

Welcome to Update



Welcome to the first edition of our regulatory update in 2021.

In this edition, we bring you a message from the Pharmaceutical Society NI President, Dr Jim Livingstone. We also bring you important information about the Registration Assessment in June 2021.

We highlight a vacancy for a Registrant pharmacist member on Council and report on new Guidance on the provision of services.

In the sixth of our series on our work teams and staff, we introduce you to Laura Hughes the new Registrar.

We give an update on the work towards the joint reform of the Initial Education and Training of Pharmacists.

We bring you an update on pre-registration and advice from former trainees on completing their pre-registration during the pandemic, which will be of interest and value to both pre-registration trainees and tutors. Lastly, we thank NI pharmacists for their excellent response to the invitation to take part in the vital UK Reach research.

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Message from the President, Dr Jim Livingstone



Pharmacists are to be commended for their unstinting dedication throughout the pandemic

This has been a most challenging year for the health service and healthcare professionals. I would like to pay tribute to the professionalism and unstinting dedication of pharmacists in Northern Ireland across all sectors. You have been a lifeline for thousands in Northern Ireland, by either being involved directly in caring for those with Covid-19 or being a main source of clinical assistance and advice for countless communities and patients. Many pharmacists are now playing a vital role in the very successful roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccine which is giving us all hope of brighter times ahead, and for which everyone involved should be congratulated.

We have had to make a number of adjustments to how we have carried out regulation during this time. We consider our approach to have been proportionate and appropriate to supporting both the profession and maintaining patient safety. As well as our regular direct communications, you can keep up to date with our regulatory approach during the pandemic by visiting the dedicated [Covid-19 – Regulatory Statements and Information page](#) on our website.

As we tentatively emerge from what we all hope is the worst of the pandemic, many challenges lie ahead for the health service, patients and professionals. We want to ensure that through our Standards and regulatory work, we can help drive reforms for pharmacy that will ensure the profession continues to meet the demands of the future, within an advancing health and social care system for the betterment and safety of patients.

The Council was pleased to have recently approved the new Standards for Initial Education and Training of pharmacists, and we are working closely with our partners in the Department of Health, the universities and NICPLD to ensure those new Standards result in pharmacists with enhanced clinical skills in the future. We have also recently published the new Standard and Guidance on the Provision of Services, which pharmacists and employers should read and become familiar with.

In 2019, we carried out a public consultation proposing to move to a single UK wide registration assessment from 2021 onwards. Based on that consultation, we decided to partner with the GPhC, to deliver that Common Registration Assessment in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The first sitting of the Common Registration Assessment was to take place in June 2021.

Regrettably, the planned Common Registration Assessment for 2020/21 has now been impacted by COVID and it will be held in July in Great Britain rather than June. This is due to venue limitations in the UK, arising from the need for socially distanced events and the high number of trainees involved. The situation in Northern Ireland is different, as sufficient alternative venues are available for our smaller number of trainees, allowing us to proceed as planned, albeit on a paper-based assessment. The Council of the Pharmaceutical Society NI has therefore approved a Northern Ireland Registration Assessment for June 2021 because it considered it unacceptable to delay assessment and registration processes for a second year. The full statement is included in this newsletter. We will be in touch with trainees with more details on venues, as well as the application process, and for now we ask that you hold 08 June 2021.

The Department of Health appointed a new Registrar of the Pharmaceutical Society NI during 2020, Mrs. Laura Hughes. The Council congratulates Laura on her appointment, we have already been working closely with Laura and the Newsletter provides you with an opportunity to find out a little more about her.

All these issues and more are dealt with in this edition of our regulatory Newsletter, which we hope is a source of useful information.

