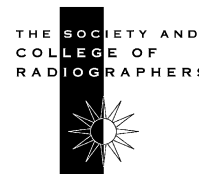


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GUEST EDITORIAL

Radiography in Europe: The HENRE perspective

The Higher Education Network of Radiographers in Europe (HENRE) is one of a number of thematic networks co-financed by the European Commission (EC) with the aim of helping Higher Education Institutions create forums to analyse and study the state of development of particular academic disciplines, to encourage the European dimension and to improve the quality of education and training across Europe. In the case of HENRE the academic discipline is radiography in its widest terms and encompasses the whole notion of pre-registration education at undergraduate level as well as the issues of life long learning including continuing professional development and research.

Thematic networks were launched as part of the European Socrates Erasmus programme in 1996 and HENRE first became partially financed in 2003. This initial 3 year funding has been supplemented by further 3 years as from October 2005. Universities, the prime actors under Socrates–Erasmus, act as Thematic Network co-ordinators with professional and other associations remaining important partners for the sustainability of its activities. The co-operation between some 50 universities across the EU offering radiography degree programmes together with the ISRR and European radiographic professional organisations has meant that radiographers have had a specific forum for the discussion of educational matters and other issues affecting professional practice so that pan EU comparisons can be made. HENRE is presently co-ordinated by the medical imaging sciences department of St Martin's College, Lancaster.

Educational matters have been a hot topic in Europe for sometime now following on from the Bologna Declaration (sometimes referred to as Accord) of 1999. This strategic approach which currently has signatories from 40 countries across Europe is intended to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 as the most competitive provider of higher education in the world or as the original declaration said "increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education". This was very much a response by European Governments to the perception that both the USA and the emerging countries of Asia might outstrip Europe in terms of workforce

educational prowess and as such, that Europe needed a common integrated response.

Before the Accord it had been noted that there was very little uniformity in higher education across the European countries. The universities in different countries awarded different degrees and required different lengths of time for their completion making comparability and equivalence unclear. The broad objectives of Bologna were to remove the obstacles to student mobility across Europe, enhance the attractiveness of European higher education worldwide, establish a common structure of higher education structures across Europe and for this common structure to be based on the 2 main cycles of undergraduate and graduate – very much the UK model.

The European Universities' response to Bologna has been the Tuning project where, rather than harmonising educational structures, there is encouragement by the EC to attempt to tune educational structures and programmes in specific disciplines on the basis of diversity and autonomy. (More information on Tuning can be obtained from the Europa website <http://europa.eu>.)

In the case of radiography we are well aware that in some countries the radiographic educational programmes are not yet within the university system but many countries are working towards an all graduate radiography profession. Such is also the case for other allied health professions. Radiography programmes delivered in different Member States are not yet at the stage to demonstrate meaningful comparisons; yet we are also aware that Erasmus undergraduate exchange students moving across the EU find many similarities in the clinical situation and are perfectly able to cope despite any language differences.

The HENRE project is involved in the first stages of trying to reach common understanding of the extent to which there is a possibility of 'Tuning' radiography programmes and thus reach consensus of what can be expected in terms of first post radiographer competencies. This is no easy task as there are a great many differences not only in the type of education and training, but also in the extent of work practices and expectations of the radiographer from

employers. Is there such discrepancy in the education of, and scope of work undertaken by, radiographers across Europe that it makes the free movement of labour across Europe (one of the tenets of the EU) in the radiography profession very unlikely? We are aware a number of UK educated radiographers can and have been working in other Member States, but what about the corollary of other Europeans working in the UK? Would radiographers, those qualified or those undergoing initial education, feel threatened? Should radiographers be concerned about a future influx of radiographers from Europe? The answer to all these questions is unclear.

When overseas radiographers (usually from Commonwealth countries) in previous decades undertook the Diploma of the College of Radiographers (DCR), they underwent an UK centrally developed curriculum and examination process understood and acknowledged by employers and other radiographers. With radiography education having moved into the higher education sector in the UK there are still favourable comparisons between degrees from separate universities and colleges, as there are many players in the accreditation process including the radiography professional body (SCOR). The UK has, with a very few exceptions, unlike most other Member State countries a strong and influential external examiner system to ensure that a degree from university A demonstrates equivalence to a degree from university B.

