

Pharmacy Professional Sponsorship Scheme Handbook

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Background

The Pharmacy Professional Sponsorship Scheme (PPSS), is a Government Authorised Exchange, is authorised by the Department of Health and endorsed by the Home Office UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI). The scheme is administered by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society holds an A-rated Tier 5 (Government Authorised Exchange – Temporary Worker) sponsor licence. This allows the RPS to act as an ‘over-arching sponsor’ and to issue Certificates of Sponsorship (CoS) to pharmacy students who meet the eligibility criteria. The Certificate of Sponsorship enables overseas (non-EEA) pharmacy students to apply for a Tier 5 visa to complete their pre-registration training in the UK before returning to practice in their home country.

The RPS does not employ pharmacy students for their pre-registration training year: students are employed by registered pharmacies in GPhC or PSNI approved training premises.

The Pharmacy Professional Sponsorship Scheme (PPSS) was introduced as an interim measure specifically to support those overseas (non EEA) pharmacy students who had already started their MPharm degree and who were directly affected by the closure of the UKBA Tier 1 Post-Study Work (PSW) visa in April 2012.

These students faced an unexpected difficulty in obtaining a visa to complete their pre-registration training – there was a real risk that the graduates of 2012 - 2015 would be unable to complete their training and register as a pharmacist despite spending four years completing the MPharm degree.

The RPS was licensed as a sponsor under the Tier 5 (Temporary Worker - Government Authorised Exchange) visa points-based system at the beginning of July 2012. The PPSS was authorised by the Department of Health and UKBA for four years only (i.e. as an interim solution for overseas students already studying pharmacy in GB Schools of Pharmacy).

The PPSS offers overseas pharmacy graduates the opportunity to complete their training as a pre-registration trainee pharmacist and then subsequently return to their home country to register and practice. Continued employment as a pharmacist and residence in the UK post registration is beyond the scope of the scheme.

The scheme is approved by the Department of Health and is funded by all participating schools of pharmacy. Schools of Pharmacy may choose to pass on some of these costs to students using the scheme. The RPS does not charge students for participating in the scheme.

Who is eligible?

The PPSS covers students who were already studying pharmacy in April 2012 which comprises OSPAP graduates from 2012 and 2013 and MPharm graduates from 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. This includes students who started their MPharm at an overseas campus.

The PPSS also covers students who have taken longer than four years to complete their degree and are due to graduate in 2016 but who would normally have been expected to graduate with their cohort in 2012 – 2015. The RPS is able to accept applications for sponsorship under the PPSS from eligible students up to 30 November 2016, provided they started their degree in 2011 or before. This allows those students who have had to retake a year at university or who fail the GPhC assessment to apply for sponsorship with the intention of sitting the 2017 Summer or Autumn GPhC/PSNI assessments. The Pharmacy Schools Council estimate that approximately 10% of students will not graduate with their peers and will require sponsorship during 2016.

Additionally, students must:

- Have a pre-registration position (supernumerary) with a GPhC/PSNI accredited premises,
- Earn below the Tier 2 visa salary criteria; or have a split placement i.e. six months in industry and six months in hospital, and
- Be RPS members.

The scope of the scheme, as agreed by the Department of Health, does not cover students who started their degree after April 2012.

Full details on the scheme can be found on the [RPS website](#).

Who is not eligible for sponsorship?

- Students who started their degree after April 2012.
- Pharmacy graduates from the EEA and Switzerland (who are considered separately).
- Students who are taking up an NHS pre-registration training placement (who should apply for a visa under the Tier 2 route).

How the scheme works

The management of the Pharmacy Professional Sponsorship Scheme (PPSS) is a joint approach between the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS), the Schools of Pharmacy and employers of pre-registration trainees with support from the Department of Health. Students and pre-registration trainees also have a major part to play to ensure that their sponsorship is successful.

