

# MPharm degrees with preparatory year

## Guidance for schools of pharmacy

V3, March 2024

### 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-accredited Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) degree,
- 52 weeks of foundation year training <sup>1</sup>(previously 'pre-registration training'), and
- the GPhC's Registration Assessment.

- 1.2 The GPhC currently accredits the following MPharm degree variants:

- 4-year MPharm degree
- 4-year MPharm degree delivered in-part overseas (MPharm 2+2)
- 5-year MPharm degree with preparatory year
- 5-year MPharm degree with year 1 taught over 2 years
- 5-year MPharm degree with integrated foundation training
- 5-year MPharm degree with Sandwich foundation training
- 5-year MPharm degrees delivered in-part overseas with integrated foundation training (MPharm 2+3)

### 2. Background

- 2.1 Since the 2020/21 academic year the GPhC has accredited 5-year MPharm degrees that include an initial preparatory year or '*year 0*', followed by the four years of a traditional MPharm. The GPhC's terminology for this programme variant is an '**MPharm degree with preparatory year**'.

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<sup>1</sup> This may be undertaken as part of a GPhC-accredited MPharm degree with integrated or Sandwich foundation training.

- 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. This additional year provides teaching and assessment to allow students to demonstrate that they can meet the equivalent academic requirements needed for direct entry to year 1 of the MPharm. As such, this programme variant tends to require lower entry tariff points than direct entry to the 4-year MPharm degree.
- 2.3 The first taught year of the programme 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, often 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 Prior to the 2020/21 academic year, the accreditation of the four-year MPharm degree component of this programme was accepted to allow students entry to pre-registration training (now known as 'foundation training').
- 3.2 Since the GPhC began accrediting this programme variant in 2020/21, accreditation teams now make a separate recommendation on accreditation for each variant of the MPharm programme being offered. This has brought the process in line with the accreditation of other variants of the MPharm degree.
- 3.3 Key reasons for introducing accreditation of MPharms with a preparatory year:
- MPharm degrees with a preparatory year are a separate programme 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 programmes 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 MPharm programme variants accredited by the GPhC and provides clarity and reassurance for prospective students.
  - Around 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 669 students embarking on an MPharm degree with preparatory year in the 2022/23 academic year.

- Although the GPhC learning outcomes are not taught or assessed during the preparatory year, there are other aspects of the programme such as admissions, student support, monitoring, progression, and fitness to practise that link to the requirements in the initial education and training standards.
- Historically there has been some disparity in the way that student fitness to practise has been managed for this programme 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). Accreditation ensures that this area is brought in line with requirements in the Standards.
- Data appears to show that a proportion of students who start an MPharm degree with preparatory year do not go on to achieve an MPharm degree. It is recognised that some attrition is due to movement of students between schools, and students opting to change to different career paths. However, it is important that this programme variant is monitored and that a review of factors such as the admissions criteria, student support, teaching and learning strategy and assessment is undertaken to have oversight of this programme variant.
- Formal recognition of this programme variant by the GPhC ensures that schools of pharmacy and the GPhC have sufficient oversight to monitor student progression and achievement to allow timely intervention should concerns arise.

#### 4. Clarification on this programme variant

- 4.1 An MPharm degree with preparatory year is a single programme 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 programme which includes a preparatory year (often referred to as 'year 0') followed by four further taught years that mirror that of the accredited 4-year 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.

#### 5. Programme title

- 5.1 The GPhC terminology for this MPharm programme variant is 'MPharm degree with preparatory year'. Schools of pharmacy may use this title or a title of their choosing. The title used, however, must ensure clarity on what the programme includes, and not have the potential to confuse or mislead applicants/students.
- 5.2 The year of in-practice training undertaken by trainee pharmacists prior to applying for registration, was renamed 'foundation training' in 2021 to reflect the new terminology used in the **Standards for the Initial Education and training of Pharmacists, 2021**. The GPhC accredits a variation of the MPharm degree which is a 5-year MPharm that includes integrated or Sandwich foundation training, permitting the trainee to apply to register upon graduation provided they

have passed the GPhC Registration Assessment. The use of the word ‘foundation’ in any other advertised MPharm programme title/variant therefore has the potential to confuse or mislead applicants or students, and should be avoided. It is also important when reporting to the GPhC, that the MPharm programme that the student has graduated from is clear in terms of the elements of education and training that have been completed.

- 5.3 Schools of pharmacy must consider the title of the MPharm with preparatory year variant carefully and avoid using titles such as ‘MPharm/Pharmacy with foundation/foundation year’. If choosing to use a programme title other than ‘MPharm with preparatory year’, approval of the programme title must be sought from the GPhC.

