



# 2013

## EMPLOYMENT AWARD AND PAY RATE SURVEY SUMMARY DATA REPORT

SUMMARY DATA REPORT IN RESPONSE TO NSW HEALTH AWARD DETERMINATION OF APRIL 2013



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NSW Health released an award determination<sup>1</sup> in April 2013 that effectively splits recognition of sonographers based on their undergraduate qualification, classifying sonographers with a medical radiations (MRS) undergraduate degree separately to those sonographers with a non-medical radiations (Non-MRS) degree (e.g. health science or nursing). The Australian Sonographers Association (ASA) believes the award determination, which allocates Non-MRS sonographers to a classification with a significantly lower pay scale, to be highly problematic. The potential negative consequences of the award determination to the NSW Health public system, the sonography profession and quality patient care have been outlined in the Joint Submission by ASA and ASUM<sup>2</sup>, submitted to NSW Health in June 2013.

The ASA recognised the need for strong workforce data in addressing this issue, and as such distributed the Employment Award and Pay Rate Survey to Australian sonographers in May 2013, to collate detailed data on the current demographics and pay conditions of the profession. The survey results highlight the following sonography workforce trends:

- There are an increasing number of sonographers entering the workforce from a Non-MRS background, therefore to significantly lower the pay scale offered to Non-MRS sonographers will deter this bulk of sonographers from the public sector, effectively limiting the pool of sonographers NSW Health can employ from and negatively impacting workforce flexibility, serving only to further exacerbate already existing difficulties in recruiting and retaining sonographers.
- Although cardiac sonographers are currently classified as Cardiac Technologists Grade 2 under the NSW Health Employees' (State) Award, a significant number are paid under different awards due to the drastically uncompetitive nature of the pay scale for cardiac technologists (now including all Non-MRS sonographers no matter their speciality) in comparison to the rates offered in the private sector, highlighting the existing difficulties with the Cardiac Technologists Grade 2 pay scale.

The ASA has strongly advocated on behalf of sonographers, together with the Australian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine (ASUM), for NSW Health to work collaboratively with us to develop a reasonable and effective solution to the present complex award structure for sonographers. The ASA and ASUM met with NSW Health representatives on the issue in June 2013, in which NSW Health requested more time to properly analyse the available workforce data, including these results from the ASA Employment Award and Pay Rate Survey.

## The respondents

There were 1,272 total respondents to the survey, equal to approximately 33.81% of ASA's sonographer membership base and approximately 24.43% of total registered ASAR accredited sonographers. There were 135 cardiac sonographer respondents to the survey, equal to approximately 13.24% of ASAR accredited cardiac sonographers.\*

There were 665 NSW based respondents to the survey, equal to approximately 55.79% of ASA's NSW based sonographer membership and approximately 38.87% of registered ASAR accredited NSW based sonographers. There were 98 NSW based cardiac sonographer respondents to the survey, equal to approximately 40.33% of ASAR accredited cardiac sonographers based in NSW.

**Table 1. Comparison of respondent demographics to ASA and ASAR membership data**

% of ...	Respondents	ASA	ASAR
Student sonographers	9.12%	14.43%	13.42%
Qualified sonographers	90.88%	85.57%	86.58%
Public sector	34.4%	28.3%	N/A
Private sector	65.6%	71.7%	N/A
Cardiac sonographers**	11.88%	8.42%	19.63%
Non-cardiac sonographers**	88.12%	91.58%	80.37%

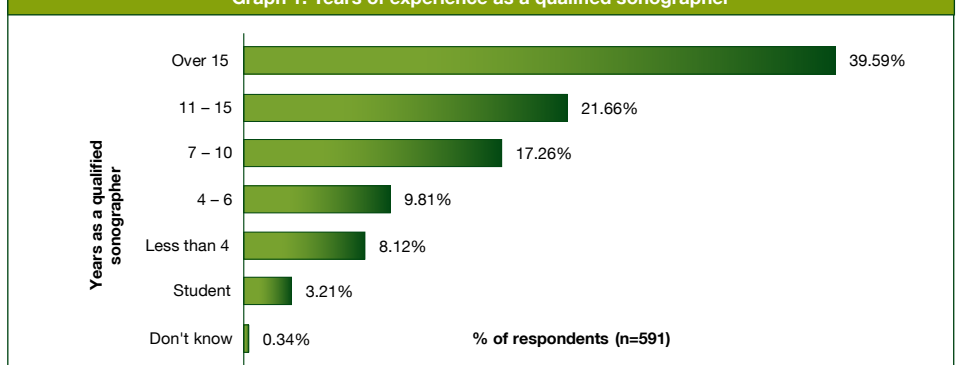
**Table 2. Comparison of NSW based respondent demographics to ASA and ASAR membership data**

% of ...	Respondents	ASA	ASAR
Student sonographers	7.1%	14.01%	12.06%
Qualified sonographers	92.9%	85.99%	87.94%
Public sector	28.27%	24.98%	N/A
Private sector	71.73%	75.02%	N/A
Cardiac sonographers**	15.93%	8.1%	16.1%
Non-cardiac sonographers**	84.07%	91.9%	83.9%

\*All ASA and Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry (ASAR) data accessed 1 July 2013.

