

**University of Birmingham Master of Pharmacy  
(MPharm) degree interim event report, March  
2021**



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## Event summary and conclusions

<b>Provider</b>	University of Birmingham
<b>Course</b>	Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) degree
<b>Event type</b>	Interim
<b>Event date</b>	4 March 2021
<b>Current accreditation period</b>	2020/21 - 2022/23
<b>Relevant standards</b>	<a href="#">Future pharmacists Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacists, May 2011</a>
<b>Outcome</b>	Continued accreditation confirmed  The accreditation team agreed to recommend to the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) that the MPharm degree provided by the University of Birmingham should continue to be approved until 2022/23, at which point the provision will be accredited against the <i>Standards for the Initial Education and Training of Pharmacists (2021)</i> .
<b>Conditions</b>	There were no conditions.
<b>Standing conditions</b>	The standing conditions of accreditation can be found <a href="#">here</a> .
<b>Recommendations</b>	There were no recommendations
<b>Registrar decision</b>	Following the event, the Registrar of the GPhC accepted the accreditation team's recommendation and approval the continued accreditation of the programme until 2022/23.
<b>Key contact (provider)</b>	Dr Anthony R. Cox, Head of Education (Pharmacy), University of Birmingham
<b>Accreditation team</b>	Leonie Milliner (Team Leader), Director of Education, General Optical Council Dr Geoffrey Hall (pharmacy academic, formerly Associate Head, Leicester School of Pharmacy, De Montfort University) Professor Emerita Angela Alexander MBE (pharmacy academic and Professor Emerita of Pharmacy Education, University of Reading) Gail Curphey (pharmacist and pharmacy consultant) Farwah Bukhari (recently registered pharmacist and General Practice/Domiciliary Care Pharmacist, Lewisham & Greenwich NHS Trust) Liz Harlaar (lay member and independent business consultant)

<b>GPhC representative</b>	Damian Day, Head of Education, GPhC
<b>Rapporteur</b>	Damian Day (rapporteur) Head of Education, GPhC
<b>Observers</b>	Ahmed Aboo (observer – accreditation panel member in training) Associate Professor in Pharmacy Practice, De Montfort University  Laura Doyle (observer – accreditation panel member in training)

## Introduction

### Role of the GPhC

The General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) is the statutory regulator for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians and registered pharmacies and is the accrediting body for pharmacy education in Great Britain (GB). The GPhC is responsible for setting standards and approving education and training courses which form part of the pathway towards registration for pharmacists. The GB qualification required as part of the pathway to registration as a pharmacist is a GPhC-accredited Master of Pharmacy degree course (MPharm).

This interim event was carried out in accordance with the GPhC's 2011 *MPharm Accreditation Methodology* and the course was reviewed against the GPhC's 2011 education standards *Future Pharmacists: Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacists*.

The GPhC's right to check the standards of pharmacy qualifications leading to annotation and registration as a pharmacist is the *Pharmacy Order 2010* (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/231/contents/made>). It requires the GPhC to 'approve' courses by appointing 'visitors' (accreditors) to report to the GPhC's Council on the 'nature, content and quality' of education as well as 'any other matters' the Council may require.

### Background

The University of Birmingham was established by Royal Charter in 1900 and was the UK's first civic university. The strategic framework for the university identifies five goals:

- Enhance our research power;
- Provide our students with a distinctive, high quality experience;
- Sustain our financial strength and use it purposefully;
- Enhance our performance and status as an 'engaged university'; and
- Be the destination of choice amongst our peers.

The university is organised into five colleges and pharmacy is located in the College of Medical and Dental Sciences. More specifically, the School of Pharmacy sits within the Institute of

Clinical Sciences, alongside partner schools of Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing, and Biomedical Science.

Birmingham's MPharm degree is relatively new and was fully accredited for the first time in the 2016-2017 academic year. The accreditation period was the maximum permissible, six years, and there were no conditions.

