

VARIATIONS AND DEPARTURES FROM THE UNIVERSITY'S REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

OVERALL GRADING OF MASTER OF PHARMACY

The Faculty of Life and Health Sciences has made a proposal to adopt three of the four undergraduate Honours degree classification bands (I, Iii, Iiii), instead of the University's postgraduate grade bands, for the overall grading of the MPharm degree, a four year Integrated Master's degree. Its case is attached.

In reaching a decision (which will require Senate approval of a revision to University-award regulations if the Committee supports the case), the Committee is asked to take account of the following.

- a) The MPharm was evaluated in 2009. Following evaluation the Faculty brought a proposal to Teaching and Learning Committee in June 2009 to use Honours classifications. The Committee did not approve the proposal. It noted that the evaluation panel had not encouraged this proposal and that the sector through UUK and the QAA Framework had upheld the status of integrated Master's degrees as postgraduate, not undergraduate awards, in the context of the Bologna process. The panel had encouraged the team, in competing with other schools to use the period before the first students graduated to promote the distinctive quality of the new course and to explain its grading scheme to employers and students.
- b) Paper TLC/12/38 and any decision on the introduction of an additional grade band for postgraduate awards, which will apply to integrated Master's degrees.
- c) The availability of marks for employers and others and also the encouragement to them, through the HEAR, to make use of more than a broad summary grade or classification.
- d) The Committee must consider the implication of the proposal for all other Integrated Master's degrees. The University seeks consistency in the standards and regulations for its awards.
- e) Appendix 1 to the Faculty's paper describes the University's course as an 'undergraduate Master's degree' and the letter from the student representatives describes it as an 'undergraduate degree'. The University's Qualifications and Credit Framework terms such awards 'Integrated Master's degrees' in accordance with the national Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. They meet the expectations of the Master's level descriptor for a Level 7 qualification in full, and include an additional period of study at lower levels.
- f) Appendix 1 to the Faculty's paper also notes that the majority of Schools of Pharmacy have four honours classes for the MPharm and identifies the pass threshold at 40%. The Faculty's paper does not propose alignment of pass marks and the use of the third class band.

(The Committee should note that the Regulation 16.2 cited in the Faculty's paper as an existing regulation contains a final clause requiring achievement of the grade band in at least half of the final year modules. This rule was removed for all students from the 2009 intake as a consequence of the Review of the Regulatory Framework (outstanding issues).)

Case for a deviation in regulations for the MPharm from University Regulations

Presented by: MPharm Course Team

Regulation affected: Section 16 Classification of Final Result

Existing regulation:

16 CLASSIFICATION OF FINAL RESULT

16.2 Classification of Final Result

The following shall be the minimum percentages acceptable in determining the overall gradings of candidates.

Pass with Distinction	70%
Pass	50%

The Board of Examiners shall recommend the award of a Pass with Distinction to a candidate who achieves an overall mark of at least 70%, provided that a module mark of at least 70% has been achieved in modules which constitute at least 50% of the credit points at level M contributing to the final result.

Proposed MPharm regulation:

16 CLASSIFICATION OF FINAL RESULT

16.2 Classification of Final Result

The results of candidates who have successfully completed the MPharm programme of study leading to the award of an MPharm degree shall be graded as first class or second class (upper or lower division).

The following percentages shall be used to determine candidates' overall grading in the MPharm degree course;

Class I	At least 70%
Class II (division i) (Ili)	At least 60% and less than 70%
Class II (division ii) (Ilii)	At least 50% and less than 60%

Case for change to regulation

All English, Welsh and Northern Irish Schools/Departments of Pharmacy under the QAA Framework for higher education qualifications classify the award of their MPharm according to the undergraduate classification system (Email survey, June/July 2012).

