

January 2019

Union of Students in Ireland

PHARMACY STUDENTS' CAMPAIGN REPORT

*The Financial Burden of the new
MPharm Programme on Students*



Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn



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Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn



Supported by;



PRESIDENT OF THE UNION OF STUDENTS IN IRELAND



A chairde,

Our future pharmacists are being exploited with extortionate fees and unpaid labour.

The Union of Students in Ireland has long defended the rights of students as workers, and with this report we aim to highlight the exploitation of our future pharmacists while on placement.

After the pharmacy programme changed in Ireland to an integrated model, pharmacy students are now feeling the significant financial and personal pressure of increased fees in their 5th year, while working on placement for a total of 12 months completely unpaid. These pressures are the result of decisions taken by the pharmacy regulator - decisions enforced by their Schools. Decisions taken by those who should have valued the students under their care.

USI has also advocated for education as a public good for decades, arguing strongly that funding responsibility lies with those in Government and in our Higher Education Institutions to ensure that everyone gets the chance to follow their chosen path. By placing the burden on students with fees and unpaid labour, both Government and Institutions have chosen to abdicate that responsibility.

We won't let them.

No path through education should be elitist. High fees and unpaid work in the new MPharm programme are shutting the door to potential students who simply cannot afford to pay, while simultaneously forcing current students into an unsustainable way of living.

I ask that you stand with students who face exploitation of their labour, when really they should be working to learn. I ask that you stand with students in our fight to put an end to the burden of fees in this country.

I ask that you stand with pharmacy students.

Le meas,

Síona Cahill

President/Uachtarán 2018/19

Union of Students in Ireland



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Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

In 2015, over 200 students entered first year pharmacy, delighted with our entrance into the degree and excited about college life ahead of us. But none of us were aware of the challenges we would have to face due to the changes of the new Integrated Pharmacy Programme.

It wasn't until we were in our second year that the changes were made clear to us. Our mandatory final year fee had nearly trebled, from €3,000 to €8,500. Not only this, but our pay for a total of 12 months placement was no longer applicable. Each student has now lost up to €25,000 in pay. A massive loss on top of our undergraduate fees, accommodation and living.



The news was shocking. Anger, upset and worry was widespread among students. With about a third of us receiving SUSI grants, we didn't know if we could afford the increased fees, which SUSI won't cover. But already being in second year, it was too late to switch to another course without having to pay full fees. We are stuck in a degree we may not be able to finish because of the costs.

Students from the three schools began asking questions, looking for support and the help to make changes. Discussions with the Schools, Unions, the PSI, and politicians were had. They saw the issues, but nothing changed.

The first unpaid placements began in 2018 and made one thing clear. You can put a student on a work placement, take away their pay, title and rights of an employee, but they will still be doing the work. We worked in the community pharmacy dispensary and OTC counters. We worked in labs and offices in pharma and regulatory. We did the work of an employee, and we are not just students.

Most students have to work on top of our placement - weekends and evenings, up to seven days a week to fund themselves. The pressure and strain is causing major problems. Students suffering under this financial strain, with stress-related mental and physical illnesses arising. Results and grades are now also being affected, with students reporting they are underperforming in their academic modules because they have little time to focus on their college work.

The USI took the pharmacy student concerns on and helped initiate the USI Pharmacy Students' Campaign. The USI Pharmacy Placement Survey was released, and the results gave evidence that the conditions of the current Integrated Pharmacy Programme are not sustainable. It is not sustainable to put students under immense financial and mental strain. It is not sustainable if we are to ensure equal access to education and to the pharmacy profession. It has created an elitist course, created barriers to those from disadvantaged or 'less well-off' backgrounds. It is allowing entrance into the course to be based on wealth as opposed to ability or vocation.

The new programme was created to improve pharmacy education, and to allow students to get a wider breadth of experience in pharmacy sectors. But with decreasing grades and the hospital pharmacy sector not engaging, it seems as though it has done the opposite.

Pharmacy students have taken to social media; sharing a petition, letters, news articles and radio interviews across as many platforms to raise the awareness needed. The support we received by the profession and pharmacists across the country was overwhelming. It is clear that change is wanted and needed from students, pharmacists and placement providers. So in order to ensure there is equal access to education, to the pharmacy degree and to the profession, pharmacy students will not stop demanding change.

Niamh Loughlin
President
Irish Pharmaceutical Students' Association

INTRODUCTION

Union of Students in Ireland

The Union of Students in Ireland (Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn) is the national representative body for third-level Students' Unions in Ireland. Founded in 1959, USI now represents more than 374,000 students in Further and Higher Education Colleges across the island of Ireland. The goal of USI is to work for the rights of students and a fair and equal post-secondary education system in Ireland.

USI is a full member of the European Students' Union (ESU) which represents students from 46 National Students' Unions in 39 countries, and a member of Eurodoc, the European Council for Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers.

Irish Pharmaceutical Students' Association

IPSA is the student association of Irish pharmacy students launched in November 2013. It currently represents over 600 undergraduate pharmacy students and masters of pharmacy students in the three pharmacy schools in Ireland; University College Cork, Trinity College Dublin and Royal College of Surgeons Ireland. IPSA provides a link between all pharmacy students on both a national and international basis.

IPSA aims to develop mutual understanding, develop information exchange and co-operative relationships among pharmacy students and professionals. This may include forums, symposiums, conferences, academic seminars and competitions.

Background

In September 2015 a new integrated Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) programme was introduced in Ireland, replacing the previous 4+1 model, consisting of a 4 year Bachelor degree, followed by a 12 month placement in an approved setting.

