**Supporting the COVID-19 response:**

**Joint Guidance: Facilitating deployment of pharmacy undergraduate students to support the pharmacy workforce**

**Health Education England, NHS Education for Scotland, Health Education and Improvement Wales, Pharmacy Schools Council, Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the British Pharmaceutical Students' Association.**

**09 April 2020**

## 1. Purpose

This guidance is aimed at providing information to undergraduate pharmacy students on how COVID-19 affects them at this time. It is sets out a number of principles on how students and employers can support safe and effective deployment of pharmacy students within pharmacy settings, during the emergency period.

It is important to note that the current pandemic is fast-changing, and that guidance may be subject to further development. Therefore, these principles should be used in conjunction with advice and guidance from students' higher education institutions, the Pharmacy Schools Council, the General Pharmaceutical Council and professional bodies.

## 2. Overview

Undergraduate pharmacy students can use this guidance to inform their decision to assist in a pharmacy setting during the COVID-19 emergency. In summary, students must consider the associated health and wellbeing risks, and timing of any deployment into a pharmacy workplace. A decision to deploy should not impact on a students' ability to complete any current or upcoming assessments to progress through their degree. As such, it is strongly advised that students deploy in a way in which their assessment schedule is not compromised. Students may deploy into the pharmacy workplace setting through a variety of methods. Systems are being established in England, Wales and Scotland to allow students to register their interest to deploy into the pharmacy workplace and be linked with employers wishing to host a student.

Employers and host organisations can refer to this guidance when receiving a student into the workforce. In summary, organisations must ensure they are compliant with all relevant employment and regulatory legislation. This includes ensuring capacity for appropriate supervision and support for students. Organisations should clearly set out the role of the student and if it will be on a voluntary or paid basis.

This document also sets out guidance on the process to facilitate effective deployment of students. This includes consideration of the location and setting at which the student could be placed, previous experience of students, and guidance on monitoring deployment and student wellbeing.

### 3. Background

The spread of the COVID-19 virus has caused significant pressure across the UK's health and care services. The Pharmacy Schools Council (PhSC), the Statutory Education Bodies (SEB) for England[1], Scotland[2] and Wales[3] the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPharmS) and the British Pharmaceutical Students' Association (BPSA) have worked to support the pharmacy workforce through this period.

We recognise the ambition of current undergraduate pharmacy students to aid the clinical and patient-facing workforce at this time. Together, we are keen to facilitate effective deployment of undergraduate pharmacy students who wish to do so.

Considering this, it is critical to find a balance to ensure that students' health, education and careers are protected and that the public is served by a competent and skilled workforce.

To ensure current pharmacy students can progress through their educational programme, Schools of Pharmacy represented by the PhSC are working closely with the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) to design and approve alternative end of year assessments, or to defer certain assessments. These include distance assessments and completed coursework assessments in order to progress undergraduate pharmacy students (MPharm 1 – 3) through the education pipeline. It will also allow fourth year students (MPharm 4) to graduate and begin their pre-registration training in summer 2020. In doing so, the future supply of the pharmacy workforce will not be compromised.

We must also consider the current education and training pathway for a pharmacy student. The undergraduate pharmacy degree is structurally different to other healthcare professions. In particular, that it does not have funded NHS clinical placements within the degree in every country or the associated contractual arrangements, occupational health clearance and, importantly, 'entrustable professional activities'[4]. Instead, the opportunity to fully embed workplace skills and develop patient-facing competencies takes place largely during the pre-registration training year, in an employment setting.

Whilst we recognise the different experiences and skills of undergraduate students, their pharmacy skills are incomplete for unsupervised practice in a pharmacy setting. This means that a different mechanism is required to effectively support and deploy students in a timely manner to support the pharmacy workforce.

In light of the challenges described, we have developed a set of guiding principles on how undergraduate pharmacy students can safely be deployed to assist the healthcare workforce.

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[1] Health Education England
[2] NHS Education for Scotland
[3] Health Education and Improvement Wales
[4] Entrustable professional activities are agreed and defined activities in the healthcare workplace that students are permitted to participate in.

## 4. Principles

The student body, PhSC, SEBs, RPharmS and the BPSA wish to facilitate pharmacy students to support the pharmacy workforce during this emergency period

The following principles are agreed by the signatories and should act as a reference point for students and employers and organisations as standards of good practice:

- Student deployment must be voluntary. Individuals should not feel coerced to deploy or complete their allocated deployment if they choose not to.

- Deployment must not impact on an individual's ability to complete any current or upcoming assessments to progress through their pharmacy degree; it must not compromise the future supply of the pharmacy workforce.

- The process used must identify and mitigate risks to individual students, patients and the general public when deploying students into healthcare settings.

