

British Pharmaceutical Students' Association

Oriel Applicant Feedback

HEE Pre-Registration Pharmacy Recruitment
Operational Group Meeting

15th November 2017

www.bpsa.co.uk



British Pharmaceutical Students' Association
The Official Student Organisation of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society

1. Foreword

The British Pharmaceutical Students' Association (BPSA) is the official representative body for pharmacy students and pre-registration trainees across the UK. Established in 1942, the Association is run by its Executive, which is composed of 19 members, ranging from university students to first year qualified pharmacists who aim to engage, inspire and empower all 15,000 members.

In order to represent students' views, the BPSA undertook a survey to gain feedback from those who applied for the new Oriel system. As pre-registration training is a key component of eventually qualifying as a pharmacist, the application process is of great importance to third year MPharm students across the United Kingdom.

The survey garnered 158 responses, which have been grouped into key points and recommendations for Health Education England (HEE) to take forward for future years. Our Executive will endeavour to continue working with HEE to ensure that all students' views about the process can be represented and considered.



2. Purpose

To provide insight to the group on applicant feedback received in relation to the 2017 Oriel recruitment round.

3. Key points

1. Applicants felt that communication between themselves and Oriel could have been improved. A greater and earlier dissemination of information would have allowed applicants to prepare better, and alleviated a lot of concern. The handbook was well received, but it would have been beneficial if this was released earlier.
2. Timescales for the process were delayed compared to previous application systems and this caused more concern for students.
3. Whilst some students found the assessment centre locations accessible, a significant proportion did not, and many applicants described a lack of local amenities around the assessment centre. The organisation of some assessment days were a concern to applicants and in some instances applicants had to prompt staff to run to time.
4. Many applicants didn't manage to secure their preferred location due to demand, and issues with the booking system.
5. Many applicants felt that the interview questions favoured students with little experience and wrongly gave no advantage to those who have endeavoured to balance placements, work or other commitments with university.
6. Applicants felt that although previous work history was requested it wasn't used in the scoring process, and so filling it in on the application was of little benefit to them.
7. Applicants found the length of the SJT excessive, and many were pushed for time in the numeracy exam.

Alastair Paterson MPharm ARPharmS
BPSA Vice President 2017-2018



4. Overview

158 responses were received from applicants from 28 schools of pharmacy, sorted by number of responses per school.

University	Count	%
University College London	23	14.6
King's College London	21	13.4
University of Central Lancashire	15	9.6
Newcastle University	11	7
Kingston University	8	5.1
University of Nottingham	8	5.1
University of Lincoln	8	5.1
Medway School of Pharmacy	7	4.5
University of East Anglia	7	4.5
Cardiff University	6	3.8
Liverpool John Moores University	5	3.2
University of Brighton	4	2.5
University of Birmingham	4	2.5
Keele University	4	2.5
University of Bath	3	1.9
Aston University	3	1.9
University of Sunderland	3	1.9
University of Reading	3	1.9
University of Bradford	2	1.3
De Montford University	2	1.3
University of Strathclyde	2	1.3
University of Manchester	2	1.3
University of Huddersfield	2	1.3
University of Hertfordshire	2	1.3
Robert Gordon University	1	0.6
University of Portsmouth	1	0.6

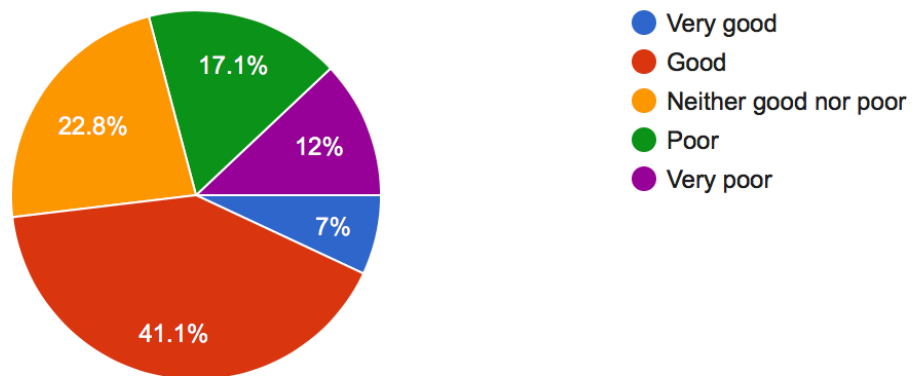


5. Results

5.1 Online application process

What did you think of the online application process?