Eligible students can apply for sponsorship up to three months before their pre-registration placement is due to start. Applications are usually made through the Schools of Pharmacy who check and verify the application and supporting documents and then forward on to the RPS for processing. On receipt, the RPS validates the application and, if appropriate, issues a Certificate of Sponsorship enabling the student to then apply for a Tier 5 visa. Sponsorship alone does not allow a student to remain in the United Kingdom once their Tier 4 visa has expired and it is the student's responsibility to apply for the Tier 5 visa and to meet the point-based requirements.

As the over-arching body managing the Government Authorised Exchange scheme and as the licensed Tier 5 sponsor for any overseas students participating in the scheme, the RPS PPSS will maintain close contact with the pre-registration tutor/employer throughout the pre-registration year. This is to ensure that all UKVI record keeping, monitoring and reporting obligations are met.

Responsibilities and obligations

An overview of the roles of the RPS, Schools of Pharmacy, student and employers in relation to the PPSS application, the Tier 5 visa application and placement monitoring is shown in [Figure 1: PPSS responsibilities overview](#).

1. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS)

The RPS is the overarching body accountable for the Government Authorised Exchange scheme and is the licensed Tier 5 sponsor for overseas pre-registration trainees participating in the scheme. The RPS will administer the sponsorship scheme including checking and validating the application and issuing the certificate of sponsorship. The RPS will liaise with the designated School of Pharmacy lead if there are any enquiries during the application process. The RPS will issue Certificates of Sponsorship (CoS) to applicants who meet the required criteria. The RPS ensures that all the requirements of the scheme are met before sponsorship is provided and details of the employment are recorded. Throughout the pre-registration year, the RPS is responsible for ensuring that any absence, issues or concerns reported to them by employers or students/pre-registration trainees are recorded and reported to the UKVI.

The key responsibilities and obligations of the RPS are to:

- Administer and provide overarching professional sponsorship, under the Tier 5 Government Authorised Exchange scheme, for pre-registration pharmacist training for overseas students completing the UK MPharm.
- Liaise closely with the schools of pharmacy and employers.
- Ensure that the pre-registration placement is GPhC/PSNI approved.
- Issue the Certificate of Sponsorship after verifying the student eligibility.
- Maintain up-to-date student records in electronic and paper format as deemed necessary.
- Comply with UKVI sponsor obligations; including informing UKVI immediately of any change in circumstance that could curtail the Tier 5 sponsorship of the student.
- Provide information on the Tier 5 sponsorship scheme for the benefit of all stakeholders.
- Provide the UKVI access to all pre-registration trainee's records when required.
- Review fees on an annual basis to ensure that these are fair and reflect the costs to the RPS in operating the scheme.
- Review the sponsorship programme every year to ensure the sponsorship scheme is accurate, efficient and meets UKVI requirements.

2. School of Pharmacy

Each School of Pharmacy is responsible for liaising with the student throughout the sponsorship application process, collating all information and ensuring all documentation submitted as part of the sponsorship application is correct; as well as supporting the student in obtaining a pre-registration placement and resolving any queries or issues.

Whilst responsible for the student the school must inform the RPS if they become aware of any issues or concerns that may affect the student's immigration status. The school is responsible for monitoring the student under the Tier 4 visa until the PPSS Certificate of Sponsorship is issued and the student has started the pre-registration placement. The responsibility of monitoring the student will then transfer to the RPS as the professional sponsor.

The key responsibilities and obligations of the School of Pharmacy are to ensure that:

- The current version of the PPSS application form is used. Applications received using old documents will be returned.
- All pages of the application form are completed and are submitted with the relevant supporting documents for verification.
- Only named authorised persons make the declaration on behalf of the School of Pharmacy. Declarations made by other members of staff will result in delays.
- Declarations from the School of Pharmacy are no more than one month old, i.e. signed no more than one calendar month before the application form is submitted.
- The authorised person at the School of Pharmacy sees the student's original documents (passport, visa etc), not copies.
- Copies of supporting documents are **clear and legible**:
 - Passport copies should include the holder's personal details and signature, leave stamps and visa.
 - A copy of both sides of the UK biometric permit is submitted (if provided).
- Copies of the applicant's passport and/or visa/biometric residence permit are certified i.e. **signed and dated** by the authorised person at the School of Pharmacy.
- The contract of employment contains:
 - names and signatures of both parties
 - work start date
 - work end date
 - job title
 - hours of work
 - salary (can be expressed as hourly, weekly or annual)
 - details of any other allowances, e.g. accommodation, if these are provided as part of the employment.