Under the new MPharm, placements are divided over the final two years, with a 4 month placement in 4th year and an 8 month placement in 5th year. This change followed the recommendations of the Pharmacy Education and Accreditation Reviews (PEARs) Report, undertaken by the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI), the regulator for pharmacy education and training, with statutory responsibility for pharmacy accreditation. The PEARs Report recommendations were then overseen by the National Forum for Pharmacy Education and Accreditation. This Forum was convened to advise and assist the Council of the PSI in its oversight of the development and ongoing delivery of the new fully integrated programme. The National Forum concluded its activities in 2014.

Under the new model there were a number of other significant, damaging changes that directly impact on the accessibility of the degree to students. Notably, the integrated nature of the Masters has resulted in the 3 Schools of Pharmacy have increased fees in the 5th year of study, despite the 5th year being a statutory requirement for qualification.

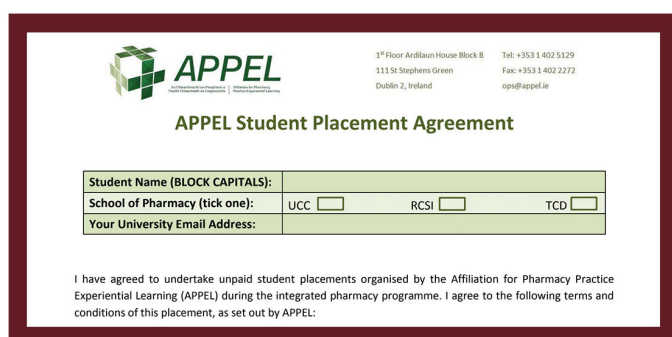
Fees for 5th year in UCC now stand at €7,500, while in RCSI they are €8,250, and in Trinity they are higher again at €8,500.

The Heads of the three Schools of Pharmacy also came together to form the Affiliation for Pharmacy Practice Experiential Learning (APPEL) to oversee the provision of placements. The new system under APPEL defined that students could only choose a placement from a limited number of providers in a randomised system based on preferred geographical parameters. While this aimed to ensure bias was removed from the application system and standardise how placements were allocated, there have been a number of issues with how the allocations are made and the effect this has on students.

However, perhaps the most worrying changes have been in relation to the employment status of the students on placements. The relationship between the student and provider has now changed from one of employee and employer (under the National Internship 5th year model), to one of student and supervisor (under the integrated MPharm model). The PSI and the National Forum both insist that this is to ensure the placements are “experiential learning” environments of the highest quality. Students had reported different experiences in placement settings, with issues of relevance of experience and treatment by providers.

The new student status under the MPharm programme while on placements required that the placement be more controlled, and to ensure quality placements, the decision was taken by the Board of APPEL with the PSI to prohibit payment of students for their work. This was enforced through a placement agreement that the student must sign and lodge with APPEL in order to undertake their placement.

SIGNING YOUR RIGHTS AWAY:



The image shows a screenshot of the APPEL Student Placement Agreement form. At the top left is the APPEL logo. To the right of the logo is contact information: '3rd Floor Ardilaun House Block B, 111 St Stephens Green, Dublin 2, Ireland. Tel: +353 1 402 5129, Fax: +353 1 402 2272, ops@appel.ie'. Below this is the title 'APPEL Student Placement Agreement'. The form has three main sections: 'Student Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):' with a text box, 'School of Pharmacy (tick one):' with three radio buttons labeled 'UCC', 'RCSI', and 'TCD', and 'Your University Email Address:' with a text box. At the bottom, there is a statement: 'I have agreed to undertake unpaid student placements organised by the Affiliation for Pharmacy Practice Experiential Learning (APPEL) during the integrated pharmacy programme. I agree to the following terms and conditions of this placement, as set out by APPEL.'

Previously students on placement in their 5th year could earn between €19,000 and 22,000 for the full-time work they were undertaking. Under the new programme, any payment was effectively banned through the APPEL matching system, and any student discovered to be in receipt of payment by their provider could face sanction that jeopardises their placement.

As the programme was introduced in 2015, the first students to go through an unpaid placement would be in Autumn 2018, and these students would then be the first to pay the Masters level fees in Autumn 2019.

SUMMARY OF KEY CHANGES UNDER THE NEW INTEGRATED PHARMACY PROGRAMME

- Increased tuition fees in 5th year ranging between €7,500 and €8,500
- Payment for placement effectively banned by the pharmacy regulator (PSI) and the placement management body run as a partnership between the 3 Schools of Pharmacy (APPEL)
- Introduction of a new 'Matching Process' under APPEL to change the way placements are allocated.

STUDENT CONCERNS

During the work of the National Forum to implement the PEARs Report recommendations, concerns were raised that the new programme would place significant financial burden and strain on students. These concerns were shared by the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) and by representatives of the Pharmacy Schools themselves.

Since then pharmacy students, their Class Representatives, and APPEL Student Representatives under the umbrella of IPSA, have been working to lobby and influence the Schools and the PSI ahead of the first students taking up unpaid placements, with the support of their Students' Unions.

At the USI Congress 2018, UCC Students' Union brought a motion to support the plight of pharmacy students to seek a reduction of fees and the reintroduction of paid placements, recognising that the rights of students as workers was being significantly and dangerously infringed by the new regime under the integrated programme.

