

MPharm degrees with preparatory year

Guidance for schools of pharmacy, 2021-22

1. Introduction

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

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

- a GPhC-approved Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) degree,
 - 52 weeks of foundation year training (previously '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 foundation training
 - Pharmacy foundation degrees¹
 - MPharm degrees with preparatory year

2. Background

- 2.1 A new course variant has emerged over recent years, which is an MPharm degree which includes a preparatory year - sometimes referred to as a *foundation year*, or '*year 0*' - followed by the accredited four years of a traditional MPharm. To avoid confusion in terminology with the foundation training year, the GPhC has opted to call this variant an '**MPharm degree with preparatory year**'.

¹ Accredited 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.

- 2.2 The purpose of the MPharm degree with preparatory year 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 preparatory 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. No GPhC learning outcomes are taught or assessed during this preparatory year.

3. Accreditation of MPharm degrees with a preparatory year

- 3.1 The GPhC began accrediting MPharm degrees with a preparatory year as a separate course to the MPharm degree in 2020-21. Prior to this the accreditation of the MPharm degree component of the course was accepted to allow students entry to pre-registration training.
- 3.2 Since 2020-21, accreditation teams have made a separate recommendation on accreditation for each version of the MPharm course being offered. This has brought the process in line with the accreditation of other versions of the MPharm degree.
- 3.3 The key reasons for this change were:
- 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 have oversight of each 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 allows greater transparency of the course types accredited by the GPhC and provides 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 an MPharm degree with preparatory year in 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 has been some disparity in the way that student fitness to practise has been managed for this course variant, 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).

- Following the preparatory year, data appears to show that a number of students do not go on to achieve an MPharm degree. Although it is recognised that some attrition is due to movement of students between schools, and students opting to change to different career paths, a review of the admissions criteria, student support, teaching and learning strategy, and monitoring of progression through GPhC accreditation processes is 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.
- 4.2 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 foundation training.
- 4.3 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. Due to the recent change in terminology from 'pre-registration training' to 'foundation training', MPharm degrees with a preparatory year that include the term 'foundation' may have the potential to confuse or mislead. Therefore, we encourage schools of pharmacy to consider this carefully in relation to the title of this course.
- 4.4 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 degree 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 onwards, with the first taught year being set aside for preparatory 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 review of the MPharm with preparatory year will therefore focus on the following criteria within Part 2 of the **Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacists, January 2021²**:

Standard	Criteria
Standard 1: Selection and admission	All
Standard 3: Resources and capacity	All
Standard 4: Managing, developing and evaluating MPharm degrees	4.3, 4.4 and 4.6
Standard 5: Curriculum design and delivery	5.3, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11
Standard 6: Assessment	6.1, 6.2 (a) and (b), 6.4, 6.7, 6.9, 6.11, 6.12 and 6.13
Standard 7: Support and development for student pharmacists and everyone involved in the delivery of the MPharm degree	7.2, 7.3 and 7.4

5.3 These standards have been selected to allow the provider to comment where there may be differences to the preparatory year in relation to the GPhC accredited standalone MPharm degree.

5.4 In addition, schools of pharmacy are asked through the accreditation process to provide additional information to detail any differences between the current MPharm degree provision and the MPharm with preparatory year provision in relation to an aspect of the remaining standards/criteria.

5.5 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.

Selection and admission (standard 1)

- 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.

² The accreditation team will take assurance that the MPharm with preparatory year meets the remaining MPharm standards through its detailed review in relation to the 4-year MPharm provision.

- 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.
- 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 apply during all years of the course.

Resources and capacity (standard 3)

- Students on the MPharm degree with preparatory year may be taught by staff that sit outside of the department and/or the school. Details of all staff members involved in the preparatory year should be clearly articulated including what and where they teach and/or support the students.
- If the preparatory year element of the course is delivered in conjunction with a partner institution full details should be provided including governance and management arrangements.
- The additional students on the preparatory year may have an impact on resourcing in terms of staffing and facilities. A narrative of how the department and/or the school has considered and managed this should be provided in the same format as what would be expected as part of the MPharm submission.
- Due to the academic entry criteria for this course being lower than entry to the 4-year MPharm degree, accreditation teams will expect to see detail of any additional support made available.

Managing, developing and evaluating MPharm degrees (standard 4 - partial):

- Students on the MPharm degree with preparatory year are not taught or assessed against GPhC learning outcomes. However, it is still expected that relevant stakeholder input is sought in respect of the design and delivery of the course and should include feedback from students.
- Reviews of the preparatory year should happen on a regular basis taking into consideration evidence acquired from feedback to ensure that the preparatory year remains up-to-date and fit for purpose.

Curriculum design and delivery (standard 5 - partial):

- Students undertaking the MPharm degree with preparatory year should have a clear understanding of the academic regulations including curriculum and associated assessments within the preparatory year of study, as well as policies on progression.

Assessment (standard 6 - partial):

- Students undertaking the MPharm degree with preparatory year should have a clear understanding of the academic curriculum and associated assessments, including pass marks required to progress.
- Clear and detailed assessment criteria in relation to the preparatory year should be made available. Course regulations and quality assurance and governance processes, including external examiner oversight, should apply to the preparatory year.

Support and development for student pharmacists and everyone involved in the delivery of the MPharm degree (standard 7 - partial)

- All teaching and learning within the preparatory year must be supported by relevant and appropriate staff, and students should have access to academic and welfare advice and support tailored to the preparatory year.
- Appropriate training to reflect the needs of students within the preparatory year must be given to all staff involved in the programme including documented procedures on how to raise concerns

6. Accreditation arrangements for 2021-22 onwards

- 6.1. All current providers offering an MPharm degrees with a preparatory year will have the provision reviewed in parallel to the reaccreditation of the MPharm provision to the 2021 standards.
- 6.2. The accreditation team will make a separate recommendation on accreditation for each course type being reviewed.

7. Accreditation of new course provision

- 7.1. Any school of pharmacy currently accredited to provide an MPharm degree, that did not offer an MPharm degree with preparatory year prior to 2020-21, and wishes to do so, should contact the GPhC to confirm its intentions. The new provision will be reviewed against the 2021 standards in parallel to the MPharm degree at the next reaccreditation event.
- 7.2. Prospective new schools of pharmacy 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 documentation should be combined with that relating to the MPharm degree; no separate submission is required. Information relating to the MPharm with preparatory year should be included against the relevant standards and criteria set out in this document, with commentary specific to the MPharm degree with preparatory year clearly set out, for example, by using 'MPharm with preparatory year', as a subheading.
- 8.2 Submission templates are available at on the [GPhC website](#)

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 foundation 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 and support

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.