158 responses



5.1.1 Applicant Handbook

Applicants found the handbook to be very useful, full of relevant information and commented that it solved lots of problems (n=3), however more screenshots of the online system would have helped to improve it, as would an earlier release date.

5.1.2 Content of the Application Process

One respondent believed the process to be fairer than previous system, but also commented that it lacked the opportunity for individuals to sell themselves. This was a common theme - many applicants felt they were not explored as individuals at either this or the MMI stage during the assessment centre (n=6).

“There were few questions asking about you as a person or why you would excel in pre-reg.”

Applicants felt that although previous work history was requested it wasn't used in the scoring process, and so filling it in on the application was of little additional benefit to them (n=3). Being able to add in a greater number of work experiences would have been preferred by some (n=2), as would the opportunity to upload a CV or personal statement (n=4).

“A personal statement section would have made it easier to express interest in certain career paths or specialities”



Some applicants expressed frustration that the application did not allow them to include university grades or academic references.

5.1.3 Time Commitment and Site Navigation

Several respondents found the process time consuming and confusing (n=4), and found some of the wording on the application to be ambiguous. They were unsure as to whether the break from work section should have included time at university or not.

Many respondents found that the interface was poor, hard to navigate and frequently logged them out or crashed (n=8). Sometimes changes were not saved on people's application and occasionally respondents found them locked out of the system. One applicant who was partially sighted found the system difficult to use.

In contrast, many applicants found the online system easy to navigate, short and concise (n=4), requiring little effort and was simple to follow (n=10). One respondent commented that despite some flaws, the idea of being able to apply to all hospitals across UK with one application is brilliant, although more information linked to each place would have been helpful when making preferencing decisions.

5.1.4 Preferencing

Respondents found the process of preferencing complex and unclear (n=2), and one commented that a search function for finding specific places would have been useful. Another found using codes for individual stores difficult – this could have been easier if the stores were named.

Some applicants had difficulties preferencing several options at once using an Apple Mac (n=3).

Others found a drag and drop mechanism and scrolling through ranks difficult (n=2).

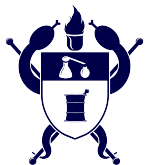
"The preferencing was difficult as every time you added something to the ranked list all your ranks would move down. You should be able to add the choice at any rank."

"More guidance on how to rank would have been useful, especially around the use of filters."

Some applicants found the terminology around preferencing difficult to understand, and one applicant asked what process was used to allocate someone a "no preference" place if they do not get one of their preferred places.

5.1.5 Communication

One applicant commented that the emails regarding application status changes and deadline reminders were good, but despite this, many respondents found it hard to communicate with organisers when applicants had issues (n=4) and this is something that the BPSA experienced a high number of queries in regard to.

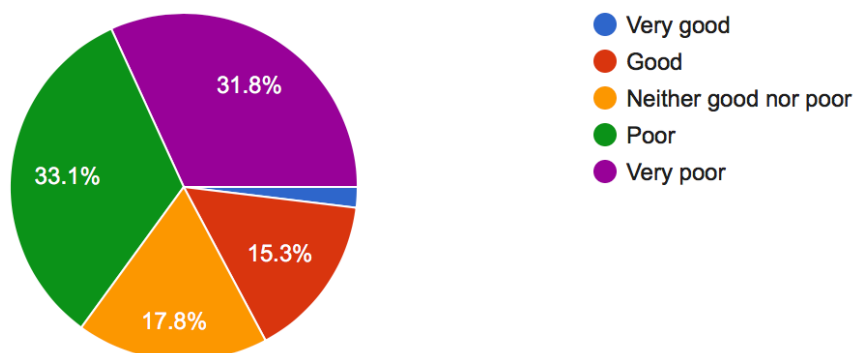


There was a lot of confusion around how the application system worked, especially prior to the release of the handbook, and this created a lot of anxiety prior to the start of the oriel cycle. Although this is to be expected to a certain degree with the process being new, more should be done to minimise this effect. More training of university staff by Oriel staff would have been useful, and one respondent commented that their tutor didn't know anything about the process. Of those whose tutors did know about the process, very few knew the full story, and even fewer knew the full story correctly. In future application cycles it would be useful to review communication methods and training to ensure information is reaching university staff and students in a timely manner, with a consistent and correct message.

