

## Where and how to apply



### HOW TO APPLY

This chapter will provide a quick summary of how to apply for your pre-registration placements. If you have been through the summer placement application process, you will already be familiar with some of this.

Every pre-registration site in the UK is listed in the document called the *Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB) Approved Premises for Pre-registration Training*. You can access this document through the RPSGB website ([www.rpsgb.org/members/preregtraining/index.html](http://www.rpsgb.org/members/preregtraining/index.html)). Scroll down to Approved Pre-registration Premises and click on the link that says 'click here'. You can search for approved premises by town or postcode and by the type of place you want – community, hospital or industry.

For independent pharmacies, you must apply directly to the various pharmacies, as they do not usually send universities information or application forms. You should apply by sending a CV and covering letter.

### Community

Most community groups (e.g. Boots, Moss, Lloyds) hold a road show, either at your university or at an outside venue. They talk about their pre-registration programme and distribute application forms if they are still using them. Many now have online applications so they may talk you through how to complete these online. Closing dates are usually around the end of June or July of each year.

Boots does not recruit pre-registration pharmacists unless they have completed a third-year summer placement programme with them. If Boots is one of your choices, then you must ensure that you apply for a summer placement programme with them. As mentioned before, most large companies are moving towards this initiative for their recruiting.

For most organisations interviews are held at the end of August or early in the autumn term of the fourth year of study. Previously, some organisations even offered positions on the same day as the interview!

The organisations that do not visit the universities usually send their application packs directly to each university and students can collect these from their careers department. The large multiples will usually have application forms or online recruitment, but when you deal with some of the smaller chains or with independent pharmacies, you may have to provide a CV with a covering letter in lieu of an application form.

During and after company presentations, you should ask questions and talk to the representatives. They want to get to know you. The more inquisitive you are, the more likely they are to remember you. It is also in your interest to find out as much as you can about their pre-registration programme so that you can make an informed decision about whether you wish to apply to a particular company.

Dates for each company's presentations should be provided by your careers department. If you do not have a careers department, then you may be able to find this information on the companies' websites, or simply by ringing them at the beginning of the academic year when you are in your third year of the MPharm programme.

## **Hospital**

For pre-reg places in NHS hospitals in England and Wales, there is a clearing house system like UCAS called Pharmalife. Around mid-March, universities receive information packs which include a thick booklet with a brief description of each hospital offering pre-registration places. These packs may be picked up from your university careers department. NHS Scotland recruits separately and you will find information on this as well as Northern Ireland and Eire at the end of this chapter.

The closing date for applications is the end of August at the end of your third year of study, so you have ample time to make your choices. The forms are to be filled via the online application form. Here, you include your preferred hospital sites. You have to provide name and address details for two referees so that the clearing house can contact your two referees by e-mail. One point to note: always ask for permission before you put a name down as a referee. It is both polite and professional to do so. Failure to do so may spoil you receiving a decent reference. However, as the literature will explain to you, the submission of referee details has to be done earlier than the closing date, to allow time for the referees to be chased. The interview dates vary from hospital to hospital, often depending on the popularity of the hospital. Most interview in mid to late September. By early October,

students know whether they have secured a place or not. Students living overseas should think about returning to the UK slightly earlier than usual to avoid missing any interviews.

If you do not receive an offer of a place, there is a second round, or the clearing of applications, when hospitals with unfilled vacancies readvertise. You can reapply by early November. Interviews are quick and posts are offered by mid-November.

The website with the online application is usually not ready for use until March or April, and this is usually after the pre-reg booklet has been produced and sent to pharmacy schools. This booklet contains details of all the hospitals offering pre-reg places. There are descriptions of the hospitals and the code numbers you need to use when you choose your hospitals on the online application form.

If you are looking for hospital pre-reg places, ask your careers office to show you the literature on other NHS regions.

There is nothing to stop you contacting any hospital to make preliminary enquires about the places they will advertise in the main recruitment booklet in April/May. You may, for example, want to know if a hospital can provide you with accommodation, or you may want to know whether the hospital specialises in a particular field.

If you are interested in the NHS north-west region, which covers hospitals in Liverpool, Manchester, Bolton, Burnley and Blackpool, there is an excellent website at: [www.doh.gov.uk/nwro.nwpharm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/nwro.nwpharm).

## **Split placements with industry**

Every year some students enquire about split industrial placements. These are usually linked with a hospital placement. A booklet called *RPSGB Approved Premises for Pre-registration Training* gives you information on which companies offer these split placements.