Birmingham was due for a full MPharm reaccreditation in the 2020-2021 academic year, but this was converted into an interim visit, the reason being that the GPhC is introducing new standards for the initial education and training of pharmacists in October 2021, so a decision was taken to extend Birmingham's MPharm current accreditation to avoid reaccrediting against 2011 standards in 2020-2021 then again a few years later against the 2021 standards.

As is the case across higher education, Birmingham has modified the delivery of its courses in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 due to the global SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and to comply with government requirements. Naturally, the accreditation team took this into account during the interim visit.

## Documentation

Prior to the event, the provider submitted documentation to the GPhC in line with the agreed timescales.

The documentation was reviewed by the accreditation team and it was deemed to be appropriate as a basis for discussion.

## Pre-event

In advance of the main event, a pre-event meeting took place via videoconference on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021. The purpose of the pre-event meeting was to prepare for the event, allow the GPhC and the university to ask questions and seek clarification, and to finalise arrangements for the event. Attendees were university representatives, the accreditation panel chair and the GPhC representative.

## The event

Due to the ongoing pandemic and restrictions on visiting university campuses, the GPhC modified the structure of the event so it could be held remotely. It was held via videoconference on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021 and comprised meetings between the GPhC accreditation team, University of Birmingham colleagues and MPharm students.

The accreditation team met the day before to be briefed on the event and to agree questions.

## Declarations of interest

Professor Emerita Angela Alexander MBE declared that she was a graduate of the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford, which is part of the University of Birmingham, where she took an MSc in Shakespeare and Theatre.

## Schedule

### Day 1 – 4 March 2021

Meeting number	Meeting	Time
1.	Progress meeting	9.30-11.30
2.	Admission, progression, monitoring and support meeting	11.45-12.45
3.	Significant pedagogical developments presentation	13.45-14.30
4.	Student meeting	14.45-15.45
5.	Deliver outcome to course provider	16.45-17.00

Meetings were interspersed with breaks and private meetings of the accreditation panel

## Attendees

### University of Birmingham

Professor John Marriott, Head of School, Professor of Clinical Pharmacy (meetings 1, 3 & 4)

Dr Anthony Cox, Head of Education, Reader in Clinical Pharmacy and Drug Safety (all meetings)

Sarah Turner, Head of Quality and Development, College of Medical and Dental Sciences (meetings 1 & 4)

Dr Christine Hirsch, Senior tutor, Senior Lecturer in Clinical Pharmacy (meetings 1 & 2)

Dr Sarah Pontefract, Therapeutics Editorial Lead Script eLearning programme, Deputy Admissions Officer, Lecturer in Clinical Pharmacy (meetings 2 & 3)

Dr Isolda Romero-Canelón, Senior Tutor, Lecturer in Medicinal Chemistry (meeting 2)

Dr Marie Christine Jones, Staff-Student Liason, Senior Lecturer in Pharmaceutics (meetings 2 & 3)

Dr Zahraa Jalal, Quality Lead Pharmacy, Lecturer in Clinical Pharmacy and Therapeutics (meeting 1)

Dr Ejaz Cheema, 5 Year MPharm Programme Lead, Lecturer in Pharmacy Practice (meetings 1 & 2)

Inderpal Dehele, MPharm Programme Placement Lead, Lecturer in Pharmacy Practice (meeting 1)

Dr Vivek Dhir, MPharm Admissions Officer Senior, Lecturer in Molecular Endocrinology (meeting 2)

Parbir Jagpal, Lead for Equality and Diversity (meeting 2)

## Key findings

### Standard 1: Patient and public safety

Standard continues to be met? Yes  No

The team noted Birmingham's approach to patient safety, monitoring student performance, reporting concerns, student support, monitoring student risk, professional standards and student behaviour & mandatory checks in the admissions process.

The accreditation team noted that in 2020-2021, a SARS-CoV-2 health check was introduced in advance of patient-facing activity to manage risk.

