



a healthier world through  
sonographer expertise

## **Jobs and Skills Australia – Skills Priority List, Stakeholder Survey 2024**

***Supplementary information provided by the Australasian Sonographers Association (ASA)***

***For the sonography profession: ANZSCO 251214***

***Date: February 2024***

### **Introduction**

The Australasian Sonographers Association (ASA) is the professional organisation for Australasian sonographers who are experts in ultrasound. With over 7,000 members across Australia and New Zealand, the ASA's purpose is to foster a sonography profession that delivers high quality ultrasound with a vision to create a healthier world through sonographer expertise. The ASA provides CPD, resources and publications, an annual conference, invests in sonography research, and advocates for sonographers to government and industry stakeholders.

### **Overview of the sonography profession and underlying workforce shortage**

The shortage of sonographers has existed for more than a decade, and is expected to take many years to resolve. The shortage is influenced by the workforce demographics and profile; increasing demand for services; and a lack of clinical training placements. The shortage exists across the board, with additional challenges in regional / rural / remote locations, and among sonographers who are experienced and/or work in specific areas of practice such as cardiac or obstetric sonography.

Approximately 80% of the profession is female; 53% of the current workforce work part-time and a further 7% work in casual and locum positions. Three quarters of sonographer primarily work in private practice, with 22% working in public hospitals. In all, 41% of sonographers work in multiple locations for the same employer, and 16% work in different locations for different employers<sup>i</sup>. An estimated 25% of the current workforce will reach retirement age in the next decade. In addition, overseas-trained sonographers have minimal impact on workforce numbers with only a small number of applications approved each year (e.g. 15-20)<sup>ii</sup>.

Demand for ultrasound services – which is currently the most frequently utilised diagnostic imaging service<sup>iii</sup> – is expected to continue increasing due to the aging population, increased application, and its cost-effectiveness compared to some other imaging services.

A significant factor impacting the workforce shortage is the chronic lack of clinical training placements. Student sonographers are required to complete clinical training for a recommended minimum of three days per week over two years, to complete their course of study and apply to become accredited.

Sonographers may work in general sonography, or in specific areas of practice such as cardiac, vascular, obstetrics and gynecology, and breast sonography. To be listed as an accredited sonographer with the Australian Sonographer Accreditation Register, sonographers must hold relevant and accredited post-graduate qualifications in their area of practice; and must undertake continuing professional development.

**Recommendation: The ASA recommends sonographers remain on the Australian Skills Priority List in 2024, as a profession in national shortage.**

## **Background to the 2024 ASA Survey of Major Employers**

In January and February 2024, the ASA undertook a survey of major employers of sonographers, to gather their insights into the workforce shortage. The survey received 23 responses from Australian-based employers, who combined currently employ 1,840 sonographers nation-wide.

As at December 2023, there were 7,780 accredited medical sonographers in Australia listed on the Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry <sup>iv</sup>.

This survey, therefore, represents approximately 24% of sonographers employed, with information provided from the perspective of employers.

In addition to the questions being sought by Jobs and Skills Australia, we sought some additional information around the impacts of the sonographer shortage.

This is the second year the ASA have undertaken this survey, with the first undertaken in December 2022.

## **Survey demographics – Australian respondents**

### **23 respondents, representing 1,840 sonographers**

- 13 respondents from public hospital departments (173 employees)
- 10 respondents from the private sector (clinics or private hospitals), (1,663 employees)

### **Location of sonographers employed (\* multiple responses allowed)**

- 18 metro (78%), 6 regional (26%), 4 remote (17%)

## **Contact details for further information**

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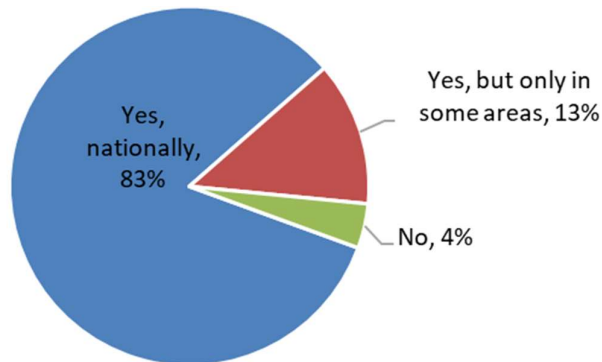
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## Responses to Survey Questions

### 1. Is there a current shortage of sonographers?

The overwhelming majority (96%) of respondents reported a current shortage of sonographers; 83% reporting that the shortage is national.



