



British Pharmaceutical Students' Association

June 2018 GPhC Registration Assessment Feedback Report

16/07/2018
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British Pharmaceutical Students' Association
The Official Student Organisation of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society

Introduction

The British Pharmaceutical Students' Association (BPSA) is the official representative body of pharmacy students and Pre-Registration Pharmacists in Great Britain. Established in 1942, the Association aims to support, advocate for and represent trainees on their path towards registration.

As part of this supportive and representative role, the BPSA invites feedback following registration assessments. The June 2018 registration assessment has attracted significant feedback. As of 11th July 2018, 266 e-mails were received via preregexamfeedback@bpsa.co.uk. Although there were more respondents to the June 2017 paper, the BPSA have been able to identify regular trends from the feedback received and believe this is a true reflection of how the majority of the candidates who sat the June 2018 registration assessment felt. The BPSA is aware of a petition being signed that has reached significant numbers but this report only reflects the feedback the BPSA has received via the above e-mail address.

In 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017 due to the strong working relationship between the BPSA and General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), a summary of collated feedback was presented to the board of assessors. This feedback also included several recommendations, all of which were accepted and have led to improvements in the assessment experience for trainees.

The feedback this year has been reviewed and categorised into themes discussed below. A number of recommendations have also been produced which the BPSA would like to put forward to the GPhC in order to improve the assessment experience for future years.

I hope this report is useful for all stakeholders of the June 2018 assessment, particularly the Pre-Registration trainees that sat this assessment. Should you have any comments about this report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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1. Environment

1.1. Assessment Centres

A number of candidates responded regarding the environment of the registration assessment.

One candidate felt that the temperature was very high at the assessment centre and not much was done to help improve the atmosphere. They felt this made it more difficult for candidates to concentrate during the exam, affecting their ability and performance. This response was not specific as to which assessment centre was being referred to.

However, a number of candidates from the Bradford centre said there was no air conditioning in the exam hall. One candidate said they "felt dehydrated but kept drinking to a minimum to avoid toilet breaks as every minute counts". Some candidates mentioned that the windows were opened at the centre to help with the temperature issue, but this created more noise at the centre making it more difficult for candidates to concentrate and therefore affecting their performance.

Recommendation 1: The GPhC should ensure that there is adequate temperature control at the venues that they select for the registration assessment, particularly in June. Pharmacy associations like the RPS, BPSA, etc. should work with the GPhC to advise candidates on how to self-manage their own temperature; for example, wear light clothing at high temperatures.

Some candidates who sat the exam at the NEC venue in Birmingham believe it's a good venue but found it difficult to locate the hall the exam was taking place at. Candidates said the hall was well ventilated, but some were distracted by the noise of the flying planes. During the break between the papers, some candidates mentioned there wasn't many places opened for lunch at the venue and the temperature was at its extreme, particularly outside the exam hall at the NEC centre.

Recommendation 2: The GPhC should ensure more specific details are provided where the assessment places might be difficult to find.

Some candidates who sat the exam at the venue in Edinburgh did not have a positive experience as their papers were delayed by 30 minutes. Candidates felt no proper explanation was given for the delay and this made them feel more nervous which has affected their ability and performance on the day.

Some candidates, who sat the exam at the Excel centre, stated that they were distracted due to the sound of the planes taking off in the background which has affected the candidates' ability to concentrate.



1.2. Desk space

A few candidates commented on the lack of sufficient desk space provided. Candidates felt that vast amount of resources provided during the latter part of the assessment meant that they spent time moving things around their small desks in order to access the resources, the question paper and answer sheet. This frustrated and distracted candidates, with complaints that this consumed time. Although, this was not a very popular theme this sitting, the BPSA believes this is still an issue that needs looking into as it was mentioned in the past sittings.

Recommendation 3: The GPhC should publish the specification of the desks used in the pre-assessment briefs that students receive (or on their website) with some advice on how to manage the desk space provided if larger desks cannot be provided.

2. Paper 1

124 (47%) respondents provided feedback on paper 1 of the assessment which highlighted regular themes.

2.1. Content

78 (29%) respondents believe that the paper wasn't varied enough, therefore only testing some of the topics highlighted in the registration assessment framework "a significant number of dilution questions but none concerning the displacement values of suppositories or alligation".

