

## **BSc (Hons) Clinical Pharmacology Periodic Review**

Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024  
Room H2.5 and Microsoft Teams



### **Panel Membership**

Prof Iain Beith (Chair)	Professor in Health Education, St George's, University of London
Dr Dan Hawcutt	Reader Paediatric Clinical Pharmacology, Department of Women's and Children's Health, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, University of Liverpool
Dr Godfrina McKoy	Lecturer in Problem Based Learning, St George's, University of London
Vafie Sheriff	Student Panel Member, St George's, University of London
Helen Tomkinson	Managing Director and Consultant, Limina Clinical Pharmacology

### **In attendance**

Glen Delahaye	Senior Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manager, St George's, University of London
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### **Introduction and Context**

- 1) St George's BSc in Clinical Pharmacology was approved at a validation panel in November 2018, with the course opening in September 2019. The ambition of the programme was to deliver an innovative degree that equips students who are interested in drugs as they relate to humans, with work-ready skills and knowledge for a career in the life sciences, particularly in the development of new medicines. The course has now enrolled students over five years and has seen two cohorts of students graduate.
- 2) In May 2021, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) decided to extend the approval period of all courses by one year, due to the impact of the pandemic. Additionally, in October 2023, QAEC approved a request from the course team to postpone the review of BSc (Hons) Clinical Pharmacology. BSc (Hons) Clinical Pharmacology was therefore due for review in 2023/24.

### **Conduct of the meeting**

- 3) Prior to the meeting, the Panel received the documents listed in Annex A. The Panel held a private meeting at which it confirmed the range of issues that it wished to explore through the event. The Panel then held a meeting with students currently on the course, followed by a meeting with the course team (see Annex B for the list of staff attendees).

### **Decision**

- 4) The Panel recommended reapproval of the BSc (Hons) Clinical Pharmacology to Senate for a further period of five years with no conditions. The BSc (Hons) Clinical Pharmacology would next be reviewed or revalidated in 2028/29. A number of Advisable Actions were agreed by the Panel and are listed in paragraph 6. The course team was not required to submit a response to the actions.
- 5) The Panel noted the course team (paragraph 26) and students' (paragraph 16) concerns about the University's desire to increase the student numbers on the course and acknowledged that this could lead to a lower quality experience for students on the course, which was considered one of the best

pharmacy and pharmacology degrees in the UK<sup>1</sup>. The course team, together with the Director of Education Operations and Programme Management, had produced a document on the feasibility of increasing student numbers to 100, which the Panel recommended the University revisit.

## **Actions**

6) The following advisable actions were agreed by the Panel:

### Advisable Action 1

The Panel noted that at some institutions, students were weighted differently depending on their background and support needs, and that therefore, through widening participation and a deeper scrutiny of their applicant demographics, the course team may be able to offset the University's desire to recruit 100 Clinical Pharmacology students by instead recruiting a smaller, but more diverse cohort of students. The Panel advised the course team to consider this.

### Advisable Action 2

To work with the students on reassessing the burden of the assessments, particularly the quizzes (paragraphs 9 and 11).

### Advisable Action 3

To consider standardizing the expected learning outcomes relating to placements (paragraphs 13 and 25).

## **Meeting with students**

### Admissions

- 7) The majority of the students that the Panel met with had originally applied for MBBS or Biomedical Science, but were unsuccessful and had chosen to join BSc (Hons) Clinical Pharmacology instead. For the most part, the students had not had much familiarity with the subject area before joining the course. One student mentioned that they had attended an offer holder day, where they had met with members of the course team who were able to answer her questions about the course and help her come to a decision.
- 8) The students were very satisfied with their decision to join the course. It had provided them with new career opportunities and a clear sense of what they might do next. One student mentioned that they would be commencing a PhD from the following September.

### Assessment

- 9) The first two years of the course had weekly quizzes, containing questions on the material delivered in the previous week with instantaneous feedback so students could assess their own progress. The students had mixed feelings about the quizzes, noting that they were a useful way for them to check their knowledge on a regular basis, but could also add to the pressure of the course, particularly as they were so frequent.
- 10) The students felt comfortable approaching staff if they were ever struggling with their assessments.

### Workload

- 11) The students mentioned that the first term of the second year was particularly challenging and suggested that if the first year were slightly more challenging, then the transition from the first to second year would be easier. They also noted that the second year started one week later than the other years and if it started a week earlier, then that would alleviate some of the pressure.

### Placements

- 12) The course included a six-week industrial placement for all students in year 2 and an optional industrial placement year between years 2 and 3.

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<sup>1</sup><http://georgesweekly.squ.ac.uk/3891os2m59n128dkjcw2d?email=true&lang=en&a=1&p=62241750&t=28568507>

- 13) The students reported that they'd had very good experiences on placement, although two of the students suggested the placements could have been shorter. One student had found their placement a bit repetitive, as they did not get the opportunity to do much on the placement other than observations. Another student would have preferred a shorter placement to allow more time to focus on projects. They understood that all placements were different though and had valued the opportunity.
- 14) One student had also gone to Naples through Turing, a scheme that provides funding to support cost of living while studying or working abroad. The student reported that the experience had been amazing.
- 15) The students reported that they had heard positive feedback from students who had completed the placement year between years 2 and 3. They suggested that the course team might be able to do more to advertise opportunities for placement years. They noted that there was a board listing placements, but that they had received it a bit late.

