

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Degree apprenticeships for healthcare professions in the training of future healthcare professionals.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society is the professional leadership body for pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation to ascertain whether there is a role for degree apprenticeships in the training of future healthcare professionals. We acknowledge that the consultation seeks views from a variety of different clinical healthcare groups, including Pharmacy.

After reviewing the consultation proforma, many of the questions are not applicable for us, as a professional leadership body (as opposed to an employer of practicing pharmacists). There are several points we would like to submit for consideration and felt this format would provide better feedback.

We recognise the vital role apprenticeships play in developing a workforce, providing a way for people to both learn in practice and study with training to industry standards or to meet the requirements of a relevant regulator. The approach increases accessibility for many, enabling them to earn a salary while training. Apprenticeships boost social mobility reaching people from diverse backgrounds opening up opportunities for all and diversifying the world of work Apprenticeships offer a clear opportunity to upskill, recruit and train future talent and help to contribute, as part of a wider approach, to addressing workforce shortages for many roles.

To qualify as a pharmacist takes a minimum of five years and includes the following steps:

- *Successful completion of a GPhC accredited Master of Pharmacy degree (MPharm), which is a full-time, four-year course*
- *Successful completion of the foundation/ pre-registration training year, a period of paid employment in one or several sectors during which a trainee pharmacist is required to build up a portfolio of evidence and demonstrate their competence whilst being observed at work (this is currently a HEIW multi-sector training programme).*
- *Successful completion of the GPhC's registration assessment*
- *Meeting the fitness to practise requirements for registration as a pharmacist.*



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This programme provides a consistency of master's degree level knowledge and theory, coupled with significant time spent on clinical placements and learning in practicing, from undergraduate level to the point of registration and beyond.

Transformational changes to the standards for initial education and training of pharmacists introduced in 2021, ensure they can play a much greater role in providing clinical care to patients and the public from their first day on the register, including through prescribing medicines. Pharmacy has now joined both Medicine and Dentistry as degree courses where graduates are able to prescribe at the point of registration.

The rigorous process of training undergraduates undertake prior to entry to the Pharmacist register is clear. Potential pharmacy apprentices would need to be subject to the same rigorous requirements as undergraduates pursuing the traditional route, to ensure achievement of the MPharm degree. Subsequently, any apprentice route would have to meet all the current requirements for entry onto the pharmacy register, to include foundation training with subsequent assessment, meeting the GPhC standards for Initial Education and training.

In addition, potential applications to the degree programme of any proposed pharmacy apprenticeship would need to provide comparable academic qualifications to those who apply for a traditional degree route.

We work closely with the Schools of Pharmacy in Wales at both Cardiff and Swansea and would also highlight the *Pharmacy with a Preparatory (foundation) year* undergraduate degree on offer through the School of Pharmacy at Swansea University. Such an approach provides an additional access route to the MPharm undergraduate degree for those students who do not have the required entry qualifications in the first instance. We are extremely supportive of such an approach and a means of ensuring we attract high calibre students whilst ensuring a degree of flexibility and widening access to the undergraduate course.

We see several notable considerations and concerns that would need clarification for the profession before consideration could be given to further wider discussions around a degree apprenticeship route for pharmacy.

These include,

- The equivalence of an apprenticeship qualification with the currently available MPharm degrees and post- foundation training programme, to include prescribing.
- The academic content of a degree funded via an apprenticeship route.
- The design and ratio of workplace learning versus service delivery in a 5-year programme.
- The protection for learners on an apprenticeship programme from any potential for exploitation by their employers
- Funding levels to allow for an increase in clinical placements.
- Perception by the public of apprenticeships.



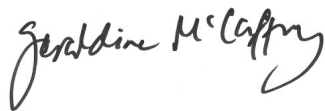
The RPS welcomes any opportunity to explore innovative approaches to education and training and to have constructive dialogue about their development and would like to ensure we are fully engaged with any potential future plans.

The strategic pharmacy workforce plan, developed by HEIW, presents the blueprint and opportunity in Wales for driving change and continual improvements in how we develop, value, and support our pharmacy workforce, in recognition of the increasing clinical leadership role they play in caring for people using medicines, in all settings.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with our colleagues at HEIW and wider stakeholders to support the implementation of the strategic pharmacy workforce plan, ensuring we attract the highest caliber of pharmacy graduates to Wales in the appropriate numbers.

As expressed earlier, at the RPS we are extremely open to further dialogue and should you wish to discuss further our noted considerations and concerns, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely



Geraldine McCaffrey, chair, Welsh Pharmacy Board

