
**Report on applications for NHS pre-registration trainee pharmacist places in
England & Wales for the 2015 intake (1st round of recruitment)**

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**Helen Middleton
NHS Pre-registration Recruitment Scheme Lead (England and Wales)**

Introduction

The National Recruitment Scheme is the system through which pharmacy undergraduates and OSPAP students apply for pre-registration trainee pharmacist posts in NHS hospitals in England and Wales. The application stage of recruitment is handled by Pharmalife (Webstar Health) with all other stages of recruitment handled by the hospitals or regional panels. Recruitment for the 2015 intake of trainees took place in 2014. This report provides a summary of the application stage of recruitment for the first round of recruitment for the 2015 intake of trainees.

Number of places advertised

There was a **3.1% increase** in the number of pre-registration training positions advertised compared to last year (n = 666 for the 2015 intake and n = 646 for the 2014 intake).

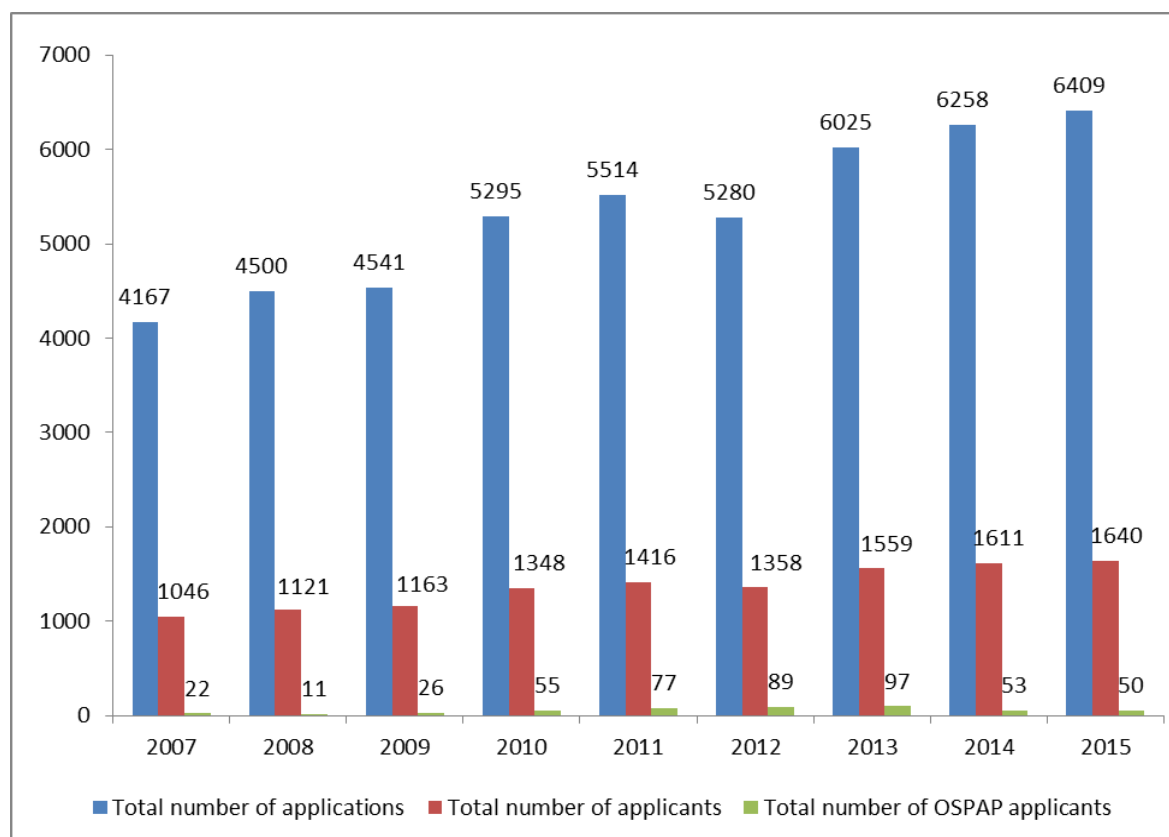
Number of applications

There were a total of 6409 applications from 1640 students for the 2015 intake. This is a **2.4% increase** in applications compared with the 2014 intake (6258 applications and 1611 students) and a 6.4% increase in applications compared with the 2013 intake (6026 applications and 1559 students).

50 applicants were from the Overseas Pharmacist Assessment Programme (OSPAP course) compared with 53 for the 2014 intake and 97 for the 2013 intake. There was also 1 applicant who is an EEA Pharmacist required by the GPhC to undertake pre-registration training.

The application statistics are shown in figure 1.0 and Table 1.0 on page 2.