## **Interviews and offers**

Most interviews are held in mid-August to early September. Some employers like to interview early, others slightly later. The *RPSGB Guidance for Pre-reg Employers* states that students should not be pressurised into accepting offers and gives a date, which varies from year to year (see Appendix 1). To check the latest guidance, see the RPSGB website ([www.rpsgb.org.uk](http://www.rpsgb.org.uk)).

Such guidance gives students the chance to attend more than one interview before making a final decision. If an employer is pressurising you

for a reply before the set date given in the guidance, you should inform the Pre-registration Division at the RPSGB, as explained in the guidance.

## **WHAT TO DO NOW?**

Three things you should think about now are:

- Referees
- Preparing your CV and cover letter
- Finding a summer work placement for the end of your third year, especially if you did not have one the previous summer

First you need to think about who would be a suitable referee. Every application form will ask for at least one referee, usually two, so you should think about those members of staff who know you well. This may be your academic tutor, your project supervisor or someone else who has taught you. My advice is that your first referee should be an academic and the second referee a pharmacy employer (or another employer if you have not yet worked in a pharmacy). You must ask permission first before you put anyone's name on an application form.

It cannot be overemphasised how important it is to have work experience in a pharmacy during the course. Pre-reg employers look for this and students who do not have such experience on their CV are at a distinct disadvantage. See the chapter on summer placements for further information.

## **NHS Northern Ireland, NHS Scotland and Eire**

If you are interested in doing your pre-reg in Scotland, Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland, contact the careers department at your university. For places in Scotland, the application procedure is similar to that in England and Wales. Your university should receive a CD-ROM pack which lists all the hospitals in Scotland offering places. It is an online application procedure.

## **The Pre-Reg Handbook**

Universities should receive copies of *The Pre-registration Handbook* from the RPSGB. Most universities distribute this to students; some have it in their careers department. This magazine contains numerous articles on pharmacy and life after graduation. There are also several pages of adverts, mainly

from community organisations, as well as some from individual NHS trusts or regions. This is a very informative read, so make sure you get hold of a copy!

## WHERE TO APPLY

Whether you are interested in specialising in hospital, community or industry, it is recommended that you apply everywhere. Places are limited and competition is high. Once you have completed your pre-registration training and qualified as a registered pharmacist, you can apply for jobs in the sector on which you wish to focus.

Competition is rising and it is getting hard to secure a pre-registration place. Do not limit yourself further by only applying for placements near your university town or home. Although many students wish to live at home and commute to work, you are further narrowing your chances by limiting yourself to pre-registration places in a specified area.

London in particular is very competitive and most large teaching hospitals and many branches of large chains are there. However, in England there are many other counties with hospitals and branches of the large community companies and industrial companies, offering a pre-registration placement. It would be wise to apply out of London to increase your chances of getting a place. Remember: it's not where you do your placement, it's what you make of it.

Many students who wish to work in London still apply in London but also choose to apply outside London to increase their probability of getting a pre-registration placement. What you should bear in mind is that it is only for a year, and even if you have to live away from home, it may be quite an experience for you. I cannot stress enough that you should not limit your applications and stay confined to one particular area.

For some students, salary plays a significant role, as students' loans need to be paid and other personal commitments take precedence. However, there is not too much difference in salary between each sector. Nevertheless, there are competitive salaries within each sector. For example, one community company might offer a couple of thousand more per annum than its competitor.

Below is a rough estimate of salaries per annum in 2006 in each pharmacy sector:

- Hospital: £17 000–£23 000
- Community: £15 000–£18 000
- Industry: £20 000–£24 000

Third-year undergraduate students at the School of Pharmacy, University of London, were asked questions on what they felt was important to them about the pre-registration year.

## **SNIPPETS: WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO STUDENTS ABOUT THE PRE-REGISTRATION YEAR?**

### **What is important for you about the pre-registration year?**

‘I want to be comfortable with the job I am in. I want to be learning new things, developing my skills, and having experience with patients. Salary is not really that important to me. I just want to get a place and pass the year.’

‘I want to gain experience and practise as a pharmacist in real life. I want to be learning more and putting things I learnt at university into context.’

‘This will be a transition from student to professional for me.’

‘I want to be prepared for it. I have a lot of expectations. I want to gain confidence as a pharmacist. I’m not sure if my expectations will be met, though.’

‘I just want to get a placement. It doesn’t matter where. It’s getting hard to get placements so I just want to get one anywhere.’

‘I want to learn as much as possible and get good training.’