\*\*Calculated as a percentage of qualified sonographers.

**Graph 1. Years of experience as a qualified sonographer**



**Undergraduate degrees and non-ultrasound imaging services**

To become an accredited sonographer requires the completion of an ASAR accredited post-graduate course, none of which require a MRS undergraduate degree as a prerequisite, although traditionally the majority of sonographers have come from a MRS background. The following data shows an increasing number of sonography students are from a Non-MRS background compared to current sonographers, suggesting a decrease in the number of sonographers entering the workforce that have MRS undergraduate degrees. The survey results also showed that 49.71% of NSW Health sonographers do not perform any non-ultrasound imaging services (e.g. radiography) at their workplace, and only 25% of NSW sonographers are registered with the Medical Radiation Practice Board (MRPB).

**The Cardiac Technologist Grade 2 Pay Scale**

Under the NSW Health Employees' (State) Award cardiac sonographers are classified as cardiac technologists, and now with the introduction of the new award determination so are Non-MRS sonographers, no matter their speciality or post-graduate qualifications. The survey results show that currently only 65.91% of cardiac sonographers are paid as cardiac technologists under the state award, suggesting ultrasound departments have difficulties recruiting cardiac sonographers under the cardiac technologist classification. The NSW Health pay scale for cardiac sonographers is drastically uncompetitive compared to the rates cardiac sonographers receive in the private sector, which explains why NSW Health may be struggling to recruit cardiac sonographers.

Graph 2. Undergraduate degrees held by sonographers

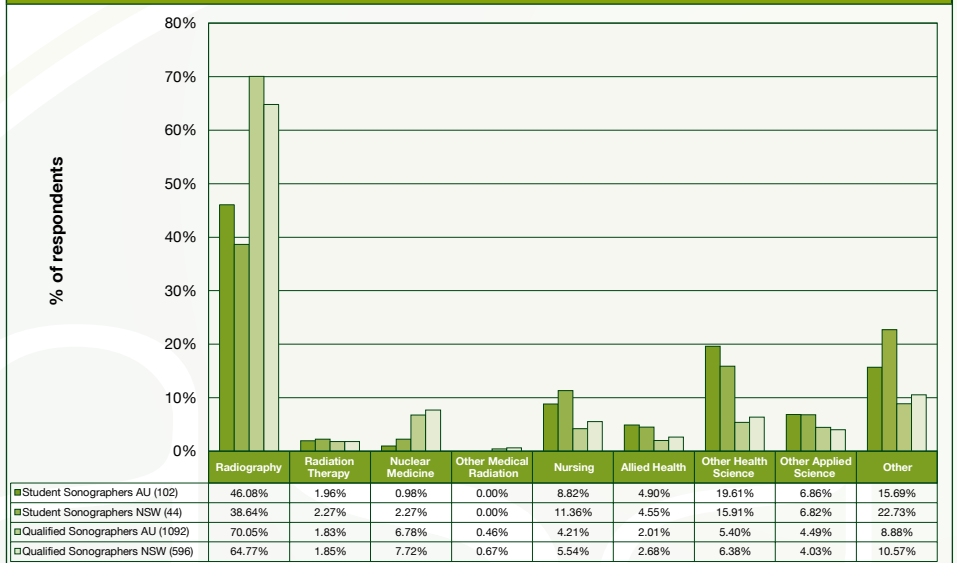


Table 3. % of Sonographers registered with the MRPB

Student Sonographers AU (102)	33.33%
Student Sonographers NSW (44)	20.45%
Qualified Sonographers AU (1092)	30.86%
Qualified Sonographers NSW (596)	25%

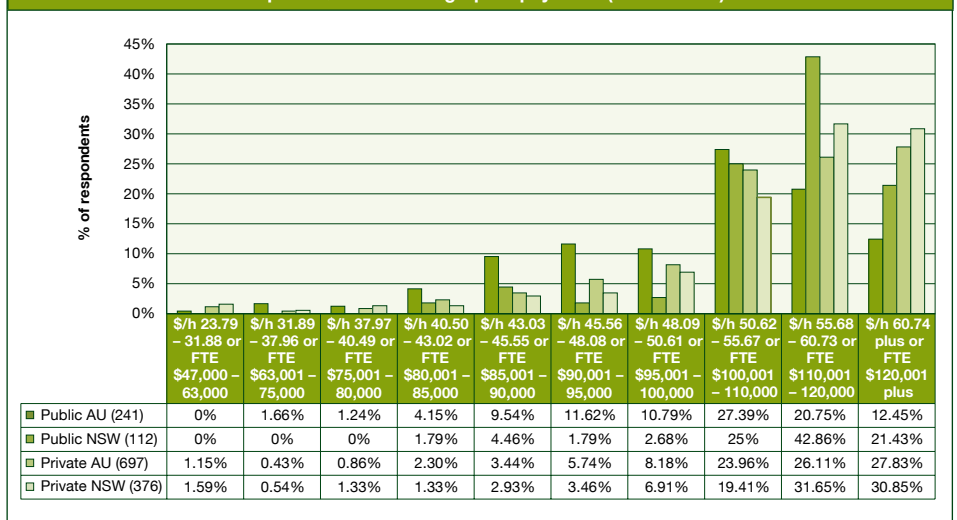
Table 4. Work time spent on non-ultrasound imaging services (e.g. radiography) by NSW Health sonographers