Pharmaceutical Society NI to hold Northern Ireland Registration Assessment in June 2021

Following the recent announcement by the GPhC, that it will be holding its Registration Assessment in 27, 28 and 29 July 2021, the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society NI has confirmed that on this occasion a separate Registration Assessment, bespoke to Northern Ireland, will be held in June 2021. Although not the original UK-wide assessment envisaged, the format and content of the assessment will be in the style and to the standard of the originally planned Common Registration Assessment. It is currently planned that this Northern Ireland assessment will be paper-based, largely due to the unavailability of Pearson Vue centres in Northern Ireland during June.

Speaking about the Northern Ireland Registration Assessment, Dr Jim Livingstone, President of the Pharmaceutical Society NI, said:

“In 2019 we carried out a public consultation proposing to move to a single UK wide registration assessment from 2021 onwards. Based on that consultation, we decided to partner with the GPhC, to deliver that Common Registration Assessment in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The first sitting of the Common Registration Assessment was to take place in June 2021.

“Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to significantly impact our joint plans. The GPhC and Pharmaceutical Society NI had to react differently to the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020, with the GPhC provisionally registering trainees until the registration assessment for 2019/2020 in Great Britain could be held in March 2021.

“Without the option of provisional registration for trainees, and with the support of the Department of Health to extend training duration, the Pharmaceutical Society NI held its Registration Assessment for 2019/20 in August 2020, successfully bringing a new cohort onto our register in September 2020.

“Regrettably, the planned Common Registration Assessment for 2020/21 has now been impacted by COVID again, and it will be held on 27, 28 and 29 July in Great Britain rather than June. This is due to venue limitations in the UK, arising from the need for socially distanced events and the high number of trainees involved. The situation in Northern Ireland is different, as sufficient alternative venues are available for our smaller number of trainees, allowing us to proceed as planned, albeit on a paper-based assessment. The Council of the Pharmaceutical Society NI has therefore approved a Northern Ireland Registration Assessment for June 2021 because it considered it unacceptable to delay assessment and registration processes for a second year.

“The 2021 Northern Ireland Registration Assessment will be based on the format of the Common Registration Assessment and will be paper based. It will be held in several locations across Northern Ireland, similar to last year, to ensure adequate social distancing and trainee and staff safety.

“Trainees have prepared for this style of assessment, with the Department of Health providing funding to NICPLD to introduce this format. In addition, robust quality assurance mechanisms have been followed in the preparation of this assessment, using similar procedures to those planned for the Common Registration Assessment.

“The Pharmaceutical Society NI and the GPhC are both committed to the UK wide Common Registration Assessment but must adjust full implementation until the Autumn 2021 planned Assessment at the earliest.

“We will be in touch with trainees with more details on venues, as well as the application process, for now we ask that you hold 8th June 2021”.

Notes:

- The 2021 Northern Ireland Registration Assessment will take place in June 2021 (hold 8th June 2021).
- The Northern Ireland Registration Assessment will be based on the format and content of the proposed Common Registration Assessment, which trainees in Northern Ireland have prepared for.
- It will be a paper-based assessment.
- It will be held in a number of locations in Northern Ireland to ensure social distancing and applicant safety.
- Information in relation on how to apply will follow.

This statement can also be accessed through our website at: <https://www.psn.org.uk/publications/news/>

Council Meetings during 2021

All our Public Council meetings take place in public and are normally held in our offices at 73 University Street, Belfast BT7 1HL. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and until further notice, Council meetings will be held remotely via Zoom.

Should you wish to attend, please contact the Council Secretary, June Alexander (june.alexander@psni.org.uk), at least one working day in advance of the meeting advising of your attendance and stating any particular access requirements you may have.

A list of upcoming Council meetings can be found [here](#).

Approved Council Minutes can be found [here](#).

Please note all Public Council meetings are open to the public except in exceptional circumstances.

Vacancy for Council Registered Pharmacist member

The Department of Health NI is seeking to appoint four Council Members to the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (one Registrant Member and three Lay Members).

