



20<sup>th</sup> September 2011

The Higher Education White Paper team  
Higher Education Directorate  
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
1 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0ET

## **Consultation - Higher Education White Paper - Students at the Heart of the System**

### **Response from the Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. The Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists represents UK wide around 4,000 pharmacists including the majority of hospital pharmacists, pharmacists employed by NHS Primary Care organisations and pharmacists employed by other public bodies such as Prisons and the Care Quality Commission. The Guild is part of the health sector of the union Unite. We wish to make the following comments:

We have concerns that despite the assurances within the paper that students from lower income families will be provided with additional support, applicants from lower income families may be discouraged from applying to university at all and that one of the consequences of this new system of funding will be the reduction in societal mix in professions, a diversity that the profession of Pharmacy has welcomed and benefited from for many years. While we appreciate the proposals laid out in chapter 5 and the proposed AimHigher program, we have concerns that the high cost required to deliver the MPharm program as well as the duration of the degree, 5-years, will serve as a significant deterrent to lower income applicants to the detriment of the profession in the long term.

As a general comment we feel that there is a need for HEFCE to ensure, even as a 'light touch' regulator, that expensive courses to deliver such as pharmacy, are not adversely affected by HEIs financial constraints, especially given the cost to the pharmacy student of the 4, soon to be 5-year degree course. It must be ensured the student gets value for money and that, for student and parents, will generally be all about job prospects.

Comments on specific chapters:

#### **Chapter 1: Sustainable and fair funding**

1.7 *"The loans will be paid back via the tax system, once a graduate is in employment. We estimate that, in total, around 70 per cent of the overall exchequer costs of issuing and financing the loans will be repaid over a maximum 30-year period. The Government will bear the cost of the remaining 30 per cent to maintain progressive elements of the scheme. This includes not requiring payment from people who are*

*President: David Miller*

*Professional Secretary: Barry Corbett*

*Email: [barry\\_corbett@hotmail.com](mailto:barry_corbett@hotmail.com)*

*Website: [www.ghp.org.uk](http://www.ghp.org.uk)*

*unable to work because of caring responsibilities; or from people in work but earning less than £21,000; and writing off any unpaid amount after 30 years”*

Pharmacy graduates will exceed the £21,000 threshold within one year of qualifying, and will have a minimum of £45,000 debt having undertaken a 5-year degree. The table under 1.17 provides a useful comparison for repayments with the current loan systems which is helpful for students (and parents/guardians) making an informed choice regarding funding. The impact of the likely lifetime of the debt (i.e. up to 20 years) may significantly add to the issue identified above relating to societal mix.

1.12 *“We are committed to ensuring that higher education in England is affordable for students too. No first-time undergraduate student needs to pay tuition costs up-front. Loans to cover both tuition and living costs are available for all first-time undergraduate students. And one of the biggest changes we are making is that many part-time and distance-learning students will also be able to access loans to cover the full tuition costs for the first time”*

Most qualified managed sector pharmacists undertake further postgraduate qualifications part-time (occasionally full-time) including clinical pharmacy diploma/MSc and/ or other qualifications including MBA, MPhil, DPharm, PhD part-time as mature students. More information is required regarding how they can access the tuition system as suggested in 1.12 above, and whether bursaries have been considered?

## **Chapter 2: Well-informed students driving teaching excellence**

2.1 *“The primary goal of our reforms is to improve the quality of students’ academic experience and to increase their educational gain. English institutions have a generally strong global reputation. The 2010 National Student Survey (NSS) showed that 82 per cent of students at English institutions were happy with their course overall with 83 per cent “satisfied or very satisfied with the teaching on their course”<sup>10</sup> That is a welcome result. However, the NSS also highlighted lower levels of satisfaction with assessment and feedback which are key elements of the learning experience”*

While we appreciate the great wealth of information that the NSS provides both students, universities and the wider public annually, some of the information gathered should be treated with caution e.g. with reference to feedback, despite established systems of feedback in most good academic institutions, most students still feel they require more information if asked. In our experience, due to the system of education at a secondary level, the expectation is for model answers to be provided and for academic staff to provide clues for examinations and assessments to reduce the need for students to study the whole curriculum. Perhaps some questions within the NSS should be reworded or expanded with supplemental questions in order to develop this theme of feedback further.