Attempting to understand the various directives that have been passed by the European Council in relationship to professional qualifications is a tall order. Radiography is, in many European countries, a regulated profession restricted by law to those individuals holding certain national qualifications. There are presently 19 countries across Europe which regulate the radiography profession. A profession is said to be regulated when access to it is subject by legal, regulatory or administrative provisions to the possession of a specific qualification. More information on regulated professions can be obtained from the Europa website (<http://europa.eu>). There are at least three EEC directives which are designed to aid mobility for those who are qualified in their Home Member State to practice a regulated profession and wish to transfer their qualifications and skills to practice that profession in another Member State. The professions regulated by the Health Professions Council (HPC) fall under the General System Directives (89/48/EEC and 92/51/EEC) which are soon to be incorporated into a new directive on the recognition of professional qualifications. The General Systems Directives apply to professions where the qualification is obtained following at least 3 years of education and training; a 1st cycle qualification in the Tuning terminology. A European Economic Area (EEA) radiographer, identified as someone who can prove nationality and a right to practise in another EEA country, can certainly apply to register with the HPC but does not have automatic right to registration in the UK. With regard to the HPC, each profession has its own specific criteria for assessment which are set out in the profession specific elements of the standards of proficiency. An applicant has to satisfy the HPC Registration Assessor in their application how they meet the benchmark standards demonstrated through a combination of education, training

and professional experience. So the profession itself via the HPC is the final arbiter as to who it wishes to join its ranks in the UK.

So what does the Bologna Accord and its further Ministerial communiqués (Prague 2001; Berlin 2003; Bergen 2005; {London 2007}) hold for the education of the profession? The UK is fortunate in that it has strong and effective agencies such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which monitor standards in higher education institutions. The quality assurance focus for the UK therefore is the enhancement of quality rather than the provision of a quality stamp of approval at subject level which, rather significantly, is the case in most other European countries. The UK approach is shared by only a minority of Bologna signatories which includes Ireland and Denmark. The differences in approach, undertaken by a number of other European states, are being tackled at Ministerial level to attempt to meet some common understandings of key quality assurance terminology and forward standards as reference points including subject benchmark statements and qualification frameworks.

Whilst radiography educational matters on one front are being considered and slowly being addressed, the differences in the scope of radiography practice in the UK compared with most other European countries is regarded by many to be a major, irreconcilable divide. The UK has forged ahead with the notion of specialist radiographers completing post registration qualifications at 2nd cycle level (to use the Tuning terminology). When HENRE first attracted European funding its aim was to enable radiographers throughout Europe to liaise about the changing role of radiography and within this context to consider issues of professional practice and education. Dialogue centred on teaching and learning methods in radiography education, initial radiography education and continuing professional development. Phase 2 of HENRE is widening previous discussions to include a focus on the learning outcomes approach to higher education, research into learning and teaching at subject level, issues surrounding radiation protection and patient information and a further approach to Tuning.

The co-operation between universities, schools and hospitals all offering radiographic education and training, the European Committee of the ISRR and radiography European professional organisations and others has meant that radiographers have a specific forum to discuss education matters and issues directly affecting professional practice and this is what HENRE is all about.

Increasing co-operation and liaison between professional bodies, educational institutions and other interested parties should only serve the wider cause of radiography and avoid misconceptions and fears.

Whilst HENRE partners are predominantly universities and other higher educational institutions offering radiography education and radiography professional bodies, representatives includes all those professions involved in the education and training of radiographers and including mostly radiographers as well as nurses, radiologists, physicists, dentists and others. This broad church approach demonstrates a mature view of the special nature of radiography and confidence in the ability of radiographers

to order their own destiny whilst taking on board the views and opinions of others involved in the medical imaging and therapy fields. HENRE II will be partly funded by the European Commission until September 2008 and meanwhile is intent on expanding its membership to include hospital Trusts, industrial and commercial bodies and any other bodies concerned with radiography and its future. More information can be gained from the HENRE website www.henre.co.uk.

One day, we may well see other Member States' radiographers working alongside us in the UK in the same way that we now welcome many European Erasmus exchange student radiographers. We can all learn from each

other and in working together can forward the European ideal.

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