Some of the respondents stated that there was some confusion with some of the questions particularly the following:

- "round your answer to the nearest pound and penny",
- The question asking to work out how many units of alcohol the patient is consuming each week – candidates were not sure if the 35ml of whisky was for 2 glasses or 1 due to the way it was written 49 (18%) respondents commented on this.
- Some candidates were not familiar with the way the stock concentration **(90%(30vol))** of the mouthwash was expressed as it's something they haven't come across before.

76 (29%) of the candidates believe that paper 1 was not to the same level of difficulty to the sample paper published on the GPhC website. Also, they feel that the guidance provided to prepare for the paper was not helpful as it did not reflect the types of question that the candidates came across in the actual paper.

A few candidates mentioned that overall this was a fair paper but still mentioned some of the issues already covered in this section.



Recommendation 4: The BPSA recommends that the GPhC should ensure the resources published and made available to candidates to prepare for the registration assessment are better aligned to the calibre of the actual paper.

2.2. Resources pack

Overall, there were not many comments regarding the resources pack provided for this paper, but a few mentioned they found the pack too large. However, 67 (25%) candidates who provided feedback on paper 1 have mentioned that they were not familiar with the algorithm provided for the conversion in the Parkinson's question. This was very time consuming and not easy to follow with about 5 of the respondents commenting on the quality of the printout, stating it was blurry.

2.3. Length of the questions

Some candidates felt that some questions were very wordy which took time to understand the question with some saying that some questions were wordier than the sample paper. Candidates are aware that it is average to spend around 3 minutes per question. However, a few candidates felt that some questions took more than 3 minutes to do as they required multiple steps to get to the answer. The BPSA recognises that some questions may take longer to work out than others.

2.4. Timing

102 (38%) respondents found timing to be an issue stating that the time provided to complete the questions was not sufficient. Some of the candidates had little or no time to review their answers.

Recommendation 5: The BPSA recommends that the GPhC ensures an adequate distribution of questions that equate to an average of 3 minutes per question, to allow candidates sufficient time to complete all questions.

3. Paper 2

249 (94%) respondents commented on paper 2. Most of the feedback the BPSA has received regarding paper 2 had little to no positive feedback. A substantial number of respondents (217 (82%) respondents) found that the paper was not fair as it does not reflect the registration assessment framework stating that the paper mostly covered medium to low weight areas. The framework states that around 60% to 70% of the paper will be questions from the high weight area,



encouraging candidates to focus most of the revision on these areas. 118 (44%) respondents believe that hospital Pre-Registration Pharmacists had a better advantage due to the type of questions being asked (hospital-based scenarios) and only a small number of over the counter (OTC) medication questions being included in the paper. Some of the hospital Pre-Registration Pharmacists who provided feedback even felt there were not enough OTC questions in the paper. The feedback regarding paper 2 of the assessment highlighted regular themes amongst the respondents who commented on the paper.

Recommendation 6: The GPhC should publish in the board of assessors report the proportions of questions from high, medium and low weight, from the registration assessment framework.

3.1. Questions

3.1.1. Incomparable to Practice

121 (45%) respondents were concerned as they believe paper 2 was not a true nor accurate reflection of the day to day practice of a newly qualified Pharmacist. For example, one candidate highlighted using the NICE guidelines that B12 deficiency is managed under a specialist and newly qualified Pharmacist are not expected to be specialist in an area on day one of practice.

Candidates also believe that the paper was not a true nor accurate reflection of real life practice stating that some questions limited your options whereas in reality there are better options available to the pharmacist. For example, some respondents referred to the 15-year-old girl who had unprotected sex 4 days ago stating they would have supplied Ulipristal as an alternative to the provided options in the exam paper. Some candidates were expecting the GPhC to include the changes that happened over the past year in pharmacy (e.g. sodium valproate, POM to P switches, and other topics); this again doesn't reflect the day to day practice. Some candidates believe that there weren't enough questions from the law and MEP and they believe it's a foundation upon which all Pharmacists practice against.

With the advance in technology, most respondents (193 (73%) respondents) found the Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC) questions were very time consuming and in real practice it would be a lot quicker to find the information needed.

Commonly, respondents stated that they have asked registered Pharmacists some of the same questions within the assessment, and "even they could not answer the questions without using resources to look up the answer". Furthermore, most respondents felt that it was not appropriate, nor acceptable to perform a clinical check within 1.25 minutes, further reflecting the discord with real practice.



Recommendation 7: The GPhC should ensure that the assessment is an accurate reflection of day to day practice to that of a newly qualified pharmacist.

