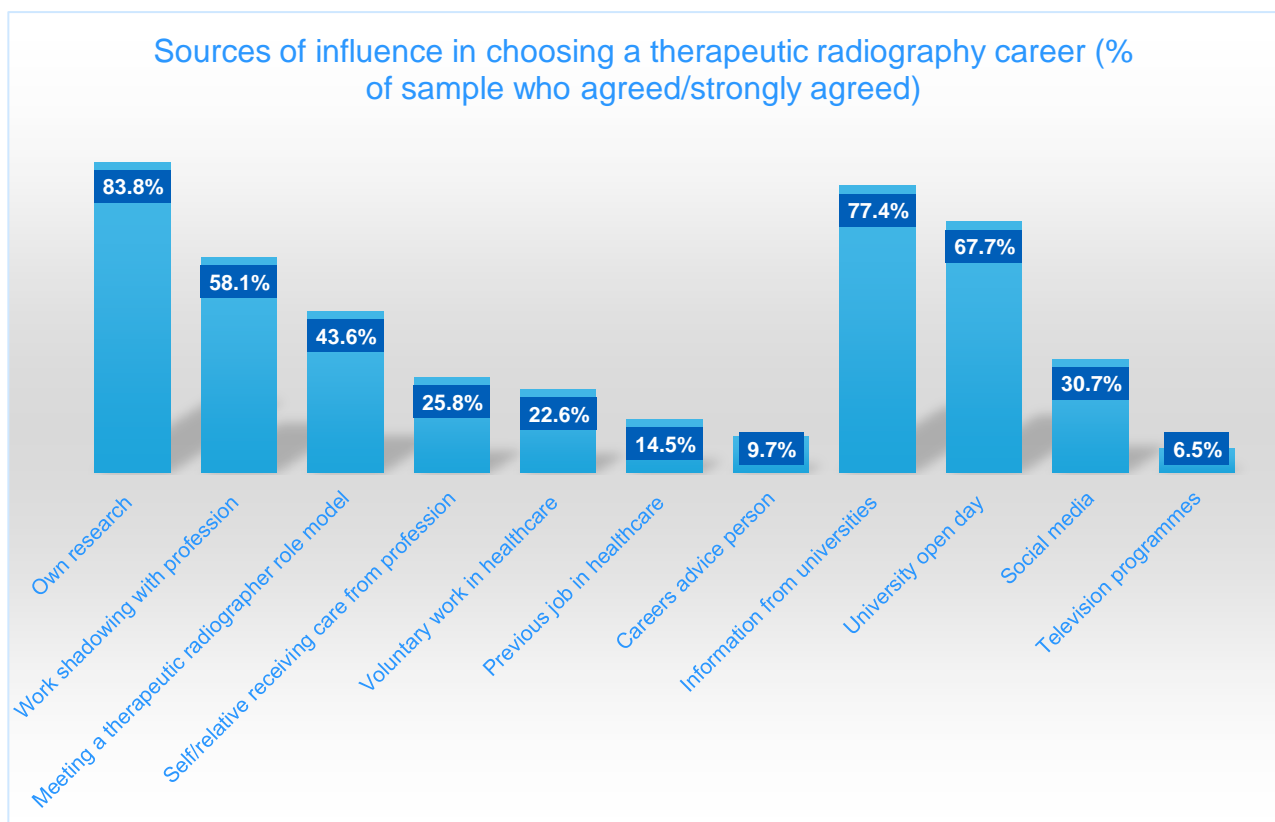
Sources of Influence

Participants were asked about the sources that influenced their career choice.

- The most influential factor was ‘conducting my own research’ (83.8% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed).
- Selected sources of influence are shown in the graph below on page 4.

