

MPharm degrees with preparatory year

Guidance for schools of pharmacy, 2020-21

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The GPhC is responsible for setting standards for the initial education and training of pharmacists and also for setting standards for initial registration as a pharmacist. Both responsibilities are set out in the Pharmacy Order 2010.

The pharmacist registration requirements for students training in Great Britain are successful completion of:

- a GPhC-approved Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) degree,
- 52 weeks of pre-registration training, and
- the GPhC's Registration Assessment.

- 1.2 The GPhC currently accredits:

- 4-year MPharm degrees
- 4-year MPharm degrees delivered in-part overseas (MPharm 2+2)
- 5-year MPharm degrees with integrated pre-registration training
- Pharmacy foundation degrees

Pharmacy foundation degrees comprise year 1 of an accredited 4-year MPharm course delivered over two years and interspersed with pharmacy placements. Successful completion of this course allows the student direct entry to year 2 of that school's accredited MPharm.

2. Background

- 2.1 A new course variant has emerged over recent years, which is an MPharm degree which includes a preparatory year - often referred to as a foundation year, or 'year 0' - followed by the accredited four years of a traditional MPharm.
- 2.2 Over time an increasing number of providers have begun to offer their accredited 4-year MPharm degree packaged as a 5-year course to include a preparatory year. The purpose of the courses is to allow those students who do not have qualifications that would allow them direct entry to an MPharm to have the opportunity to study pharmacy.

- 2.3 The first taught year of the course is designed as a foundation year to build on students' knowledge and skills in preparation for studying pharmacy. For most providers this year has a strong science focus, usually with the addition of other modules in relation to areas such as numeracy, research skills, and orientation to pharmacy.
- 2.4 There has been an increase in the number of schools of pharmacy offer this type of MPharm degrees type over time. During spring 2020 the GPhC undertook an information gathering exercise with input from the schools currently offering this course type, which culminated in a meeting with these schools in summer 2020 to share the findings and seek feedback on the GPhC proposals.

3. Accreditation of MPharm degrees with a preparatory year

- 3.1 From the 2020-21 academic year onwards, MPharm degrees with a preparatory year will be accredited by the GPhC as a separate course. All course types will be reviewed in the same event; however, accreditation teams will make a separate recommendation on accreditation for each version of the MPharm course being offered. This will bring the process in line with the accreditation of other versions of the MPharm degree.
- 3.2 The key reasons for this change are:
- MPharm degrees with a preparatory year are a separate course type to the current 4-year MPharm and are recruited to as such through UCAS.
 - A UK Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) degree is a qualification that forms part of the education and training eligibility criteria and is accepted by the GPhC as a route to registration as a pharmacist. Therefore, the GPhC should oversight and approval of the UK MPharm qualification as a whole, and not a proportion of it.
 - The Pharmacy Order 2010 states under article 42.(7) that '*The Council must publish and maintain a list of the courses of education and training, qualifications and institutions or other providers (including tutors): a) which are for the time being approved under this Order*'. Accreditation of MPharm degrees with a preparatory year will allow greater transparency of the course types accredited by the GPhC and provide clarity for prospective students.
 - Almost a third of schools of pharmacy now offer MPharm degrees with preparatory years. There are also an increasing number of students undertaking this route, with around 500 students starting the course in the 2019-20.
 - Although the GPhC learning outcomes are not taught or assessed during the preparatory year, there are other aspects of the course such as admissions, student support, progression, and fitness to practise that link to the initial education and training standards.
 - There is currently disparity in the way that student fitness to practise is managed, with some schools having regard to this at the point of entry, and others at the point of entry to Year 1 of the accredited MPharm (the second taught year).

- Although some attrition is due to movement of students between schools, and students opting to change to different career paths, there appear to be a number of students who do not go on to achieve on the MPharm. Review of the admissions criteria, student support, teaching and learning strategy, and monitoring of progression through accreditation processes is therefore important.