Recommendation 8: To give candidates a better understanding, the GPhC should produce a document detailing the process followed to produce the registration assessment.

3.1.2. Ambiguity

The ambiguity of many questions was a cause for concern amongst 71 (27%) respondents. The candidates felt that a lot of questions were unclear in their wording and so could have been interpreted in different ways. This ambiguity meant that some questions could potentially have had more than one answer. There isn't a specific question that has been highlighted by the respondents.

Recommendation 9: The GPhC should review and remove all questions which are unnecessarily ambiguous during the moderation of this assessment. In the future, the GPhC should work to avoid unnecessary ambiguity within questions and ensure there is sufficient information to inform a clear single best answer from the options provided.

3.1.3. Short answer questions

204 (77%) candidates who provided feedback for paper 2 have mentioned there were too many complex calculation questions in the paper. These did not consist of simple numbers and were very time consuming to do without a calculator meaning candidates found that the average 1.25 minutes per question was not enough. The options for one of the calculation questions were "0.76, 0.77, 0.78, 0.79, and 0.80" meaning a very precise calculation was required to get to the right answer. In day to day practice, candidates would have used a calculator for such calculation questions.

Recommendation 10: The GPhC should ensure that the calculations within paper 2 of the assessment use simpler numbers and are answerable within the average time limit for each question in this paper



3.1.4. Extended matching questions (EMQs)

62 (23%) of the candidates in their responses referred specifically to questions 90 to 120 stating they were worded in such a way that it made it difficult to extract what was being asked in the question and lead to some candidates feeling confused. Candidates felt that some questions were excessively worded. Coming towards the end of the paper, candidates felt really pushed for time and therefore took educated guesses to what the answer could be. There were also some EMQs that required the use of resources which candidates felt it was really time consuming.

Recommendation 11: The GPhC should restrict the amount of EMQs that require resources to ensure candidates have sufficient time to complete each question.

Recommendation 12: The GPhC should restrict excessively worded EMQs or provide sample questions of similar length to appropriately prepare candidates for these types of questions.

3.1.5. Specific questions

The candidates who provided us with feedback did not provide specific information on questions. However, 22 (8%) respondents were surprised to see a question on the P-value. It is something candidates did not expect to come up in the exam as it did not for some during their Pre-Registration training.

Recommendation 13: The GPhC should work together with pharmacy associations, such as the RPS and BPSA, and training providers to ensure that candidates understand that they are being assessed for what they have learnt during their pharmacy degree and not just the Pre-Registration training year.

3.2. Length

Many of the respondents said the paper was too long and some questions were excessively worded. They are aware that the average time per question is 1.25 minutes which is unrealistic. Some respondents said it took them 1.25 minutes to read through the questions and understand what is being asked. This frustrated candidates as they felt the wording of questions had been “deliberately written to confuse them”. Candidates felt that realising how much time they spent reading the question during the assessment made them uneasy and therefore rush decisions, which they would



not normally do in practice. Some candidates felt that the exam was a test of speed rather than knowledge and skills of a newly qualified pharmacist.

3.3. Resources

193 (73%) candidates who provided feedback found the resource pack too large and overall the assessment contained too many questions requiring the use of resources, specifically the SPC. Candidates felt there was not enough time to read the question, flick through the SPCs and answer the question in the average timing of 1.25 minutes per question. Again, candidates felt that this was not a true reflection of real life day to day practice.

Candidates have taken the advice and recommendations provided and are therefore familiar with the layout of the SPCs, but they were thrown by the number of questions there were answering from an SPC. Many respondents stated that this resource was largely incomparable to real life practice due to the use of technology.

Recommendation 14: The BPSA recommends that the GPhC should provide less questions requiring the use of resources and should provide a smaller resources pack.

3.4. Timing

235 (88%) respondents stated they found timing to be an issue. Candidates felt like the registration assessment was a test of speed, rather than a test of clinical knowledge and competency of a newly qualified pharmacist.

As already highlighted in the report candidates found the average 1.25 minutes per question not long enough to understand the question, use resources where needed and to answer the question in a safe and practical manner. Candidates ended up guessing some answers to have an answer for every question, but as a Pharmacist, candidates recognise this is not a safe way to practice. The GPhC should not take the number of candidates that submitted all answers as a measure of appropriate timing, as it is clear that many candidates merely filled in a box with the hope of guessing an answer, rather than having made an appropriate and informed choice.

