

# Supporting the COVID-19 response

**Joint Guidance: Position statement on deployment of pharmacy undergraduate students during Autumn 2020 to Spring 2021.**

Health Education England

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

16 December 2020

## 1. Purpose

This guidance is aimed at providing information to undergraduate pharmacy students on how COVID-19 affects them at this time.

It sets out the position of the named signatories in relation to any deployment of undergraduate pharmacy students into a pharmacy workplace setting between Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021 during the COVID-19 emergency. **This guidance excludes structured experiential learning undertaken by students as a component of their MPharm undergraduate degree.**

It is important to note that as the current pandemic is fast-changing, this guidance will be reviewed subject to further developments. 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.

This position statement supersedes the Joint Guidance issued for students between April to August 2020.

## 2. Overview

Undergraduate pharmacy students can use this guidance to inform their decision to assist in a pharmacy setting during the COVID-19 emergency between Autumn 2020 to Spring 2021.

**In summary, the position of the joint signatories is that students should not be deployed or seek to be deployed into a pharmacy work setting at this time<sup>1,2</sup>. Students should focus on continuing their studies and training in order that it is uninterrupted, and they are able to form an effective part of the future workforce.**

Students considering working in a pharmacy workplace during the COVID-19 resurge between Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021, must consider all of the associated health and wellbeing risks, and the potential impact of deployment on a student's ability to effectively pursue their studies and training with minimal disruption, including any current or upcoming assessments to progress through their degree. Ultimately, it is the decision of the individual undergraduate student as to whether they wish to work in a pharmacy workplace.

### 3. Background

The spread of COVID-19 has caused significant pressure across the UK's health and care services. The Pharmacy Schools Council (PhSC), the Statutory Education Bodies (SEB) for England<sup>3</sup>, Scotland<sup>4</sup> and Wales<sup>5</sup> the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) and the British Pharmaceutical Students' Association (BPSA) have worked to support the pharmacy workforce through this period.

Between April and August 2020, the emerging COVID-19 situation meant pharmacy employers faced an increased demand for the delivery of core pharmacy services to support the response to the emergency. These challenges meant additional staffing was necessary to support the effort to manage workforce pressures. The timing of the onset of the national emergency meant that students – who were near the end of their education cycle - could be deployed into pharmacy work settings during their summer break, after completion of their end of year assessments and with appropriate risk assessments and mitigations in place. This meant that student deployment could be considered with minimal impact on their progression through their education and on the workforce pipeline.

Outlined in the original Joint Guidance (April to August 2020 – now withdrawn), Health Education England established the **HEE Pharmacy Student COVID-19 Deployment Survey** to facilitate the deployment of undergraduate pharmacy students in England who wished to support the pharmacy clinical and patient-facing workforce during their summer break. Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) and NHS Education Scotland (NES) set up similar systems. These deployment/recruitment systems are now **closed** to avoid any further

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<sup>1</sup> This guidance excludes structured experiential learning undertaken by students as a component of their MPharm undergraduate degree.

<sup>2</sup> We recognise that some individual undergraduate pharmacy students are currently in existing employment with a pharmacy employer.

<sup>3</sup> Health Education England

<sup>4</sup> NHS Education for Scotland

<sup>5</sup> Health Education and Improvement Wales

disruptions to the current academic year, to enable students to focus on their academic studies and to progress through the education pipeline.

The timing of the COVID-19 resurge between Autumn 2020 to Spring 2021, means that any deployment of undergraduate pharmacy students has a greater risk of disrupting this academic year's education and training, including assessments affecting progression through the MPharm degree. This is in addition to the risk to mental and physical health and wellbeing that is associated with any workplace deployment during the COVID-19 emergency.

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'<sup>6</sup>. 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.

In light of the challenges and the different circumstances of the current COVID-19 emergency, we have updated our position statement which now supersedes earlier Joint Guidance in April 2020.

## 4. Position Statement

The joint signatories make this position statement on the basis that any decision around the deployment of pharmacy students to support the pharmacy workforce during this emergency period should be proportionate and informed by all relevant factors of the current stage of the COVID-19 emergency.

- The position of the joint signatories is that that students should not be deployed into a pharmacy work setting at this time<sup>7</sup>. Students should focus on continuing their education and training as much as possible in this fast-changing environment, in order to minimise disruption their education, to protect the graduate pipeline and to form an effective part of the future workforce.
- It is the individual decision of an undergraduate pharmacy student as to whether they wish to work in a pharmacy setting to support the workforce during this emergency<sup>8</sup>.
- Any student considering supporting the workforce is encouraged to consider all the associated risks which include but are not limited to:

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<sup>6</sup> Entrustable professional activities are agreed and defined activities in the healthcare workplace that students are permitted to participate in.

<sup>7</sup> This guidance excludes structured experiential learning undertaken by students as a component of their MPharm undergraduate degree.

<sup>8</sup> We recognise that some individual undergraduate pharmacy students are currently in existing employment with a pharmacy employer.

- An increased exposure to and risk of contracting COVID-19.
- An adverse impact on mental wellbeing, including post-traumatic stress disorder.
- An adverse impact on progression through the MPharm degree, including successful completion of assessments
- Individuals who are at increased risk of severe illness (as set out in the latest [government guidelines](#)<sup>9</sup>) **should not** work within a healthcare setting.
- Any employer (e.g. community pharmacies, NHS Trusts/Boards) that chooses to employ a pharmacy undergraduate during this time, must:
  - Employ a process that identifies and mitigates risks to individual students, patients, and the general public
  - Comply with all relevant employment and regulatory legislation.
  - Provide a full induction and any training necessary for the student
  - 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.
  - consider how they can support the student's physical and mental health wellbeing whilst working in challenging circumstance and unfamiliar environments.
- The Joint Signatories agree that as the current pandemic is fast-changing, this guidance will be reviewed subject to further development of the impact of COVID-19.

## 5. 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](#)
- [Health Protection Scotland](#)
- [Public Health Wales](#)

Information on health and wellbeing support can be accessed via a variety of organisations, including:

- [Pharmacist Support](#)

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

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<sup>9</sup> Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health England, [Guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19](#) [Last Accessed: 3 December 2020]

## Supporting the COVID-19 response

- [Health Education England, NHS England and NHS Improvement](#)

- [NHS Scotland](#)

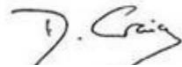
<https://learn.nes.nhs.scot/27993/coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/education-and-training/by-discipline/pharmacy.aspx>

- [Welsh Government](#)



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