

"You are really helping people and it's actually a very positive place to work. I often end up having a laugh with my patients and the team!"

Lily loves that her degree offers her a career with real purpose. She has even secured a job before she has even graduated.

Lily Aston

Student therapeutic radiographer

Employer or university

Studying at Birmingham City University
female therapeutic radiographer

What made you decide that therapeutic radiography was for you?

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I looked at quite a few options for my degree and chose therapeutic radiography for lots of reasons. First of all it's a career that has a great work life balance - there's very little weekend work and the shift patterns mean you don't often work unsocial hours.

I knew I wanted to do something which incorporated science and had that caring aspect too so I definitely wanted a course and a career which involved people. Therapeutic

radiography is great because you are always working in a team and at university there's a great support network.

The practical nature of the course was also really attractive. Not only do you do lots of placements as part of the course, the learning side of things is also really practical so you can really see what you're learning in action!

How did you become a therapeutic radiographer?

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Originally I had planned to do a degree in psychology but I had a change of heart and I decided to take a gap year to really consider my options. I knew I wanted to do a degree that was more focussed and really prepared me for moving straight into a career when I finished and that's when I came across therapeutic radiography. I also knew that I wanted to do something with a practical medical application that would allow me to make a difference and really help people.

I looked at a few different options. Luckily during one of my searches I came across the therapeutic radiography course and it really peaked my interest.

I then visited a therapeutic radiography department at a hospital to see what it was all about and decided that it was the career for me. Like everyone when I started university I wasn't totally sure if it was for me but after starting the course I quickly realised that I had 100% made the right choice!

What I do

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At the moment I'm in the last year of my degree and my day really depends on whether I'm at university or on placement.

Your first year placement is really about finding your feet and getting used to the new environment, it's a great way of easing into the role and establishing an understanding of therapeutic radiography and the world of working in the NHS.

In second year it's all about developing your skills and becoming a valued member of the therapeutic radiography team. This is a really exciting time as you get stuck in with things like imaging and 'beaming on', the term we use for operating the linear accelerator. Then

in your final year you have already got the skills and you really start to feel like an established professional! You spend your final year placements consolidating and honing your skills and making sure you are really ready for when you take that step into your first job as soon as you leave university.

I've had the opportunity to do some amazing placements in the UK and internationally, ranging from working in therapeutic radiography teams at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham and Royal Stoke University Hospital, to going out to Canada to work at the Nova Scotia cancer centre. In June I'm set to go on my fourth placement, this time at the Eastern Caribbean cancer centre in Antigua. I'm really excited, it's not something you get to do every day and not many degrees offer you these kinds of opportunities.

The time you spend at university is really varied too which keeps things interesting. There is a balance between the practical and the theoretical aspects of the degree. The anatomy and physics lectures are super interesting and give you all the knowledge you need to be able to apply it to your practical work and placements. In addition to these lectures there are a range of workshops and virtual learning. We are lucky at my university that we have access to a [radiotherapy \[1\] planning system](#) which gives you the opportunity to apply all that knowledge on a practical basis.

The best bits

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The thing I like most is the relationship you build with your patients. In therapeutic radiography treatments range from 3 to 7 weeks and during that time you can develop a really strong bond with your patients, which is important to me. It's amazing to see the change in attitude of the patient when they come in and when they leave. Having a positive and lasting impact on people is so rewarding - you really do miss them when they go!

The combination of the science and care aspects of the job is also something that I love. You have to develop an in-depth understanding of the subject and you become an expert. You can then put this into action to help people. It's also a field that is constantly changing and developing. There's always a new trial, technique or treatment to keep you on your toes and there's loads of different opportunities.

Next steps and top tips for others

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I've already secured my job at Royal Stoke University Hospital for when I graduate so that's where I will kick start my career! I'm planning on working hard to get past my band 5 competencies and figuring out which area of therapeutic radiography that I want specialise in. There's so many different options and opportunities so I'm excited to get stuck in and choose which path to go down.

There's also some interesting development opportunities and doing a masters with a view to becoming an advanced practitioner is something that really interests me.

I think some people might think it could be quite depressing as you are working with patients who are going through such a difficult and worrying time, but actually the opposite is true – you are really helping people and it's actually a very positive place to work. I often end up having a laugh with my patients and the team!

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[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Radiotherapy>