

PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES IN PHARMACY AND BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH

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Many universities are now reshaping doctoral level learning by providing flexible, part-time, work-based "professional doctorates". In this article the authors describe just such an approach in the school of pharmacy and biomedical sciences at the University of Portsmouth

There are a number of professional development routes open to pharmacists. Many undertake a postgraduate certificate, diploma or MSc as part of their professional role. Pharmacists with an MSc often want to find a post for the next stage of their career development that includes a research and professional development component while still enabling them to maintain a practice base.

Originally, the PhD degree was a qualification that was obtained for a subsequent academic career, or a "preparation for a life of scholarship".¹ Nowadays the PhD is more widely pursued, but it is still fundamentally about the application of research training and methodology to a narrow field of full-time study, leading to a project thesis. Recently, the appropriateness of this qualification has been questioned, as it is not necessarily relevant to wider professional interests.^{2,3} At the same time the number of people wishing to undertake postgraduate study, as well as life-long learning and continuing professional development (CPD), is

increasing.⁴ Consequently, there is a need to ensure the relevance of postgraduate qualifications for a rapidly changing workforce that will maintain their employability through the acquisition of appropriate transferable skills.⁴

Many universities are now reshaping doctoral level learning by providing flexible, part-time, work-based "professional doctorates" (PDs). The equivalence of the PD degree to the PhD has been acknowledged by the Quality Assurance Agency,⁵ and they have been described as "being equal in rigour but different in substance".⁶

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A recent survey of English universities concluded that there were 109 PDs available in 19 subject areas at 38 different institutions.⁷ Figures from 1998 showed that 26 "old" and 12 "new" universities offered at least one PD across a range of disciplines. In contrast to a PhD degree, PD qualifications are named according to the field of study with titles including DBA in business administration, EdD in education, EngD in engineering and DClinPsych in clinical psychology. Evidence suggests that PD graduates attract job offers, salaries and career progression that are comparable to those with traditional PhD qualifications.

However, the development of PDs in the health care disciplines has generally been neglected, leaving practitioners who wish or need to study at doctoral level with little choice other than the PhD route.⁷

Considerable attention has been paid to CPD in nearly all professional groups in the United Kingdom during the past two decades.⁸ Effective CPD aims to provide professionals with the necessary skills to en-

able them to update their knowledge and skills in order to respond to technological, economic and social changes that require them to improve and develop their professional competence.⁸ In this context it is recognised that all health care professionals need to improve their services to patients through CPD activities at the highest level and have them accepted within an academic framework.⁹ In addition, recent Government policies advocated the need for multiprofessional education and interaction between health care staff with the view to the improvement of patient care and an increased integration of service delivery: "right person, right place, right time, right treatment" is now a critical focus for the National Health Service.^{10,11} The value of multiprofessional undergraduate education, allowing students from a range of backgrounds to learn together the skills and knowledge common to different health care disciplines, is now being advocated at a number of universities in the UK. In due course it is envisaged that this shared and complementary style of learning will become more widespread in the post-graduate sector.

In response to the lack of PDs in the health care sector, the need for CPD for health care professionals and the realisation of the value of multidisciplinary education, the University of Portsmouth has pioneered a unique doctoral level programme to address these issues.

THE PD PROGRAMME

The PD programme developed at the University of Portsmouth is flexible, part-time, work-based and highly relevant to the NHS and other health care environments. It allows a PD student to develop advanced research and CPD skills in a multidisciplinary environment. It increases professional knowledge, as well as offering the opportunity to undertake a relevant, work-based research and professional development project. This project brings together the expertise of the student, the research skills of the academic supervisor, and an identified area of improvement to patient care and service delivery. Entry into the programme requires a relevant postgraduate masters level qualification (or equivalent).

The programme is divided in two parts. Part 1 is essentially the 'taught' component common to all disciplines and takes between 18 and 24 months to complete. During this time students undertake three units:

- Professional review and development
- Advanced research techniques
- Publication and dissemination

These units aim to enable students to:

- conduct a critical self evaluation and identify future learning requirements
- become familiar with a variety of qualitative and quantitative research techniques to enable the design and implementation of research investigations appropriate to their professional context

- understand the processes involved in the dissemination of information and engage in academic debate with critical communities and professional peers

Assessment is by a portfolio of written evidence, oral presentations and the submission of an article suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed, professionally relevant journal. In addition, students are required to submit a structured, coherent and realistic research proposal for the subsequent professional research and development unit (Part 2).

The professional research and development unit (Part 2) is designed to enable students to make a significant and original contribution to their profession. This may involve one or two pieces of practice-based research linked with a commentary demonstrating the relevance of the work to their professional practice. The nature of these investigations may include pure or applied research related, for example, to a clinical, educational, managerial or service delivery setting.

Examples of the types of projects which prospective PD students are planning include:

- development and evaluation of electronic prescribing systems in secondary care
- development and evaluation of a formal, in-house training programme for newly qualified pharmacists
- introduction and evaluation of pharmacotherapy clinics in primary and secondary care
- development and evaluation of a "managed learning environment" for the delivery of a postgraduate course

Typically, this unit takes between 18 and 36 months to complete and involves the submission of a detailed report (approx-

mately 30,000 words), an oral presentation and a viva voce examination.

At present Portsmouth University offers five different named PD health care leaving awards, namely:

- Doctor of Pharmacy (DPharm)
- Doctor of Biomedical Science (DBMS)
- Doctor of Medical Imaging (DMI)
- Doctor of Nursing (DNursing)
- Doctor of Chiropractic (DChiro)

The student's area of professional practice, together with the nature of their investigation undertaken in Part 2, determines the title of the PD awarded.

Since the inception of the PD health care programme at Portsmouth in October 2000, nine students from a variety of professional backgrounds are currently enrolled.

CONCLUSION

The PD programme developed at the University of Portsmouth offers a wide range of health care staff the opportunity actively to engage in CPD at the highest level through directed study and work-based research projects. The structure of the programme creates a genuinely multiprofessional learning environment and is proving to be of particular value to those participants who have clinical leadership or development of service delivery responsibilities. Recruitment for the next academic year is already encouraging in all the PD health care disciplines.

The university, although leading the UK in its breadth of provision of health care related PD programmes, is currently looking at means of extending the existing model to enable other professions allied to medicine to participate in work-based doctoral level learning. In the long term it is hoped this new initiative will enhance career opportunities and improve patient treatment and care.

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