5.2 Assessment Centre Booking

What do you think of the assessment centre online booking facility?

157 responses

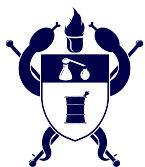


Many respondents found booking their assessment centre stressful as the system did not open until two hours after the time specified in the handbook. Candidates were not made aware of this until an hour later, and only informed via twitter.

"Only using twitter is not a sufficient way of informing students"

Several candidates found it difficult to establish what interview slots were available. There was comment as to whether during the day was the best time to release the bookings, especially with students working over summer.

"The confusion around when places were released was unprofessional. The programme should follow their own deadlines and timings just as we are given deadlines to meet."



“Many students work during the day especially over summer break. Bookings should have been at a time that accommodated for this.”

Students felt that the time between the booking and assessment centre should be reviewed, to ensure international students aren't unfairly disadvantaged.

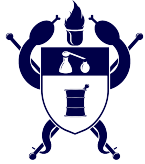
“Getting an interview was solely based on luck and how fast you could get one, with very very limited time. Whilst this may be a first come first serve system, the time gap between when the online booking opened and the date itself was too short. As an international student, it makes it very complicated when booking flight tickets back to the U.K. and in my case, to change the date. It should have opened much earlier on with many more spaces for popular places and times.”

More London, Manchester/North West, and Midlands dates were requested by applicants (n=12), as these dates went quickly and some applicants had to travel a lot further as a result. Some respondents suggested mapping assessment centres to pharmacy schools.

A few applicants said that the system was okay as they managed to book as soon as it went live (n=2) but an overwhelming majority of applicants complained about the website crashing (n=28).

5.3 Which assessment centre did you attend?

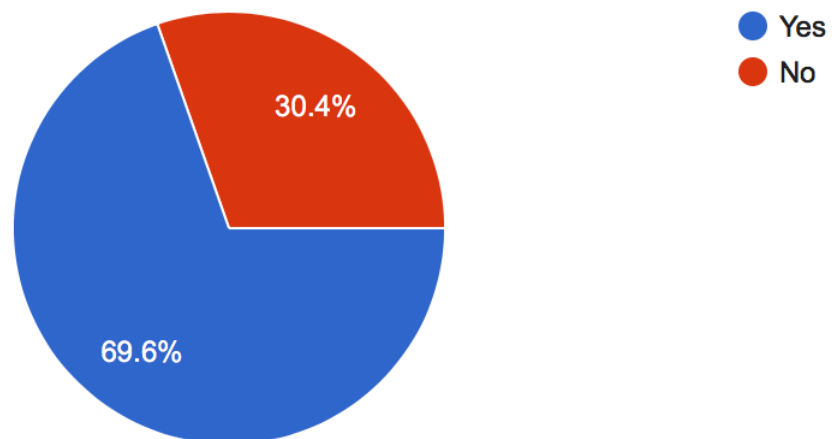
Day	Location	Number of respondents	%
11 th September	Newmarket Race Course (Suffolk)	3	1.9
12 th September	Newmarket Race Course (Suffolk)	4	2.5
12 th September	Cardiff City Stadium	2	1.3
13 th September	Newmarket Race Course (Suffolk)	3	1.9
13 th September	Cardiff City Stadium	4	2.5
14 th September	Newmarket Race Course (Suffolk)	4	2.5
15 th September	Newmarket Race Course (Suffolk)	3	1.9
18 th September	Kassam Stadium (Oxford)	6	3.8
18 th September	St. James' Park (Newcastle)	10	6.4
19 th September	Kassam Stadium (Oxford)	1	0.6
19 th September	St. James' Park (Newcastle)	8	5.1
19 th September	KCOM Stadium (Hull)	9	5.7
20 th September	Kassam Stadium (Oxford)	8	5.1
20 th September	KCOM Stadium (Hull)	5	3.2
21 st September	Kassam Stadium (Oxford)	7	4.5
21 st September	Etihad Stadium (Manchester)	8	5.1



