With a national shortage of trained sonographers there is a need to train sonographers as quickly as possible. One option currently being introduced is direct graduate entry by those with no previous health service experience. For all trainees, a particular bottleneck in training is the need for one-to-one hands-on training to master scanning and achieve the necessary competencies to scan. This can place a high demand on a department that may have limited staff and a heavy workload. The number of trainees they can cope with is limited. Consequently, the time taken for a trainee to begin to gain some confidence in scanning is often prolonged because they have to fit learning to scan into busy clinic schedules.

This paper draws inspiration from the airline industry to propose a novel model for the initial training of sonographers. Would-be pilots have to master a set of practical and theoretical skills that may be compared with the physical and mental complexity of sonography. The basic training of an airline pilot to gain their commercial pilot’s licence is 12 weeks. The full theory and experience will take longer, but at that stage they can fly a commercial plane. This paper proposes an intensive 12 week training programme for sonographers that will take someone from zero experience to a point where they can operate a scanner and be able to scan an abdomen, recognising and obtaining clinical views of normal anatomy and simple pathology. During this time they would gain 250 hours of hands-on scanning time using simulators and real patients. It requires a dedicated trainer to train students on a 2:1 basis. At the end of this period the trainees would immediately begin to be useful to a department and could move onto a more advanced phase of recognising pathology straight away.