This is an exceptional opportunity to share your talents and expertise to make a positive difference to the lives of people in Northern Ireland.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland is the regulatory and professional body for pharmacists in Northern Ireland whose work is overseen by a Council comprising 14 Non-Executive Members (7 Registrant and 7 Lay Members). It maintains a Register of over 2700 pharmacists, 130 pre-registration trainees and over 500 pharmacy premises across the country.

Applicants for the four Council Member posts must meet the following four Essential Criteria:

Performance Management, Corporate Governance, Collaborative Working and Strategic Thinking.

There is an optional Desirable Criteria for applicants to provide evidence of a background in financial management.

The deadline for receipt of applications is **Midday Wednesday 24th March 2021**

For further information go to: www.psni.org.uk/psni/about/current-vacancies/

Or contact Mrs Joan Duffy

E-mail joan.duffy@psni.org.uk
Telephone: 07734 253 137 or

Write to: Mrs Joan Duffy, Head of Business Operations, Pharmaceutical Society NI, 73 University Street, Belfast BT7 1H

Launch of new Guidance on the Provision of Services

Following approval by Council, the Pharmaceutical Society NI launched new Guidance on the Provision of Services for pharmacists in Northern Ireland on 12 February 2021

The Guidance primarily provides help to pharmacists when considering their obligations under Principle 1 of the Code – *Always put the patient first* – and Standard 1.1.5 – *If, for any reason you are unable to provide a professional service, you have a professional responsibility to take reasonable steps to refer the patient or service user to an appropriate alternative provider for the service they require.*

The new Guidance covers two areas relating to the provision of services:

- the impact of a pharmacist’s religion and/or beliefs on their willingness to provide a specific service;
- the medicine, service or medicinal device is not currently in stock or available.

Speaking about the launch of the new Guidance, Dr Jim Livingstone, President of the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society NI said:

“This is important guidance designed to assist pharmacists to navigate complex situations. The Pharmaceutical Society NI has a responsibility to protect the public. The Code outlines the standards of conduct and ethics we expect from pharmacists to ensure patient safety and care. We also, however, recognise that pharmacists are individuals that hold valid beliefs and values, which may impact on their willingness to provide certain services. The new guidance outlines how pharmacists should protect the rights of patients to access the care and services they need, whilst acknowledging pharmacists’ right to conscience and working in a safe and fair environment. This guidance brings us into line with other regulators of healthcare professionals and is timely as services continue to change across Northern Ireland”.

“At the heart of the guidance is an emphasis on sensitive, clear and appropriate communication. This is communication between pharmacists and patients, pharmacists and their employers and between pharmacists. Employers have a particularly important role to play in this regard, ensuring that patients receive safe and timely care, whilst working collaboratively with pharmacists that may have concerns related to matters of conscience.

“The guidance will also be of interest to patients and patient groups, as it outlines what they can expect from their pharmacist”.

We plan to assess the impact of the guidance once it has had a bedding in period and we would encourage pharmacists and employers to engage with us on this review when it occurs. The new Guidance can be found [here](#)

The section of the draft guidance, which focused on providing services to patients and services users that are violent, threaten violence or are abusive does not form part of this published guidance. This guidance will follow shortly. After careful consideration of the consultation responses Council wants to ensure consistency of approach with the Department of Health and the Health and Social Care Board. We will continue to work with our stakeholders on this important issue. The full reasons are outlined in the consultation report which can be found [here](#).

Laura Hughes, the new Registrar and Head of Registration, Education and Investigation



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In the sixth of our series introducing the Pharmaceutical Society NI's staff, we introduce Laura Hughes, who took up her role as Registrar and Head of Registration, Education and Investigation on 31 August 2020.

Laura brings a wealth of experience to the role having worked within the independent community pharmacy sector, GP practices and most lately in a large pharmacy multiple in Belfast. Laura joined the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society NI as a Registrant Member in 2016 and provided oversight and leadership to the regulator, as Chairperson of the Fitness to Practise oversight Committee before her appointment by the Health Minister Robin Swann MLA, as Registrar.