## 6. Requirements for accreditation

- 6.1. The GPhC undertakes accreditation of MPharm degrees which include a preparatory year where it is a single programme of study, with one application point. Any foundation, or other preparatory programme, 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.
- 6.2. 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 programme. All teaching and assessment of the MPharm learning outcomes is expected to take place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> taught year (MPharm year/stage 1) onwards, with the first taught year being set aside for preparatory teaching and assessment only.
- 6.3. For the purpose of accreditation, it is assumed that the programme 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.
- 6.4. 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 2021<sup>2</sup>**:

Standard	Criteria
<b>Standard 1: Selection and admission</b>	All
<b>Standard 3: Resources and capacity</b>	All
<b>Standard 4: Managing, developing and evaluating MPharm degrees</b>	4.3, 4.4 and 4.6
<b>Standard 5: Curriculum design and delivery</b>	5.3, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11
<b>Standard 6: Assessment</b>	6.1, 6.2 (a) and (b), 6.4, 6.7, 6.9, 6.11, 6.12 and 6.13

<sup>2</sup> 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.

Standard	Criteria
<b>Standard 7: Support and development for student pharmacists and everyone involved in the delivery of the MPharm degree</b>	7.2, 7.3 and 7.4

These standards and criteria 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.

- 6.5. In addition, schools of pharmacy are asked through the accreditation process to provide additional information to detail any key differences between the current MPharm degree provision and the MPharm with preparatory year provision in relation to an aspect of the remaining standards/criteria.
- 6.6. Further guidance in relation to the interpretation of the standards for 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 may understandably be lower than what would be expected for entry to the 4-year MPharm degree, with some programmes 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 entry criteria set are appropriate for students to progress and realistically achieve an MPharm degree.
- The school must also consider the teaching and learning strategy, and the support that will be in place for students on this programme, 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.
- Any progression requirements that students must meet to progress from the 1st taught year (preparatory year) into the 2<sup>nd</sup> taught year (year 1 of the accredited MPharm) must be clearly set out to students at the admissions stage. The academic requirements to allow a student to progress from the preparatory year into year 1 should align with the equivalent requirements for direct entry to year 1.
- Suitability of the applicant to study pharmacy must be considered during the admissions stage, and not delayed until entry to the 2<sup>nd</sup> taught year. That is to say that schools are required to have regard to an applicants' suitability to study pharmacy before they are accepted to enter the 5-year programme. Student fitness to practise policies must apply during all years of the programme.
- The GPhC is aware that for this programme type, students may decide to follow other career pathways and not progress to pharmacy. For this reason, schools may delay formal criminal records checks until the point of entry to the second taught year, provided that they can demonstrate that this will not compromise patient safety. As a minimum, schools must require students to make formal health and fitness to practise declarations at the admissions stage, which must be reviewed for suitability, and appropriate guidance given where necessary, before the applicant is accepted onto the programme.

### **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 whether or not they are a healthcare professional and what and where they teach and/or support the students.
- If the preparatory year element of the programme is delivered in conjunction with a partner institution, full details should be provided including governance and management arrangements.
- The addition of 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 programme 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 programme 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 academic requirements to meet in order to progress through the programme.
- Clear and detailed assessment criteria in relation to the preparatory year should be made available. Programme 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.

- Students undertaking the preparatory year must have access to pharmacy professionals who are able to act as role models and mentors, giving professional support and guidance.
- 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.

## 7. Accreditation arrangements from 2021/22 onwards

- 7.1. All current providers offering an MPharm degrees with a preparatory year will have the programme provision reviewed in parallel with the MPharm degree provision.
- 7.2. The accreditation team will make a separate recommendation on accreditation for each MPharm programme variant being reviewed.

## 8. Accreditation of new programme provision

- 8.1. A 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 complete an **expression of interest form** and submit it to the GPhC Education team to confirm its intentions, so that accreditation of the new MPharm programme variant can be arranged.
- 8.2. Prospective new schools of pharmacy may apply to be accredited to provide both an MPharm degree and an MPharm degree with preparatory year. Both programme versions will be reviewed in parallel during accreditation step events, and no separate submission is required.

## 9. Submission documentation

- 9.1. The submission documentation relating to the MPharm with preparatory year 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.
- 9.2. Submission templates will be provided by the GPhC Education team on request [education@pharmacyregulation.org](mailto:education@pharmacyregulation.org)

## 10. Additional information

### 10.1 Fees

The GPhC does not currently charge for the accreditation of MPharm degrees with a preparatory year for programme providers who were accredited to provide an MPharm degree or MPharm degree with foundation training prior to 2020/21. The GPhC does not currently charge for reaccreditation of MPharm degrees with a preparatory year.

The GPhC charges for the accreditation of the initial accreditation of MPharm degrees with a preparatory year on a cost recovery basis, however the process is normally undertaken in parallel

to the accreditation of a 4-year MPharm degree, where that is possible, so costs associated with accrediting the additional MPharm variant are likely to be minimal. A detailed breakdown of the expected cost of the initial accreditation of an MPharm degree and MPharm degree with preparatory year is available on request.

## 10.2 Data requirements

Schools delivering more than one variant of an MPharm degree are required to hold student data in a way that allows the School to identify and track each student by MPharm programme variant for monitoring and reporting purposes. Data and information requests from the GPhC will require the student's programme variant to be identified, this includes both summary student data requests and MPharm pass list confirmations. Data analyses submitted for accreditation purposes will also require a breakdown by programme variant.

## 10.3 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](mailto:education@pharmacyregulation.org).

GPhC

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