

Council meeting

By Zoom

Wednesday, 02 June 2021

10.00 – Workshop

11.30 – Public session

Public business

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| 1. Attendance and introductory remarks | Nigel Clarke |
| 2. Declarations of interest – public items | Nigel Clarke |
| 3. Registration Assessment: report and lessons learned from March 2021 sittings | 21.06.02.C.01 |
| <i>For noting</i> | Mark Voce |

Date of next meeting

Thursday 13 June 2021

Registration assessment: report and lessons learned from March 2021 sittings

Meeting paper for Council on 02 June 2021

Public business

Purpose

To provide Council with a report on lessons learned from the registration assessment which candidates sat on 17 and 18 March 2021.

Recommendations

The Council is asked to note the report at **Appendix 1** and the actions being taken prior to the next assessment in July 2021.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The registration assessment was held on 17 and 18 March 2021. A total of **2666** candidates sat the assessment and **2352** passed; an overall pass rate of **88.2%**.
- 1.2 The registration assessment had been postponed from June 2020 and moved online in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This was the first time the assessment had been held online. A more detailed breakdown of the pass rate and candidate performance will be provided to Council at the meeting on 10 June.

2. Report and lessons learned

- 2.1 While we achieved the overall strategic objective of holding an online assessment which maintained standards and enabled the majority of eligible candidates to sit, there are a number of lessons to be learned from this challenging exercise. We have held a number of sessions since the March assessment, involving all members of the team and have also held a detailed discussion with Pearson Vue.
- 2.2 Key issues highlighted include our communications to candidates throughout the process, management of risk and a number of practical operational issues, including candidate bookings for test centres through the Pearson Vue systems. The report at **Appendix 1** sets out the chronology of issues and decisions from the point when the decision was made to postpone the assessment in 2020 and sets out the key lessons learned from each stage of the process.
- 2.3 We are now taking forward these actions in advance of the summer sittings which will be held on 27, 28 and 29 July 2021 at Pearson Vue test centres.

3. Equality and diversity implications

- 3.1 The report highlights that all candidates were able to apply for adjustments (for example, on medical grounds) with 350 applications granted or partially granted. The report also sets out the reasons for the decisions taken in respect of overseas candidates and the measures that were subsequently taken to enable candidates to sit overseas either at a test centre or remotely.

4. Communications

- 4.1 The report highlights the communications that were issued to candidates throughout the process and the points where additional or swifter action should have been taken.

5. Resource implications

- 5.1 There are no additional resource implications arising from the report.

6. Risk implications

- 6.1 The report highlights an action to develop a more comprehensive risk register, taking account of Council's recent adoption of a risk appetite statement and ongoing organisational developments to improve risk management.

7. Monitoring and review

- 7.1 We will provide further updates to Council prior to the July sittings and will be asking our internal auditors to provide assurance that the necessary actions have been taken forward.

8. Recommendations

The Council is asked to note the report at **Appendix 1** and the actions being taken prior to the next assessment in July 2021.

Mark Voce, Director of Education and Standards
General Pharmaceutical Council

06/05/2021

Registration assessment: Review and lessons learned from sittings in March 2021

Background and context

1. The registration assessment forms the final part of initial education and training for pharmacists. It provides objective evidence that individuals have met the required standards for entry onto the register and to practise as a pharmacist.
2. The assessment consists of two parts: Part 1 lasts two hours and has 40 pharmacy calculation questions; and Part 2 lasts two and a half hours and has 120 selected response questions. Candidates have a scheduled one-hour break between papers. The assessment is based on the knowledge required to be a day one pharmacist. The questions are developed by pharmacists and reviewed by standard setters with the Board of Assessors providing the quality assurance and final sign-off.
3. The assessment normally takes place twice a year in June and September. Typically, around 3,000 candidates sit in June and around 1,000 in September. In June, the assessment takes place in six or seven large conference venues on the same day with all candidates sitting the same paper. In September, a smaller number of (usually) the same venues are used with all candidates sitting a different paper to the one used in June, albeit there may be some of the same or similar questions. Invigilators are present at each venue.
4. The dates for the assessment are usually confirmed around 12 months in advance and, in line with dates from previous years, pre-registration students were planning to sit the assessment on the last Thursday in June 2020 or September 2020.

