



British Society for the  
History of Pharmacy

## The evolution of pharmacy Theme B, Level 3 History of the Pharmaceutical Society



Royal  
Pharmaceutical  
Society  
of Great Britain

### Qualifying as a pharmacist

#### Training as a pharmacist

Before the establishment of the Pharmaceutical Society, 'chemists and druggists' simply learned their trade through a period of apprenticeship in a pharmacy. They did not have to take exams.

The Society established the first qualifications for pharmacists. In 1842, it founded a School of Pharmacy at its headquarters building in Bloomsbury Square, London, to teach candidates for its exams.

The examinations offered by the Society from 1841 were:

- the *minor examination*, a basic qualification for pharmacists' employed assistants. Successful candidates were listed on the Society's 'Register of Chemists and Druggists', published annually from 1869.
- the *major examination*, intended for established business-owning pharmacists who were, or who aspired to be, members of the Society. However, some non-proprietor pharmacists went on to take the major examination having passed the minor. Those that passed the major exam were called Pharmaceutical Chemists.

Before taking their exams, most candidates spent several years of apprenticeship with a practising pharmacist followed by a course of study, often by correspondence or part time at one of the growing number of schools of pharmacy. Other candidates studied full time at a school of pharmacy.

It was not compulsory for pharmacists to take the Society's examinations until 1868.

After the **Pharmacy Act, 1868**, the Society's exams became the only route to qualify as a pharmacist.

The Society had been unsuccessful in establishing provincial schools of pharmacy in its early days. However, the Pharmacy Act provided impetus for a slow growth in schools of pharmacy outside London, and private schools that were predominantly in London.

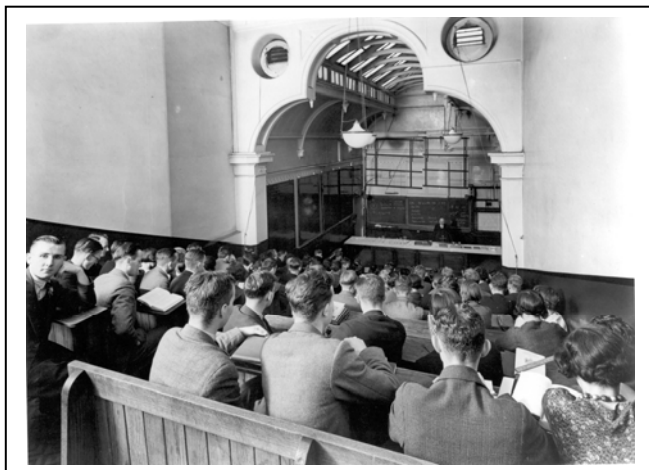


The **Pharmacy Act, 1908** brought about a significant change. It allowed the Pharmaceutical Society to make bye-laws to regulate courses of study and qualifying exams. This resulted in the development of a compulsory syllabus, particularly focused on the needs of pharmacists dispensing under the new National Health Insurance scheme. The Society began to approve schools of pharmacy themselves after the First World War.

In 1924, the University of London's **Bachelor of Pharmacy degree** was the first to be approved by the Pharmaceutical Society as equivalent to passing its exams.



After the Second World War, private schools of pharmacy died out, and pharmacy was taught in polytechnics, colleges and universities. The University of London launched a 3 year honours degree in 1946, and in 1957, the Pharmaceutical Chemist qualification became a 3 year diploma.



The **Pharmacy Act, 1953** introduced the Pharmaceutical Chemist's Diploma as the new single professional qualification for pharmacists. The category of Chemist and Druggist was abolished. The last examination for this qualification was held in 1954.

From 1954 onwards, pharmacists had to complete a two-year period (known as an articulated pupilage) before, or alternatively one year of practical pre-registration training after, their three year course of study.

The Nuffield Report, the result of an investigation into the pharmacy profession published in 1986, concluded that the teaching of pharmacy should put more emphasis on communication skills, and include clinical and practical elements alongside the traditional subject areas. The result was that many schools of pharmacy introduced teaching positions and courses in pharmacy practice.

Today students must take a four year Master of Pharmacy degree course (first introduced in 1997), followed by a year of pre-registration training within a pharmacy workplace. Finally they must pass the Society's registration exam, before they are able to practise as a pharmacist.

### FIND OUT MORE

#### Links to other sheets:

Theme B: History of the Pharmaceutical Society, sheets 1 and 2

#### Further reading:

Earles, M, 'The development of pharmaceutical education' in Anderson, S. (ed.), *Making Medicines. A short history of pharmacy and pharmaceuticals*, (Pharmaceutical Press, London, 2006)

Holloway, S W F , *The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain: A political and social history, 1841-1991*, (Pharmaceutical Press, London, 1991)

#### Other resources:

Museum of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society Information Sheet: *Tracing people and premises in pharmacy*