Applications which include a contract of employment that does not meet these requirements will be rejected.

Note that job offer letters and some standard contracts of employment do not always contain all the relevant details.

- The student is aware of the UKVI requirement to provide evidence of maintenance (for 90 days before the visa application). Students are advised to delay their application for sponsorship until they have the required maintenance (funding) in place.

Certificates of Sponsorship are valid only for 90 days leaving insufficient time to gather the funds together if they are not already in place.

- Students are advised that they should apply for their Tier 5 visa as soon as the Certificate of Sponsorship is received and that they have confirmation of completion of their degree.
- Students are informed, where relevant, that visa applications from outside the UK may be subject to the result of a tuberculosis test.

3. Employers

As part of the PPSS application process, the employer must confirm that the trainee has been appointed to a pre-registration placement at a registered GPhC/PSNI accredited pharmacy premises. The trainee must also be issued with a contract of employment which includes specific work start and end dates, job title, hours of work, salary and names and signatures of both parties. Details of any other allowances, e.g. accommodation, if these are provided as part of the employment must also be specified in the contract of employment.

Employers are responsible for notifying the RPS PPSS when the trainee starts the placement. Confirmation must be submitted to the RPS PPSS within five working days of the placement start date.

Employers are also responsible for monitoring the pre-registration trainee throughout the placement and confirming their attendance to the RPS PPSS on a monthly basis. Any changes, issues or extended periods of absence should also be reported to the RPS PPSS immediately. The RPS PPSS in turn, is required to report any such information directly to the UKVI immediately. Failure to provide the RPS with the evidence of attendance may result in the Tier 5 sponsorship being withdrawn.

Employers should note that acceptance onto the PPSS does not guarantee that a Tier 5 visa application will automatically be successful.

The key responsibilities and obligations of the employer are to:

- Read through the PPSS Handbook and FAQs making sure they understand the employer responsibilities and obligations under the scheme.
- Send a copy of the contract of employment to the RPS PPSS (via the School of Pharmacy or trainee) as part of the application process.

The contract of employment **must** contain:

- names and signatures of both parties
- work start date
- work end date
- job title
- hours of work
- salary (can be expressed as hourly, weekly or annually)
- details of any other allowances, e.g. accommodation, if these are provided as part of the employment.

Note that job offer letters and some standard contracts of employment do not always contain all the required information.

- Ensure that the pre-registration trainee employment conditions conform to all relevant UK and European employment legislation (e.g. National Minimum Wage, Working Time Regulations).
- Provide RPS PPSS with a copy of any Disclosure and Barring (DBS) check carried out on the trainee.
- Ensure that the trainee's original documents (passport, visa, etc) and not copies are viewed when checking their right to work. Ideally, employers should keep a signed and dated copy of the relevant documents.
- Make a note of the expiry date of the trainee's passport/visa/biometric residence card. Employers should be aware of any documents expiring during the course of the pre-registration placement and check they are renewed.
- If the trainee has not applied for their Tier 5 visa when their placement starts you should advise them to do so as soon as the Certificate of Sponsorship is received.
- Confirm the trainee has started their placement by emailing support@rpharms.com. Alternatively the employer can complete the [Confirmation of Attendance](#) form and submit it to the RPS PPSS within five working days of the expected start date.
- Provide the RPS PPSS with confirmation of attendance of the trainee on a monthly basis (either on the first working day or the 15th or each month) throughout the pre-registration training.
- Provide the RPS PPSS with details on completion of the placement or if the pre-registration trainee pharmacist leaves the placement for any reason.
- Keep the RPS PPSS informed of any changes to the placement including change of tutor, workplace address and start and/or finish date.