March – May 2020: Postponing the assessment and development of provisional registration

5. On 23 March, the respective governments across the UK announced a national lockdown. The restrictions included a prohibition on large gatherings and a requirement for social distancing. We began to receive questions through our customer contact centre straight away from pre-registration students anxious to know whether the assessment would take place in June.
6. On 25 March, the GPhC brought together student and trainee representative bodies, universities, employers, education and training bodies and others from across the UK to discuss the key issues in relation to pre-registration training during the COVID-19 pandemic.
7. On 26 March, the GPhC and PSNI issued a joint statement indicating that all stakeholders recognised the significant pressures that pre-registration trainees were working under and the

major impact this would have on their ability to prepare for the registration assessment. It recognised that this was the case both for trainees in Great Britain and for trainees due to sit the PSNI exam in Northern Ireland. We also recognised that more pharmacists would be needed to help respond to the pandemic and deliver care to patients and the public in the coming months, and that pre-registration trainees were expecting to be able to register and work as pharmacists from August. Taking account of the views expressed, the GPhC and PSNI decided to postpone the assessment sittings scheduled for June and September in GB and June and October in NI. These sittings would be scheduled at a later date either later in 2020 or early 2021, when the position in relation to the pandemic had become clearer. In the meantime, we would consider options for some form of provisional registration.

8. On 21 May, and after further consultation with stakeholders to discuss the necessary practical detail and patient safeguards, the GPhC's governing Council agreed a policy of provisional registration. This was based on a set of principles designed to:
 - maintain standards for entry to the register to protect patient safety and the quality of care given to patients and the public both now and over the long term;
 - support the NHS and community pharmacy by strengthening the workforce at a critical time;
 - minimise blockages or gaps in the pipeline for qualified new registrants to join the profession in 2020 and in coming years too;
 - safeguard the welfare of students and trainees whilst also ensuring that their hard work, and that of their tutors, over many years is given suitable recognition at this key stage in their professional lives;
 - enhance the transition from trainee to pharmacist by strengthening the framework of support in their initial period of work.
9. The policy confirmed that individuals who were provisionally registered must sit the registration assessment at the first opportunity if they were fit to do so. Successful candidates would then apply to join the (main) register and unsuccessful candidates would no longer be provisionally registered.
10. The Council agreed that, subject to the outcome of a procurement exercise, the registration assessment should be delivered online as soon as practicable, taking account of the necessary technical, security, accessibility and content issues. This reflected the current Government requirements across the UK in relation to social distancing and large gatherings and took account of the possibility of such requirements either continuing or being re-imposed later.
11. Individuals would be given a minimum of two months' notice of the date for the assessment.

June – November 2020: Procuring an online solution, identifying dates for the assessment and deciding on the model for delivery

12. On 10 June, we issued an invitation to tender which set out our requirements for delivery of an online solution. At this stage and based on both the current situation with the pandemic, and the possibility of restrictions continuing or being re-imposed, the requirements envisaged an online solution which could be delivered from any location, including candidates' home addresses.