2.4 *“The variations in subjects like Law, between a workload of 44.8 hours a week and 18.7 hours a week, or in Historical and Philosophical Studies between 39.5 and 14 hours a week, suggest that institutions can approach course teaching in very different ways. While there is no single “right” measure for the amount of study that should be required for a degree, potential applicants and employers should know how much time will be spent on different learning and teaching activities before they select a course. This is why we are expecting higher education institutions to provide information on the proportion of time spent in different learning and teaching activities. This should be supported by links to more detailed information at module level, for example about the time engaged in different types of teaching and learning activities including lectures.”*

We fully support the investigations into HE institutions teaching philosophies and ask whether this information will be made available to accrediting bodies and/ or competitor HEIs?

The pharmacy undergraduate course has a significant science (and therefore laboratory) teaching alongside the need for clinical placements. Therefore, for the student to be at the heart of the system there has to be recognition that one size, in terms of approach, will not fit all courses.

It would be useful if consideration were given to dealing with time spent on types and size of teaching e.g. small groups of 10, 1 to 1, or large laboratory classes of 200 etc, and if the Gibbs quality markers for each course will be published in order to identify which dimensions of educational quality can reasonably be used to compare educational settings?

2.9/ 2.10 *“The issue, for the most part, is not the existence or collection of the data, but how it can be made available and linked in ways that make sense to potential students, their families, schools, employers and others with an interest. In 2010, the Higher Education Funding for England (HEFCE) commissioned research into the information which prospective higher education students want to inform their decisions – and where they look for that information.<sup>17</sup> This found that applicants to higher education primarily look for information on the UCAS website or on individual university websites, rather than on Unistats, the central website where much of this information is currently published”*

We welcome the proposals to increase access to information which will guide students and their families /Schools to support student tertiary education and propose that where professional bodies exist for professional degrees, this information should be shared with these organisations so that a cohesive booklet of information regarding all degree courses available for the profession in the UK are presented together. This process would need to be driven via an agreed consistent dataset, including student, academic, societal and other elements. In the case of Pharmacy, this sharing and dataset development would be led by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and General Pharmaceutical Council.

### **Chapter 3: A better student experience and better- qualified graduates**

3.4 “Charters should emphasise that to pursue higher education is to belong to a learning community and that the experience will be most enriching when it is based on a partnership between staff and students. They must include clear information on what to do if expected standards are not met, and provide links to more detailed information in course handbooks and university regulations. They will help to provide consistency of practice across different subject areas, such as about what students can expect in terms of assessment and feedback on their work. They should be reviewed regularly by the higher education institution and students’ union”.

We agree that student/academic learning contracts or charters should help to support learning communities within HEIs, however the emphasis here should be placed equally on what is expected from students as what is expected from academic staff and institutions.

### **Employer engagement**

3.27 – 3.32

Pharmacy, like other healthcare professions, has engaged employers across all sectors of the workforce (community, hospital and industry) to support and train students during their -year undergraduate MPharm and their pre-registration year. Current proposals for a 5-year MPharm will require much closer links and ongoing partnerships to be established between HEIs and employers. To support employee-pharmacists providing teaching and mentoring for undergraduates, HEIs need to be prepared not only to provide the resources to support the delivery of modern clinically focused training but also to provide substantial ongoing education and training to employee-pharmacists in order to deliver high quality training and feedback to undergraduate students.

### **Chapter 6: A new, fit-for- purpose regulatory framework**

6.3 “We will respect the autonomy of institutions and the prime importance of academic freedom and will:

- Create an open, dynamic and affordable higher education system, with more competition and innovation, and a level playing field for new providers;
- Maintain the highest quality of higher education, safeguarding the strong international reputation

- of English universities; and
- Reduce the regulatory and administrative burden, adopting a risk-based approach while improving accountability to students”.

We fully support ‘right touch’ regulation of HEIs to support student learning and development whilst also encouraging development of the academic staff and research clusters within the Universities.

We hope these comments are of assistance. Our reply may be made freely available.

Yours faithfully

Barry Corbett  
Professional Secretary  
Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists

Richard Cattell  
Immediate Past President  
Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists

Roisin O’Hare  
Chair of Education & Development Committee  
Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists