

Nigel Clarke
Chair of the General Pharmaceutical Council

By email

6 August 2021

Dear Nigel,

Moving to a fair and timely resolution following technical faults at pre-registration assessment

As I hope you are aware, my team have recently raised serious concerns about a technical issue with the registration assessment at the Redditch centre, where the clinical paper could not be seen on the screen and so a number of trainees could not complete the exam.

The trainees affected have been informed that they must wait until November to sit the entire assessment again. This has been confirmed to us by a member of the GPhC staff. This lack of a timely resolution is not what we would expect of our regulator. There is an apparent lack of any adequate contingency plan for IT failure of this type. There does not appear to be an understanding of the significant impact on their wellbeing, compounded by a demonstrable financial cost. We have been contacted by trainees and an employer about the distress this has caused, and they are urgently seeking a fair resolution. It is deeply disappointing that GPhC has not been able to offer a better alternative to sitting both papers (including the one sat without issue this time) in November and do not seem to be currently working on improved solutions.

After the serious problems with the planning and preparation for the March registration assessment, my predecessor wrote to you about whether you were assured that any risks relating to the exam had been properly understood and adequately mitigated. Despite robust assurances it seems that the wholly predictable risk of a technical issue such as that experienced by these three trainees was not properly considered, with no contingency for an alternative on the day or a timely new sitting day.

Given the devastating impact for those trainees who will be unable to work as pharmacists for three months through no fault of their own, I urge you to develop a fairer solution (such as a sitting as soon as possible, only for the paper for which there were problems), alongside any appropriate compensation. Since universities and royal colleges have been able to plan for potential issues with online exams and arrange alternative sittings, including on the same or next day, it is completely unacceptable that the GPhC has left trainees in this upsetting, stressful and unfair position.

It is now incumbent upon you as the regulator to take responsibility for this oversight and improve contingency planning to prevent such serious implications for trainees. I urge you to open up the GPhC risk assessment and mitigation plans to public scrutiny so that the profession can be assured this type of thing will not happen again.

Yours sincerely,



Prof Claire Anderson FRPharmS
President, Royal Pharmaceutical Society



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