



PSI GUIDANCE on the

Recognition of Prior Learning for the Purposes of Granting of Exemptions in relation to the PSI-Accredited Programmes of Education And Training to qualify as a Pharmacist

Approved by the Council of the PSI on 19 September 2012

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1. Context

The following guidance on exemptions is derived from the position paper that was produced by Prof. Keith Wilson of Aston University in August 2010 at the request of the PSI. The purpose of the position paper was to provide recommendations on whether the accredited programmes of education and training to become a pharmacist should allow for exemptions from certain modules or part-modules for students who have prior academic qualifications and/or recognised academic learning outcomes.

The request for a position paper on exemptions was prompted by queries received by the PSI from the schools of pharmacy regarding exemptions in recognition of prior learning and it was the opinion of the Professional Development and Learning (PD&L) Committee that a clear policy was required on this matter. Currently in the schools of pharmacy the PSI understands that there is a 'no exemptions' policy in place in relation to applicants to the undergraduate pharmacy degree programme and this, it is understood, is relayed to mature students at the interview process for entry to the programme or undergraduates seeking to move from a pharmacy programme in another jurisdiction to Ireland.

Furthermore, the accreditation standards for the five-year fully integrated pharmacy degree programme are currently being developed and, included in these standards, is the requirement for the Degree Programme Provider to have in place policies and procedures for entry to, and progression on, the Degree Programme which should include:

'a clear statement of the requirements for entry including policies on transfer credit and course waivers, progression and successful completion to align with the CCF, alongside any requirements as approved by the PSI Council from time to time'¹.

Following a review of the draft standards by the National Forum's sub-forum for accreditation and education standards and further to discussion on transfer credit and course waivers, it was the view of the sub-forum that more flexibility of movement for students from different course should be considered.

The development of this proposed guidance is in response to the matters set out above and taking into consideration the current legislative framework.

2. Legislative Background

A core duty of the PSI as laid out in the Pharmacy Act 2007 provides that the PSI must:

¹ This statement is extracted from Version 16 of the draft accreditation standards for the five-year fully integrated pharmacy degree programme. It is expected that the draft standards will go out for public consultation end 2012.

Determine, approve and keep under review programmes of education and training suitable to enable persons applying for registration to meet those criteria and pharmacists to comply with those codes.

Section 16(1) of the Pharmacy Act 2007 sets out the requirements for a qualification appropriate for practice relating to the education and training of pharmacists in Ireland. It states that:

A person holds a qualification appropriate for practice if he or she has received in the State the prescribed training and education and has the prescribed qualifications.

As set out in the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Education & Training) Rules 2008, the prescribed training and education requires at least *'four years of fulltime theoretical and practical training at a recognised institution, (...)'* be carried out (in addition to the 12 months of in-service practical training). In this regard a *'recognised institution'* is defined in the same Rules as *'a university or other higher education institution in the State that is recognised by the State as having an equivalent status to that of a University'*. There are also the requirements in the Professional Qualifications Directive (Directive 2005/36/EC) insofar as it relates to the profession of pharmacist.

3. Recommendations

In preparing his position paper, Prof. Wilson was asked to draw inasmuch as possible on the international peer reviewed literature in relation to the merits and the drawbacks of allowing exemptions during the pursuit of the pharmacist qualification. The position paper addressed the issue from the following perspectives at a minimum:

- Educational standards and how they may be met if exemptions are applied
- Patient safety considerations
- Academic criteria for completion of a degree programme
- Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications
- International comparators (UK context)

Following a review of the literature on the recognition of prior learning in higher education, Professor Wilson made the following general recommendations in his position paper. These recommendations may form guidance to the Schools of Pharmacy to assist in forming policy on exemptions:

- i. **Credit Transfer and Course Exemption.** There is an educational case in support of taking into account an applicant's prior learning (APL). However, because of the requirements of Directive 2005/36/EC only Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) from a university level provider should be taken into account. Each applicant should be reviewed and assessed individually and only those course units or modules, where there is clear evidence of equivalent prior learning should be considered for credit transfer and exemption. Credit transfer and exemption should be considered as part of the admissions system and should apply ONLY to the first year of study.
- ii. **Core Modules:** In the first year of study, defined elements of the pharmacy programme should be designated as core for the purpose of credit transfer (i.e. cannot be subject to credit transfer and exemption). This would include all pharmacy practice and pharmaceuticals teaching but also teaching where there is strong orientation within the teaching to

pharmacy. This might include course units in chemistry, physiology and other disciplines. Core units or modules should not be considered for credit transfer or exemption. All units and modules in stages of the programme should be designated as core (this would include both optional and compulsory modules).

- iii. **Maximum Credit Transfer and Exemption.** Not more than one third of the first year credits should be open for credit transfer and exemption. This is a maximum and not an indicated norm.
- iv. **Currency of Credit for Transfer and Exemption.** Based upon normal educational practice, this should be no more than five years.
- v. **Total Course Duration.** The current EU Directive 2005/36/EC specifies that the pharmacy training programme must be a total of five years of which four are under the supervision of a university level institution. There is therefore no logical argument for any reduction in the total duration of the university degree.
- vi. **Learning attainments from outside the EU.** A fast-track programme from a third country should be considered equivalent to the standard qualification in that country only if it is an intensive programme covering the full range of learning outcomes for the standard programme. Where programmes have been attenuated on the basis of significant credit exemption through APEL (e.g. credits from another non-pharmacy degree programme) then they should not be considered equivalent to the normal programme of qualification in that country.

References

- Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications. Brussels: European Community 2005.
- Pharmacy Act 2007 (as amended).
- Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Education and Training) Rules 2008. *S.I. No. 493 of 2008*
- Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (2010). *Interim Accreditation Standards for the Level 9 Masters Degree awarded on the successful completion of the National Pharmacy Internship Programme.*
- Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (2012). *Interim Accreditation Standards for the Level 8 Bachelor Degree awarded on the successful completion of the 4 year undergraduate pharmacy degree programme.*
- Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (2012). *Draft Accreditation Standards for the Five-Year Fully Integrated Masters Degree Programmes in Pharmacy.*
- Prof. Keith Wilson (2010). *Recognition of Prior Learning within Higher Education: Course Exemption in the Pharmacy Undergraduate Programme.*