- Inform the RPS PPSS immediately if the trainee is absent for more than 10 consecutive (working) days or leaves your employment.
- The pre-registration trainee should be paid directly into their chosen bank account and not paid in cash.
- Make available to UKVI or RPS PPSS on request, copies of the trainee's:
 - job description
 - payslips
 - progress reports
 - training plan/syllabus.

Employing migrant workers

It is the responsibility of the employer to check the migrant has a right to work in the UK and that right to work continues throughout the pre-registration year by checking that any visas or passports which expire during the placement are renewed/replaced.

Pre-registration trainees generally have a grace period as part of their student visa which allows them to remain in the country following completion of their pharmacy degree course (usually four months). However, all individual's circumstances differ and you are advised therefore to confirm whether you are able to employ a pre-registration applicant who has yet to successfully obtain a Tier 5 visa.

Employers should note that acceptance onto the PPSS does not guarantee that the migrant has a right to work in the UK; nor does it mean that a student's Tier 5 visa application will automatically be successful. Employers should therefore check with their pre-registration trainees as to the progress of the visa application and should confirm the application has been successful.

The RPS PPSS is unable to provide visa or immigration advice. Employers can find advice on employing migrant workers on the [Government website](#) or should take advice from an employment specialist.

4. Applicants: students/pre-registration trainee pharmacists

Each applicant is responsible for ensuring that the PPSS application form and relevant supporting documents are submitted to the School of Pharmacy for verification prior to submission to the RPS PPSS.

The key responsibilities and obligations of students/pre-registration trainees are to:

- Ensure they do **not** apply for sponsorship until they are able to meet the [Tier 5 maintenance requirement](#).

The Home Office UKVI is very strict on these requirements and failure to meet this requirement is the most common reason why a Tier 5 visa is refused. Certificates of Sponsorship are valid for 90 days only which is not sufficient time to gather the funds if they are not already in place.

- Contact the RPS immediately if the pre-registration start date is delayed after the certificate of sponsorship has been issued and it is not possible to start work on the contracted work start date. Any delay in informing RPS of the change may result in the visa expiring before the end of the pre-registration training.
- Make sure that their pre-registration tutor/employer completes and returns the attendance declaration each month. If the RPS PPSS is unable to confirm a pre-registration trainee's continued attendance in their placement then their sponsorship may be at risk.
- Send a copy of their Tier 5 visa/BRP to the RPS PPSS as soon as it is received. If the visa application is refused the applicant must update the RPS PPSS immediately.
- Send evidence of the National Insurance number to the RPS as soon as it has been issued (if not submitted previously as part of the application process).
- Notify the RPS PPSS if their home address changes at any time during the pre-registration training period; this must be within 10 days of the change occurring.
- Complete a placement amendment form to notify the RPS PPSS within ten days of any change of tutor or pre-registration placement.
- Inform the RPS PPSS immediately if they leave their placement for any reason.
- Be RPS members. Pre-registration trainees sponsored under the PPSS must remain in membership throughout the pre-registration training year. If the RPS membership lapses the sponsorship may be at risk.
- Submit copies of your GPhC progress reports and/or evidence of progress in performance standards (e.g. assessment summary) to UVKI or RPS PPSS if requested to do so.
- Ensure they make every effort to respond to requests for information from the RPS PPSS Team throughout the pre-registration year. Your sponsorship will be at risk if you fail to respond to requests from RPS PPSS in a timely manner.

Note that failure to meet the student obligations under the PPSS may result in withdrawal of sponsorship.