22 nd September	Kassam Stadium (Oxford)	7	4.5
22 nd September	Etihad Stadium (Manchester)	4	2.5
25 th September	Stewart House (London)	15	9.6
26 th September	Stewart House (London)	14	8.9
27 th September	Stewart House (London)	13	8.3
28 th September	Stewart House (London)	13	8.3
29 th September	Stewart House (London)	6	3.8

Was this your preferred date?

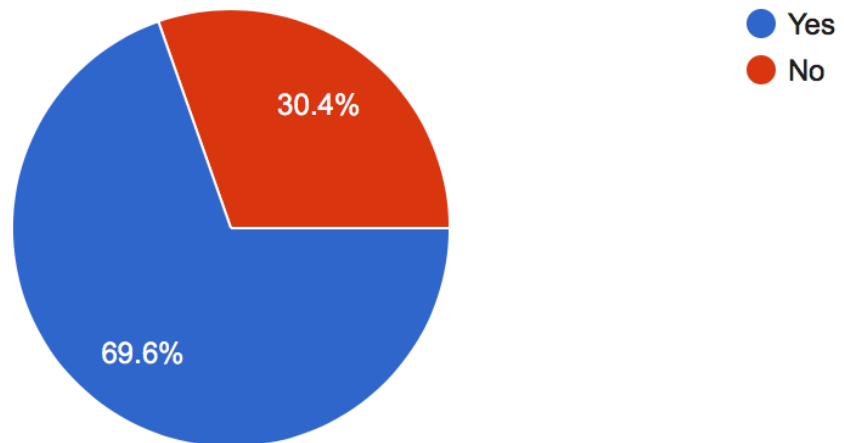
158 responses





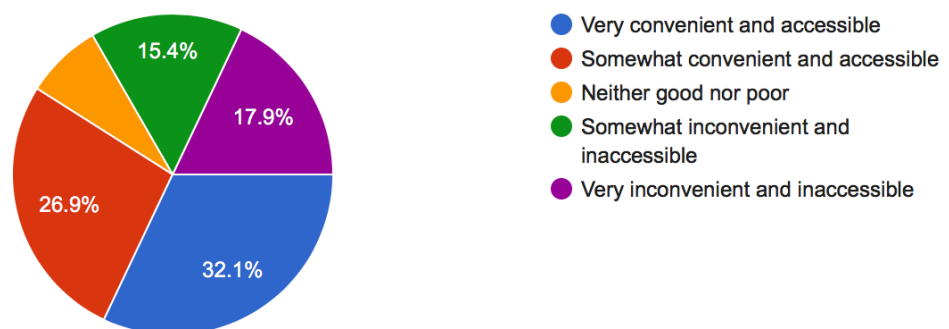
Was this your preferred location?

158 responses



How convenient and accessible was this assessment centre for you?