### Standard 2: Monitoring, review and evaluation of initial education and training

Standard continues to be met? Yes  No

The accreditation team noted that the monitoring, review and evaluation of the MPharm degree was embedded in Birmingham's multi-layered approach to academic quality assurance. Quality assurance decisions about the degree either reside at the school level or are escalated elsewhere in the university, depending on the nature of the issue.

There is a (maturing) School Education Plan which informs the development of the degree. Among other things, the Plan considers student survey results, student performance data, external examiner comments and staff-student committee outputs.

There is a School of Pharmacy Quality Committee, which considers more operational matters. A recent focus has been the delivery of placements, which have been affected by Covid-19 restrictions since early 2020.

As an additional quality assurance check, and in line with university requirements, there are four external examiners, with expertise in professional/clinical pharmacy, pharmaceuticals, medicinal chemistry and therapeutics.

### Standard 3: Equality, diversity and fairness

Standard continues to be met? Yes  No

The university is committed to equal treatment for its staff and students, as detailed in the university's Equality Scheme. The College of Medical and Dental Sciences has been awarded Athena Swan Silver Award status and the university holds a Race Equality Charter Bronze award. The School of Pharmacy's Director of Postgraduate studies is the School's Lead for Equality and Diversity and Chair of the College's Race Equality Charter Working Group.

The university's new equality change programme for staff has working groups that will be reviewing an inclusive environment, academic services and campus services, individual development, family friendliness, recruitment, selection, induction, retention and career structures.

Equality and diversity training is mandatory for staff.

As part of the MPharm, students consider health inequality, ethnicity, deprivation, regional disparities in health, outcomes and access to treatments from a variety of perspectives and in a variety of contexts.

The university monitors the ethnicity, sex, religion, caring responsibilities and disability of its students as well non-continuation rates, degree classifications, award gaps and employability, with particular reference to those characteristics, as well as more generally.

The accreditation team noted that there was not significant variation in student achievement by protected characteristics. Staff did, however, speculate that converting examinations into other modes due to SARS-CoV-2 may have increased progression rates.

#### Standard 4: Selection of students

Standard continues to be met? Yes  No

The admissions and selection process has not changed significantly since the GPhC's last visit.

The main university-wide widening access programme is Access to Birmingham, A2B, which is used by the school.

Staff noted the altered approach to A-level grading in England in 2020 and 2021.

#### Standard 5: Curriculum delivery and student experience

Standard continues to be met? Yes  No

As has been stated above, the university had to adapt its courses as a result of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The accreditation team discussed this with university colleagues and their summary of the changes, noted by the accreditation team, is:

'All planned teaching and assessments were moved online from the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. The impact of this change was relatively minimal on students for delivery of teaching, since the majority of teaching had been completed, and we managed to complete all face-to-face coursework assessments online as planned.

Following University guidelines for SARS-CoV-2 we enacted various contingencies for summer examinations. We cancelled summer examinations in years 1, 2, and 3 as per University policy. Student marks progression marks for those years were calculated from completed coursework and examinations taken in January. Summer synoptic bridging assignments were provided to students to prepare them for their next year of teaching and to review any outstanding learning outcomes.

For year 4, we wished them to complete all of their modules, and graduate with full credit. We moved OSCEs to online Case Based Discussions on Zoom, ran open book applied clinical examinations, and a pharmaceutical calculation examination online.

For 2020-21 all modules on the MPharm were made minimum 50% in-course assessment in line with University resilience plans. New module teams were developed, along with new online module structure with support for academics. We will be holding online examinations in the summer, and have our OSCEs under constant review, with a heavy bias towards carrying these out. Students were given mandatory additional weekly group tutorials for additional support throughout the academic year.

Placements were stopped in early March 2020. In the 2020-21 academic year students were required to undertake a SARS-CoV-2 Risk Assessment and were allocated placements aligned with their level of risk. We successfully carried out placements throughout semester 1, but further placements will not be taking place until after spring, and those will be targeted on student groups based on learning needs.'