Additionally, the following points will ensure that PPSS applications from students/pre-registration trainee pharmacists are processed promptly:

- Students should read through the PPSS Handbook and FAQs and ensure they understand their responsibilities and obligations under the scheme.
- Students should check the guidance on the Home Office UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) website regarding Tier 5 visa applications; in particular ensure they have sufficient funds and be able to meet the maintenance criteria. Students should also be aware of the requirement for tuberculosis testing if relevant.
- Ensure the current version of the PPSS application form (available on the RPS website) is used.
- All sections of the application form must be completed (unless indicated otherwise). Each field must be completed as required. The form and the guidance document should be read carefully. If students/pre-registration trainees have any queries about completing the form please contact RPS Support on 0845 257 2570 or email support@rpharms.com. Any incomplete sections or discrepancies on your application form will delay your application.
- The School of Pharmacy declaration must be completed by authorised persons only; students should check with their Placement Office, International Office or Head of School if they are unsure who the authorised person is. Declarations made by other members of staff will result in delays in processing the application.
- The application form should be received by the RPS PPSS within one calendar month of the date of the declarations from the employer, applicant and School of Pharmacy.
- The information provided in the PPSS application form will be used when applying to the Home Office for certificates of sponsorship. If ANY information provided on the application form changes, at any stage in the pre-registration training period the RPS must be informed immediately and will then update the Home Office. The certificate of sponsorship is at risk if the Home Office are not aware of changes to residential address, passport, workplace etc.
- The contract of employment must contain:
 - names and signatures of both parties
 - work start date
 - work end date
 - job title
 - hours of work
 - salary (can be expressed as hourly, weekly or annual)
 - details of any other allowances, e.g. accommodation, if these are provided as part of the employment.

Note that job offer letters and some contracts of employment do not always contain all the relevant details.

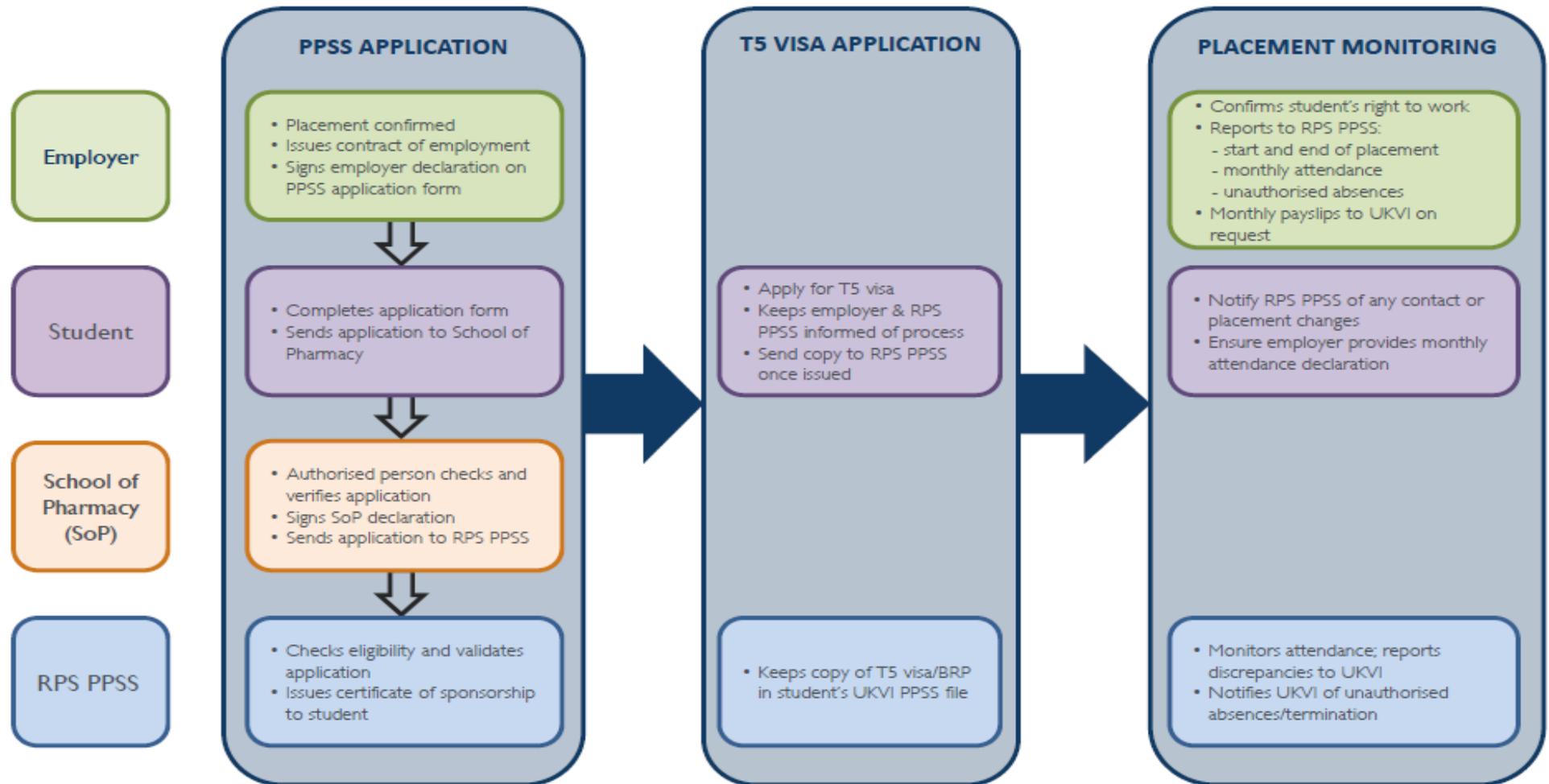
- The contract of employment needs to have a specific work end date. This date is specified on the Certificate of Sponsorship and is used when applying for the Tier 5 visa. Dates such as 'end of June' or 'week commencing 01 July' are not acceptable.
- Check that the work period and the work end date specified on your contract of employment cover your GPhC/PSNI assessment. This is particularly important for pre-registration trainees intending to sit the autumn assessments.