USI and IPSA subsequently came together in October 2018, as 4th year MPharm students in Ireland, for the first time, faced the consequences of unpaid placements. A survey of pharmacy students on placement was then launched by USI. Parallel to this, IPSA and pharmacy students were proactive in raising awareness of the difficulties encountered by pharmacy students across the airwaves and in print media. An open letter was launched by IPSA, with the support of USI, in December 2018.

THE REPORT

This report was written based on the results of the aforementioned survey hosted by USI. The survey was aimed at 4th year Pharmacy students, and was promoted by USI, IPSA and APPEL Student Representatives through their respective channels to ensure as many students in UCC, TCD, and RCSI on placements were surveyed.

Fieldwork was carried out on the survey from the 23rd October until 19th November 2018.

The purposes of this report are to:

- Provide evidence highlighting the financial challenges student pharmacists face when undertaking unpaid placements and facing high fees in 5th year;
- Highlight the key concerns of student pharmacists on placement;
- Identify ways in which placement procedures can be amended to ensure all students have the opportunity to undertake such studies, regardless of financial status and other factors.

The aim of this report is to:

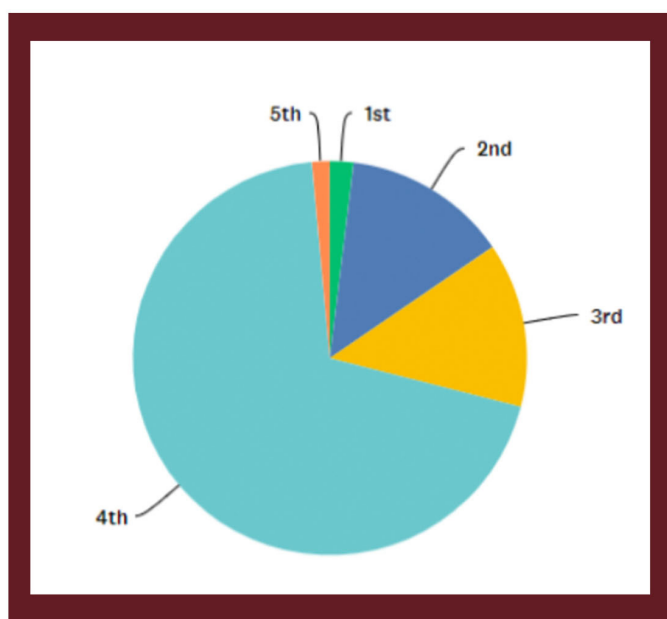
- Highlight the unfairness of increased fees during an integrated Masters and propose solutions;
- Provide evidence of the need for further reform to the APPEL system of pharmacy placement allocation;
- Ensure that the PSI and the Board of APPEL lifts the ban on payment for placement and to recommend additional financial supports for students while on placement;
- To recommend changes to the PSI on “experiential learning” and the status of students on placement.



SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Overall Response Rates

In total there were 207 responses to the survey - 87 from UCC, 86 from TCD, and 34 from RCSI. While the survey was only supposed to be answered by current 4th year students on placement under the new MPharm, we did anticipate that students in other year groups may attempt to answer the survey, so we did ask the question of which year of study students were in. The answers were as follows:



In total 144 (69.57%) of the respondents were in 4th year of their MPharm. For accuracy and relevance this report will only analyse those 144 responses, considering that these are the students who have direct experience of placement under the new MPharm.

Taking the 4th year response rate, the responses by college were as follows:

College	4th yr enrolment	Responses	%
UCC	65	59	90.8
TCD	54	52	96.3
RCSI	49	33	67.4
All	168	144	85.7

Given the extremely high turnout of nearly 86% of 4th year pharmacy students, it was clear that students had concerns and opinions that they wanted to be heard.

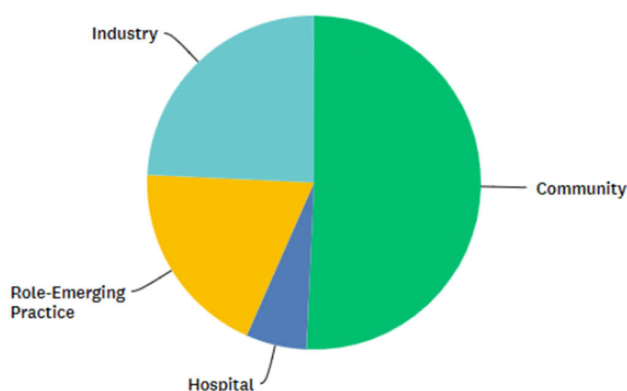
Demographics

Of the 144 respondents, 102 (70.8%) were women, 41 were men (28.5%), and 1 (0.7%) preferred not to answer.

CONDITIONS OF PHARMACY STUDENTS ON PLACEMENT

Placement Provision

Pharmacy students can undertake a placement in 4 different settings, as indicated in Table 2 below.



There were 136 valid responses, of which 69 were in a community pharmacy placement (ie. a local pharmacy practice), 8 were in a hospital placement, 26 were based in role-emerging practice, and 33 were based in industry.

Finances, Fees, and Costs

In this section we detail the financial consequences of undertaking placement for 4th year students in the new MPharm.

Financial Support

Of the 144 respondents, a total of 108 (75%) indicated that they receive financial support of some kind to attend college.

When prompted to give further details on this support, responses can be summarised as follows:

- 91 students are supported by their parents;
- 32 receive a SUSI grant;
- 17 had gotten a loan from a financial institution;
- 11 are in receipt of a scholarship;
- 2 indicated support from their college;
- 2 are in receipt of Student Assistance Fund (SAF) payments;

Other responses included support from wider family and the need to undertake weekend work to support themselves.