#### Student support

- 16) The students found the course team to be very dedicated to the course, approachable and supportive. They expressed concerns that if the cohort size were to increase, it would likely lead to delays in response times from course team members and that the course might lose its "personal touch". One of the students knew another SGUL student on a larger undergraduate course, where it was clear that the experience was very different, as there was less contact between the students and the course team.

#### **Meeting with course team**

##### Recruitment

- 17) The students joining the course had generally applied for MBBS or Biomedical Science originally and had not applied directly for the Clinical Pharmacology. The course team reported that in the most recent admissions period, they had recruited students with lower A-levels than usual. However, they believed that all of the students recruited were well suited for the course and they had been able to mold and add value to each of them.
- 18) There had not been many applicants from outside of London. This was partly due to the fact that it was more difficult to visit and market to schools outside of London or to persuade prospective students to attend open days. Now that the course had two years of NSS feedback and would soon have more Graduate Outcomes Survey data, the course team hope that the course would become more attractive to students nationally, since this had an effect on how the course would rank on University lists. The merger with City could also help, as the University would be bigger and potentially more appealing.

##### Assessment

- 19) When the course was originally designed, it was influenced by a pharmacy degree offered by Kingston University, which had included quizzes. The course team considered this to be a good way to measure student performance, noting that some other degree courses did not test students in the first semester, leading to students getting a shock when they began being tested in the second semester.
- 20) The quizzes allowed the course team to identify students who were struggling, so that the year lead or personal tutor could offer help.
- 21) The quizzes had originally been fortnightly, but were made weekly following student feedback. This made the stakes of the individual quizzes lower and ensured that students would receive feedback as frequently as possible.

##### Student achievement

- 22) As with a number of courses at SGUL and in the sector as a whole, the course team had recognised a high proportion of first-class honours degrees in graduates from the programme. They had worked

with the Director of Quality and Partnerships to explore the causes for the high proportion of degrees and were confident that the awards were appropriate. They expected that these numbers could decline, since the more recent cohort of students had been impacted by the pandemic during their previous studies and was therefore less prepared for University.

- 23) Progression through the course was generally good. In 2021-22, a significant proportion of first year students had failed to progress. An analysis of the first-time failure rate by module and cohort demonstrated a strong association between first-time failure rate and lack of exam experience pre-university. The cohort with the particularly high failure rate had not sat A-level or GCSE exams and entered with teacher assessed grades, because of the pandemic. Several interventions were put in place to mitigate the risk of failure-to-progress, including creating a Year 1 lead role and an increase in face to face teaching, linking and recap sessions.

#### Placements

- 24) Placements had been an integral part of the course since its inception. They were becoming increasingly challenging to find and coordinate as student numbers had increased.
- 25) The Panel noted that it was important to ensure that students understood how the placement was relevant to their studies and that they'd be able to explain what they'd done on the placement to potential employers. The course team acknowledged that the content of placements varied and that this was flagged to students, noting that the learning from the placements would always be relevant, even when it was not in a clinical pharmacology unit.

#### Future growth

- 26) The course team believed that 50-60 students was the optimal number that they could manage and stated that it would be impossible for them to expand and to still offer the same quality experience to students. The course team stated that if the University wished to increase the numbers, then it would need to decide between either a greater income or a flagship degree, but it would be difficult to maintain both. They added that resources would become an issue, since they were reliant on computer rooms.

*GD/June2024*

### **Annex A – course documents**

Self-evaluation Document  
Programme Regulations  
Programme Specification  
Module Directory  
Scheme of Assessment  
Annual Programme Monitoring Reports (for the last three years)  
External Examiner Reports (for the last three years)  
NSS and SES feedback  
Example Student Engagement Report  
Staff CVs  
The report from the 2018 validation

### **Annex B – Programme Team**

Emma Baker (Course Co-Director)  
Iain Greenwood (Course Co-Director)  
Iulia Blesneac (Lecturer and Personal Tutor Lead)  
Daniel Burrage (Senior Lecturer)  
Toqa El-Nahhas (Tutor and Co-Module Lead)  
Fu Liang Ng (Senior Lecturer)  
Errol Lobo (Senior Course Administrator)  
Dagan Lonsdale (Senior Lecturer)  
Efthymia Papaevangelou (Lecturer)  
Mark Preece (Senior Lecturer)  
Mohani-Preet Dhillon (Lecturer and Co-Module lead for data and stats)  
Sarah Shanmuganathanclin (Clinical Teaching Fellow)  
Jennifer Stott (Senior Lecturer)  
Jade Vince – (Portfolio Coordinator)  
Divyen Vanniasegaram (Clinical Teaching Fellow)