13. Following an initial lack of response from potential providers, an extension to the original deadline for bids was offered and, on 21 July, seven bids were received. In order to identify an appropriate shortlist, a further set of supplementary questions was asked of each bidder. Three organisations were subsequently shortlisted and invited to present their bids to an evaluation panel. These presentations took place between 14 and 22 September and a decision was made on 29 September to award the contract to Pearson Vue. Following detailed work to finalise the contract, we confirmed Pearson Vue as the supplier for the online assessments in 2020 on 6 November.
14. At the beginning of discussions with Pearson Vue they advised that, in addition to an online solution whereby candidates would sit the assessment remotely, a number of Pearson Vue test centres had been made COVID-secure with social distancing and other measures in place, including the wearing of face masks. Based on our requirement for around 3,000 places, Pearson Vue advised that this could be achieved, although it would require the assessment to take place over two days as only 1,500 places were available per day due to social distancing requirements.
15. All test centre places could be reserved in advance for all GPhC assessment candidates. The original requirement – an online solution with remote proctoring – remained possible but it would not be possible to guarantee spaces in advance. This meant that GPhC candidates would be competing with exam candidates from many other organisations across the world for spaces in a particular time slot. Pearson Vue also advised that, based on their experience of delivering remote sittings, around 10% of candidates experienced significant issues with reliable internet connectivity at their home address making an exclusive use of remote sittings undesirable if other options were now available. Therefore, a hybrid solution may offer the fairest and most effective way for candidates to sit the assessment.
16. The GPhC also noted feedback from stakeholders and from candidates in other professions which indicated some concerns about remote sittings, including internet connectivity and the inability to leave the room during the assessment for a comfort break other than during a scheduled break between papers.
17. After detailed discussions with the Board of Assessors, the GPhC decided that all candidates should sit at a test centre, although a remote sitting option would potentially be available if there were medical or other reasons why a person could not attend a test centre. This decision meant that the assessment needed to take place over two days with two different papers prepared.
18. We remained committed, in line with the decision by our Council, to holding the assessment as soon as possible. Due to the volume of organisations requiring assessments with Pearson Vue, and the need to have two days for the assessment (due to limited capacity in test centres while social distancing measures were in place), the options were limited. In addition, the need to produce two papers and to ensure that the previous paper-based format could be changed to an online format in line with Pearson Vue systems, presented a major challenge in terms of timescales. Also, an appropriate time was needed to ensure those candidates who required adjustments (for example due to conditions such as dyslexia or inability to wear face masks) were able to apply and have their requests fully assessed.
19. Given the earliest available dates where Pearson Vue test centres were available, and the work required to prepare for the two sittings, we confirmed that the assessments would take place on 17-18 March. There is little doubt that there were considerable risks in achieving this date which may have contributed to the issues affecting overseas candidates and the booking process

outlined below. However, we believed that it would be unreasonable for candidates to wait beyond the end of March and had consistently highlighted our aim to hold the assessment in late 2020 or early 2021.

20. We provided short updates to candidates every 4-6 weeks during the procurement process, to let them know about key developments in the process. In the absence of being able to answer the two main questions that candidates had – the date of the assessment and where and how it would be held –our overall approach was to wait until there was a relevant development or update before contacting candidates via email. While we were required to ensure all commercial aspects of the procurement remained confidential, we recognise we could have done more in this phase to contact candidates more regularly to explain the issues we were seeking to resolve and provide greater opportunities for them to engage with us.
21. On 30 November we wrote to all candidates confirming the dates of the assessment, that candidates would be expected to sit the assessment online at a test centre, that the types of questions used and the standard required to pass were not changing; that we would be adding more information, including frequently asked questions, to our website, and that we would be hosting a webinar to help answer questions that candidates may have.

Lessons learned

We are conducting a review of our procurement needs and will ensure clearer timescales for the overall process, including the need for supplementary information and resolution of contracts. (NB This does not affect the summer and autumn sittings where Pearson Vue are already contracted to deliver the assessment).

We are now in a position to provide more regular updates for candidates and will be issuing communications on a clear schedule so that they are aware when they will be receiving updates and information. If problems or issues arise, we will keep candidates regularly informed about them.