Laura holds a key role within the Pharmaceutical Society NI as almost all of the critical public safety roles are the responsibility of the Registrar. The Registrar is responsible for the registration of pharmacists and premises ensuring those eligible to join are permitted to do so. Laura is responsible for all aspects of the fitness to practise process up to the adjudication stages. It is the role of the Registrar to take action when pharmacy standards are not met in order to ensure and maintain public safety and public confidence in the pharmacy profession.

The Registrar is also responsible for the standards and development of the Pre-registration Training Programme and the maintenance and development of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) processes.

Laura works with the Department of Health NI and other stakeholders to contribute to legislative reform and leads in the transposition of UK exit programme, Brexit, to pharmacy specific legislation. As part of the senior management team the Registrar has responsibility to work to establish and deliver the key strategic objectives as approved by Council.

Looking back on her experience as Registrar, Laura commented:

“During the past year pharmacy professionals have adapted to an extreme set of new circumstances and demonstrated just how capable and adaptable the pharmacy profession can be in order to ensure the delivery of effective patient care. It has been both inspiring and humbling to witness how pharmacists have responded to the pandemic and have been at the frontline of COVID-19 response and continue to be so along with their heavy involvement in the mass vaccination roll out programme.”

Looking to the future, Laura commented,

“It is also an exciting time to be joining the profession in light of the new reform agenda to Initial Education and Training of pharmacists. These changes will enable pharmacists to play a wider role in providing clinical care to patients from their first day of entry on to the Register. The transition and implementation of these reforms will bring long term health benefits to both patients and the health service.”

Reforms to Initial Education and Training

During the last decade pharmacists' roles have evolved quickly in response to rapid changes in healthcare and pharmacy practice and there is a significant and growing demand across the UK for clinical, patient-facing pharmacist practitioners. It is vital that the pharmacy workforce is equipped to work flexibly alongside other health and care professionals, using their specific skills to help meet the changing demands in service provision and patient care. As a result, we need to ensure that the early stages of education and training of pharmacists are reformed to reflect the changing nature of practice, including the importance of assuring patient safety.

Following extensive joint consultation and engagement with stakeholders, including a public consultation in 2019, a working group including the GPhC, and Pharmaceutical Society NI developed new [Standards for the Initial Education and Training of Pharmacists](#) which were adopted by the Pharmaceutical Society NI Council and GPhC as part of the process of the joint reform of the Initial Education and Training of Pharmacists, announced on [28 July 2020](#).

In Northern Ireland, an implementation group (the Education Reform Group) has been set up to complete the reforms here.

The implementation of the new Standards will transform the early years of education and training of pharmacists, enabling them to play a much greater role in providing clinical care to patients and the public from the point of registration. The Standards set out the knowledge, skills, attitudes and professional behaviours that a student / trainee pharmacist must demonstrate to join the professional Register.

The Standards also detail the requirements for providers of initial education and training. They have been developed to produce adaptable pharmacy professionals, confident and capable of operating in multi-professional teams, across a variety of healthcare settings to meet diverse and changing patient needs.

The Pharmaceutical Society NI is working with the GPhC to develop a transition plan for implementing the new Standards in a phased manner over the coming years, starting in July 2021 when the Pre-registration Year develops into a Foundation Training Year. Reforms to the Pharmacy Undergraduate Programme will also be progressed in a phased manner.

In addition to regular email updates and information sessions about the changes, a new webpage, which can be accessed [here](#), contains recordings of information events, press releases, news items and updates on the implementation programme.

Newsletter Feedback

As always, we would welcome your feedback on this Newsletter to make it as effective as possible. If you have any feedback or suggestions, please contact Simon McClenahan:

Simon.McClenahan@psni.org.uk

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Pre-registration update

The Pharmaceutical Society NI recognises the significant challenges faced by trainees, tutors and employers during Covid-19. Despite these difficulties, the vast majority of trainees progressing well through training and achieving the various assessment components which is positive.