Figure 1.0: Applications and applicants 2007 – 2015 intakes of pre-registration recruitment



Despite there being a higher total number of applications, five regions had a reduction in numbers of applications compared to last year (see red font in table 1.0).

Table 1.0 shows applications per region for the 2014 and 2015 recruitment intakes.

	Applications 2014 intake	Applications 2015 intake
East Midlands	384	473
East of England (Bedfordshire, Essex & Hertfordshire)	265	306
East of England (Norfolk, Suffolk & Cambridgeshire)	279	237
London	1952	1889
North West	707	727
South East	482	597
South West	292	383
Wales	299	274
West Midlands	566	583
Yorkshire and The Humber	458	406
Thames Valley	213	276
North East and North Cumbria	361	258
Grand Total	6258	6409

Timing of applications

The majority of applications were made in August 97.8% (n = 6266) with 76.2 % (n = 4887) of applications made in the last three days. The numbers of “last minute” applications was similar to last year (70% (n=4395)). No late applications were accepted.

Applications per hospital

167 hospitals advertised places for the 2015 intake. There was an average of 38.38 applications per hospital (range 3 – 231) compared with an average of 36.8 applications per hospital for the 2014 intake and 35.44 applications per hospital for the 2013 intake.

On average there were 9.62 applications per advertised post (compared with an average of 9.69 applications per advertised post for the 2014 intake and 9.4 applications per post for the 2013 intake).

There were a total of 1640 students applying for 666 advertised posts. A similar number of students applied per advertised post this year and last year (2.46 students applied per post for the 2015 intake; 2.49 students applied per post for the 2014 intake).

Kings Health Partners and University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust received the highest number of applications, each receiving over 200 applications. However both of these hospitals advertised over 20 places. Four non-London hospitals were in the top 10 compared to three last year. Thirteen non-London hospitals were in the top 20 compared with eleven last year.

The average number of applications per hospital and the average number of applications per post advertised were similar to last year.

Applicants from Schools of Pharmacy

	Number of MPharm applicants								
Intake	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Aberdeen	45	43	45	39	53	36	32	25	24
Aston	90	62	68	65	61	39	43	60	74
Bath	70	52	67	64	77	50	61	71	79
Belfast (Queens)	9	8	6	5	2	7	4	7	5
Bradford	33	48	42	58	31	34	37	36	39
Brighton	80	75	85	65	74	51	42	66	69
Cardiff	61	67	44	66	72	63	63	73	74
Central Lancashire					18	32	33	32	48
Hertfordshire			22	49	60	44	64	71	93
Huddersfield						29	38	32	33
Keele				23	27	34	40	50	56
Kingston		30	47	52	59	43	90	74	68
Leicester	54	65	47	44	40	49	44	47	59
Liverpool	48	42	77	45	54	55	53	60	49
London Kings	52	72	50	69	55	64	60	96	76
London (University College)	126	116	99	98	99	95	128	118	120
Manchester	99	107	89	94	82	100	85	86	71
Medway		47	42	88	84	56	62	84	103
Norwich (UEA)	28	53	43	56	55	48	63	79	69
Nottingham	85	82	79	111	108	116	124	122	137
Portsmouth	58	46	67	64	47	50	64	57	52
Reading			20	54	60	44	56	51	80
Strathclyde	18	8	10	17	24	36	51	46	36
Sunderland	90	87	77	49	57	67	91	76	31
University of Ulster							1	2	4
Wolverhampton				17	11	26	27	36	41
	Number of OSPAP applicants								
Intake	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
International **	22	11							
Aberdeen OSPAP PgDip			0	2	6	7	6	0	0
Aberdeen MSc OSPAP					3	4	6	0	0
Aston OSPAP PgDip			9	35	30	36	17	9	9
Aston MSc OSPAP							9	6	6
Brighton OSPAP PgDip			11	11	20	19	22	11	2
Brighton MSc OSPAP							5	4	2
Hertfordshire OSPAP PgDip						2	3	2	6
Kingston OSPAP PgDip					0	7	14	5	5
Sunderland OSPAP PgDip			6	8	17	12	2	4	5
Sunderland MSc OSPAP							13	12	14

Intake	Number of EEA Pharmacist applicants***								
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
EEA*** Schools of Pharmacy						3	6	1	1
Total number of applicants (MPharm + OSPAP + EEA Pharmacists)	1068	1121	1163	1348	1416	1358	1559	1611	1640

** The 2009 intake was the first time that we had a breakdown of the Schools of Pharmacy for the OSPAP course.

*** EEA Pharmacists with notification from the GPhC to undertake pre-registration training (adaptation training)

Academic references

Academic references were not obtained for a total of 73 MPharm students. 69 of these students submitted their academic referee details after the 30th June deadline therefore Pharmalife did not collect these references. 4 students submitted their referee details on time but the referee did not provide a reference.