November 2020 – March 2021: Developing the assessment papers; agreeing regulations; applications, adjustments and booking processes

Development of papers

21. During the procurement process, the GPhC and the Board of Assessors worked with our marking contractor, Alpha Plus, to implement Item Response Theory (IRT)¹ to ensure maintenance of standards when the assessment was delivered online. We held a series of meetings with our standard setters to review all questions used in the assessment since June 2016 to assess if these were suitable for reuse. Reasons that questions are considered no longer suitable include changes to clinical guidelines, unavailability of products in the questions and question stems or options no longer reflecting current practice situations. Following this review, we developed a plan with Alpha

¹ Item Response Theory is a statistical technique that takes into account question difficulty and candidate ability. It enables maintenance of the same standard across multiple assessments.

Plus to reuse some questions as anchors enabling the implementation of IRT in the 2021 assessments.

22. After agreeing the contact with Pearson Vue, we developed a timetable for the March 2021 assessment papers considering build time, review and approval by the Board of Assessors and the 4-6 weeks required for the test publishing process by Pearson Vue. We used our example questions for candidates and worked with the Board of Assessors to establish rules around style and layout ensuring that our three question styles could be accommodated with acceptable readability for candidates. The example questions were made available to candidates in February to provide insight into the types of topics tested and to allow them to gain familiarity with the functionality of the online delivery system, including how to navigate between questions and how to use the online highlighter function.
23. During this time, we continued to develop new assessment questions through virtual question development workshops with question writers and our well-established remote review process.
24. The papers for 17 and 18 March were built concurrently. All the new questions in the papers were reviewed by standard setters with reused questions having been reviewed in the autumn of 2020. This provided the GPhC and the Board of Assessors with assurance of consistency across the two papers, and confidence in the reliability and validity of the two papers.

Regulations and publication including confirmation of remote sittings

25. On 23 December 2020 we published the updated registration assessment regulations and informed candidates by email. These included the specific amendments setting out the criteria for allowing remote sittings.

Water and wipeable booklets

26. Following publication of the assessment regulations and associated information for candidates, concern was expressed about two issues.
27. Firstly, water would only be available to candidates in test centres in the scheduled break between papers. This was due to Pearson Vue rules and the potential damage to IT equipment if water or other liquids were spilled during the assessment. Although we recognised that this was not an ideal situation, we did not, at the time, explore possible alternative options. Based on feedback from candidates and stakeholders, we arranged with Pearson Vue that water bottles could be placed on a desk immediately outside the assessment room and accessed at any time during the assessment by asking the invigilator.
28. Secondly, wipeable laminated booklets and erasable pens would be used by candidates rather than pen and paper for rough workings out, an important issue for the Part 1 calculations paper in particular. This reflected Pearson Vue rules both at test centres and for remote sittings. Although there may have been some flexibility to amend the rules at test centres, this was not an option for remote sittings because of the significant challenge it would have presented for the online proctors and the possibility of introducing irregular assessment practice.
29. Extensive discussions took place, including with the Board of Assessors, on the usability and suitability of these before the decision was taken to use them. However, in our initial communications, we did not provide this level of detail meaning that some candidates were anxious about whether they would be able to do their rough workings for calculations. We

subsequently provided further information about the size and nature of the wipeable booklets, including that additional ones would be provided if needed during the assessment.

Applications to register

30. From 5 January, candidates were able to register for the assessment. We sent out communications in advance to explain the process for registering for the assessment and answered any follow-up queries. In line with our ongoing development of online services, candidates were able to register to the assessment through their MyGPhC account rather than submitting paper-based applications. On 8 January we issued a statement in response to further questions about whether the assessment would take place following the rise in infections over December and January. We confirmed that the assessment was the most effective method to maintain standards of entry to the pharmacist register in the current system of pharmacist education and training. We also stated it was not feasible to introduce alternative arrangements that would uphold standards, protect patient safety, and be fair to all candidates. We also emphasised that candidates who did not feel fit to sit would be able to sit in the summer and that provisional registration would continue until those sitting in the summer had received their results. We set out that candidates may decide they were not fit to sit for a wide range of reasons, including the impact the pandemic had on their health and wellbeing or their ability to prepare adequately for the assessment due to pressure at work or caring responsibilities at home.
31. By 26 January, just under 3,000 candidates had registered to sit. On 2 February, we contacted all candidates via email to share with them the 'on the day' guidance, which was supported by Q&A and other documents on the website, to help them know what they could expect on the day of their sitting and how to prepare.