4. Clarification of course type

- 4.1 An MPharm degree with preparatory year is a single course that leads to a Master of Pharmacy award. It is recruited to separately from the accredited 4-year MPharm degree and is assigned a different UCAS code. For most schools this will be a 5-year course which includes a preparatory year (often referred to as 'year 0') followed by four further taught years that mirror that of the accredited MPharm degree. A 6-year MPharm degree is also possible, should a school wish to apply for accreditation of an MPharm degree with preparatory year and integrated pre-registration training.
- 4.2 Although the GPhC terminology for this course type is 'MPharm degree with preparatory year', schools of pharmacy may use a course title of their choosing, provided it does not have the potential to mislead. Typical course titles used include 'Pharmacy with Foundation Year' or 'Pharmacy with Health/Science Foundation Year'.
- 4.3 Any foundation, or other preparatory course, that is not linked to the GPhC's initial education and training standards for pharmacists, and is a standalone entity, will not be reviewed by the GPhC for the purpose of accreditation, as it does not lead to a qualification that forms part of the eligibility criteria for registration with the GPhC.

5. Requirements for accreditation

- 5.1 An MPharm with preparatory year must meet all of the GPhC's initial education and training standards for pharmacists in all years of the course. All teaching and assessment of the learning outcomes is expected to take place in taught years 2-4, with the first taught year being set aside for foundation learning only. For the purpose of accreditation, it is assumed that the course content for the four taught years following the preparatory year will be identical for students on the MPharm degree and the MPharm degree with preparatory year.
- 5.2 The accreditation team will take assurance that the MPharm with preparatory year MPharm meets six of the nine standards through its detailed review of these standards in relation to the current accredited MPharm provision. The review of the MPharm with preparatory year will therefore focus on the following:
- Standard 1: Patient and public safety
 - Standard 4: Selection of students and trainees
 - Standard 6: Support and development for students and trainees

- 5.3 In addition, schools of pharmacy will be asked to provide any additional information to detail any differences between the current MPharm degree provision and the MPharm with preparatory year provision in relation to any of the other six standards.
- 5.4 Further guidance in relation to the interpretation of the standards in relation to MPharm degrees with a preparatory year, and what is expected of schools is set out below.

Patient and public safety (standard 1)

- Students on the MPharm degree with preparatory year are expected to be subject to the same arrangements as those on the MPharm degree, and the standards in relation to patient safety must apply to all years of the course. This means that fitness to practise procedures must apply to students in all years of the MPharm with preparatory year.
- Suitability of the student to study pharmacy must be considered during the admissions stage, and not delayed until entry to the 2nd taught year. That is to say that schools will be required to have regard to a student's fitness to practise before they are accepted to enter the course and that student fitness to practise policies should continue to apply during all years of the course.
- The GPhC is aware that for this course type there are often high attrition levels after the preparatory year, and that there is also a high degree of movement of students between schools. For this reason, schools may delay formal criminal records checks until the point of entry to the second taught year, provided that they can demonstrate that this will not compromise patient safety. As a minimum, schools must require students to make formal health and fitness to practise declarations at the admissions stage, which must be reviewed for suitability before the student is accepted onto the course.

Selection of students and trainees (standard 4)

- The academic entry criteria for the MPharm with preparatory year are understandably lower than would be expected for entry to the 4-year MPharm degree, with some courses specifically aimed at widening participation. As for the 4-year MPharm degree, the school has the flexibility to set its own academic entry criteria, however, in doing so the school must consider whether the criteria set are appropriate to admit students who will be able to achieve on the course.
- The school must also consider the teaching and learning strategy, and the support that will be in place for students on this course, and how this might differ from the strategy for the 4-year MPharm degree. The teaching and learning strategy and the support that will be provided should be considered when setting the entry criteria.
- Any progression requirements that students must meet to progress from the 1st taught year (preparatory year) into the 2nd taught year (year 1 of the accredited MPharm) must be clearly set out to students at the admissions stage.

