

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions for Pre-registration Pharmacist Trainees

The following advice is based upon the information available as of 21st April 2020. This remains subject to change as the situation develops so please monitor our communication channels for updates.

Following the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) announcement ([26 March](#)) to postpone both the June and September 2020 pre-registration pharmacist assessments, we have published a joint statement with NHS Education for Scotland and Health Education England. The statement can be accessed [here](#).

We recognise that you will have concerns and questions. Your main point of contact for support and queries will be your regional Pre-registration Pharmacist Lead. We also encourage you to use the [Health Education and Improvement Wales Pre-registration Questions Portal](#) to anonymously submit any questions and concerns that you have. We will use this portal to understand the concerns of our trainees and we will aim to update this Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) resource.

Please be aware that the full details of the amended registration process, are still being explored and developed by the GPhC. As such, we will not have all the answers at this time.

The [GPhC](#) has also produced an FAQs resource, available on their website.

FAQs

When will pre-registration pharmacist trainees and tutors be provided with further information about the postponed registration assessments?

Thank you for your questions. We appreciate that you have many concerns on how the proposed registration assessment and registration changes will affect your current training. Please be assured that we are continuously working closely with the GPhC and other key partners to share your concerns and provide some clarity for pre-registration pharmacists. As soon as we have any further or new information, we will share this with you.

We know how worrying this is for you and we want to help you as much as we can. Please continue to use the portal and encourage your fellow pre-registration pharmacist trainees to use it. This will help us understand how better we can support you all. We anticipate sharing further, which will detail some of this support, and we ask you to please keep an eye out for this.

What should pharmacist trainees do now they have been told that the GPhC registration assessments are postponed?

The GPhC is currently considering the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on pre-registration training and assessment and we expect more information will be available in the coming days.

We recognise that there may be circumstances when trainees may be required to help or support outside of their scheduled training pathways and contracted duties. Trainees may also be temporarily re-directed to duties where they have already demonstrated competency to help with service provision. In these circumstances it is essential that systems are in place to support trainees and keep patients safe. Trainee wellbeing must be protected, and processes must be in place to ensure they are not exposed to risks through their work or training. As such, we have set out some guidance principles for trainees.

***New - 21 April* Will I be at a disadvantage compared to prior years because my mock exams have been cancelled?**

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) are working with key partners such as regulators and professional bodies to support our pre-registration pharmacist trainees in these unprecedented times. The disruption due to COVID-19 has impacted pharmacy trainees, trainees in other health professions, registered professionals and the general population in multiple ways.

We recognise that HEIW and other providers have cancelled the scheduled mock examinations. The timing and format of re-arranging these will be dependent on decisions made by the GPhC on the registration assessment, as well as government guidelines on social distancing.

***New - 21 April* Should I still be receiving my study time?**

We appreciate that trainees are working hard to support the NHS and pharmacy staff at this difficult time and will have had to be flexible to ensure patients receive high-quality care.

In normal circumstances, trainees will acquire study time that are either formally agreed or given on an ad-hoc basis. Given the current health emergency and government guidelines for social distancing, trainees and supervisors will be experiencing an unprecedented workload. We anticipate the current situation is likely to continue into the near future, which will mean trainees may not be able to access their usual study leave on an on-going basis.

As trainees, you will still have many opportunities to learn, reflect and develop, although they may be different from your planned learning. We encourage you to use these to demonstrate competence against the GPhC performance standards and support your preparation to practice.

***New - 21 April* My training programme has changed significantly and I am worried how this will impact on my ability to demonstrate competence or pass the registration assessment.**

The mandatory requirements of the pre-registration pharmacist training year are for all

trainees to demonstrate competence, through the GPhC's performance standards and registration assessment. Considering this, there is a variety of structure and opportunities given to pre-registration pharmacists as part of their training.

It is unfortunate that elements of training have had to be altered or postponed, such as study days, cross-sector placements and specialist rotations. But these changes are necessary to manage workload and protect the safety of trainees, patients and the public.

Despite the changes to training programmes, we encourage trainees to continue to work with their tutors to demonstrate competencies and prepare for the registration assessment.

This includes trainee to discuss options with tutors (and other available support networks such the regional training team) and:

- Review progress with performance standards.
- Identify performance standards that may need additional evidence.
- Seek opportunities and activities to demonstrate competencies.

***New - 21 April* How can the health of myself and my family be protected at this time?**

We advise you to follow all [government guidance](#) relating to social distancing and vulnerable people.

Guidance for pregnant individuals has been published by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Royal College of Midwives, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Public Health England and Health Protection Scotland. This can be accessed [here](#).

If as a result of this guidance, you are in a vulnerable group (or live with those in vulnerable groups) and need to take time away from your training, the GPhC has provided guidance around [40-day absence](#) in their most recent FAQs.

Your HEIW Pharmacy team can support discussions about how to manage time away from your training site and help you to return when the current situation improves.

Guidance principles for all pre-registration pharmacy trainees

***New - 21 April* I feel my mental health is being affected by the current situation, what support can I access?**

We encourage you to seek support from your tutor/educational supervisor and the HEIW pharmacy team.

The following resources are also available to support pharmacists and pre-registration trainees during this challenging time.

- **Pharmacist Support** – an independent charity, providing a range of free and confidential services to pharmacists and their families, pre-registration trainees and pharmacy students. <https://pharmacistsupport.org/>

- **HEIW Wellbeing hub - Access to the HEIW wellbeing hub is open to all and can found here:** <https://leadershipportal.heiw.wales/playlists/view/c0abd55e-92ee-44d2-bcd1-33dd0221d1e3/en/1?options=oHXU%252BPmvHPR07%252FdPIVyiI5sWo5wWqGQ3R4ZWzrZU%252B9vn1fRQkuIHkJS3aCF%252F5pPA4NRIUrRdtEhtlc1jVmauiYg%253D%253D>

***New - 21 April* My visa expires at the end of my pre-registration contract, what will happen?**

We understand many trainees are concerned about their visa arrangement at this time.

The DHSC is keeping the Tier 2 visa arrangements under constant review to ensure it serves the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trainees should:

- Only complete activities in the workplace that they have demonstrated competence in or are in the process of developing competence in, under supervision. Trainees should continue to ask for help and guidance when needed.
- Continue to have regular check-ins with their tutor. The tutor is key for supervision and to the support structure of a trainee. It is important to have regular communication and share any concerns.
- Continue to gather evidence of their competence against the GPhC performance standards.
- Continue to plan for their next review and should assume this is still the next milestone for their training. If this cannot be completed as scheduled, it should be rescheduled to the next available date. Trainee and supervisors should work together to demonstrate competence for each outstanding performance standard, this could be through direct observation or written evidence. We recognise some flexibility may be needed in these challenging circumstances.
- Look after their own wellbeing and support their colleagues and teams. We advise trainees to share concerns and anxieties with their tutors and supervisors where necessary.

More FAQs for pre-registration pharmacists can be found on the [GPhC website](#).