‘Passing! I want to pass the registration exam. I want to be able to get enough experience so that I can work as a pharmacist on my own. I hope I have a good tutor to guide me.’

‘I want to have the confidence to work as a pharmacist on my own.’

‘Passing the exams is top of my list!’

‘I want to be able to experience what being a pharmacist is like in real life and how to run a business and learn the practicalities of the pharmacy.’

‘I want to build confidence in medicines and diseases so I have more experience when advising my patients. I want to attain the skills of responsibility, time management and the ability to multitask.’

## **How would you select where you want to do your pre-registration placement?**

‘It would help if I did my placement with a big company, as it is better known, more respected, and other employers would know the place I have trained from. I would want the company to have good training to help me pass the exams.’

‘I would want to apply to the big teaching hospitals. I have spoken to students who have worked in teaching hospitals, and they tell me that you gain more experience there as you have good tutor support and structured learning. If you are working in London then salary is important, as the cost of living is higher.’

‘Money is not a factor for me. I just want a place, anywhere!’

‘I would wish to go to a large teaching hospital, as they are well known and have a good reputation. It would also help me when I finish my pre-reg year when I am looking for a job. I do want a decent salary and I have been told that London has better salaries. I would also like to look at applying to a specialist hospital in London.’

‘I just want a pre-reg place so that I can pass the exams. I think you need to be motivated by yourself; it doesn’t matter where you go. You should make the most of your placement.’

‘I want to be near home, somewhere local, somewhere where the competition is less. I would want to do my placement in a large company as training will be good. Salary is not important for me.’

‘To choose my place I will talk to my friends in the year above, visit employers’ websites, and visit locations. Having good training is important for me. Salary is not important. I just want get through the year.’

‘I wish had done more placements so you know what you are going in for. I will apply to places where I have done a placement and go to road shows. I think I will apply everywhere.’

‘Money is not a factor as it is a training year. Having a good tutor is important. I will be mature about this and not confine myself to London. I am looking for an established programme of training, and a well-known, reputable company. I would prefer to work in a busy pharmacy as you are likely to learn more.’

‘The hospital’s reputation is important. I would also ask other students who have done a pre-reg placement at the hospital how the training is. Salary doesn’t matter to me.’

**Do you have any apprehensions about the pre-registration year/process?**

‘Not really. I’m not sure how much experience to have.’

‘Not really. I am worried about not getting a place and what to do if I don’t get one.’

‘If I don’t get a placement then I would not want to reapply. I may go for a career change.’

‘No. I am looking forward to working as a pharmacist.’

‘There is a lot of competition. I just want to know how to be certain of getting a place!’

‘Yes. I am not sure if I have enough experience. I fear that I may be rejected.’

**Do you have any concerns about the pre-registration application process?**

‘I don’t know if I will have enough experience. How can I stand out above the others? Interviews worry me and presenting yourself on the day is a big worry. Finally, will I even get a place?’

‘I am scared of doing interviews; I get nervous. I have never had an interview before. I can’t think on the spot.’

‘Interviews are my biggest worry. If I have a large panel interviewing me, I may feel intimidated and nervous. Once I get past the first question hopefully I will calm down and everything will flow naturally. The exam is already worrying me – having the burden of three attempts to do it.’

‘I just want to know what employers are looking for. I am not sure if I have enough experience. Interviews sound daunting. I don’t know what employers expect and what kind of questions they will ask me.’

‘The lack of experience in interviews is my main concern.’

‘I am scared of interviews. I don’t know what is expected. I find some application forms hard to fill in; I just don’t know what they want me to say.’

‘I hate the application form questions. I really don’t know how to answer them. What can you say that is different from others? It’s all so scary!’

‘Interviews are my biggest fear! I haven’t done one before – there is fear of the unknown. I don’t know how you are meant to act on the day, and what you do if you are asked an awkward question. I just want a job!’

‘Yes: I hate the application forms. I just don’t know what to write and I feel like I am being arrogant as I am just selling myself. I don’t know what they are expecting.’

‘Yes. I am extremely worried about the interview. I don’t know how to act in interviews. I feel that it’s not a fair indicator of my personality.’

‘I prefer having an interview. I am just worried about the application forms as they are very wordy and technical.’

Students from other schools of pharmacy will probably share similar fears and views as the School of Pharmacy students. It is anticipated that most of these concerns will be addressed in this book.

Students’ biggest fears are interviews. The chapter *How to Conduct Yourself on the Day* and the sample questions will help students be better equipped for the big day.

The chapter on *The Application Process* will give students a better insight of what the applications forms look like and give advice on how to fill them out.