5th Year Fees

The fee for 5th year in the previous Pharmacy programme required students to pay a €3,000 'Registration Fee' to the PSI, with RCSI then facilitating the 5th year of the pharmacy degree for all 3 schools of Pharmacy. Under the new integrated programme each School has set their own Masters level fees of double or almost triple the previous fee rate. This change, along with the introduction of the ban on payment for placement, was poorly communicated to some students causing unnecessary confusion and concern.

On the higher fees, 91.85% of students (124 out of 135 responses) believed that paying a higher fee in 5th year was unfair, with just 5.2% believing it to be fair.

"I think that the placement providers should have to give us at least a supplement towards living expenses if not a full wage as I am currently considering taking a year out between 4th and 5th year to earn enough money to survive the 8 months unpaid and cover the €9000 fees, as I have been declined for student loans for the cost of the fees alone."

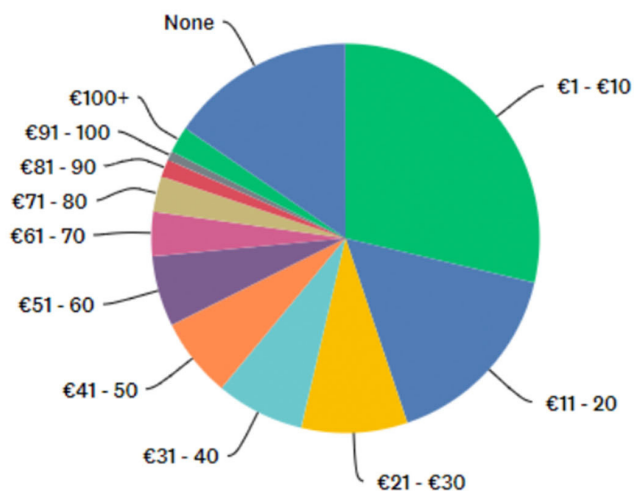
Expenses and Living Costs

Students were asked a series of questions on the living costs and placement-related expenses incurred during their placement.

On the question of whether or not there were

financial costs for resources and materials associated with their placement, only 21 of the 136 respondents (15.4%) said that there were no costs. Overall 39 (28.7%) spent up to €10, with a total of 92 respondents (67.6%) spending up to €50 per week.

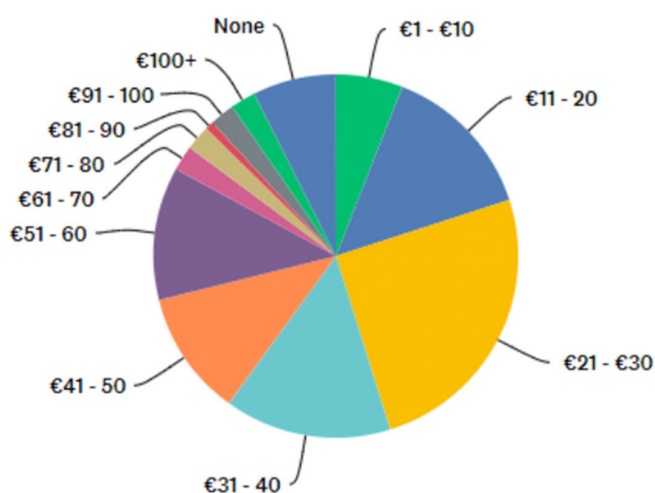
20 students (14.7%) spent between €51-100 per week, and 3 students (2.2%) spent over €100.



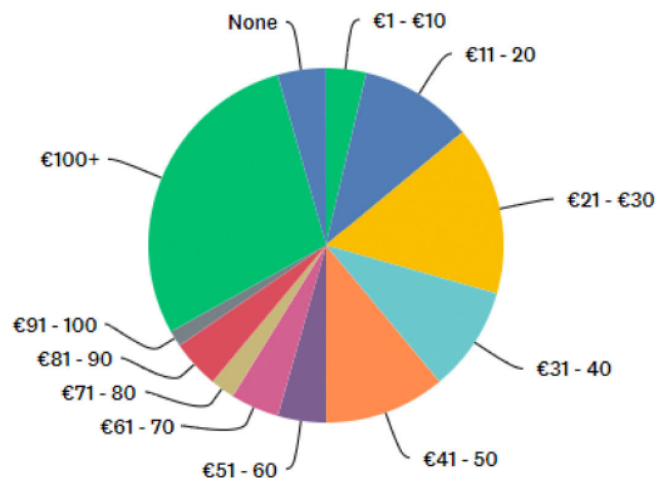
When undergoing the placement allocation procedures of APPEL, students indicate a geographical radius in which they may be able to undertake a placement. The survey asked what costs they then incurred associated with travel. (see Table 3)

Only 10 of the 136 responses did no incur a travel cost. Most commonly students would incur costs of €21-30 per week, with 34 (25.2%), followed by 20 (14.8%) spending €31-40 per week.

In total 112 (83%) incurred costs of up to €60 a week, while 10 (7.4%) incurred €61-100, and 3 students (2.2%) spent over €100.



Additionally students were asked about their living costs, including food, bills, and accommodation. The most common response, with 39 out of 136 (28.7%), was living costs of over €100, followed by 21 (15.4%) at €21-30.



Part-Time Work

Placements in pharmacy practice in 4th year are 30 hours per week, with the expectation of 20 hours of self-directed learning of online modules (primarily on a Wednesday) to ensure students stay abreast of their course material. Despite this, 111 out of 137 students indicated that they had another job during placement.

