



Ulster University Education Update

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ULSTER UNIVERSITY EDUCATION UPDATE

In response to the transformative Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacists introduced by the GPhC and PSNI in January 2021, Ulster University School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences has been redefining its approach to pharmacy education [1].



To meet the demands of regulatory bodies, and to ensure the highest quality graduates are moving into the Pharmacy workforce, the school has embarked on a journey of innovation and adaptation, working with key stakeholders across United Kingdom and Ireland reshaping our landscape of pharmacy education.

These updated standards have not only redefined the core focus and scope of undergraduate education but have also ushered in changes to the foundation training year. In light of this, the School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences has conducted an exhaustive review of its curriculum, engaging with pharmacists from diverse sectors across the UK and Ireland to ensure our teaching practice supports graduates as they move into an evolving pharmacy profession incorporating enhanced clinical skills, prescribing, and technology.

In March 2023 Ulster University's MPharm programme received full regulatory approval from the GPhC and PSNI, marking a significant milestone in the journey toward the September 2023 rollout. This approval underscores the dedication and meticulous planning that the school has invested in its curriculum reform. The first cohort of graduates under the new MPharm provision will embark on their foundation training year in June 2025, with the goal of joining the Pharmacy Register in Northern Ireland by 2026. The work undertaken to develop our MPharm programme has been a collaborative effort that extends across key stakeholders. The School has partnered with placement providers in both primary and secondary care settings, working with the Northern Ireland Centre for Pharmacy Learning and Development (NICPLD), Queen's University Belfast (QUB), and the Department of Health. Through these partnerships, the school aims to offer experiential learning opportunities that bridge the gap between theory and practice.

In developing experiential learning opportunities for students we have worked to ensure that placement providers across Northern Ireland are fully supported to enact their role. To support experiential placement supervisors, the School have also partnered with NICPLD and QUB to provide a suite of training resources and events across Northern Ireland. The initial response from placement supervisors has been overwhelmingly positive, and we are grateful to

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continue our close working relationship with placement providers in primary and secondary care sectors across Northern Ireland.

To enhance the quality of our education provision, the School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences has significantly enriched its academic team. New additions to the clinical and pharmaceutical sciences academic teams, drawn from local and international talent pools, are now in post to enhance the educational experience for our growing number of students. The School is committed to providing the very best educational experience for our students to prepare them for working life, and having academic staff who have clinical experience in patient facing roles locally and internationally working with scientific staff who have industrial experience is key to ensuring our course provides relevant teaching to prepare our students for working in Pharmacy across hospital, community, general practice and industry.

In tandem with these academic reinforcements, the school has invested in cutting-edge clinical

education facilities designed to facilitate simulation-based learning, a pivotal aspect of modern healthcare education. These enhanced facilities will play a key role in providing students with the opportunity to undertake simulated teaching in community, hospital, and general practice settings, further enhancing student experience. Ultimately, the School is seeking to improve student understanding of how clinical care provision is situated in real practice, and to develop students' application of theory into clinical practice, in preparation for experiential placements, foundation training year, and professional working. The School intends to hold an official opening of our newly installed clinical education suite, and extended model pharmacy when building works have been completed.

The Ulster University School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences continues to perform well in university league tables placing 2nd in the UK Pharmacy and Pharmacology category of the Guardian University Guide 2024. Its consistent ranking within the top positions in the Complete University Guide and Times Good University

Guide underscores its commitment to professionalism and academic excellence.

The school's portfolio of offerings extends beyond the MPharm programme. The range of courses includes the undergraduate MPharm (Hons)^[2] and Pharmaceutical Biosciences MSc programmes^[3]. The School also offers a spectrum of postgraduate study options, exemplified by the Advanced Pharmacy Practice MSc^[4]. This program seeks to nurture competencies as defined in the Royal Pharmaceutical Society Advanced Pharmacy Framework, encompassing facets such as expert professional practice, collaborative working relationships, leadership, management, education, training and development, and research and evaluation. This course has been particularly popular with practicing clinicians, and graduates report a step change in their clinical practice.

As pharmacy education undergoes this significant transformation, Northern Ireland is uniquely placed as a key location in the training and development of pharmacy students and the wider pharmacy profession. The School's commitment to aligning its offerings with industry demands, coupled with its emphasis on experiential learning and academic excellence, positions it at the forefront of shaping the future of pharmacy education.

As this academic year begins, we continue to work closely with our partner institutions, and are keen to hear your thoughts and receive feedback on aspects of training provision that impact on your practice and professional experiences. The School continues to grow and develop, and we look forward to providing future updates on the research and teaching undertaken within our team, impacting directly on patients here in Northern Ireland, and globally.

References:

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