Average work time spent on non-ultrasound imaging services	% of NSW Health sonographers (n=171)
None	49.71%
Less than 5%	11.11%
6-25%	19.88%
26-49%	9.36%
More than 50%	7.6%
Other	2.34%

Table 5. Award NSW Health cardiac sonographers are paid under

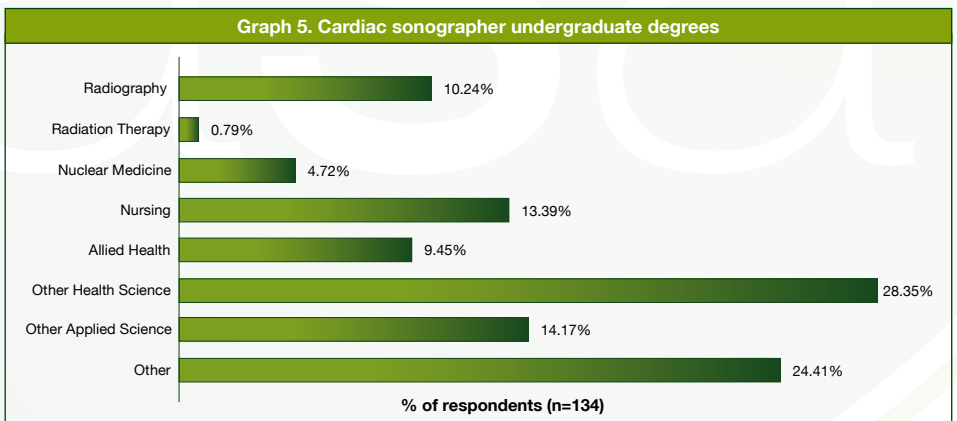
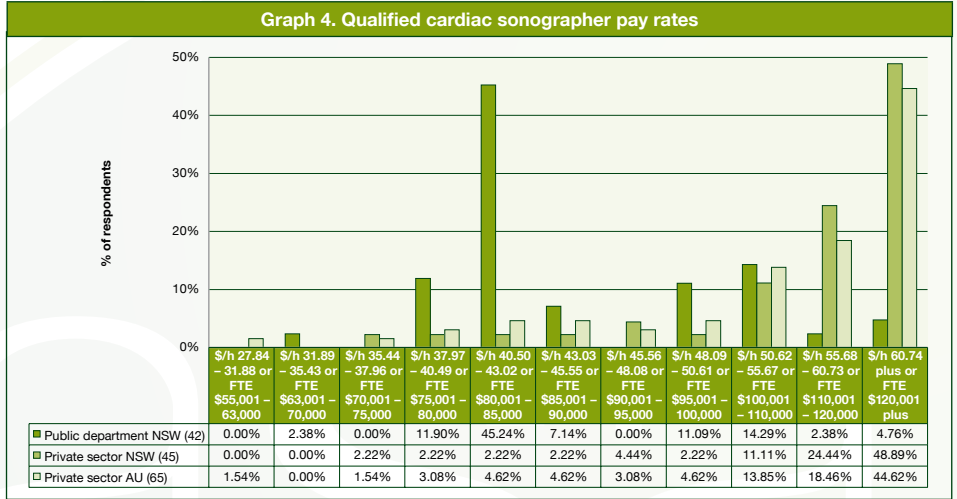
NSW award title	% of NSW Health cardiac sonographers (n=44)
Health Employees' Medical Radiation Scientists (State) Award	25%
Health Employees' (State) Award	65.91%
Public Health System Nurses' and Midwives' (State) Award 2011	4.55%
Don't know/other	4.54%

Graph 3. Qualified sonographer pay rates (non-cardiac)



**Conclusion**

The ASA recognises the deep impact the NSW Health award determination has not only for those sonographers directly affected by the reclassification, but for all sonographers concerned with the respect and reputation of the sonography profession. If you would like further information in regards to the NSW Health award reclassification or this summary data report, please contact [policy@a-s-a.com.au](mailto:policy@a-s-a.com.au).



**Background information**

1. NSW Health award determination, April 2013: <http://www.a-s-a.com.au/Publication/?p=33>
2. Joint Submission by ASA and ASUM, June 2013: <http://www.a-s-a.com.au/Publication/?p=39>