It feels hugely demoralizing and degrading to do all the same hands on physical work as the Pharmacist and other staff members yet not be paid. I do not feel like a student at all. I feel a sense of exploitation and my life has been made very difficult as I must work 2 jobs to pay for my petrol/car insurance and college fees while on placement.

Related to the issue of time spent working was whether or not students felt that their placement period had had a negative effect on their studies (modules, assignments etc.). In response to this question 75 (54.7%) indicated that placement had had a negative effect on their studies, while 19 (13.9%) did not know.

The Payment Ban

We asked students a series of questions on the new rule that prohibited payment for placements within the new MPharm degree.

99.3% of students (136 of 137) believed there should be financial support while on placement, with the remaining student answering that they did not know.

94.1% of students believed that there should be payment while on placement, with the remaining students answering 'other'. Answers primarily focused on the need for payment in the 5th year at the very least, recognising the significantly longer period of placement and the additional high fee burden.

We also asked whether or not a lack of payment restricted placement opportunities, with 60.6% answering that it had and 30.7% answering that it had not.

Students indicated that they were paying high rents near college they that could not give up, and some had to select placements near home so that they could move in with family.

Furthermore, the lack of placement providers in some areas was seemingly indicative of providers pulling out of the programme due to a lack of employee status or payment.

Considering the prohibition on payment enforced by the PSI and The Board of APPEL we also asked if students were aware of any other student who was being paid, having anecdotal evidence that placement providers were unhappy with the lack of fairness under the new system. In total, 49 (36%) said they were aware of students receiving payment, while a further 14.7% did not know.

“

Due to the lack of payment, I had to set my radius to somewhere that I would be able to travel too that would not cause a large financial burden. I was forced to stick to community although I do not have much of an interest in it as many of the practice settings were located too far away and I just knew that I would not be able to afford accommodation, travel and living expenses.

”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the financial burdens that students on placement are facing, it is recommended that:

LIFT

the ban on paid placement. The PSI and APPEL must do this with immediate effect.

AS A MINIMUM

requirement, the PSI introduces a rule that travel and other placement associated costs are covered by employers.

PSI & APPEL

work with placement providers to introduce paid placement as a precondition of approval of provision for the new round of placement in 4th and 5th year.

COLLEGES

offering the integrated Pharmacy programme should immediately reduce fifth year tuition fees ahead of the academic year 2019/20, recognising the significant barrier this could create to completion of the MPharm for many students.

INTRODUCTION

of legislation by the Department for Education and Skills to regulate against practices by colleges seeking to charge higher fees for an integrated programme

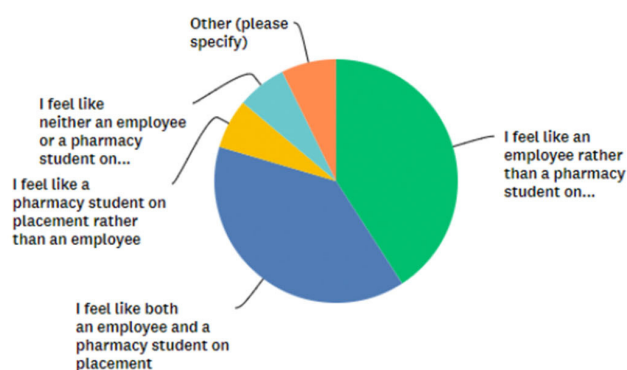


WORKING CONDITIONS ON PLACEMENT

Considering the insistence of the relevant authorities that the new placement was an 'experiential learning' opportunity, rather than employment, this section examines the working conditions in which pharmacy students undertook placement.

Employee or Student?

We asked the 4th year pharmacy students what best described their experience on placement, with 56 out of 137 (40.9%) indicating that they felt more like an employee than a student, followed closely by 38.7% indicating they felt like both an employee and a student. See Table 6 below:



Furthermore, 74.5% of students indicated that they were treated the same as any other employee, for example in terms of tasks, working hours, and duties.

There was consistent reporting throughout the survey of a feeling that students were carrying out the work of employees, whether that was a fully trusted member of the pharmacist team, or as someone tasked with more "menial" over-the-counter or make-up retail work.

Students often reported that they felt if they were not in their placement setting, the provider would employ someone in their place. As a result, they were carrying out the tasks of an employee.

“

I honestly don't know how to feel on placement anymore. I am getting great experience in industry. I have the same workload as my colleagues around me except they are all getting paid and I am not. No one understands why I'm not getting paid. I feel like when there is a group meeting in the office for employees no one wants me there because technically I am not an employee. There are so many activities for employees on site but I can't partake because I am not an employee. No one is directly excluding me or trying to make me feel that way but that's just the reality of the situation I have been put in. It's not their fault students have been sent out as free labour. This is the harsh reality of not paying students. There is a TY student in the company right now who gets an allowance. A TY who is 6 years my junior, has no experience and is getting paid. Can you imagine how that feels? All of my work has to be double and triple checked because I am not an employee and therefore my work cannot be trusted as being up to the appropriate standard. We were told before going out on placement to try and integrate into the workplace with our fellow colleagues. That's all I have done since starting placement and I get on so well with everyone however you can only get involved so much when you're that student who's just on placement. Everyone in the company is uncomfortable not paying me, as someone else would have to do the work I'm doing if I wasn't there. I am learning so much on my 'experiential learning' placement but don't think for a second that I am not working.

”

"I am treated as an employee. I do many classic admin roles unrelated to pharmacy. I am doing many tasks others don't have time to or don't want to do such as scanning, photocopying and printing. I consider myself free labour."