Students/pre-registration trainees should also note the following:

- Students should apply for their Tier 5 visa as soon as the Certificate of Sponsorship is received; UKVI expect that unless there are exceptional circumstances, all students/pre-registration pharmacists will have applied for or received their visa/BRP before starting their placement.
- Application forms and the accompanying supporting documents should be scanned/copied/photographed and emailed to: support@rpharms.com.
- Note that the applications are usually submitted from the School of Pharmacy direct to the RPS.
- Students/pre-registration trainees who intend to switch from a Tier 2 visa in the UK should seek professional advice from an authorised immigration/visa advisor before applying for sponsorship and for a Tier 5 visa.
- The RPS is not authorised to provide information on immigration or visa issues. Details of registered providers of immigration and visa advice can be found on the [OISC website](#). Alternatively the university international team may be able to help.

Note that failure to meet the student obligations under the PPSS may result in withdrawal of sponsorship.

Figure 1: PPSS responsibilities overview



Frequently Asked Questions

[General FAQs](#)

Answers to the following General FAQs can be found on the [RPS website](#).

Subject	FAQs
Eligibility	Who is eligible for sponsorship?
Other visa options	I am not eligible for sponsorship under the PPSS. What other visa options will cover my pre-registration training?
Northern Ireland	Does the PPSS cover Northern Ireland?
When to apply	Can I apply for sponsorship before I graduate?
Applying for sponsorship	How do I apply?
Certificate of Sponsorship	How will I receive my Certificate of Sponsorship?
Split placements	Can the PPSS be used to sponsor a split placement e.g. six months in industry and six months in the NHS?
Graduating in 2016	I started my degree in 2012. Will I be able to apply for sponsorship for my pre-reg year?
OSPAP	I am due to finish my OSPAP qualification later this year. Can I use the PPSS to apply for a visa for my pre-registration year?
Student obligations	What do I need to do once I have received my Certificate of Sponsorship?
Work start date changes	What do I need to do if my work start date changes (for example, if I need to re-sit exams at university)?
Changing employers	What happens if I change employer or training site during my pre-registration year?
GPhC/PSNI assessment/ extending sponsorship	What if I fail the GPhC/PSNI pre-registration assessment?
Working as a pharmacist	Can I remain in the UK and work as a pharmacist once I register with the GPhC/PSNI?
Charges	Do I need to pay to join the scheme?
Dates	When is the last date I can submit a sponsorship application?

