



Healthcare
Improvement
Scotland

SHTG
Advice on health
technologies

Plain Language Summary

Factors needed for a successful regional radiology network in the north of Scotland SHTG Assessment | August 2022

What is the radiology network in the north of Scotland?

Radiology is a medical specialty that uses imaging to diagnose and treat diseases seen within the body. A radiology network is a partnership of boards, set up to deliver timely and expert radiology services across a region. The proposed network in the north of Scotland (north radiology alliance, or the NRA) is a collaboration between NHS Western Isles, NHS Highland, NHS Orkney, NHS Grampian, NHS Shetland and NHS Tayside.

Why is this important?

There are large waiting lists and variation in the numbers on the waiting lists in the boards in the north of Scotland. While there is a large (£41.7m) medical locum spend for medical and dental services across the area, there is a clinical radiology vacancy rate of 10.6%. Working in a network could help to reduce the vacancy rate and money spent employing locums. Working in partnership could direct resources to improve the sustainability and resilience of radiology services across the north by supporting local service delivery.

What we did

We looked at the published evidence around the factors that were important in setting up a successful radiology network. We surveyed representatives from five English radiology networks to find out what they thought were the key factors for success. We also gathered the views of five Scottish experts (four from the Scottish radiology community and one member of the Scottish Health Technology Council) about what factors they thought would be key in setting up a radiology network in the north of Scotland.

What we found

We found that the only published evidence on factors to support radiology networks was limited to guidance documents published on websites.

Radiology network leaders in England described many benefits of setting up a radiology network. Key benefits of the network approach highlighted were: being able to share medical images across hospital sites, buying equipment jointly, sharing information about the best way to do things and being able to use staff resources more efficiently.

Radiology network leaders reported that key factors for a successful network were: wide and early engagement, creation of a dedicated team which includes dedicated leadership and programme management support, and governance. All network leaders surveyed agreed that culture was an important consideration in the development of their radiology networks; a collaborative culture of transparency, trust, shared goals and understanding was proposed.

Scottish opinion proposed many of the same factors described by English network leaders as important for a successful network. Additionally, Scottish reviewers noted an existing culture of collaboration in Scotland which will pave the way for network working. Awareness of existing alliances, local identity and local systems and processes will be important. Consideration of inequities as a result of social and geographic factors should also be given.

What is our conclusion?

The document highlights many factors that should be considered when setting up a radiology network in the north of Scotland. Key considerations are: engagement, culture of collaboration, creation of a dedicated team to support the network, and good governance. Consideration should be given to any social and geographical inequities across the region and respect should be given for existing alliances and ways of working.

What next?

This work will be shared with the Scottish clinical imaging network (SCIN), Scottish radiology transformation programme (SRTP), Scottish Government and as part of discussions within the NRA governance groups.

This plain language summary has been produced based on SHTG Assessment, August 2022