Previously one School of Pharmacy (Bradford) had deviated from the norm and had used the Pass and Fail framework. They used this from AY 2007/08, but in AY

2010/11 Bradford decided that they needed to revert to the classification system that is universally recognised for the MPharm degree – the First, 2(i) and 2(ii) system. They did this in direct response to the confusion being caused for employers:

“We used to use Masters classifications but they were not understood by sponsors and potential employers and other HE establishments so we have adopted the UG classification system”

Karen Pidduck, Admissions Co-ordinator, Bradford School of Pharmacy (Email communication 05/07/12)

In light of the comments received from Bradford, the Course Director carried out a survey of 34 of the main employers and pharmacy stakeholders within Northern Ireland. The survey consisted of six questions and was designed to allow the Course Team an understanding of the perceptions of the employers towards the differences in degree classification (Appendix 1). The results obtained were as follows:

22 responses (65%) were obtained.

1. In your opinion, could this possible difference in degree classification be confusing for employers?

Yes No

2. Would you consider that both of these applicants were of the same standard?

Yes No

3. If no, which one would you consider to be better qualified?

2:1 (of the 91%) Pass

4. Would you know to ask for a copy of the student's degree transcript to see a breakdown of their marks?

Yes No

5. In your opinion, could this possible difference in degree classification be to a disadvantage to one cohort of students over another?

Yes No

6. If yes to question 5, which cohort of students, in your opinion, would be disadvantaged?

2:1 Pass (of the 86%)

Other comments received were as follows:

“Unless you explain an MPharm Pass sounds like a 3rd class honours because of the system we have been used to”.

“I believe that there would be a perception that a 2:1 would be a higher grade than a pass and could be detrimental to recently newly qualified pharmacists.”

“There needs to be universal consistency in the presentation of outcomes to ensure no ambiguity or misinterpretation.”

“The difference would only matter in community pharmacy for the applicants first job, where a pass would be a disadvantage, however after 5 years or so I would look more at their experience than their degree”.

“I got 2:1, sounds better than a pass! Good for the student who gets 50% bad if you get 69%!”

“If you believe you are competing in a UK market then better to go with market standard which is 1st class, 2:1, 2:2 system otherwise you disadvantage your students because of prevailing perceptions. Perception is of considerable impact and if individuals perceive a pass to be less than a 2:1, then for them it is true”.

“Why change from the accepted standard already used”.

“I would imagine that a student who has attained a high 2:1 would be aggrieved to be referred as an MPharm Pass. Why are you creating confusion when we are used to the QUB classifications? “

There were only 2 comments that suggested that the classification would not matter:

“In my experience, the only time anyone asks a pharmacy graduate their degree classification is on the day of graduation. Once registered the classification system becomes completely irrelevant.”

“Once a pharmacist is registered, I would not look at their degree classification as part of the recruitment process”.

The results of this short survey would be strongly in favour of the Ulster MPharm being classified in accordance with the UG classification system. If another system is adopted it will cause confusion amongst employers and stakeholders, and it would appear from the results of this survey, place Ulster students at a disadvantage in the job market. The Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for Northern Ireland, the Chief Executive of Community Pharmacy NI and the Head of Pharmacy and Medicines Management in one of the Health Trusts were amongst those who were very negative towards having a difference in classification systems.

While the Course Team recognises the employability innovations that are currently taking place with the HEAR and EDGE awards, it was remarked on several surveys that the current systems in place for online applications do not allow a student to add such additional evidence.

The Course Team are aware that there are other Integrated Masters programmes within the University but would not believe that this re-classification of the MPharm would require similar re-classifications in other disciplines. It does not need to set a precedent. It should be the responsibility of other Course Teams to decide what the employers perceptions are within their own disciplines and whether or not their classification is fit for purpose.