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- All personal sources scored higher than educational sources. With the exception of university related sources and social media, media and marketing sources were influential for less than 30% of the sample.
- Universities play a key marketing role: 77.4% of the sample were influenced by information they received from universities and 67.7% from attending a university open day. This emphasises the key role universities can play in encouraging therapeutic radiography course applications. This could take the form of school outreach work.
- The low percentage being influenced by career advisors (9.7% of the sample agreed, 0% strongly agreed) is a concern. This finding is noticeable in that 29% of the sample chose to become a therapeutic radiographer at college/sixth form suggesting reliance on external sources.
- Therapeutic radiography work shadowing experiences was influential for 58.1% of the sample. Voluntary work in healthcare settings generally only influenced 22.6% of the sample suggesting less influence in choosing therapeutic radiography.
- 30.7% had been influenced by social media. This suggests that although more traditional methods of information gathering are still more influential in choosing a therapeutic radiography career, this platform is being utilised and could be utilised more.

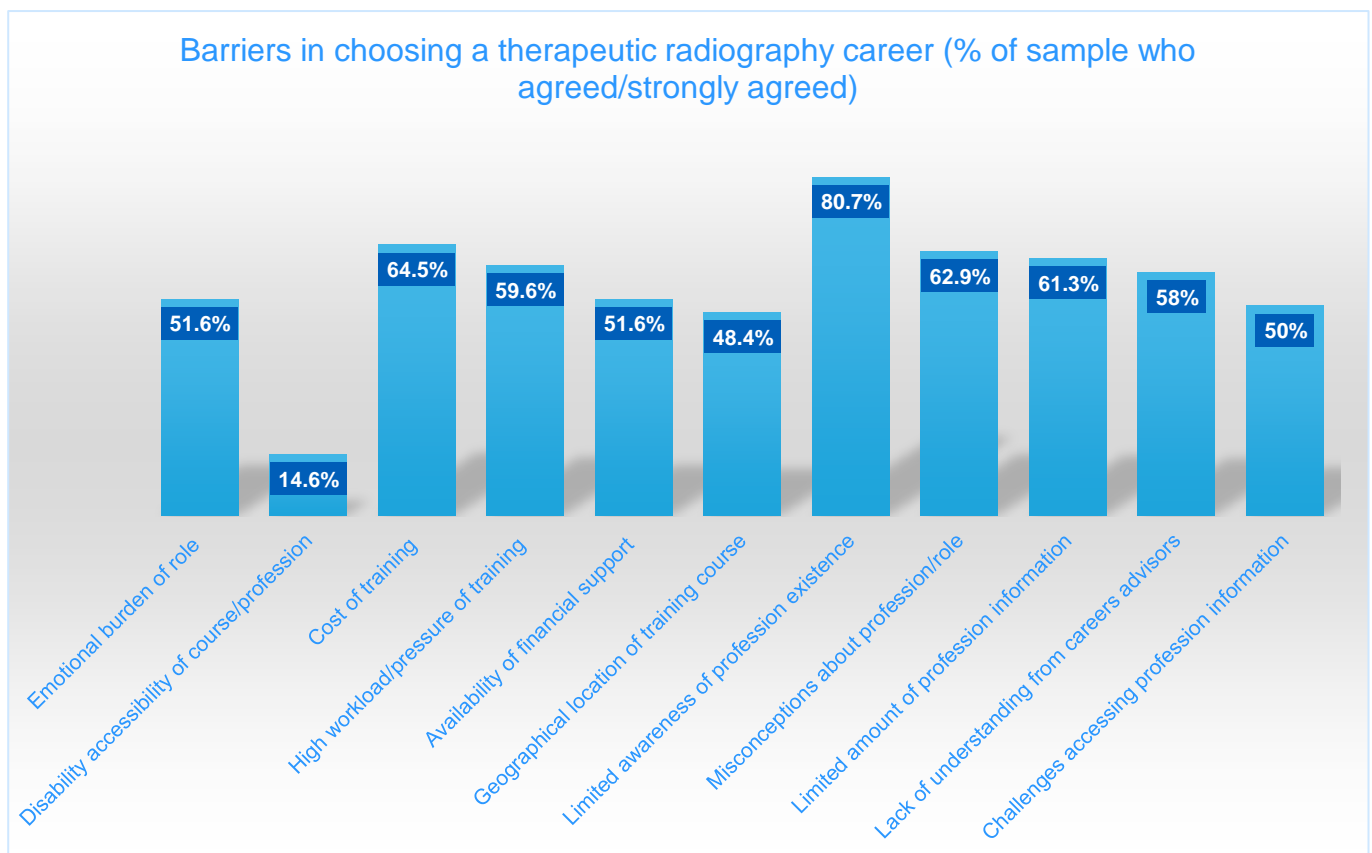


Barriers to entering therapeutic radiography

Participants were asked how their career choice had been affected by potential barriers to entering a therapeutic radiography career. The participants recognised barriers and overcame them to still choose therapeutic radiography.

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- The most influential barrier was 'Limited awareness of the existence of the profession' (80.7% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed with this statement) which is a real concern.
- Most common barriers are shown in the graph below on page 5.
- Although the majority of barriers was not chosen by many respondents, nine out of the 23 barriers were chosen by 50% or above of the sample.
- Financial barriers were seen as a concern by over half of the sample (64.5% and 51.6%). This suggests that communication surrounding financial support available for therapeutic radiography students' needs to be strengthened.
- Barriers relating to understanding of the role were chosen by between 50% and 81% of the sample. 58% of the sample agreeing/strongly agreeing with the barrier of a lack of understanding about the role from career advisors is in keeping with the low influence from this source (see above).
- It should be noted that over half the sample (51.6%) perceived the emotional burden of the role as a barrier to choosing therapeutic radiography.
- Although a lower percentage in comparison to other barriers, 14.6% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed that 'a concern around accessibility of the course/profession in terms of physical or mental disability' was a barrier. 24.6% of the sample reported having a disability and therefore it is important that this message is addressed to potential therapeutic radiography students.