[Application form FAQs](#)

Answers to the following Application form FAQs can be found on the [RPS website](#).

Subject	FAQs
Application form	Has the application form been updated?
National Insurance number	I do not have a National Insurance (NI) number yet. What should I do?
Processing time	How long does it take for applications to be processed?
Hints and tips	Is there anything I can do to ensure my application is processed as quickly as possible?
Contract end date missing	My contract of employment specifies a start date but no end date. Is it acceptable for my employer to add the end date by hand and counter-sign the amendment?
Passport expiry	My passport is due to expire before I start my pre-registration training. Can I apply for sponsorship with this passport or should I renew it before I apply to PPSS?
School of Pharmacy declaration	Who should sign the 'School of Pharmacy' declaration on the PPSS application form?
Deadline	Is there a deadline for submitting the PPSS application form?

[Tier 5 visa FAQs](#)

Answers to the following Tier 5 visa FAQs can be found on the [RPS website](#).

Subject	FAQ and link
Visa applications	Are all Tier 5 visa applications approved by UKVI?
Starting work	Can I start my pre-registration training before I get my Tier 5 visa?
Maintenance requirement	I am applying for my Tier 5 visa but am unable to provide supporting evidence for the maintenance requirement. Can the RPS, as my sponsor, certify maintenance for me?
RPS sponsor rating	What rating is the RPS sponsor rating?
Sponsor licence number	What is the RPS sponsor licence number?
Tuberculosis testing	Do I need a tuberculosis test when applying for a Tier 5 visa?

[Employer FAQs](#)

Answers to the following Employer FAQs can be found on the [RPS website](#).

Subject	FAQ link
Employer obligations	What are my obligations as an employer or pre-registration tutor under the PPSS?
Employer checks	What checks do I, as an employer, need to do to ensure an international pre-registration trainee is entitled to work in the UK?

Further information

Where can students get further information or support?

Students should contact their School of Pharmacy in the first instance for advice and support with any enquiries about the scheme or their pre-registration placement.

The RPS Support Team can help with more complex queries relating to the sponsorship scheme. You can email them using support@rpharms.com or telephone 0845 257 2570.

For information and advice on visas, including the Tier 5 Government Authorised Exchange, you should contact an authorised immigration adviser. The [OISC website](#) includes details on how to find authorised advisers. The RPS is not authorised to provide visa or immigration advice.

PPSS resources

Essential resources

- [UKVI Tier 5 \(Temporary Worker\) Policy Guidance](#)

Useful forms

- [PPSS Application Form](#)
- [PPSS Application Guidance Notes](#)
- [Confirmation of Attendance Form](#)
- [Guidance for Applicants](#)
- [Guidance for Employers](#)
- [Guidance for Schools of Pharmacy](#)
- [Placement Change Form](#)
- [Home Address Change Form](#)

Useful contacts

- [British Pharmacy Students Association](#)
- [General Pharmaceutical Council](#)
- [Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner](#)
- [Pharmacist Support](#)
- [Royal Pharmaceutical Society](#)
- [United Kingdom Visas and Immigration](#)

Employment, visa and immigration advice

The RPS PPSS is unable to provide employment, visa or immigration advice.

Employers can find advice on employing migrant workers on the [Government website](#) or should take advice from an employment specialist. Pharmacist Support are also be able to help with employment issues.

Details of authorised visa and immigration advisors can be found on the [Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner website](#).