In conclusion, the Course Team feels that the undergraduate classification should be adopted for the Ulster MPharm to coincide with the first graduate cohort in June 2013. The evidence obtained shows that employers would prefer one type of classification system amongst pharmacy graduates within the UK, and that embedded perceptions will place graduates using the Masters' classification system at an unfair disadvantage. It is important that our pharmacy graduates exit university on a level playing field with other UK pharmacy graduates; the perceptions of employers are paramount to successful recruitment of our graduates. Subsequent changes should only be made in co-operation and collaboration with all other Schools of Pharmacy in the UK, facilitated and informed by bodies such as CUHOP and new pharmacy providers' interest groups.

Dear

In 2013, the Department of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of Ulster will have its first cohort of pharmacy graduates. In preparation for this, we are carrying out a short survey on the opinions of local pharmacy employers on the MPharm degree classification that we will use for these students. We would very much appreciate your response to a survey that seeks your views on how informative you will find our classification during an interview selection process.

The MPharm is an undergraduate Masters degree. The majority of Schools of Pharmacy in the UK use the standard undergraduate honours degree classifications for their MPharm award, which is as follows:

70%+	First class honours
60 – 69%	2:1
50 – 59%	2:2
40-49%	3 rd class honours

The University of Ulster will use the standard Masters award classifications, which are:

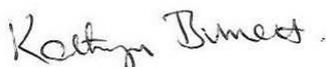
70%	Pass with distinction
50-69%	Pass

A pharmacy student who attains 62% in his/her degree could, therefore, be classified as MPharm 2:1 or MPharm Pass, under each of these classification systems. Both students would have University transcripts showing their individual marks, which would be available on request.

Please consider the following scenario, as presented overleaf, and return your response in the SAE provided.

Thank you very much for completing this survey; your response is very important to us. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this survey, please do not hesitate to get in touch

Yours sincerely



Dr Kathryn Burnett
MPharm Course Director
k.burnett@ulster.ac.uk ; 028 7012 3283

Scenario:

As a pharmacy employer you have two pharmacists who have applied for a single post. One has listed their pharmacy qualification as an MPharm 2:1 and the other an MPharm Pass:

7. In your opinion, could this possible difference in degree classification be confusing for employers?

Yes No

8. Would you consider that both of these applicants were of the same standard?

Yes No

9. If no, which one would you consider to be better qualified?

2:1 Pass

10. Would you know to ask for a copy of the student's degree transcript to see a breakdown of their marks?

Yes No

11. In your opinion, could this possible difference in degree classification be to a disadvantage to one cohort of students over another?

Yes No

12. If yes to question 5, which cohort of students, in your opinion, would be disadvantaged?

2:1 Pass

13. Other comments

Thank you for completing this survey – please return it in the SAE provided by 31st July 2012.

October 2012

To whom it may concern,

We are writing with regards to the recent proposal put forward by the department of Pharmacy in relation to the degree classification of the integrated undergraduate pharmacy masters degree, in which we are studying in our final year.

As it currently stands the degree will be classified as pass or pass with distinction, however other undergraduate degrees within the University of Ulster are classified as first class honours, second class and third class. On speaking with the class they were all disappointed with how our degree would be classified. As the course is an undergraduate degree, we feel that we should get the same classification as other undergraduate degrees both from the University of Ulster and the other universities throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. Should we qualify with a pass or pass with distinction we feel it would hinder our chances of employment, as employers would not understand this classification, as previous employees and other job applicants for example Queen's University pharmacy graduates would be producing a first class honours or 2:1 degree, with which they are familiar. We feel we would be at an unfair disadvantage that employers might see it as some sort of second class qualification; even though the degree has been developed to excellent standards. The students also feel it would be unfair that they would get the same qualification whether they got 50% or 69%. We feel that if the degree classification does not change it will deter potential students selecting Pharmacy at Ulster as their first choice in the future.

Please find attached a list of signatures from the final year students in support of this letter. There are 21 signatures attached which is 100% support from a class of 21 students. We would all appreciate you taking this into account when making your decision.

Yours Sincerely,
Nicola Hamilton & Kim McWilliams
Final year Pharmacy class representatives