Referees for students who met the 30 June deadline were contacted during August to chase outstanding references. In addition a list of outstanding references was sent to the pre-registration co-ordinator at each school of pharmacy to ask them to follow up the references or find a replacement referee if necessary. If no reference has been collected for the student the application form specified the reason e.g.

ACADEMIC REFERENCE

Pharmalife DOES NOT have an academic reference for this applicant because they submitted their academic referee details LATE.

ACADEMIC REFERENCE

Pharmalife DOES NOT have an academic reference for this applicant because the referee did not supply a reference when requested to do so.

The validity of all applications and academic references were confirmed and applications from anyone who was not eligible to apply were removed.

Appointment

618 of the 666 advertised places were filled in the first round. 17 of these were filled by regional clearing. Three regions filled all of their vacancies in the first round.

Three more places were filled by holding interviews for regional clearing candidates after the second round had opened. As these places were filled between rounds they have not been included in the 'offers and responses to offers section' of this report.

One student still had a place on hold after the end of the first round and due to exceptional circumstances the hospital had agreed to hold the place open and the place wasn't entered into second round.

44 places from 29 hospitals were advertised in the second round.

Offers and responses to offers

787 offers were made in the first round. 618 offers were accepted and 169 offers were rejected by students. Students were asked to respond to offers online within 72 hours and could choose to accept, reject or 'hold' the offer. 97.6% of offers (n = 764) were responded to within 72 hours. Students who had not responded to an offer within 72 hours were sent a reminder email. 73.7% of these outstanding offers (14/19) were responded to within 24 hours of receipt of the reminder email. This demonstrates that the majority of students acted in accordance with the guidelines.

23.0% of offers (n = 180) were placed on hold. The length of time that an offer was held was very variable ranging from less than 24 hours to 16 days. 43.3% of offers (n = 78) were held for less than 72 hours, 36.7% of offers (n = 66) were held for 72 hours – 1 week, 19.4% of offers (n = 35) were held from 1 – 2 weeks and one offer was held for 16 days. Hospitals were slow to update their reserve lists and despite frequent reminders from Pharmalife some hospitals filled all their places but left some students on reserve lists or with un-coded interview outcomes. This impacted on the length of time students kept offers on hold as they were waiting to hear from all hospitals before making a final decision. 11.8% of offers (n=64) were accepted in the last 3 days before the deadline (03 October). This indicates that the majority of students did not hold onto offers until the last minute, however the number of students making last minute decisions was higher than last year (6.5%). 7 of these offers were accepted after 03 October. However, all of these offers were made on or after 03 October to students on reserve lists.

Discussion and conclusions

Overall the website has performed extremely well with hospitals receiving their applications on the agreed date 01 September. The monitoring and reporting functionality was improved this year which enabled us to analyse information in more detail e.g. offers and responses to offers.

Two technical problems were reported:

1. There was an issue which affected 9 students where the PDF application form provided to the hospital stated that the student's academic referee had not provided a reference when in fact a reference had been received. This was caused by academic referee's clicking on the submit button more than once or using the back button and then submitting again. This issue will be resolved for the 2nd recruitment round.

2. There were two related issues that occurred with the text in the PDF application form
- 2.1 Rogue characters in place of characters like apostrophes, hyphens or quote marks. The issue affected some users more than others and is not always possible to replicate which made diagnosis difficult. This issue is due to how the database behind the Pharmalife application interprets the intended characters when they are submitted by students via the application. It can not be corrected between the first and second round as students use first round applications for second round and to resolve the problem requires the database to be emptied, repopulated and checked. Students have been sent an email explaining how to overcome these issues.
- 2.2 Limits on characters permitted – the character count in the Pharmalife database is not the same as the character counts in text editors e.g. MS Word due to how MS Word counts “white space” characters used to format the text for presentation purposes examples are hidden characters that exist before indented bullet points. MS word does not count these but when pasted into the application these may be counted as padding spaces reducing the number of characters available for the user’s response. Pharmalife have advised students not to heavily format their responses as this formatting will not be reproduced in the PDF application form.

Both of these issues will be addressed before the 2016 recruitment intake.

There were a higher number of queries from students this year which may be due to the increase in applicants. In addition there was a high number of coding errors by hospitals and requests to reverse coding required input from the website developers to resolve. Both of these factors put additional pressure on the Pharmalife team.

Regional co-ordinators will be invited to provide feedback and gather feedback from hospitals in their region on the website functionality in preparation for improvements for the 2016 intake of recruitment.