As many trainees are approaching the half-way point in training, this update reviews progress and provides a number of useful reminders, which will be of interest to both trainees and tutors.

Progress with the reflective e-portfolio:

Most trainees are making good progress with their reflective e-portfolio and are achieving the expected levels of % completion of performance standards at their next appraisal. This is positive news and well done to those trainees and tutors who have worked hard to achieve this.

Ongoing Monitoring

Tutors and trainees are reminded that they have a joint responsibility to ensure that there is evidence of continual progress with the e-portfolio during training. The reason for this is that it provides assurances to the regulator that trainees are making progress and are developing the necessary competencies to be a pharmacist. When progress appears behind, it can become a matter of concern.

TRAINEES are asked to work towards 50 % completion of the portfolio for the 26 week appraisal and 75 – 90 % completion of performance standards by the 39 week appraisal.

TUTORS are expected to verify enough learning cycles so that their trainee can meet the expected levels of completion. This is because the % completion score for portfolio completion is based entirely on cycles that are verified by the tutor.

Appraisal update

The appraisal process has a dual function. It is aimed at providing motivation and encouragement to trainees as they progress and importantly, it represents a formal process where key development areas are identified to help the trainee on their trajectory to safe practice and to develop the professional behaviours expected of a pharmacist. The majority are making steady progress with their appraisals.

Tutor accreditation 2021-22

Plans for tutor training and accreditation for the 2021-22 intake are still being finalised as we move forward with our NI stakeholders to introduce the educational reform agenda with the transition from pre-registration training to a foundation training year. We will issue communications very shortly about the arrangements for tutor training so that tutors can be fully prepared for the upcoming foundation training year .

We advise you that you keep up to date with the education reform agenda through our communications and information on our website.

Advice from former trainees on how to cope with pre-registration training during COVID-19

It is undoubtedly a challenging time to be a pre-registration trainee, balancing the requirements of learning and working at the same time during extraordinarily difficult circumstances. As part of our learning from COVID-19, we asked new registrants who successfully overcame the challenges of undertaking pre-registration training during a pandemic, to share their advice and tips about how new trainees could successfully navigate pre-registration training.

We have grouped the responses from last year's trainees into eight main themes. Some of this will sound like common sense but, more often than not, can be easily neglected in the face of challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is hoped that you will find this learning helpful and that you will be encouraged by the fact that you are not alone in this experience and that you will take confidence from the fact that last years' trainees successfully overcame the challenges of undertaking pre-registration training during the pandemic to become newly qualified pharmacists.

1. "Concentrate on what you can control"

With so much uncertainty around, it is easy to get stuck focusing about the things that are not within your control rather than focus on what you can control. A common theme from the feedback is that one thing you can control is your progress through training and your professional development.

"Accept that things won't be normal but do your best and take every opportunity you get to develop your learning." (2019/20 pre-registration trainee)

2. "Keep up to date with guidance"

Trainees recommend keeping up to date online as much as possible with important updates about patient care during COVID-19 and the benefits of sharing this with your team.

"Always keep up to date on latest government guidance and practice about Covid-19 so you can provide up to date advice and support to patients." (2019/20 pre-registration trainee)

3. "Make the most of learning opportunities"

Although there will be lots of challenges, be pro-active and make the most of every learning opportunity and use the learning to keep on top of your learning cycles and develop the various skills and competencies. The challenges you will face can represent opportunities to reflect on your development and learn new professional skills.