Adjustments

32. The registration assessment regulations enable candidates to apply for adjustments where, for example, they have a particular medical condition. The applications may involve requests for additional time due to conditions such as dyslexia or requests to sit in a separate room from other candidates due to diagnosed conditions such as anxiety. Candidates were also able to apply to sit the assessment remotely if they had a particular condition that would prevent them sitting at a test centre. 370 applications for adjustments were received and considered by a panel which consisted of members of the Board of Assessors and two adjustment advisors. 350 applications were granted or partially granted.

Overseas

33. This was the first occasion on which the assessment could be sat overseas. Enabling overseas sittings had not been identified by the Council as a strategic priority. However, the online nature of the planned sittings meant this was an opportunity we wanted to offer, subject to it being feasible and above all, posing no security or integrity risk to the assessment overall.
34. Around 80 overseas candidates applied to sit. In line with the overall approach, candidates were required to sit at a test centre unless they applied through the adjustments process as outlined above. Pearson Vue had test centres either owned directly or operated through third parties in all the countries where overseas candidates were based. There were no issues affecting candidates in countries where the time difference from the UK was less than five hours. Over 30 candidates were therefore assured of being able to sit at test centres.

35. The remaining candidates were concentrated in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia where the time difference is over six hours. We did not believe it would have been appropriate for some candidates to start the assessment after others had finished as it would have been possible for some discussion to take place between candidates and/or for details of questions to be highlighted on social media, affecting the overall integrity of the assessment. This issue had been identified early in the process.
36. At the time three options and assumptions were made. Firstly, that it would be possible for opening hours of the Pearson Vue centres in the countries to be varied so that some remained open for longer period enabling candidates to sit at the same time as those in the UK. Secondly, that arrangements could be made for some form of chaperoning to ensure candidates remained in a test centre until such time as UK candidates had started the assessment. Thirdly, that candidates could potentially sit remotely. We did not focus attention at an early enough stage to confirm these possibilities. Once we did so, Pearson Vue advised that it was not possible for the test centres to remain open for longer hours due to contractual requirements with their third-party operators. And, based on legal advice, we concluded that it would not be appropriate to require people to remain at test centres once they had finished the assessment. Finally, Pearson Vue advised that their systems for remote sittings automatically defaulted to local time and it was therefore not possible for candidates in the affected countries to sit remotely at the same time as UK candidates.
37. Furthermore, as we were not able to guarantee places for remote sittings, we were concerned that there may not be enough places to accommodate both the number of UK candidates who required remote sittings due to reasonable adjustments and overseas candidates. We believed it was right to prioritise those who were already working in the UK and who would be able to contribute immediately as a pharmacist given the continuing pressures created by the pandemic.
38. On 20 January, we wrote to candidates in countries with more than six hours' time difference to say that due to significant challenges we had identified, it would not be possible for them to sit the assessment in March. Although this would be disappointing and frustrating for candidates, we also took account of the fact that, due to the pandemic, the likelihood of being able to travel and work in the UK would be limited and therefore the impact reduced.
39. We received a significant number of representations from overseas candidates and stakeholders following this decision. We discussed urgently with Pearson Vue whether any further flexibility was possible in relation to the opening hours of test centres or to facilitate remote sittings. Despite significant efforts, there was no option to increase the opening hours and no option to identify alternative locations.
40. In relation to remote sittings, we were able to identify a workaround whereby the GPhC could manually amend individual slots for remote sittings so that the overseas candidates were able to sit at the same time as UK candidates. This coincided with our own confirmation of the very small number of UK candidates who had requested and been granted remote sittings. As such, and although places could not be guaranteed, there was an exceptionally strong likelihood that all candidates would be able to sit. As such we informed overseas candidates on 15 February of the options now available to them and also provided updates to stakeholders through targeted emails and a statement on our website, which was also issued to the pharmacy media.