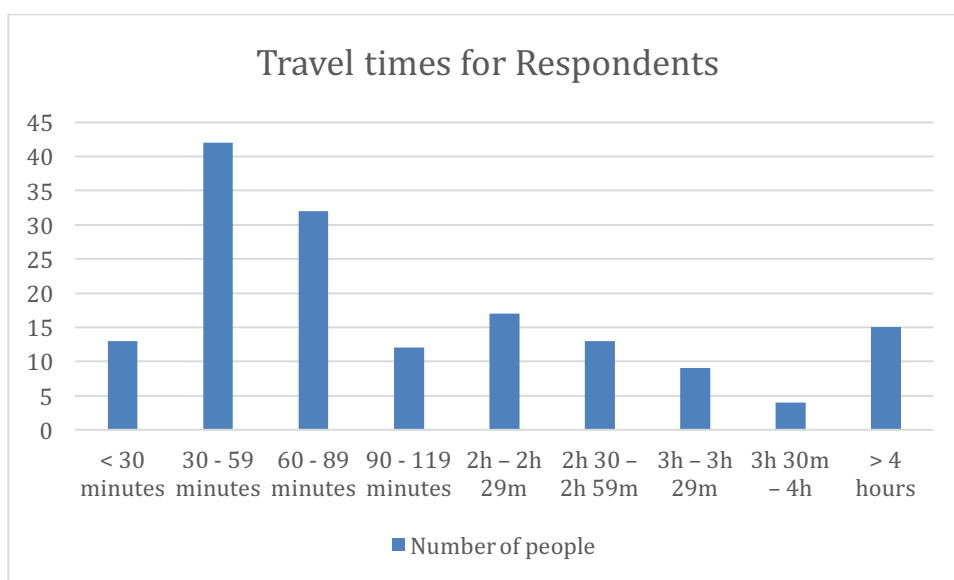
156 responses





5.4 What was your travel time to the assessment centre?

Travel time	Number of people	Percentage (%)
< 30 minutes	13	8.3
30 - 59 minutes	42	26.8
60 - 89 minutes	32	20.4
90 - 119 minutes	12	7.6
2h – 2h 29m	17	10.8
2h 30 – 2h 59m	13	8.3
3h – 3h 29m	9	5.7
3h 30m – 4h	4	2.5
> 4 hours	15	9.6

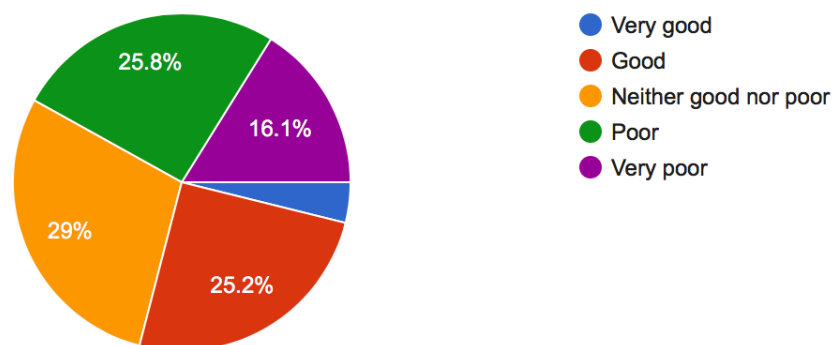




5.5 What did you think of the structure and format of the assessment centre?

How would you rate your overall experience at this assessment centre?

155 responses



5.5.1 Location

Eleven candidates stated that the location and logistics of the assessment centre were good, however this was countered by an even greater number of candidates who made comments about poor timekeeping and organisation at the assessment centres (n=21).

St James' Park (Newcastle) was however described by one candidate as *"the perfect location for an assessment centre based in the North East"* and some candidates from other venues complimented the running of the day (n=4) as well as the friendly nature of the staff (n=3). Stewart House (London) was also ideally located according to several candidates (n=2).

5.5.2 Logistics and Running of the Assessment Centres

Respondents who attended the St James' Park assessment days found the rooms difficult to locate, with no information given about where to go and poor signposting. They also commented that staff were unaware of what was happening and at what time, and their SJT started 30 minutes late, after they had to remind staff. The process of getting everyone into the room took a further hour, which only increased stress levels. Delays caused the day to run over lunchtime and significantly over at the end of the day. Some candidates missed trains home as a result (n=2).



“Considering time management was stressed so heavily to candidates throughout the whole process, time management on HEE’s part has been very poor.”

“Format was fine, the structure was poor. We were not communicated with at all. I often didn't know if I should be in a place or when I was supposed to be called.”

Instructions about the timing of the day were confusing to applicants and resulted in them waiting a long time. Some applicants spent from 11am to 7pm at the assessment centre and commented that the remote location and lack of access to nearby refreshments was an issue (n=3), however applicants at other locations thought otherwise.

“Good location. Restaurants around to eat while waiting for the net part of the assessment”

“Not much to do around. It was a full day and therefore I think it should be in the city centre where people can leave and come back.”

