

## PhSC Position Statement: Academic Staffing within Pharmacy Schools in the UK

Growth in the pharmacy profession is welcomed by all members of Pharmacy Schools Council. However, the Pharmacy Schools Council urges that this growth is managed not only in the workplace but within the education sector.

The publication of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan<sup>1</sup> for England in April 2023 showed a planned growth of pharmacists in training in England in 2028 by nearly 30% on the 2022 baseline of approximately 3,400 students, and by nearly 50% on the 2022 baseline by 2031. This increase of over 1500 pharmacy students in England alone is a welcome development but places great pressure on an already strained and constrained Higher Education (HE) sector. Currently there are 29 fully accredited MPharm programmes in the UK, with one further school, Swansea, very close to the final step for full accreditation. Absorbing over 1500 new students into these 30 schools is problematic due to resource constraints both in terms of the physical environment and student/staff ratios (SSRs). The SSR is one of the many indicators the General Pharmaceutical Council uses to measure the quality of delivery of MPharm programmes during the accreditation and reaccreditation process.

In September 2024, one further School of Pharmacy (SoP), the University of Leicester, will take a first cohort of MPharm students. The University of Bath, in partnership with Plymouth University will also welcome a cohort of first year students to Plymouth in September 2024. At least seven more universities in the UK are in the early stages of accreditation for new MPharm programmes. Whilst these new schools will enhance the number of undergraduate places available to study pharmacy in the UK, current Heads of School have expressed concerns around the current difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified staff in all the fields required to run an MPharm programme. It is not uncommon for advertised posts to attract only one or two suitably qualified candidates and headhunting of existing members of the pharmacy academic workforce by new and established SoPs is becoming an increasingly common occurrence.

This is particularly acutely felt when the need is to recruit practising pharmacists with the correct clinical expertise to deliver the increased core clinical components of the MPharm. Financial pressures within the HE sector, mostly due to the fact that student tuition fees have not increased since 2012 (when they were set at £9,250; current estimates are that the tuition fee is actually only worth £6500 in real terms), mean that Heads of School are under pressure to either manage with a smaller staff base (which will affect the overall SSR) or to recruit at lower grades within HE pay spines. Clinical pharmacists with sufficient expertise to deliver appropriate teaching within academic practice (regardless of sector of practice) are most commonly found at the equivalent to Agenda for Change Band 8a in terms of salary requirements (£50,952 on entry, moving to £57,349 after five years of service). In many higher education institutions (HEIs), this is on the border between Lecturer/Senior Lecturer (Assistant/ Associate Professor) which have very different job descriptions and requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan-2/#2-train-growing-the-workforce> (accessed 26.6.24)

This matter was discussed at the April 2024 meeting of the Pharmacy Schools Council and the following points were raised by Heads of School:

- A career in academic pharmacy needs to be a more attractive option for pharmacists to expand the academic pharmacy workforce.
- The challenge of preparing individuals for a career in academia without following the traditional PhD route was considered. There is a need to explore alternative pathways for career progression.
- When universities lose staff, it takes time to recruit new members of staff.
- It is difficult for universities to recruit casual staff due to university's hourly rate not matching pharmacy locum rates.
- New schools of pharmacy opening in the next two to three years will lead to a greater demand for academic staff to fill teaching positions.
- Staff at current SoPs are being approached by new SoPs about job opportunities.
- New SoPs in the Republic of Ireland are likely to take some staff from SoPs in Northern Ireland.
- There are currently many vacancies in the NHS, so universities are competing with the NHS for pharmacists – this causes particular issues with teacher-practitioner posts.
- With teacher-practitioner joint posts, while the NHS can promote pharmacists, universities can't promote them if they do not have the necessary qualifications. This can affect retention.
- Using secondments to recruit senior pharmacists to academic posts may be an option worth exploring.

The Pharmacy Schools Council recognises and welcomes the work currently being done by the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for England's office on enhancing clinical academic careers, but this does not address the current salary disparities between HEIs and the external workplace. We are therefore formally raising our concerns about the currently uncontrolled increase in schools of pharmacy in the UK without a commensurate investment from the NHS in any of the Home Nations in training at undergraduate level. We would welcome discussions with Chief Pharmaceutical Officers on this matter.

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