"I spend hours of the day looking for fax numbers and faxing. This is not 'learning' this is carrying out an essential task that requires little skill but requires time. I am being used to carry out the tasks actual employees do not enjoy doing."

"Having been previously employed in a pharmacy before as part time staff, there is no difference between the work I am doing now on 'placement' and the work I do in my part time job."

"We also asked students whether or not they were treated differently to an NPIP pre-registration intern in their placement. Of the 20 students in a placement were there was an NPIP employee, the vast majority indicated that their duties were either exactly the same or very similar."

We also asked students whether or not they were treated differently to an NPIP pre-registration intern in their placement. Of the 20 students in a placement were there was an NPIP employee, the vast majority indicated that their duties were either exactly the same or very similar.

"The workload is more or less the same. I dispense prescriptions (just like him), I place orders (just like him), I put away orders (just like him), I deal with patient queries (just like him) I do verifying (just like him), I do blister packs (just like him) and so on. The only difference is that he has more clinical knowledge due to the extra year of college and so, granted, he is capable of dealing with more difficult prescriptions and queries. The learning experience is the EXACT same. Our tutor pharmacist shows each of us the exact same things whether something is difficult or if something needs to be explained."

It is also important to note that students indicated they were doing the tasks of a Pharmacy Technician, which at 4th year, is a job that they would be qualified to undertake employment in. A number of students indicated they were working alongside Pharmacy Technicians and performing the same tasks.

Neither USI or IPSA believes that placements and internships of any kind should be unpaid, and considering the evidence provided by students in the survey, cannot accept the PSI definition of "experiential learning" to be at all incompatible with paying students for the work they undertake while on pharmacy placements.

In fact, it is evident from the survey responses that the ban on payment is viewed as "free labour" by both students and even their providers, and that this is creating an oppressive environment rather than one of learning, trust, and responsibility.

APPEL Rules and Workers Rights

Throughout the survey responses there was a wealth of evidence to demonstrate a consistent undermining of workers rights and cultures that would be deemed consistent with fairness and equality in the workplace. Worryingly, much of this was as a direct result of APPEL guidelines and rules.

In responses it was indicated that the APPEL rule on only allowing a one hour lunch break meant that unpaid students were receiving shorter breaks than staff in some settings. For example, staff may get a number of shorter breaks on either side of lunch, but the student would not be permitted to stop working. The students would then have to cover staff breaks.

Other students reported significant problems with fairness from APPEL when attempting to enforce their guidelines, for example, unreasonable expectations on sick leave. Rules around attendance, sick leave, and holidays were considered extremely unfair and unrealistic.

"I am treated exactly like an employee. In fact, in some respects such as holidays or even sick days I do not have the same rights as employees despite working the same hours (except for Wednesdays). I recently called in sick and rang my placement provider who said that was no problem but it was insisted upon by Appel initially that I get a sick cert for missing a single day. I had to really argue for them to see how ridiculous it was so make me go to the doctor for a stomach bug and missing a single day."

"My being in the pharmacy is enabling them to give employees holidays and days off because I am there to cover shifts."

"I am not given any sick days or holidays. Over a four month period, it is unrealistic to expect every student in all three schools have 100% attendance - people get sick, have graduations, family events, funerals, etc. Requesting days off is supposed to be aligned with the student's school's policy; however, this is just not the case. People have had to send photos of invitations to weddings, graduations as proof of events. In college, we are allowed self certify up to two consecutive days before requiring a doctor's note."

Similarly, APPELs stringent enforcement of rules around work hours was reported as a major problem for students, with many reporting that their pharmacy providers had flexitime policies for employees because of travel and other personal considerations. This was not available to students due to APPEL.

"Everyone in my training establishment works on flexitime. I have to get two buses to and from placement and arrive at half eight every morning. It would make far more sense for me to be able to avail of this, as with other employees, as it means I could leave at five and get home sooner after having completed the same number hours as if working 9-5:30pm."

The suppression of employee status and a lack of flexibility towards students on placement had created seemingly hostile or exclusionary environments in some instances. For example, one student reported being disinvited from the Christmas party as they were not a staff member, creating considerable isolation within the team and embarrassment.

The need for a better placement experience has driven the changes in the MPharm, yet major inconsistencies still remain, and have seemingly been exacerbated by the lack of employee status. Students indicated that they expected a higher standard of support from APPEL, rather than a consistently inflexible and impersonal approach.

Students sometimes had to wear uniforms, rather than professional attire of a pharmacist, indicating that they were OTC Assistants: "I think APPEL should have guidance regarding uniforms for employers."

Furthermore, one student reported being searched 6 times in one week to check that they hadn't been stealing from the practice. While this was a company policy, the student felt that there was a higher expectation that they would steal because they were not being paid.

Learning Experience?

During the course of the survey research, it became clear that a number of factors resulting from unpaid placement were undermining the stated aim of the PSI to improve the "experiential learning" of students and a need to ensure more uniformity of experiences and professional development that had been identified during PEARS.

For example, there was significant indication that the prohibition on payment made providers more reluctant to give "experiential" work to placement students. For example, some students indicated that as a result of their specific student status, the tasks they were given were more akin to an over-the-counter assistant, which in turn created a culture that they were employees that performed more "menial" tasks, counter to the need for "experiential learning" as a future pharmacist.

...they are receiving more work to do and are learning more as people don't feel bad getting them to do work as they are getting paid.

The following quotes from students speak for themselves in this regard and reflect a widespread isolation, dissatisfaction, and feeling of exploitation that undermines the aspiration for experiential learning.