One candidate queried whether the three week assessment window may have put students on later bookings at an advantage. Another candidate commented that the logistics of the day were tiring and candidates were fatigued by the end of the day.

Two candidates complained of a distracting protest outside their venue involving musical instruments.

5.5.3 Travel

Some candidates felt their travel time was inconvenient, expensive and may have impacted their performance on the day. Those who travelled by car generally found the venues accessible however there were comments by those who travelled by train that the venues were difficult to get to from the railway station, particularly those attending the Oxford assessment centre.

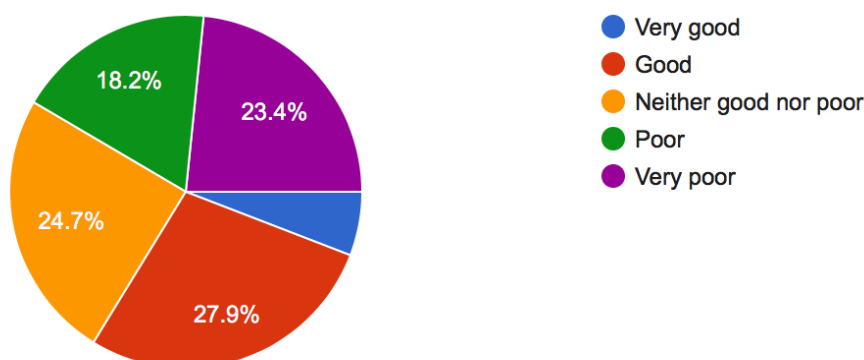
“It was very far for me to travel, and very inconvenient as the Stadium (Oxford) was very far from the train station. I spent a considerable amount of money travelling to and from the stadium, whilst experiencing financial difficulty. A lot of the journey tired me out before I actually reached the centre.”



5.6 Multiple Mini Interviews

What did you think of the multiple mini interviews (MMI)?

154 responses



Candidates felt there was a poor balance of questions, with not enough questions delving into their character and experiences (n=6). They were not very able to discuss extra-curricular activities that demonstrated commitment to their development and the profession beyond their course.

"I felt like the process didn't allow me to get across what experience I already have"

"I felt like the questions asked didn't allow me to make my personality shine through, it felt quite robotic"

"The 3 scenarios based questions were good however the 3 personality based questions did not allow you to sell yourself. They were very directed and did not allow you to show off what you had done. A candidate who had gone out and found placements and opportunities for themselves could sell themselves no better than someone that just attends university lectures."

"It made me question what kind of student Oriel is looking for. Do they want someone proactive who has done things outside of the standard MPharm degree or someone who can answer pre-set questions correctly?"

"The interviews had very little personality and they were reading questions/responses word for word off a sheet of paper and so open their follow up questions didn't quite fit the answer I gave, it was a very impersonal experience"



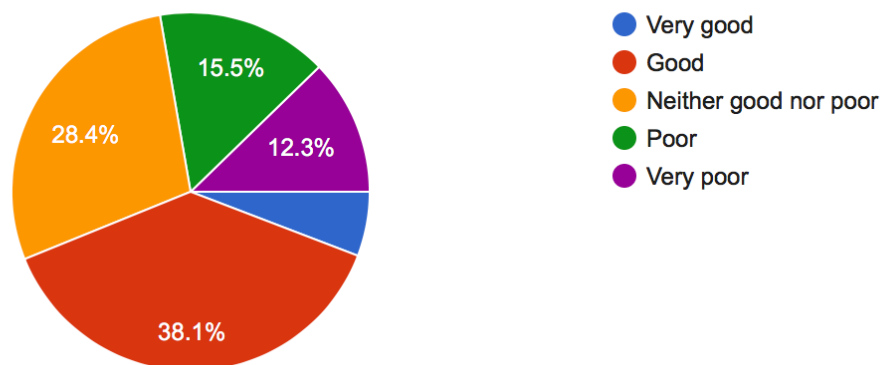
Candidates felt that the assessments didn't examine any clinical knowledge, and were concerned that the questions were the same between dates and assessment centres, allowing people to share answers (n=3).