Respondents felt that the unreasonable time pressure within the assessment meant that they were unable to make safe and informed decisions, which they would normally make time for in practice. Candidates recognised that in practice, no Pharmacist would make a decision on the basis of guesswork despite any sort of time pressures and so this contributed to the assessment being at discord with practice.



4. The Registration Assessment Framework

217 (82%) respondents had strong views regarding the relevance of the Registration Assessment Framework to the actual assessment. Candidates formed the basis of their revision using the Registration Assessment Framework and so felt perturbed that the actual assessment was not consistent with the framework. After sitting the registration assessment, a clear majority of the candidates don't know how to prepare differently for the assessment if they were to have a second sitting as they have followed the advice and recommendation provided in the Registration Assessment Framework and GPhC website. Candidates have expressed disappointment that after 5 years of hard work and positive progress, it comes down to passing a paper which isn't a true representation of the Registration Assessment Framework and day to day practice to become a registered pharmacist.

Almost all the respondents felt that the content of the paper was mainly from medium to low weighted topics. They believe that 60% to 70% of questions in the paper were not from the high weighted topics highlighted in the Registration Assessment Framework. Candidates were not expecting 6 questions on adverse drugs reactions and yellow card scheme as they believe that it is highlighted as a low weight area (up to 10% of questions) in the Registration Assessment Framework.

Some of the candidates felt that the assessment was not accommodating of the different training environments. Whilst 118 (44%) respondents agreed that the assessment was clinical, and hospital focused, they felt there was a lack of over the counter and law questions within the assessment.

Recommendation 15: The GPhC should ensure that the Registration Assessment Framework is not misrepresentative nor misleading and provides trainees with sufficient information in order to structure their learning and revision accordingly.

Recommendation 16: Some respondents have recommended that newly qualified Pharmacists should be allowed to review the questions with an experience pharmacist to ensure the level of difficulty is appropriate to a newly qualified Pharmacist.



5. The GPhC sample papers

199 (75%) respondents expressed their concerns as the GPhC sample papers were not to the same level of difficulty to the actual paper. Candidates had passed and answered the sample questions with relative ease in comparison to the actual assessment and felt misled by the sample questions published by the GPhC.

Recommendation 17: The GPhC should publish sample questions of representative difficulty, complexity and length to the registration assessment, and choose these questions from the same pool that the registration assessment questions are chosen from.

Recommendation 18: The GPhC should provide at least 2 sample papers for each paper to help candidates have a better understanding of the wording and types of questions as well as a better feel for the timing of the paper

6. Mock Assessment Training Providers

The BPSA recognises that the GPhC is not involved in regulating organisations that provide mock assessments, however the considerable amount of feedback received from respondents regarding these mock assessments, has meant that this complaint cannot be ignored.

Some candidates fed back their concerns regarding the mock questions provided by various organisations. Respondents felt that mock assessments were recommended and advertised as being of the same difficulty, if not more so, as the actual assessment, and turned out to be the complete opposite. Respondents had paid considerable amounts of money for some assessment and felt angered and disappointed at the cost of such incomparable assessments.

Recommendation 19: The GPhC should ensure that Pre-Registration trainees are aware that no mock assessments or courses are endorsed by the GPhC and may not provide an accurate insight into the actual GPhC Registration Assessment.

Recommendation 20: The BPSA should work closer with the GPhC to help address some of the issues raised in this report and therefore allow candidates to be more prepared for the registration assessment.



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Authorship

This document was written by Abdallah Alkhalaf, Pre-Registration Pharmacist and BPSA Graduate Officer 2018-2019. It has been accepted and endorsed by the BPSA Executive of 2018-2019.

About the BPSA

Founded in 1942, the British Pharmaceutical Students' Association is in its 77th year and is the only organisation that solely represents pharmacy students and Pre-Registration Pharmacists across Britain. As the official student organisation of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, the BPSA aims to promote the interests and welfare of pharmacy students and Pre-Registration Pharmacists. The BPSA regularly represents students' views in the wider pharmacy media, in consultation responses and in meetings with individual stakeholder organisations. As well as represent pharmacy students, we aim to educate, support, and entertain our members. We organise a comprehensive range of events and services throughout the year, so there is something for everyone to get involved in. We have an Executive which coordinate the running of all our events and services and they are supported by a network of BPSA National Representatives which are in every school of pharmacy.

Media Enquiries

Media enquiries can be made to the following members of the BPSA Executive:

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