The course team told the accreditation team that online assessments had worked well. To accommodate overseas students not resident in GB, assessments had been planned around relevant time zones to mitigate the impact on students having to sit at relatively antisocial times.

Students told the accreditation team that studying online for long periods was tiring and staff told the team that while student engagement was good currently it was being monitored.

The accreditation team noted other changes in delivery outlined in the university's submission.

Looking to the future, the identified drivers for change are:

- The new educational and training standards from the GPhC, and evolving foundation year training for trainee pharmacists;
- Changes in programme architecture at the university;
- Changes in the curricula of other professional programmes on campus in relation to prescribing;
- Shifts in pedagogic paradigms accelerated by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic; and
- Changes in expectations of both students and our public stakeholders (including patients).

These drivers will inform the development of a new MPharm over the next few years.

The accreditation team wished to note the impressive lengths to which the pharmacy team has gone to run the MPharm in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 in very difficult circumstances and, further, to note their clear commitment to students on the course and to the profession.

## Standard 6: Support and development for students

Standard continues to be met? Yes  No

Students are supported by a variety of university and external staff, including staff within the school and elsewhere in the university. Every student has a personal academic tutor (PAT) and senior tutors within the school are also available to students.

Support has been put in place for shielding students.

One SARS-CoV-2 -related innovation is the introduction of a series of remote mandatory weekly meetings (MWMs) and monthly vertical personal academic tutoring (v-PATs). MWMs are

horizontal, in that they are restricted to students in particular year groups, but the vertical v-PATs cut across years. Students told the accreditation team that meeting students from other years and learning from their experiences was particularly valuable.

Students told the accreditation team that studying during a pandemic was challenging and that isolation was difficult to manage, particularly for overseas living in GB, but they did appreciate the lengths to which pharmacy staff had gone to deliver the MPharm in highly unusual circumstances and also the level support they had received.

### Standard 7: Support and development for academic staff

Standard continues to be met? Yes  No

Staff benefit from a range of support and development opportunities in the school, college and university, that the accreditation team noted in the university's submission.

Working from home, working online, home schooling and managing their work-life balance has been a challenge for staff and the school has been sensitive to staff needs. At the university level a Wellbeing Employee Hub is now in place and its services include general support, learning and development activities, focus groups on particular topics, mental and physical health activities and fitness and nutrition advice, along with signposting to other community information and events.

As an additional resource, an Employee Assistance Programme for staff in difficulty has been established.

### Standard 8: Management of initial education and training

Standard continues to be met? Yes  No

There have been no substantive changes to the management of the MPharm since the GPhC's last visit. The MPharm is embedded in school, institute, college and university management and quality assurance structures and lines of reporting.

### Standard 9: Resources and capacity

Standard continues to be met? Yes  No

The resources of the school are subject to scrutiny through an established business planning process. The Head of School has overall responsibility for budgets, which are agreed in consultation with the Pharmacy Executive Management Group.

The pay and non-pay budgets agreed at the last accreditation visit have not been altered.

Additional funding has been released by the university for SARS-CoV-2-related expenditure.

In light of the pandemic, the university has placed expenditure under closer scrutiny, to monitor the possible impact of the pandemic on student recruitment, research income and other areas

with possible financial implications. Fortunately for pharmacy, student recruitment is buoyant and research income is rising.

Planning for 2021-2022 is underway but is, to a large extent, contingent on the progress of the pandemic and its impact on the university.

The accreditation team was told that the school had not been impacted financially to date but that this would be monitored carefully until the longer-term prognosis was clearer.

## Significant pedagogic developments

The accreditation was presented with two examples of pedagogy from the MPharm:

Provision of audio-visual feedback on 2nd year Pharmaceutics assignments  
(presented by Dr Marie-Christine Jones, Senior Lecturer in Pharmaceutics and Nanotherapeutics)

and

Integrating the Electronic Patient Record into Healthcare Education  
(presented by Dr Sarah Pontefract, Lecturer in Clinical Pharmacy and Therapeutics SCRIPT Programme Director)

