

CAREERS IN RADIOTHERAPY

THERAPEUTIC RADIOGRAPHER

EAST OF ENGLAND RADIOTHERAPY NETWORK

WHAT IS A THERAPEUTIC RADIOGRAPHER?

Therapeutic Radiographers plan, deliver and manage the care of patients receiving radiotherapy - treatment that uses high-energy radiation to destroy cancer cells. Most patients are being treated for cancer, though radiographers also treat some non-cancerous conditions.

Therapeutic Radiographers are an Allied Health Professionals (AHPs). They are the only healthcare professionals who train entirely in cancer treatment and care. They work with state of the art technology and equipment and are part of a multidisciplinary team that includes clinical oncologists, medical physicists and nurses.

The degree is challenging and rewarding, and there are strong job prospects once you qualify. This career could suit you if you enjoy science, particularly biology, and want to work in healthcare.

GLOSSARY

AfC - Agenda for Change. The NHS pay scale that sets salaries and working conditions for most NHS staff.
AHP - Allied Health Professionals
CPD - Continuing Professional Development. The training and learning you do throughout your career to keep your skills up to date.
HCPC - Health and Care Professions Council. The regulator that licenses healthcare professionals in the UK.

QUALIFICATIONS NEEDED

You will need at least 5 GCSEs at grades 9 to 4, or equivalent, including English, maths and science.
Each university sets its own entry requirements, but on average you will need three A levels at grade C or above, or an equivalent qualification. At least one must be a pure science subject - biology, chemistry or physics. BTECs and access diplomas are also accepted at many universities.
To work as a Therapeutic Radiographer, you must register with the HCPC. To do this, you need to complete an HCPC-approved training programme at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Universities currently offering the undergraduate programme include:

- Birmingham City University
- Cardiff University
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- Health Sciences University
- London South Bank University
- Sheffield Hallam University
- City St George's, University of London
- University of Hertfordshire
- University of Liverpool
- University of Suffolk

Apprenticeships
An apprenticeship lets you earn a salary while studying for your degree. Your employer and the government cover the tuition fees, so you do not qualify for a student loan.

Apprenticeships are advertised on the NHS jobs website. Go to www.jobs.nhs.uk, click on 'search' and type 'apprentice' or scan the QR code

Universities currently offering the apprenticeship degree include:

- London South Bank University
- Sheffield Hallam University
- University of the West of England (Bristol)
- University of Hertfordshire

More universities are opening apprenticeship routes each year. Scan the QR code to find the current providers



All courses are three years full-time and combine theory with clinical placements. You will apply your knowledge of anatomy, physiology and oncology to real patients.

As well as meeting the academic requirements, you will need to demonstrate or develop the following:

- Strong communication and interpersonal skills
- Emotional resilience - you will be caring for people with serious, life-threatening conditions
- An understanding of the requirements of a health care professional e.g., confidentiality and professionals standards
- A sensitive, tolerant and non-judgemental approach
- The ability to empathise with patients and their carers
- Good observation skills and attention to detail
- The ability to work well in a team
- Strong organisation, planning and time management
- Reasoning, analytical and decision-making skills
- The ability to stay calm under pressure and manage interruptions
- Creative problem-solving skills

- Self-motivation and the ability to motivate others
- Confidence working with technology
- Flexibility and adaptability as working practices change
- An understanding of what is required to deliver radiotherapy safely

RESPONSIBILITIES

As a Therapeutic Radiographer, your day-to-day work will include:

- Producing treatment plans, both routine and complex, following clinical guidelines
- Explaining treatment to patients so they can make informed decisions, including what side effects to expect
- Using manual dexterity skills to position patients precisely and taking images to check accuracy before treatment is delivered
- Using detailed knowledge of anatomy to interpret and analyse medical images
- Developing technical skills to operate equipment accurately and confidently
- Building a supportive professional relationship with patients and their carers
- Keeping accurate, computer-based patient records
- Attending multidisciplinary team meetings
- Engaging with CPD to keep your practice up to date
- Supporting and assessing student Therapeutic Radiographers
- Mentoring collegues less experienced than you

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

You will have opportunities to attend conferences and professional events, where you can network with colleagues and stay up to date with developments in the field. Some universities offer further study at Masters and PhD level in therapeutic radiography and oncology.

SALARY AND CAREER PROSPECTS

New graduates normally start at AfC band 5. There is no pre-registration period for Therapeutic Radiographers. After around two years of experience, you may be ready to apply for a band 6 role. For current NHS pay rates, visit: www.nhscareers.nhs.uk

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Most Therapeutic Radiographers work in the NHS, where there is a clear career structure. Progression depends on gaining experience, continuing your education and developing your role within the team.

Advanced roles you could move into include:

- On-treatment review
- Consultant Therapeutic Radiographer
- Late effects specialist
- Cancer-specific roles, such as breast cancer
- Treatment-specific roles, such as brachytherapy
- Practice Educator
- Research

Once qualified and experienced, you could also train as a clinical tutor and help shape the next generation of Therapeutic Radiographers.