- Individuals who are at increased risk of severe illness or who are advised to follow social distancing measures (as set out in the latest government guidelines[5]) **should not** work within a healthcare setting.

- The employing/hosting organisation (e.g. community pharmacies, NHS Trusts/Boards) receiving the student must comply with all relevant employment and regulatory legislation.

- The employing/hosting organisation must provide a full induction and any training necessary for the student

- The employing/hosting organisation must not put a student in a situation where they are asked to work beyond their competence. They must be provided supervision where necessary and the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where necessary.

- The employing/hosting organisation consider how they can support their student's physical and mental health whilst working in challenging circumstance and unfamiliar environments.

- The employing/hosting organisation should decide whether their pharmacy student roles are paid or unpaid. This must be made clear to any prospective pharmacy students who are deployed.

- Where paid, appropriate pay should be made by the employing organisation based on the responsibilities the student undertakes. Students should be entitled to at least the National Minimum Wage[6].

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[5] Public Health England, COVID-19: guidance on social distancing and for vulnerable people [Last Accessed: 3 April 2020]
[6] GOV.UK. National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage Rates. [Last Accessed: 3 April 2020]

- It is preferable for there to be a single central system to identify students wishing to deploy and to direct students to prospective employer/host organisations. However, there may be a variety of processes that could be used to facilitate deployment of students into the workplace **– see Section 12 for country specific guidance**.

- A single central system should attempt to record student deployment and capture relevant data, to support strategic deployment of students according to workforce need and enable Schools of Pharmacy to provide pastoral care to the deployed.

## 5. Health risks associated with deployment

Pharmacy students should make an informed decision when considering deploying into the pharmacy workforce. Students must be fully aware of and understand the risks of working within a healthcare environment during this period on their health and that of those around them.

These risks include, but are not limited to:

- An increased exposure to and risk of contracting COVID-19.
- An adverse impact on mental wellbeing, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

Students who are at an increased risk of severe illness or who are advised to follow stringent social distancing measures **should not** be deployed. This includes:

- People with underlying conditions such as chronic heart and lung disease
- People that are immunosuppressed (including taking medicines that suppress the immune system)
- Pregnant women
- Those aged 70 or older
- More information can be found in the latest [government guidelines](#)[7]

## 6. Timing of student deployment

The ideal time for undergraduate pharmacy students to deploy to support the pharmacy workforce is **after completion of their amended assessment schedule**. This will typically fall in May or June 2020. However, the schedule **will vary** and depend on the arrangements of individual Schools of Pharmacy.

Should a pharmacy student fail to undertake, complete or attain the necessary standard in university assessments (unless through illness), they must be aware that deployment at this time **would not normally** be recognised as a reason for extenuating or mitigating circumstances.

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[7] Public Health England, [COVID-19: guidance on social distancing and for vulnerable people](#) [Last Accessed: 3 April 2020]

Students and employers should refer to the guidance:

- All MPharm 1-4 students that wish to can be deployed to their local pharmacy setting **after** they have completed their adjusted assessment schedule.

- Current MPharm 4 students may, by mutual consent, be deployed to their arranged pre-registration workplace setting ahead of their scheduled start date. There may be practical issues that require resolving between the student and pre-registration employer. These may include but are not limited to:
    - Availability of accommodation where necessary
    - A possible requirement for an initial separate contract to cover the period of time until graduation is confirmed
    - Anticipation that this work would not necessarily contribute to the formal pre-registration pharmacy training requirements.


## 7. Employment and regulatory legislation

The employing/ hosting organisation (e.g. community pharmacies, NHS hospitals) must ensure they are compliant with all relevant employment and regulatory legislation.

This may include, but is not limited to:

- Appropriate occupation health screening and/or clearance

- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check

- For overseas students, identification of how their visa status affects any right to work

- Identification of appropriate indemnity insurance and/or arrangements to cover the activities of the student. Further information is available from NHS Employers[8].

- A contract of employment (including honorary contracts or volunteer agreements). This must include clear information on whether the role will be paid or unpaid

- A clear description of the job role

- An appropriate workplace induction

- Access to complete mandatory training and other training where necessary

- Capacity for appropriate supervision and support in the workplace.

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[8] NHS Employers. Indemnity and litigation. [Last Accessed: 3 April 2020]

## 8.  Definition and supervision of activities for pharmacy students

It is the responsibility of the employing/hosting organisation to ensure that the activities of the pharmacy student are appropriate.

The following must be considered:

- Activities should be properly described in a contract of employment / honorary contract/ volunteer agreement.

- Activities should be appropriate to the level of experience and training of the pharmacy student. A student should not be asked to work beyond their competence.

- Activities carried out by the student must be properly supervised by a designated manager and/or supervisor.


