

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Proposed Discontinuation of the Written Examination

Released: Tuesday 2 October 2018

Submissions due: Midday, Friday 19 October 2018

1. Purpose

The purpose of this consultation is to seek views on the Pharmacy Council's proposal to discontinue the intern Written Examination (WE).

2. Who we are

The Pharmacy Council is established under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (HPCAA) and has a duty to protect the public and promote good pharmacist practice. The Pharmacy Council is responsible for the registration of pharmacists and setting the standards for pharmacist practice. The Pharmacy Council's vision is to promote enhanced wellbeing through excellence in pharmacy practice.

As a regulatory authority, the Pharmacy Council must hold a period of consultation if proposing to amend, revoke or replace any prescribed qualifications, as per the HPCAA.

3. Background

The Pharmacy Council consulted on a proposed WE fee of \$1,119.53 (incl GST) in November 2017. Based on submissions to that consultation, it was decided that the WE fee should be set at \$745.20 (incl GST) to enable external costs associated with its delivery to be met.

In addition, the Pharmacy Council sought to review the value of the WE in response to submission comments. A comprehensive review of the WE was undertaken to confirm if the exam continues to meet its purpose. The response to this consultation can be read online [here](#).

4. Written Examination (WE)

To become a registered pharmacist, New Zealand applicants must:

- Complete a BPharm degree from Auckland or Otago Universities;
- Register in the Intern Pharmacist Scope of Practice and complete the intern training programme delivered by the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand;
- Pass the WE, a Multi Choice Question exam (MCQ); and then
- Pass the Assessment Centre, an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) administered by the Pharmacy Council and Pharmaceutical Society.

The WE was introduced in 2014. The purpose of the exam was to assess the clinical knowledge, and the application of that clinical knowledge, of intern pharmacists.

It tests candidates' knowledge of legislation, health management, the supply and administration of medicines and calculations. The exam is a three hour open-book exam consisting of 125 questions and is delivered in a computer-based format. Interns are required to complete 50% of supervised practice before they can sit it.

5. Key findings

Several key findings support discontinuation of the WE. All findings are within the report and notable points are set out as follows.

- All the Pharmacy Council competencies assessed by the WE are assessed elsewhere. Therefore, the justification for retaining the WE as a competency assessment tool is weak.
- Since the introduction of the WE, educational programmes and assessments have made many improvements, and programme accreditation gives the Pharmacy Council confidence. There is no reason currently for the Pharmacy Council to be concerned about the quality of assessment within the ITP or university programmes.
- According to information from the Pharmacy Defence Association, the Health and Disability Commissioner and the Pharmacy Council, there is no evidence that the WE reduced any professional risk for pharmacists. Therefore, there is no expectation that there would be any increased risk if the WE was discontinued.
- Other concerns include the cost to the Pharmacy Council and interns, that it distracts interns from the practical focus of the ITP, and whether the exam is an effective assessment.

The WE review was undertaken by an independent contractor and the full report can be read online [here](#).

6. Key Implications

Some concerns remain that pharmacists may not have all competencies needed for the future. The main concerns among those interviewed are with skill and judgement with calculations and competence in oral English communication.

However, the WE does not assess oral English and only assesses calculations after 22 weeks of the ITP. These skills are assessed from year 2 of the degree programmes but it may still be possible for students who are strong in other skills to pass while being weak in calculations or oral English.

The review makes some suggestions in respect of these concerns, including: creating additional gateways to ITP entry to remediate specific skills that need improving; modifying accreditation processes to ensure issues are better addressed within education

programmes; and creating additional the Pharmacy Council processes, such as putting conditions on an Annual Practising Certificate, to address specific issues.

The Pharmacy Council will be exploring these suggestions to better understand the situation and what the best actions would be for the profession.

7. Next steps – if the proposal is supported

If the Pharmacy Council decides to discontinue the WE, no further attempts will be provided.

If there are intern pharmacists who have not yet passed the WE, the Pharmacy Council will ensure these interns are not disadvantaged. The affected interns will be advised about next steps directly by the Pharmacy Council.

If this proposal is not supported, the status quo for failed candidates, and the 2019 intern pharmacist cohort, will remain.

8. How to submit a response

Responses can be sent via our online form which can be accessed [here](#). You can make a submission individually, on behalf of an organisation, or anonymously.

The Pharmacy Council invites feedback on the proposal by midday on Friday 19 October 2018.

Ngā mihi

Michael A Pead
Chief Executive