Support and development for students and trainees (standard 6)

- Due to the academic entry criteria for this course being considerably lower than entry to the 4-year MPharm degree, accreditation teams will expect to see detail of the additional support made available, and regular monitoring of progression, for students undertaking the

MPharm with preparatory year. Student feedback and progression data will be sought during the accreditation process to triangulate this evidence.

6. Transition arrangements during 2020-21

- 6.1. All current providers of MPharm degrees with a preparatory year (those offering the course before, and including, the 2020-21 academic year) will have the MPharm with preparatory year provision reviewed for accreditation in parallel to the accredited 4-year MPharm provision. A formal view on accreditation of the MPharm with preparatory year course will be made by the accreditation team at the next reaccreditation or interim event; with a separate recommendation on accreditation being made for each course type.
- 6.2. Schools due an interim event or other MPharm event in the 2020-21 academic year should provide their submission at the same time, and to same deadline, as has been provided for their event.
- 6.3. **Interim arrangement for schools not due an MPharm event in 2020-21**

To provide a consistent and fair approach to the introduction of accreditation of this course type process, given that providers are due for reaccreditation at different times, any school that is not due an MPharm event during the 2020-21 academic year is asked to provide a submission document to detail their course provision. This will allow the course provision to be listed on the GPhC website in the interim period before accreditation takes place. The deadline for providing a completed submission is **31 March 2021**.
- 6.4. The submission will be reviewed by the GPhC, and additional information requested, and clarifications sought as necessary. Following this review, if it is appropriate, it will be confirmed to the school that they may continue to deliver the course as specified in the submission until it is formally reviewed for accreditation at the next event. Any areas that the School is advised to review further or develop in preparation for formal review will be highlighted. The letter will be displayed publicly on the GPhC website in the interim period until the next MPharm event, to provide assurance to students and other stakeholders that the GPhC has regard for the course and it is suitable for entry to pre-registration training, and is a qualification that meets the eligibility criteria for registration.

7. Accreditation of new course provision

- 7.1. Any school of pharmacy currently accredited to provide an MPharm degree, wishing to apply to provide an MPharm degree with preparatory year should notify the GPhC of their intentions and their intended timeframes. Should the school not be due an MPharm event, it will be asked to submit a completed submission template along with documentary evidence. The provision will be reviewed by an accreditation team as a desktop review, with a short meeting with the school convened if necessary. The accreditation team will agree a recommendation on accreditation, and this will be considered by the Registrar, as per our normal processes.
- 7.2. Prospective new providers may apply to be accredited to provide both an MPharm degree and an MPharm degree with preparatory year. Both course versions will be reviewed during accreditation step events, and no separate submission is required.

8. Submission documentation

8.1 The submission template is available at:

<https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/education/approval-courses/accreditation-guidance>

This template should be used by those schools that:

- Currently offer an MPharm degree with preparatory year and do not have an event in 2020-21
- are accredited to offer an MPharm degree but do not currently offer an MPharm degree with preparatory year and wish to apply for accreditation
- are due an MPharm interim visit in 2020-21 (both an interim submission and an MPharm with preparatory year submission should be completed).

8.2 Schools who are submitting documentation for reaccreditation or for initial accreditation of an MPharm degree, do not need to complete a separate submission. Information relating to the MPharm with preparatory year should be included in the main submission with commentary relating specifically to the two different MPharm courses clearly differentiated (by using a different colour font, for example).

9. Additional information

9.1 Fees

The GPhC does not currently charge for accreditation of MPharm degrees with a preparatory year for course providers who are already accredited to provide an MPharm degree or MPharm degree with preregistration training.

9.2 Data

Schools delivering more than one version of an MPharm degree should collect separate data for each course so that reporting can show a breakdown by course type. All data reported for accreditation purposes should be reported by course type to allow the accreditation team to view the course provision separately.

9.3 Further information

For further information on any aspect of this guidance or the GPhC accreditation processes please see <https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/education> or contact education@pharmacyregulation.org .