Additional comments include:

- Yes, particularly in regional and rural locations, incl WA and the Kimberly
- Yes, especially in areas away from Eastern coast
- Yes, especially in cardiac
- Yes, especially in obstetrics
- We are in desperate need of specialists.

### 2. If you believe there is a shortage, how would you rate the degree of undersupply for your organisation? Please describe in percentage terms (e.g. we require x% more sonographers to meet current demand or work to capacity)

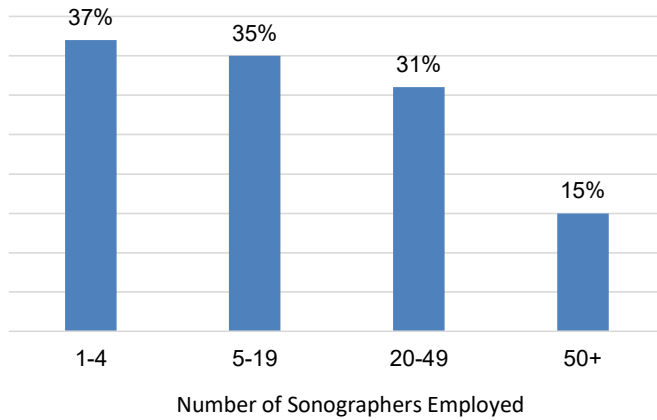
Respondents indicated a range in the degree of undersupply; from 10% to 200%.

The most common response was 20%-30% (which 43% of respondents reported); and 40-50% (which 38% reported).

The chart below shows the average level of undersupply by size of employer:

- 1-4 sonographers employed: Average 37% (range 20-50%)
- 5-19 sonographers employed: Average 35% (range 10-50%)
- 20-49 sonographers employed: Average 31%\* (range 20-50%) \*excludes outlier at 200%
- 50+ sonographers employed Average 15% (range 5-20%).

**Average level of undersupply  
by number of sonographers employed**



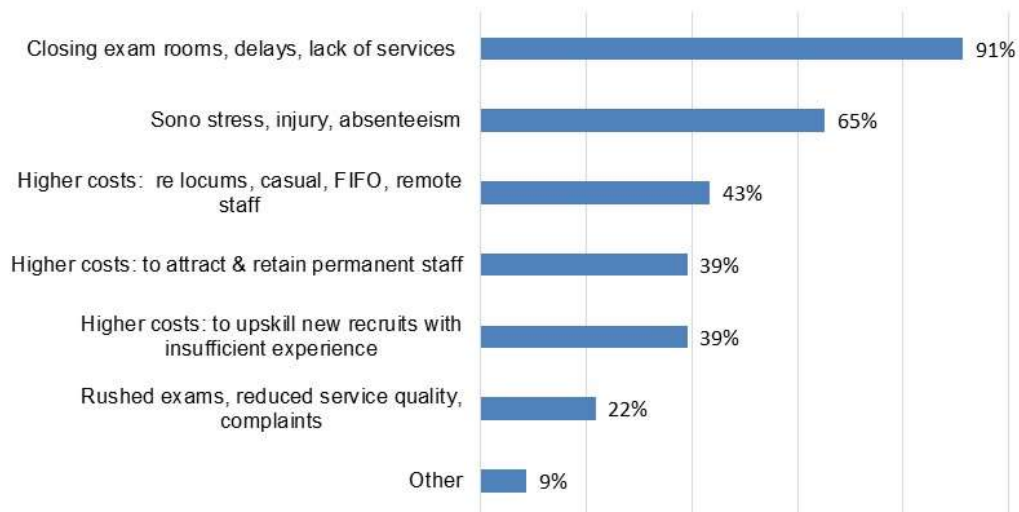
Additional comments include:

- We constantly require sonographers.
- Despite being fully staffed we cannot keep up with referral demand and have long wait lists. We need additional rooms and sonographers.

**3. If you believe there is a current shortage, what are the main impacts on your organisation?  
Select any that apply? (\* includes multiple responses)**

Employers indicated a range of impacts resulting from the sonographer shortage, including having to close exam rooms (91%); sonographer stress, injury, and absenteeism (65%); and higher costs for employers (39-43%).