There is less pressure to show me how things work, as they aren't paying me and they have no desire or need to train me as I am not a valued member as I am not costing them anything. I am basically a shadow

I feel often I can be neglected on placement as because I am not an 'employee' I can often be forgotten about and am left with nothing to do and therefore am not learning where I could be.

I definitely feel that I spend at least 50% of the day stacking shelves and selling people shampoo. I understand that selling other items is a part of the pharmacy but I should be being paid as an employee, not a passive student.

I don't want to do menial tasks in the pharmacy if I'm not getting reimbursed for it so sometimes I just end up looking for something relevant to my actual course to do. Then I worry that other employees will think I'm lazy so it's a hard line to walk. I'm frustrated with it.

I would do a vast majority of the unwanted work in my placement. Although some of it does relate to the learning outcomes of the placement the vast majority of it does not. I've been asked to get food, change and even go the ATM/the bank during the course of my placement.

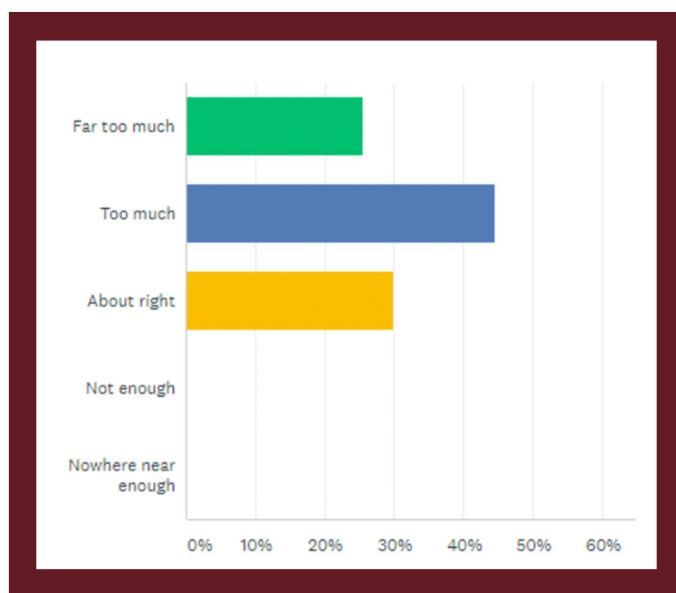
I serve customers at the tills, help select their foundation shades and lipstick colours and other such menial tasks, and am 100% treated in the same manner as a paid employee, with the same expectations regarding reaching targets but without compensation for my efforts.

...the line between students and employees is not clear enough for placement settings. You either get treated like an employees with employee responsibilities or else you get nothing to do and feel like a burden on whoever has to find something that is deemed suitable for a student to do.

Workload

We also asked students overall on how they felt about the workload of 30 hours of placement combined with 20 hours spent on online modules, specifically on a scale of the workload being 'nowhere near enough' to 'far too much'.

137 students responded as indicated in **Table 7**.



No students believed that the workload of 50 hours per week was not enough, with just 29.9% believing it to be 'about right'. 44.5% believed it to be 'too much' and 25.55% believed it to be 'far too much'.

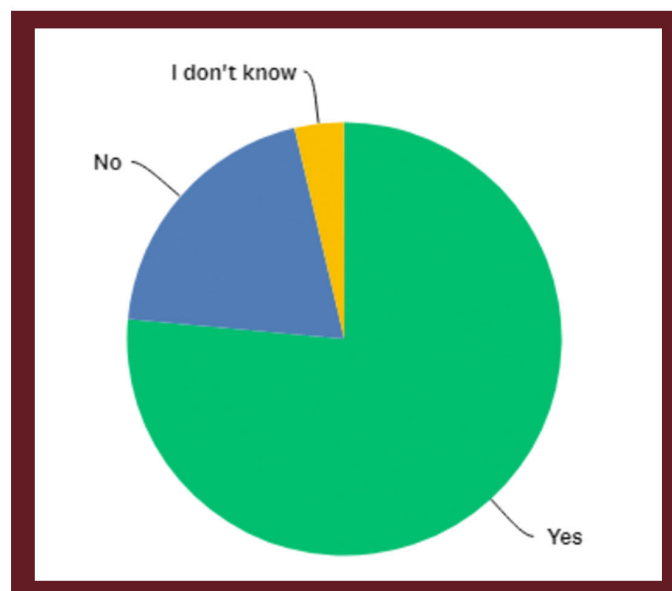
Students raised that the lack of standardized placements, including working late and long travel hours has had a detrimental impact on their ability to balance their workload with other commitments. A number of students reported that this often equates to 65 to 70 hours in total per week when part-time work and additional duties are factored in.

It is important to note that a total of 27% of respondents indicated they had been asked to work late by their placement provider.

Mental Health

Considering the significant workload, the lack of paid placement, impending increased fees, and all of the consequences of those pressures it was clear that students were facing increased stress.

We specifically asked students if they found placement stressful. A total of 104 of 136 (76.5%) students answered yes to this question.



Students were also asked if they had considered dropping out as a result of 'workload or financial pressures on placement'. 51.8% of students said they had, while 42.3% of students had not.

Added Value

In the survey we sought to explore whether or not the work of pharmacy placement students was in any way bringing added profit to the providers in which they worked.

It is important to note that we consider all placement students to bring value to their placements through their labour, but by 'added value' we are referring to any additional profits or benefits accrued from the efforts of the unpaid placement student beyond their labour.