"Work with your tutor to set targets and use tutor feedback to help you develop and learn. Try to complete cycles as they present themselves rather than letting them accumulate to keep on top of your reflective portfolio." (2019/20 pre-registration trainee)

"Ensure you take time to write down anything you're unfamiliar with and look it up when you get time. It may sound very simple, but I found this was the best method for identifying gaps in my knowledge and helps the information to stick in your memory better." (2019/20 pre-registration trainee)

"Keep on top of compulsory training, courses and training cycles so you do not get overwhelmed". (2019/20 pre-registration trainee)

Advice from former trainees on how to cope with pre-registration training during

4. “Get organised”

- Create a timetable that will incorporate target dates for completing the compulsory elements including a robust study plan and how you will spend your protected development time.
- Try to stick to your timetable but be prepared to be flexible and adapt to circumstances – set goals and do your best to achieve them.
- Make sure you schedule and plan your study hours well in advance so you can use it wisely.
- Establish a good working relationship with your tutor and draw on their support when facing challenges or difficulties.

“Always set goals and try to stick to them. COVID-19 really tested my ability to stick to my study/training plan. Make sure you and your tutor schedule in your study hours well in advance so you are guaranteed those hours. (2019/20 pre-registration trainee)”

“Use every opportunity to learn about effective prioritising and time management in a busy and uncertain environment.” (2019/20 pre-registration trainee)

5. “Look after yourself and others”

One of the frequent themes from last year's group is the importance of taking care of your personal health and wellbeing during training and in particular the importance of looking after your mental health and maintaining a good work life balance.

It might sound like common sense but make sure you take proper breaks to recharge and ensure that you are eating well, getting regular exercise, sleeping well and, in particular, remember to apply the health advice that you would ordinarily be giving to patients.

It is also important that you take steps to protect those around you including your family and friends by ensuring you follow guidance and looking after their welfare.

“Look after your mental wellbeing and make sure to speak to someone about it if you're having any troubles.” (2019/20 pre-registration trainee)

“It is important to have a work/ life balance. As easy as it can be to throw yourself into work during the madness of the pandemic, it is also important to take proper breaks to process everything and recharge your energy allowing you to continue to be at your best for your patients.” (2019/20 pre-registration trainee)

To help you manage day to day challenges, you may find it helpful to explore the resources available from the Mindfulness Initiative - [COVID-19 & Mindfulness: Resources for health and care staff](#)

Advice from former trainees on how to cope with pre-registration training during COVID-19

6. Connect regularly with friends, family and colleagues”

It is really helpful if you can create good support networks and connect regularly with friends, family and trusted work colleagues so that you can share any problems that you are facing.

If you need to access health and well-being support, the Pharmacist Advice and Support Service (PASS) delivered by Pharmacy Forum NI offers a range of free, impartial and confidential services which are available to pre-registration trainees and their families (spouses/civil partners, children and dependants).

This includes:

- 24/7 telephone helpline
- Structured counselling
- Financial and legal guidance

Access to online support at [Inspire Hub](#)

Details on how to access PASS services can be found [here](#)

7. “Resilience and self-awareness”

A common theme from the feedback from last year, is that training during a pandemic actually helps you develop really important professional and personal skills like resilience, self-awareness and learning about how to manage things when so much uncertainty exists. There is no doubt that these attributes will be important skills for all future health care professionals, and it is therefore vital that you make the most of the opportunity during the training year to learn and continually develop your personal and professional skills.

“Stay focused. Your tutor will help you to achieve what you need to achieve, and the pandemic situation actually helped me work better under pressure, (2019/20 pre-registration trainee)”

8. “Be proud of what you are doing”

Pre-registration trainees play an important role supporting their pharmacy teams to deliver front line health care to patients during the pandemic. Be proud of what you are doing and your contribution to helping the pharmacy profession respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

UK-REACH—THANK YOU

The Pharmaceutical Society NI, along with 6 other healthcare regulators, supported UK-REACH an urgent public health study, backed by the UK Government, which aims to help understand why healthcare workers from certain ethnic minorities are more likely to have severe COVID-19.

We wrote to all Pharmacists in December 2020 and January 2021 with an invitation to take part in the study and would like to thank all those pharmacists who took part for the excellent response. The study can be followed through this [link](#).