

The UK MPharm programmes

1. The EU context

The length, and to an extent the content, of the MPharm is dictated by two EU documents. The first, a legally-binding directive, sets minimum training requirements of five years, of which four must be full-time 'theoretical and practical training in a university...' plus 'at least six months of in-service training in a pharmacy open to the public or in a hospital under the supervision of the pharmaceutical department of that hospital'. It includes a bulleted outline syllabus (mainly science). The second document is advisory and suggests a minimum number of hours of study (3000), the proportions of the overall syllabus devoted to particular scientific topics and recommends inclusion of a research project. There is almost no mention of pharmacy practice and ethics is 'advisory': the documents are quite dated and do not really reflect UK aspirations for pharmacy.

2. The UK MPharm

UK MPharm degrees are designed with reference to the Society's Indicative Syllabus, which has 51 items under the following broad headings: 'The Patient', 'Medicines: drug action', 'Medicines: the drug substance', 'Medicines: the medicinal product', 'Healthcare systems and the roles of professionals' and 'The Wider Context'.

As a framework around which MPharm degrees are designed, the Society has defined 50 criteria, all of which need to be met by providers (except one, the use of inter-professional learning, which is recommended). The first five relate to EU requirements, the sixth to minimum entry standards for English Language and Mathematics (GCSE grades A-C or equivalent), seven-31 outline graduate outcomes (the nearest thing to competencies the Society uses) and the remainder, 32-50, deal mainly with the academic infrastructure supporting delivery.

3. Accreditation

The Society accredits all UK MPharm degrees and successful completion of a course allows a pharmacy graduate to apply for preregistration training. The accreditation process is different for new and existing schools, although the underlying principles are the same: it is evidence based, involves peer review and is cyclical. New schools are required to submit a business plan and detailed syllabus in advance of students entering the course: the school is then visited in each of the first four years of delivery of the MPharm; only then is full accreditation given. Once a new school becomes an existing school it is reaccredited quinquennially. Accreditation can be suspended or withdrawn (by Council) if there are concerns about the standard of an MPharm.

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