**Independent Sector Practice Placements: Opportunities & Barriers**

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**BACKGROUND**

In 2006 the Society & College of Radiographers identified placement capacity issues within Diagnostic Imaging undergraduate programmes and suggested the use of speciality modality placements and the independent sector as ways to elevate the pressure. Although literature pertains to the use of specialist modality training (2) there is limited research that looks at the independent sector as a placement provider for students within the Allied Health professions (3) and none relating to student Radiographers. The aim of this work is to investigate opportunities and barriers of this potential placement providers identified by students accessing them.

**FINDINGS/ EMERGENT THEMES**

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<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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<td>Number of Placements Offered, Locations &amp; Accessibility</td>
<td>Increasing Number of Radiography Graduate Training Programmes</td>
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<td>Quality Assurance of Learning Environment</td>
<td>Enriches and Diversifies the Student Experience</td>
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**EXTERNAL FORCES**

-I had to hire a car because there wasn’t a bus. (Bob: Line 67)

- “It cost around £80/ week in petrol. I was happy to pay this for this opportunity but would not have been able to afford this for regular placement” (Matthew: Line 33)

- “Since applying to do this placement I have had a lot of negative comments from staff working at my regular placement site. In fact I don’t think I had any positive comments” (Oscar: Line: 476)

- “They kept showing me what they were doing and why they were doing it because they’re used to teaching the trainees that come through” (Louise: Line: 154)

- “Yes definitely thought they had the skills to teach me, some staff more than others but I think that you get that everywhere. But I’d say they were definitely as up to scratch as what we’d get on any of our normal placements.” (Mia: Line 186)

- “I accessed the placement to boost my chances of getting a place with a company offering a Graduate MRI training programme. Currently we only get about 3 days experience in MRI” (Mia: Line19)

- “This was one of my best placements. Being the only student in the department meant I had the luxury of one-on-one supervision By the end my confidence in this complex modality and my knowledge had grown considerably” (Susan: Line: 167)

- “I accessed this placement because of my interest in MRI really and also I suppose it would look good on my CV and kind of give me more options for a career instead of just being limited to within the NHS and limited to general X-ray” (Jane: Line 18)

**DATA COLLECTION/ ANALYSIS**

9 MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) clinical placements were secured within the independent sector and accessed by 3rd year students from one higher education institute. As the placements were geographically spread out, exclusion criteria were students who could not provide daily transport and/or accommodation. The placements were advertised and once the quota of places was filled the researcher did not look to recruit anymore participants. Ethical approval was sought and granted from the local research ethics committee. To explore the student’s experiences a qualitative methodology was adopted and one-to-one audio recorded semi-structured telephone interviews lasting 30 minutes were used to determine student perceptions post placement attendance (4). Interview data was transcribed verbatim and themes were extracted and manually coded (5). Participants were asked to choose pseudonyms so as to ensure anonymity.

**EXPLOITING OPPORTUNITIES**

A number of independent sector companies now offer “Graduate Training Schemes” with fast-track schemes in MRI (6, 7) a specialism which traditionally could not be accessed without general radiography post-qualification experience. Placements in the independent sector offer students the opportunity to explore this first-post option thus allowing them to make informed career choices. This holds true for deciding on working in the NHS or Independent Sector. Current estimates state that ~10% of the radiography workforce work in the private sector (8). However proposed Government agendas may see healthcare providers required to be “cooperatively delivered by ‘any properly qualified provider’” (9), and thus a potential shift in employment opportunities. Finally, all students reported enjoying and benefiting from this placement thus enhancing their student experience.

**EXTERNAL FORCES**

**MINIMISING BARRIERS**

Despite the opportunities noted there are some barriers that need considering. Some participants felt that their regular placement sites deemed them as being disloyal for opting for this placement type. This research demonstrated that healthcare providers should not devalue the opportunities each affords in enriching the student experience. Even though learners reported that they had the ability to make the necessary clinical and educational progress and had adequate tools such as computers and library access to support this, these placements would need to be accessed for quality as per SCoR/ HPC requirements (10).

**CONCLUSION**

Although a small sample size was used for this study, this work highlights some interesting topics for consideration when considering Independent Sector placements for inclusion within an undergraduate placement portfolio.

**REFERENCES**