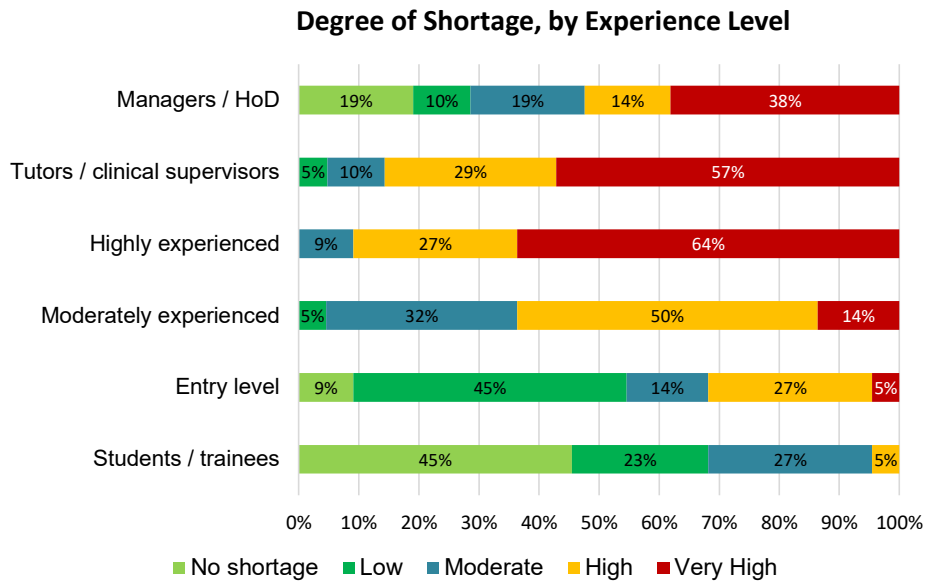
**Impact of Sonographer Shortage**



**4. How significant do you rate the sonographer shortage by experience level?**

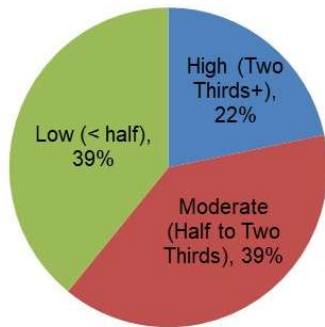
When asked about the degree of shortage by experience level, respondents reported the greatest shortages (i.e. very high and high) among most the experienced and senior sonographers. This includes sonographers who are moderately and highly experienced, tutors and clinical supervisors, and managers or heads of department. For example, 91% of respondents indicated a high or very high shortage of “highly experienced” sonographers, and 86% for “tutors and clinical supervisors”.

In comparison, 68% of respondents reported no or low shortage of sonography students and trainees.



**5. During the period January to December 2023, what proportion of job vacancies for sonographers were filled in your organisation?**

Over 2023, 39% of respondents indicated they had only filled less than one half of positions advertised; a further 39% had filled between one half and two thirds; with only 22% indicating more than two thirds of job vacancies had been filled.



**6. Thinking back to the last accredited sonographer position your organisation advertised for:**

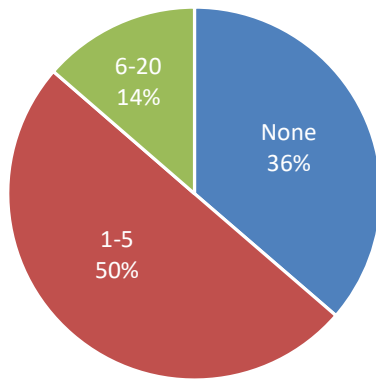
**(a) Approximately how many applications did you receive, and**

**(b) How long did it take to fill the position?**

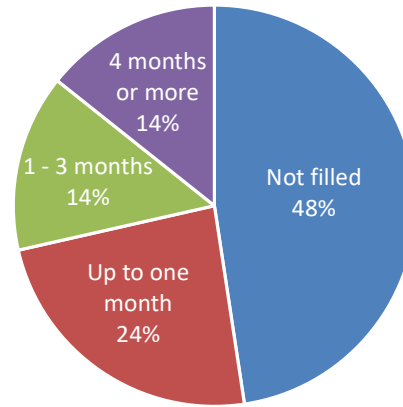
Of the 22 responses to this question, 36% indicated they had received no applications at all; 32% had received between 1 and 3 applications; with the remainder receiving between 4 and 10.

A total of 48% indicated the advertised position was not filled; with a further 14% indicating it took 4 months or more to fill. In comparison, 24% stated it was filled within a month; and 14% within 1 - 3 months.