More than one candidate commented that the area in which the MMI took place was busy and so it was difficult to see the instructor.

5.7 Situational Judgement Test

What did you think of the situational judgement test (SJT)?

155 responses



One candidate commented that there were too many questions, and that the SJTs could be shorter.

Some candidates thought that they were given too much time to complete the SJT (n=9), some thought there were too many questions and found the test boring (n=8), and some found the questions to be ambiguous. Several candidates said they would have liked more sample questions prior to the assessment day.

"It was ok but very very subjective considering option 1 and 2 are interchangeable. There was no practice papers or questions so there's a big disadvantage."

Several candidates found the SJTs fair, with a good range of questions

"I found this part of the assessment somewhat enjoyable as it really tested my problem solving skills and required me to put myself in the shoes of a pre-registration pharmacist."

"Enjoyed the SJT, felt I had the opportunity to demonstrate my skills, however it was long and tedious."



Some candidates felt that their answer was not best described by any one of the options. This may highlight that candidates are not used to undertaking SJTs.

"The options given to choose from were insufficient. For many of the questions I would do a combination of different things, not just one."

Some students reported incidents in which they could have been given more support, or when staff could have responded better to situations that arose.

"Should've given us a brief on the layout of the answer sheet as it was very confusing."

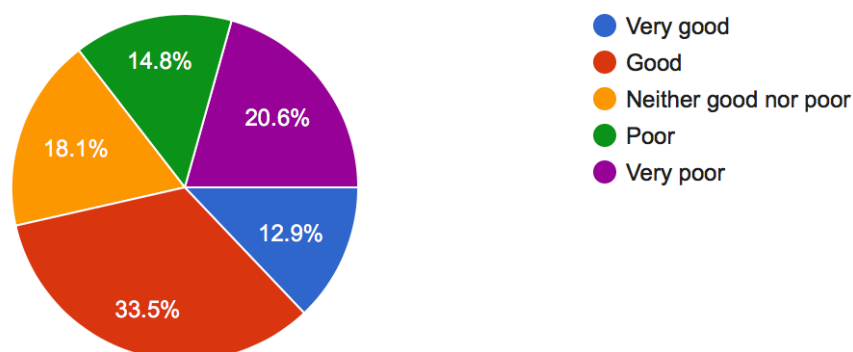
"I had an incident in which a young lady was having a conversation with the examiner across the room about how she could not do the test - this was very disruptive and it impacted on my time during the SJT. I think the examiners handled it poorly and took little consideration for the other candidates attempting the paper."

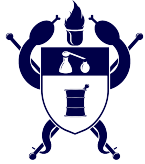
"The assessment room I was in did not even have the start or finish time written down, or a clock to follow. I was unable to keep a track of time and as a result felt extremely rushed for time. Not enough time was allocated for the SJT. The lack of standardisation in the examination room by the invigilator was poor. It is not fair, that other assessment centres and rooms knew the start and finish time, and were able to have a greater grasp of time, than myself."

5.8 Numeracy Test

What did you think of the numeracy test?

155 responses





Many applicants complained that there was not enough time to complete calculations quickly and accurately (n=52) in the numeracy exam.

However, others thought the exam was fair and appropriately time pressured.

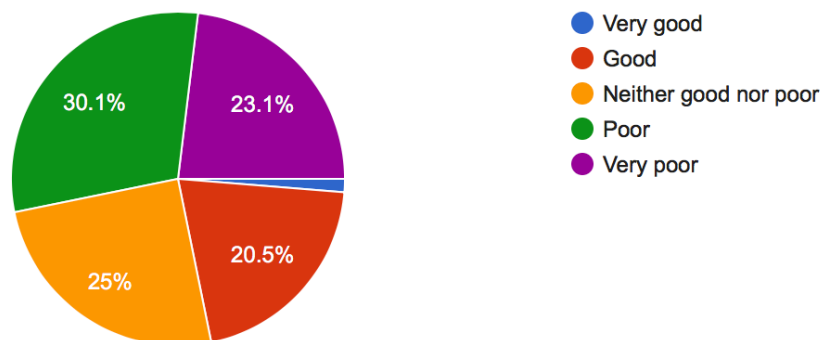
"There was a good selection of questions requiring different calculation methods, although I found that it was a bit rushed for time."