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Additional findings

Participants were asked what they thought the public perception was of therapeutic radiography. The question was answered by 56% of respondents and the most frequent response was that the public were unaware of therapeutic radiographers. There was a perception that individuals only became aware of the profession through personal experience, such as cancer treatment. In addition, there was a confusion with the profession and diagnostic radiographers. Although description of the role evoked a positive reaction, a number of participants also mentioned the perception of the profession as 'stressful' and 'depressing' owing to the association with cancer treatment.

Key findings

- **Altruistic reasons were the key motivations for choosing therapeutic radiography.**
- **Universities and conducting research were the most important sources of influence. Overall, educational media and marketing sources scored lower in terms of influence.**
- **A lack of awareness of the existence of the profession was the key barrier to choosing therapeutic radiography.**

Recommendations

- Whilst altruistic reasons were key motivations for choosing therapeutic radiography, aspects such as **job security, job availability** and an **intellectually stimulating career** were also key motivations. **Therefore, marketing of this profession should also focus on these aspects.**
- The low impact of educational sources (at school/college level) as a source of influence in choosing therapeutic radiography is troubling. That 40% of the sample were under 21 shows that individuals are ready to choose therapeutic radiography during school/college and therefore **career advisors need to be engaged to promote the profession to younger people.**
- Less than 26% of the sample had been influenced to choose therapeutic radiography based on themselves or a relative receiving care. **Therefore, individuals need to learn about the profession through other sources** without reliance on discovering the profession through treatment from a therapeutic radiographer.
- Over 80% of the sample saw a lack of awareness of the existence of the profession as a barrier. This is a concern. **Promotion of the profession should therefore be increased in addition to its distinction from diagnostic radiography.**
- Therapeutic radiography work experiences were influential for 58.1% of the sample. Therefore, **upscaling work experience is critical** to recruitment to therapeutic radiography to help ease the reliance on discovering therapeutic radiography through other sources.

Acknowledgements

This factsheet was produced by Dr Lucy Wallis from the University of Winchester utilising the data responses from the Motivations for choosing an Allied Health Profession career questionnaire 2020. Lucy was assisted by Dr Rachel Locke, Mandy Tuckey, Jo McNamara, Professor Beverley Harden and Carrie Biddle. For more details, please contact Dr Rachel Locke: Rachel.Locke@winchester.ac.uk

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