Applications Received - Last AMS Vacancy



Time to Fill Position - Last AMS Vacancy



**7. Thinking back to the last student placement position your organisation advertised for:**

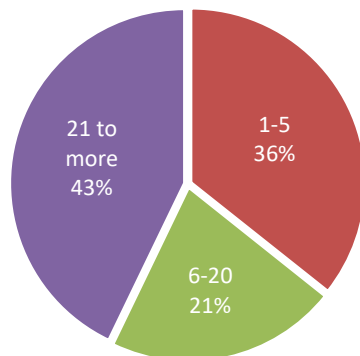
**(a) Approximately how many applications did you receive, and**

**(b) How long did it take to fill the position?**

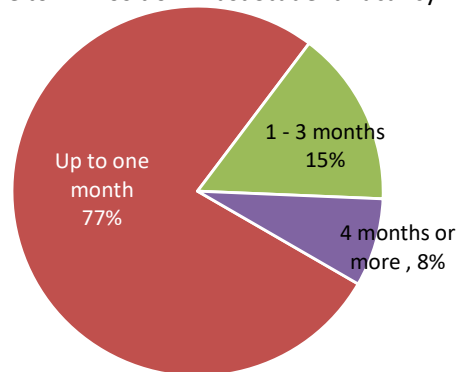
Of the 14 responses to this question, 36% indicated they had received between 1-5 applications, 21% had received 6-20, and 43% had received more than 20. Of those that had received more than 20, examples include 35, 50, 80 and 150.

Many vacancies for student or trainee positions (77%) were filled within a month. A further 15% took up to 3 months, and a small proportion (8%) took 4 or more months.

Applications Received - Last Student Vacancy



Time to Fill Position - Last Student Vacancy



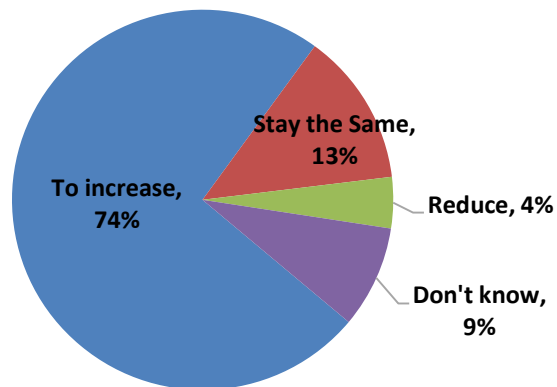
## 8. Have you used any employer sponsored visas programs in past 12 months?

Most respondents (77%) indicated they have not used employer sponsored visa programs in the last 12 months. Almost one quarter (23%) had, though one noted it had not worked out in the long term and would not do so again.

Anecdotal evidence indicates mixed experiences, with some finding it unreliable and expensive, poor retention rates, or difficulties with the process of having overseas qualifications recognised for accreditation purposes<sup>v</sup>.

## 9. How do you expect demand for sonographers to change over the next five years?

Almost three quarters (74%) of respondents expect demand for sonographers to increase over the next five year, with a further 13% expect it to stay the same. One respondent (4%) expected it to reduce, and the remainder were unsure.



### Summary of additional comments about demand for sonographers over next 5 years include:

- The situation has not changed in my 30+ years in medical imaging.
- The demand for cardiac sonographers has been high for more than 2 decades.
- Better support is needed for students and trainees – to help overcome the shortage - including additional time to undertake exams, plus extra rooms, and ultrasound equipment.
- COVID impacted the number of students coming through training, with a lag effect.
- It is difficult to retain current employees due to burnout and sonographers considering alternative careers; influenced by injuries, stress, and the aging sonographer population.
- Demand may reduce if there is greater availability of other imaging modalities and / or medical practitioners undertaking exams including point of care ultrasound.

## 10. Do you have any additional comments about sonographer workforce shortage?

Respondents were invited to add general comments about the sonographer workforce shortage, as summarised below:

- Shortage in obstetrics may be linked to increasing blame for missed pathology being directed to sonographer.
- Shortage of funded training positions is adding to the chronic shortage.

- More training positions in public hospitals would reduce staff turnover and costs incurred by those in private sector.
- Patients and businesses are being affected by high remuneration rates in some areas of the country.
- Higher salaries in the private sector, adding to the shortages faced in the public sector
- Pay discrepancies and lack of flexibility in public sector awards contributing to shortage as difficult to retain sonographers.
- Current lack of trainee positions is a major issue.
- Support needed for employers to take on trainees, and trainees need assistance with cost of living when on placement.
- Effective prevention of injuries is important, as currently injuries contribute to the shortage.

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<sup>i</sup> 2022 ASA Employment and Salary Survey

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Society of Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy (ASMIRT) Annual Reports

<sup>iii</sup> Medicare Statistics: Available from [http://medicarestatistics.humanservices.gov.au/statistics/mbs\\_group.jsp](http://medicarestatistics.humanservices.gov.au/statistics/mbs_group.jsp)

<sup>iv</sup> Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry

<sup>v</sup> 2023 ASA Survey of major employers of sonographers