Webinar

41. On 9 February we hosted a webinar which was attended by 1,900 people. The purpose was to expand and emphasise information that had been sent to candidates about the process and to demonstrate how the assessment questions would look on screen. In addition, we invited questions in advance and throughout the webinar, answering as many as possible during the event and following up afterwards by adding to the frequently asked questions section on our website.
42. On the day of the webinar, the pharmacy media highlighted an extract from a financial paper which was due to be discussed by Council at its meeting on 11 February. This included an estimate for budgeting purposes of a 60% pass rate in the March assessment. This was not a prediction and we issued a statement confirming this. However, given the heightened anxiety around the assessment, this reference was regrettable and avoidable.

Bookings and response

43. On 25 February, candidates were invited to book their test centre places with Pearson Vue. 164 test centres were available throughout GB with appropriate social distancing and other COVID-secure adaptations. There were four significant issues with the booking process:
 - Emails to candidates were sent out by Pearson Vue in batches meaning that some candidates received the emails several hours earlier than other candidates, and so had greater opportunity than others to choose a place at their preferred test centre.
 - Due to a technical error in the Pearson Vue systems, 60 candidates in three test centres were wrongly allocated an afternoon slot which would have been after other candidates had completed the assessment.
 - There was insufficient capacity for all Scottish candidates to sit in Scotland itself or in centres close to the border. This was caused in part by the late conclusion of a contractual issue between Pearson Vue and a third party for the use of a particular test centre.
 - The booking system did not prevent candidates being able to book places on both days as some candidates mistakenly did.
44. Although the breadth of candidates' home addresses had been shared between GPhC and Pearson Vue, a detailed mapping exercise matching all available test centre capacity to the candidates' addresses was not carried out in advance. This meant that the issue most significantly affecting Scotland was not identified. In addition, our previous assurances to candidates about the number of test centres may have led to an assumption that all candidates would be able to sit at their preferred test centre despite messaging that they should prepare for different centre options.
45. Following this, we addressed the situation urgently. In Scotland, our director communicated extensively and directly with stakeholders and individual candidates. Once the issues had been identified, we issued updates via our website, social media accounts and emails on a regular basis to reassure candidates and stakeholders that we were working with Pearson Vue to resolve these issues as an urgent priority, and to let them know about progress on resolving the issues.
46. We confirmed on 5 March that additional capacity in Scotland had been identified and Scottish candidates who wanted to sit the assessment in Scotland would be able to do so. We also confirmed that we were finalising the allocation of places to candidates and were seeking to re-allocate people closer to their home where possible. The issues affecting afternoon slots and candidates who had double-booked had also been resolved.

47. On reflection, our initial response to concerns raised on social media on the afternoon and evening of 25 February was too slow. We should have responded immediately to concerns with messages to reassure candidates that we would work to resolve the issues as quickly as possible, rather than waiting until we had established more of the facts the following day.

Summer and Autumn sitting dates, and decision to extend provisional registration

48. On 12 March, we contacted all potential candidates via email to let them know that we had now confirmed the dates for the Summer and Autumn registration assessment sittings. The pandemic has continued to be a significant factor in planning the registration assessment sittings in 2021. We advised candidates that due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic on capacity and availability within Pearson Vue test centres, the summer and autumn sittings would take place later than usual this year, in July and November.
49. We also explained that we were extending provisional registration until January 2022. This meant that provisionally-registered pharmacists who did not feel fit to sit the assessment in March could remain provisionally registered until they sat the assessment in July or November 2021. Current pre-registration trainees planning to sit the assessment in Summer 2021 would be able to apply to become provisionally-registered once their training was satisfactorily completed and could take up offers of employment at the same time as they usually would, from 1 August 2021. We emphasised in our communications that candidates should only sit the assessment if they felt fit to do so, and they could withdraw at any time up until they started the sitting.