Other routes for career development include:

- Mentoring
- Operational management
- Project management
- Quality improvement
- Public health
- Commissioning
- Digital leadership

WORK EXPERIENCE FOR UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS

Before your university interview, make sure you have a solid understanding of what Therapeutic Radiography involves. It is strongly recommended that you shadow Therapeutic Radiographers at work before applying. This shows your commitment to the profession. Include any relevant work experience in your application. Paid or voluntary experience in a caring or healthcare setting is also very useful.

Therapeutic Radiographer apprentices from the the East of England share their experiences

How did you find out about the apprenticeship scheme?

I knew I wanted to work within the field of Therapeutic Radiography, and started my search on LinkedIn jobs. From here, I found that Trac***** was the most helpful website for finding related careers within the field including the apprenticeship. I also followed social media sites including RadChat to find out more about the available opportunities

I found out via word of mouth that the NHS offers apprenticeships, therefore, I kept checking TRAC* daily to see what opportunities were arising.

I was looking for a clinical, patient-facing role in the NHS and found the advertisement for a Therapeutic Radiography Apprentice on either NHS jobs or Indeed.

***** an online recruitment management system for NHS jobs

What attracted you to the apprenticeship?

I benefit from hands on learning which an apprenticeship offers. Financially, you are earning whilst learning. Enters you into the 'real world'.

I was keen to move into a professional environment and contribute to patient care whilst learning on the job. This route offered academic learning alongside being a member of a department in the hospital. Personally, the apprenticeship gave me the opportunity to move to a new area, whilst other apprentices benefitted from being close to home.

The focus on clinical experience and the funded qualification are major assets of the apprenticeship route. The time you spend building relationships with each patient as a Therapeutic Radiographer made this particular apprenticeship appealing to me, combined with the opportunity to develop specialist technical and clinical skills with the purpose of improving the lives of patients with cancer.

Why radiotherapy?

For me personally, I knew I wanted to work in healthcare, particularly in a role that combined patient care and advanced technology. The career has multiple pathways and opportunities for career development. Furthermore, being able to work with at least one other person at all times drew me towards the career.

I am intrigued by anatomy and science and I feel radiotherapy combines both my interests perfectly. I wanted to cultivate my learning in this field due to a family member experiencing radiotherapy. Being able to help people with cancer was a huge driving factor too.

Targeting cancers with radiation to cure or improve the symptoms of patients is a fulfilling career to work in. The dynamic nature of the role, requiring technical and logical problem-solving, makes Therapeutic Radiography a challenging and interesting field.

What support have you received?

I have found the apprenticeship a very supportive route. Academically, we have small cohorts allowing focussed learning and an open environment. Clinically the staff support our learning, and are trained to mentor students throughout the 3 years. This environment supports professional development and allows students to thrive. Additionally, I have found the other people on the apprenticeship alongside me invaluable.

Other members of staff. Superior members of staff having meetings with us. Our lecturers are also very friendly and help.
Given study leave when needed.

I receive clinical support from my mentor and practice educator; both work at my hospital and are available for regular meetings to discuss my clinical progress.
I have an academic advisor from my university who meets with me to discuss my academic progress, as well as an apprenticeship coach who bridges any gaps in communication between my hospital and the university. While I am undertaking my 3rd year project, I also have a specific topic supervisor who is supporting me.

What advice would you give others ?

Be prepared for challenge, being able to allocate time. Learning and doing assignments whilst at work is difficult, but it is about manging time wisely and asking for help when necessary.

I believe this job heavily relies on patient communication. The ability to have a conversation with patients, learn about them as people, and understand what they are going through will make you a more compassionate and understanding professional.

I would suggest an apprentice in any medical field advocates for learning opportunities throughout and adjacent to the discipline they are working in, as understanding different roles connected with your own will strengthen your clinical knowledge base.

What have you found challenging?

Assignments being due whilst at work. Work becomes more stressful, especially when still trying to learn new information along the way. I am an anxious person, so gaining confidence on set has been difficult, especially with the machines costing a lot of money (the fear of making a mistake), however, I understand that will come with time.

There are hard days within the job. patients' may be finding treatment difficult, dealing with an emotional time, and we are a huge part of their support system. This can be a challenge and something I personally had to adapt to. All being said, you are able to be there for a patient and potentially make their day a bit better.

The work-study-life balance can be a challenge. It is important to communicate academic needs to your work-based supervisors to ensure you have enough protected study time to complete your assignments. It is also important to prioritise scheduling in time off for yourself to completely decompress and look after your own wellbeing.

How have you found it overall?

So far, 6 months in, I am very much enjoying the apprenticeship. Coming into work knowing I can help people and continue learning every day is a privilege. I look forward to qualifying!

A great opportunity, feeling grateful for it. Whilst challenging at points, it is rewarding.

I am loving this apprenticeship and appreciate that I am continuing to learn new information and skills even in my final year of the programme.

FOR MORE INFORMATION.....

The East of England Radiotherapy Network's website has a page dedicated to careers in radiotherapy. You will find more information and links to videos about:

- Radiotherapy
- Being a Therapeutic Radiographer
- Studying Therapeutic Radiography
- Working in the NHS

Visit: www.eastofenglandradiotherapynetwork.nhs.uk/careers

Or scan the QR code

To apply to visit one of our radiotherapy departments, complete the form at:
https://forms.office.com/e/0T7pviWShr

You must be 16 or over.
For more information, contact:
eofertnetwork@nnuh.nhs.uk

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