We specifically asked students if they believed they had contributed to the financial gain of their placement provider, and many of them identified that their labour had in itself contributed to the profit and success of their providers, including "lightening the workload" on the team. Many also indicated that there would be a paid member of staff in their place, and that this accrued a significant saving to the company in which they worked.

Numerous responses indicated that they had targets to meet like any other staff member.

“Yes in particular I've been given task with reaching a new medicine services target each week. If I reach this target other employees receive a weekly wage bonus”

“I am expected like the other staff to push for certain products as we all have targets to reach so everyone (bar me) receives their weekly bonus in their paycheck.”

Students also indicated that their experiences on other placements or during their course had improved the professional capacity of the organisation, especially in industry settings.

“I perform tasks that are of value to the business and contribute to the business e.g. teaching other employees about some industrial concepts.”

“My contribution accelerates the research project I am on - could lead to publications which will eventually indirectly increase 'financial gain' from increased citations, publicity, funding and research collaborations.”

Students reported that their presence in the pharmacy would free up the paid/permanent staff to cover other work, thereby preventing the need to employ more staff. Other pharmacies have relocated full-time staff to other practices to save costs. This clearly indicates that students on placement are treated as employees.

Other examples of financial gain for the employer were improved customer retention, sales of cosmetics, testing products.

Provider Reluctance

There is significant anecdotal evidence that providers who previously provided pharmacy placements did not sign up to be a part of the new MPharm.

Students in the course of the survey indicated placement provider dissatisfaction, which may indicate that more providers will decide not to take on students in future. This should be of significant concern to APPEL and to the PSI.

“My team gave me a new task to complete last week. I was told none of their students in the past had ever got as far as doing it. These past students were paid and I have more responsibility than them now and I'm not even being paid. It creates a bad impression of Pharmacy and APPEL within the company. Everyone thinks it's unfair and the company are very uncomfortable about it and so aren't sure they will take students in the future.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

IMMEDIATE

reconstitution of the National Forum for Pharmacy Education and Accreditation to set new guidelines and to hear from students directly.

INCLUDE

significant student representation on the newly constituted National Forum to ensure the process is informed and balanced.

SET

new guidelines that incorporate clear guidance on the rights of students as workers in pharmacy placements.

REDEFINE

"experiential learning" to include paid work ie. employment.

APPEL

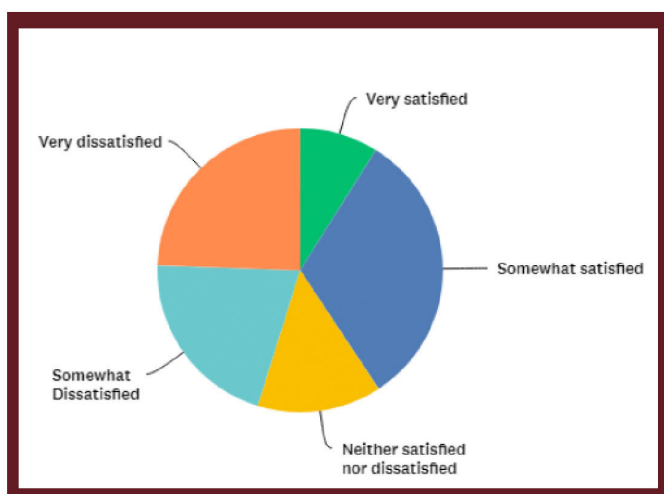
to set more flexible rules on working conditions, including flexi-time, breaks etc to align with the placement provider's practise.

PLACEMENT MATCHING PROCESS

In this section we take a look at the student experience of the new system of 'matching' or allocating placements to students under APPEL.

Satisfaction

Students were asked how satisfied they were with the new matching process, having completed it in advance of their 4 month 4th year placement. In total 40.8% answered that they were either 'somewhat satisfied' or 'very satisfied', 14.1% were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied', and 45.2% indicated that they were either 'somewhat dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied'. See TABLE X below:



In total 44.4% of students also indicated that they had encountered problems during the matching process, correlating closely with those who were dissatisfied to some extent.

Choice Limitation

The new system introduced limitations to placement choices, relating to how many could be applied for, placement settings and with regards to placement location.

Student were asked whether they found the limit of four locations and four settings too restrictive, with 57.8% answering yes. Furthermore, considering these restrictions, students were asked if they were unable to apply

for any placements that they would have liked to have had the opportunity to apply for. In this instance a total of 67.2% answered yes.

A significant number of students wanted the option of a hospital placement, but given that most hospitals withdrew from offering placements, this has obviously stifled the availability of that option.

In order to gauge student opinion on how to address problems with the new system, we asked students whether they would prefer to apply from a list of approved placements or whether they would prefer random selection based on preferences. Students preferred the former option by 86.7% to 10.4%. 3% of students answered 'other'.

Students were then asked if they would prefer more than 10 randomly selected placements options, to which 77.8% answered that they would. In total 90.4% also indicated that they would then like to be able to apply to more than 5 placements.

Considering the ability of a student to travel (or other factors affecting geographical choices) we asked if the radius function for defining the location of placement choices accurately represented where they were able to undertake placement. A total of 47.4% of students indicated that it was not an accurate representation.

“Due to lack of payment my parents preferred that I stay at home for placement to save expense on accommodation, transport, day to day living etc. Hence I was then limited as only was available where I'm from.”

Finally, we asked how students would prefer to receive a placement offer, to which 28.2% said 'Immediate offers followed by rounds of formal offers', 40% said 'rounds of formal offers only', and 31.9% answered 'offers at any time following application to the placement'.

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NOTES



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