Lessons learned

Prior to the July sitting, we will undertake a detailed mapping exercise based on the addresses of candidates and the availability of test centres prior to the booking process.

We will ensure that all references to the registration assessment in financial or other Council papers are consistent with information addressed to candidates, and properly contextualised and explained.

We will ensure arrangements for overseas candidates are confirmed much earlier in the process to allow issues to be identified and resolved.

We will work with Pearson Vue to arrange a more effective booking process, enabling candidates to have a more equal opportunity to book the test centre of their choice.

We will explain the use of wipeable notebooks and erasable pens more clearly in communications to candidates.

17 and 18 March 2021: Sitting the assessment

50. The assessment took place on 17 and 18 March. 2,670 candidates sat the assessment (2,587 at test centres and 83 remotely in GB and overseas). Of those sitting at test centres, 86% were able to do so within 50 miles of their home address, meaning most candidates had shorter distances to travel than in previous years when a small number of larger venues were used.
51. Over the two days, the GPhC and Pearson Vue scheduled briefing sessions twice a day to ensure all issues had been identified and, where possible, resolved. This was supplemented by additional contact as and when any operational or technical issues arose. Pearson Vue provided a report to the GPhC at the end of each day with a summary of all issues identified.

52. A small number of individual candidates experienced some technical issues during the sittings. Several candidates sitting remotely were unable to sit the online registration assessment, with initial analysis suggesting this was due to internet connection issues they were experiencing.
53. A small number of candidates sitting in test centres also experienced some technical issues, which were largely resolved by the test centre staff. Our staff also worked with Pearson Vue to resolve wherever possible some other minor issues experienced by candidates.
54. In a small number of test centres, there was a lack of clarity about whether additional whiteboards could be issued to candidates.
55. Overall, significantly fewer issues were raised on the day than have occurred in previous years.

Lessons learned

We will amend guidance to Pearson Vue invigilators to clarify the requirements in relation to whiteboards

We will work with Pearson Vue to maintain and enhance the arrangements for addressing any technical or other issues affecting candidates on the days of the assessment

19 March – 29 April 2021: Marking the papers and issuing results

56. Immediately following the assessments, Pearson Vue passed the relevant information to the GPhC to initiate the process for the results of the assessment. The performance of all questions and papers as a whole were analysed and, using statistical methods applied across health professional examinations, the pass mark for each paper was confirmed and candidates were awarded passes or fails.
57. On 15 April, we wrote to provisional registrants and to employers to confirm that those who sat and did not pass the assessment would not be able to practise as a pharmacist from 9am on 29 April and to highlight both the contingency plans that should be put in place and the support that would be available. This communication benefited from being shared in draft form with certain stakeholders to ensure the main questions that candidates and employers might have would be answered clearly and to ensure the tone of the message was appropriate, given the difficult position that candidates who did not pass would find themselves in.
58. On 29 April, results were issued to candidates. For the first time, and as part of the GPhC's ongoing development of online services, results were available to candidates through their MyGPhC account. All candidates received an email informing them that their results were available and to check their account. All results were available by 9.00 a.m. as planned.
59. We liaised with key stakeholder organisations in advance to make sure they had sight of key information to help them support candidates who did not pass, including our guidance for unsuccessful candidates. We put a statement announcing the pass rate on our website and wrote to all key stakeholders to inform them of the outcome of the assessment. Detailed guidance was provided to ensure candidates were aware of what they needed to do next and to signpost to the support available.

General lessons learned

We will also:

Develop a more comprehensive risk register, taking account of Council's recent adoption of a risk appetite statement and ongoing organisational developments to improve risk management

Take forward work to confirm and, where necessary, clarify the responsibilities of the Board of Assessors and Council in relation to the registration assessment and the most effective way for decisions to be made, particularly in exceptionally challenging timescales.

Consider how best to use our social media presence and how to respond quickly where issues are highlighted in this way