

Meet Sarah



Imaging Physicist

Hi, my name is Sarah and I work in the Medical Physics and Bioengineering Department at the Royal United Hospitals Bath (RUH). Find out more about me and what I do below.

What do you do?

I am a registered Clinical Scientist and I work as an Imaging Physicist mainly in Nuclear Medicine. I am the Lead Physicist for PET in the Trust and Medical Physicist Expert in this area. I provide scientific support to the hospital and I look after equipment used to take images of patients. For example, I carry out tests on PET scanners. I occasionally test X-Ray, CT and MRI equipment too. Although I have little direct contact with patients, I seek to give patients the best possible experience; for example, by reducing the number of visits they need to make to have their images taken. I also support colleagues to get the best quality images possible through image optimisation. In addition, I develop new imaging procedures. For example, I recently installed a new Gamma camera that is the first of its kind in the country. I deliver radiation safety training to staff to ensure that X-rays are used safely. I also lecture at the University of Bath and supervise students' research projects.

Describe a typical day

I do not really have a typical day. Some days, my diary is booked with lots of appointments. Other days, I could be testing scanners or writing risk assessments and reviewing documents. Quite often, I deal with enquiries as they come in.

What hours do you work?

The department works Monday to Friday, generally 9am – 5pm but

there is some flexibility around this to fit with service need. I work part time (30 hours a week) and work three longer days and one shorter day to fit with childcare.

What inspired you to become an Imaging Physicist?

I loved physics at school as there was always a right or wrong answer to a question. I decided to study physics at the University of Bath. It was during this time that I undertook a module in medical physics which looks at the application of physics to healthcare. I felt that it demonstrated how physics could be combined with the real world to make a direct and immediate impact and I found this really exciting.

What qualities should somebody have to become an Imaging Physicist?

You should have a good scientific mind and be good with people. This is a collaborative job working with lots of other staff members (clinical technologists, radiographers, radiologists.) You should be able to clearly explain physics to others, especially when delivering training to a wide range of people (nurses, undergraduates, apprentices.)

What training did you undertake to become an Imaging Physicist?

After graduating with a physics degree, I took up a medical physicist post at the RUH. In this role, I spent four years training, during which time I studied at the University of Exeter to gain a Masters in Science. Nowadays, people can get into a career in imaging physics by studying a pure or applied science degree (relevant to the specialism) and then completing the NHS Scientist Training Programme. This is a three-year programme where people complete rotational placements to gain the competencies to become registered with the Health and Care Professions Council and gain an MSc in clinical science (medical physics) at the same time. I undertook further study about 10 years ago when I completed a PhD. I split my time between studying at the University College London Hospital and working at the RUH. Once I gained my doctorate, I became Lead Physicist for PET at the RUH and Medical Physicist Expert in this area.



When you were at school, what would you have done better or differently?

I consider myself very lucky as I received good careers advice when I was at school. I had originally decided to study biology, physics and chemistry at A-Level and ignored the advice of my teachers to swap to an A-Level in maths. Six weeks into my studies, I changed my mind, dropped out of biology and studied maths instead. I had to catch-up but I felt this was the right decision because these subject choices set me up well for the future.

What advice or tips would you give somebody interested in becoming an Imaging Physicist?

Getting into medical physics can be competitive so try and get work experience (which I understand can be difficult at the moment.) If you feel that you have missed opportunities to study medical physics at university, you should not be put off by this as there are other options. For example, some hospitals might offer the healthcare science practitioner apprenticeship or you could consider a career as a clinical technologist.