## 9.   Location and workplace setting

The following should be considered when identifying a suitable setting to deploy students:

- The local pharmacy workforce demand

- The current geographical location of the student

- Previous work experiences the student has, including:
    - The time spent working in a pharmacy setting
    - The sector(s) the student has experience in
    - A record of competencies gained from previous pharmacy roles.

- Student preference
    - Hospital or community setting
    - Paid or voluntary position


## 10. Monitoring the deployment of students

Information on the deployment of students should be collated to inform strategic support of the workforce and pastoral care by schools of pharmacy. For further country specific details see **section 12**. Information that is collected should include, as minimum:

- Student details:
    - Name
    - Date of birth
    - Address
    - Contact details, including email and telephone number
    - School of Pharmacy
    - Their current year of study

- Details of the place of deployment:
    - Name of employing/host organisation
    - Address
    - Contact details of a named contact (email and telephone)

- Details of the length of deployment:
  - Start date
  - End date and/or duration (if known)

## 11. Monitoring student wellbeing during deployment

Student wellbeing during this time should be considered and monitored by Schools of Pharmacy and the organisation receiving a student.

**Schools of Pharmacy**

- Schools of Pharmacy should consider using existing mechanisms of pastoral care for their students. Schools should, as far as is practically possible, regularly monitor student wellbeing whilst they are deployed into the pharmacy workforce. For MPharm 4 students, this should occur at least until their point of graduation and if possible beyond.

- Support could be, but is not limited to, a regular phone call or virtual meeting, or an offer of a point of contact for the student if needed.

- Support for students should be considered both during deployment and upon re-commencing their degree.

**Employing/Host organisation**

- The employing/host organisation should consider how they can regularly monitor and support students' physical and mental wellbeing whilst working in challenging circumstance and unfamiliar environments.

## 12. Country specific processes to register interest or details of how students can participate and how employers can request a student

### England

**Information for pharmacy students**

**Students who wish to register their interest to be deployed to support the pharmacy workforce**, should do so via the *HEE Pharmacy Student COVID-19 Deployment Survey* which can be accessed on the HEE website:

https://www.hee.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-information-pharmacists-pharmacy-technicians

Their details will be processed by HEE's regional pharmacy workforce cells supporting the response to COVID-19 and will be shared with employers that have registered interest to receive a student. Student details will also be shared with their School of Pharmacy to allow pastoral care to be extended. Students will be contacted by employers for deployment opportunities.

**Students who have already made alternative arrangements** are encouraged to record these details using the same survey. Submission of this information will inform the strategic

support given to the pharmacy workforce. This information will also allow Schools of Pharmacy to have a record of students' deployment and extend pastoral care.

Alternative arrangements include but are not limited to:

1. Students having deployment facilitated via their School of Pharmacy, where local arrangements have been organised

2. Students with existing relationships with a pharmacy employer (e.g. a regular term time and/or summer job) who could be deployed directly to that employer.

**Information for employers/host organisations**

Pharmacy employers who wish to receive a student should follow the steps outlined below:

1. Employers should contact their system Pharmacy Leadership Collaborative (via their Regional Chief Pharmacist) to register their interest. The details of suitable students will be provided to employers via this route.
2. Employers will need to contact students about current deployment opportunities.
3. Employers will be asked to confirm to Health Education England once they have placed a student.

## Scotland

In Scotland all student recruitment for support with COVID 19 should be through the NHS national recruitment portal for hospital and community sectors.

This can be accessed here: https://www.careers.nhs.scot/coronavirus-covid-19-recruitment/

## Wales

**Information for pharmacy students**

Students who wish to register their interest to be deployed to support the pharmacy workforce in Wales should do so via https://www.covidhubwales.co.uk/ The COVID Hub Wales.

**Information for employers/host organisations**

Pharmacy employers in Wales who wish to receive a student should email HEIW.pharmacy@wales.nhs.uk

## 13. Information and resources on COVID-19

We also wish to highlight the importance of following current guidance and advice from Public Health England, Health Protection Scotland and Public Health Wales:
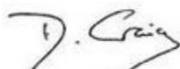
- **Public Health England:**
  https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance

- **Health Protection Scotland:**
  https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/a-to-z-of-topics/covid-19/

- **Public Health Wales:**
  https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/

More information and guidance to support health professionals and the public to respond to coronavirus (COVID-19) is provided here:

- **Health Education England, NHS England and NHS Improvement:**
  https://www.hee.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19

- **NHS Scotland:**
  https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19
  https://learn.nes.nhs.scot/27993/coronavirus-covid-19
  https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/education-and-training/by-discipline/pharmacy.aspx

- **Welsh Government:**
  https://gov.wales/coronavirus

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