"Good set of questions, however 15 minutes was not enough. I managed to complete only 9/10 questions."

5.9 How would you rate your overall experience of applying for pre-registration training?

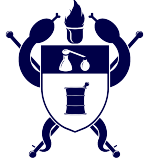
How would you rate your overall experience applying for pre-registration training?

156 responses



As this is a new system for pharmacy students, it is important to recognise the feedback gained from the first year. Whilst some candidates had positive experiences, over 50% of those surveyed stated either poor or very poor experiences. However, there was a variety of different comments from students regarding the application process as a whole.

"I don't think oriel should exist. [Neither] pharmacy students nor employers know who we/they are being matched to. I think it is a horrible system. Separate interviews for each place are perfect, we should go back to that."



"I think having three different methods of assessments was good as it examined a range of abilities. However, I think the overall structure of the assessment was extremely unfair to those of us who wanted to do the interview honestly without asking others how their interview/SJT/calculations went. Finding out later on that a LOT of students knew the MMI scenarios/questions prior to attending the assessment made me feel very disappointed in this whole Oriel process, especially after finding out that the exact same scenarios were used throughout the three weeks at all of the assessment centres, and even throughout the same day at the same assessment centre. This means that whatever rank I, and probably along with everyone else, will most definitely not be a true representation of my abilities, because the people who had found out the MMI scenarios beforehand will probably have scored higher. This was an extremely unfair process, and I now feel cheated out of a pre-registration place in a hospital that I actually deserved. The Oriel organisers should have planned it better, either in terms of having completely different/a wider variety of MMI questions, or spreading the assessments across a number of days rather than three whole weeks to reduce the chance of people conferring questions/answers."

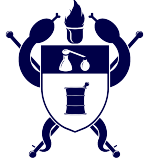
"Great that there is variety in the nature of the assessments"

"I think the structure and format of the assessment centre was good. The aspects being examined were appropriate, although some additional clinical element could be introduced. The time gap between the MMI and SJT/mathematical tests was a bit too large, resulting in us finishing at around 6pm."



6. Recommendations

1. In future application cycles it would be useful to **review communication methods and training** to ensure information is reaching university staff and students in a timely manner, with a consistent and correct message. Ensuring that communication channels for students to make direct queries to HEE are available and well-advertised would also be useful.
2. **The timescales for the process should be reviewed, well communicated and stuck to**, to minimise confusion to applicants.
3. **The Handbook is a very useful resource, but would it would be beneficial if it contained more screenshots of the process, and to release it earlier.**
4. **It is important to continue to promote definitions of the language around the process**, particularly with regards to preferencing.
5. **A greater provision of assessment centres should be considered, particularly with more dates in London, Manchester/North West, and a new assessment centre in the West Midlands.** Holding these selection days at Universities may help increase accessibility for students.
6. **Assessment centre locations should be reviewed** to ensure they are easy to access for as many students as possible, and there are local amenities in the surrounding area, so applicants can refuel and recharge during the day.
7. **The online assessment centre booking process and communication regarding this should be reviewed** as timings of release and the fact that the system opened late, was found to be a problem for students. The booking system should be reviewed for capacity to prevent issues with the website crashing when experiencing a high volume of traffic.
8. **A greater level of organisation at assessment centres is required**, with more training in place for staff.
9. **The questions in Multiple Mini Interviews should be reviewed** to ensure they explore the experiences and personality of an individual.
10. **The length and timing of the numeracy exam and the SJT should be reviewed** to ensure candidates are tested thoroughly, but fairly.



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7. Closing Remarks

In the first year of any system or structure there are always teething issues. The BPSA feel a large majority of these have been captured here, and are committed to continuing our excellent working relationship with Health Education England over the course of future Oriel cycles to ensure the system is fair and robust, and to ensure the best experience possible for all applicants.

We would like to thank Health Education England and the members of the Pre-Registration Pharmacy Recruitment Operational Group for kindly inviting us to be part of this process, and respectfully and professionally receiving the views of our members throughout.