APPLICANT PREFERENCING OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES IN THE NATIONAL PRE-REGISTRATION PHARMACIST RECRUITMENT SCHEME FOR ENGLAND AND WALES: APPLICANT BEHAVIOUR AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS IN THEIR DECISION MAKING

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Objective
A centralised system for recruiting to all hospital preregistration pharmacist training and majority of community pharmacy posts based in England and Wales was introduced in 2017. Applicants submit a single application and are allocated their highest preferenced training place, based on their performance in selection centres. This evaluation explored applicant preferencing of their future employers and factors influencing their behaviour.

Design
The study was undertaken in three phases:

- Preferencing data from all applicants (n=2694) of the 2017 national recruitment cycle were analysed
- A cross-sectional online survey of all students in England and Wales undertaking Master of Pharmacy Year 4 who were eligible applicants of the 2017 application cycle
- Survey was followed by qualitative focus groups and telephone interviews

Data collection tools designed based on literature, theoretical domains framework (TDF) and expert opinion of evaluation steering committee. Descriptive and inferential analysis of quantitative data was undertaken. The framework technique was used to analyse the qualitative data.

Results
The majority (n=2325, 86%) of applicants preferenced pre-registration programmes across both hospitals and community pharmacy sectors. A total of 283 (11%) and 86 (3%) applicants respectively only preferenced pre-registration programmes in either hospital or community pharmacy sectors respectively. 2182 (83.9%) applicants ranked hospital pre-registration programmes as their first ranked preference. London was the most popular geographical area with approximately 4 in 5 applicants preferencing at least one programme. Ethnic variations as well as differences across applicants from different Schools of Pharmacy were identified. A total of 307 responses were received from the survey (response rate 11%). A third expressed dissatisfaction with the preferencing process. Participants indicated high satisfaction with the provision of information about preferencing at presentations and events runs by the Universities and HEE.

Conclusions
This evaluation has demonstrated a high affinity of pharmacy students for pre-registration pharmacist training programmes in hospitals. Long term career aspirations were very important as were favoured geographical areas. These findings highlight the need for community pharmacy employers to enhance their marketing strategies including the quality of information available to students about their programmes. The preferencing process itself can be improved by widening the timeframe and improving information on the geographical location of training places.