



Evolving the "E" in Entrustable Professional Activities: mapping "entrustment" across the pharmacy degree

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**Northern Ireland
Clinical Education
Pharmacist Team**
Patient centred hospital experiential
learning to develop future pharmacists



HSC Health and
Social Care

Introduction

Standards for initial education and training of pharmacists recognise the role of Experiential Learning (EL) in practice settings for enhancing preparedness for practice¹. Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) provide a method of evaluating students evolving competence in practice activities and represent what the practice of a "safe beginner" pharmacist should look like, regardless of area of practice (Figure 1).

The retrospective entrustment scale developed for pharmacy undergraduate context in Northern Ireland (Figure 2) has been adapted from the literature and offers 5 choices; 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, and 3c, which offering incrementally increased independence.

Students complete progressively more complex EPAs as they increase in confidence and competence with each academic year for example, medication history in year 2, progressing to Medicines Reconciliation and medication review in year 3 and prescribing in year 4.

Results

A total of 3,753 entrustment decisions made on 692 pharmacy students from Year 2 (n=259), Year 3 (n=244) and Year 4 (n=189) were reviewed. Seventeen percent of Year 2 students received an entrustment level of 3c when completing a medication history, compared to 21% of Year 3 students (Figure 3). Thirteen percent of Year 3 students received an entrustment level of 3c when completing medication review compared to 23% of Year 4. Nineteen percent of Year 2 received an entrustment level of 3c when Evaluating and Managing Clinical Improvement or Worsening compared to 31% of Year 4 (Figure 4). Sixty percent of Year 4 students received 3b for their prescribing skills, a further 26% received 3c.

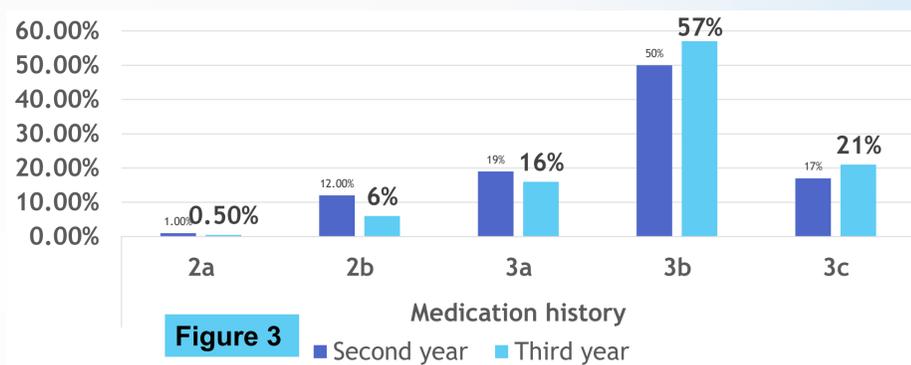


Figure 3 ■ Second year ■ Third year

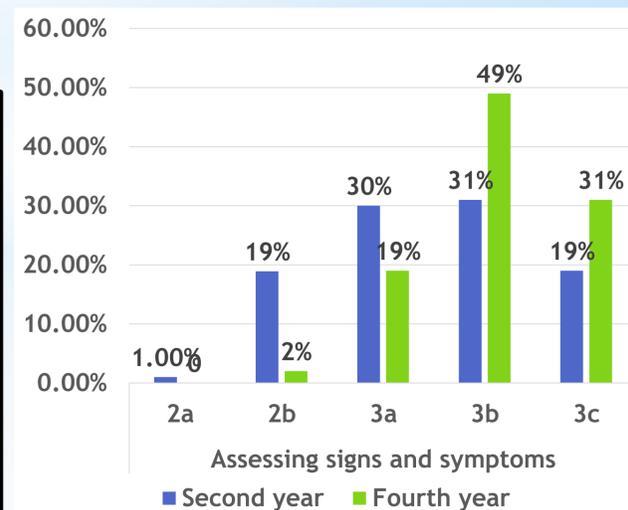


Figure 4 ■ Second year ■ Fourth year

Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) for the Initial Education and Training of Pharmacists in Northern Ireland	
1. Medicines optimisation	2. Communication & collaboration
5. Recognising & managing the acutely unwell patient	3. Contributing to public & population health
4. Patient safety	

Figure 1: The core EPAs for Pharmacist training in NI

Levels of entrustment	
Decisions are 'retrospective' reflecting level of responsibility trainee has undertaken in instances of carrying out the EPA so far (rather than defining ongoing responsibility)	
Level 2: Practiced EPA under proactive, full supervision as co-activity with supervisor	
Level 2a	Supervisor prompted throughout (I had to talk through all aspects with student; I had to prompt throughout; level of support high)
Level 2b	Supervisor prompted from time to time (I had to talk through some aspects with student; I had to prompt from time to time; level of support reduced)
Level 3: Practiced EPA independently under proactive, full supervision	
Level 3a	With supervisor ready to support as needed; student completed independently but significant guidance needed (I needed to be there; student checked with me and needed direction on many aspects)
Level 3b	With supervisor ready to support as needed; student completed independently but some minor guidance required (I needed to be there just in case; student checked with me and needed direction on minor aspects)
Level 3c	With supervisor ready to support as needed; student completed independently, no guidance needed (I did not need to be there; student checked with me and all aspects appropriate)
Entrustment decision expiration date	
Applies only to current period of experiential learning	

Figure 2: The NI EPA Entrustment Scale

Aim

To explore the evolution of pharmacy student ability to complete authentic pharmacist tasks in secondary care with increasing independence and responsibility, as judged by entrustment decisions by Practice Supervisors (PSs) on EPAs.

Method

All entrustment decisions on EPAs completed by pharmacy undergraduates in the academic year 2024-25 by PSs in secondary care using the NI Entrustment Scale were reviewed in May 2025. Where EPAs were completed in two academic years, the results were compared using descriptive statistics.

Discussion

This study shows that as NI pharmacy students' progress through the MPharm, acquiring knowledge, skills and engaging in more EL, they are more likely to achieve a higher entrustment rating from a PS, i.e. are less likely to require PS intervention than those in earlier year groups.

Limitations include the need to further develop PSs' understanding of entrustment, and the comparison between academic years may be due to differing academic ability and not solely evolving competence. In future studies, we can compare third year performance in 2024-25 to fourth year performance in 2025-26.



References

1. General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC). Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacists. 2021. <https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/sites/default/files/document/standards-for-the-initial-education-and-training-of-pharmacists-january-2021.pdf> Accessed September 18th 2025.
2. O'Hare R, Hughes F. Using Entrustable Professional Activities to build the future pharmacist. Pharm J 2025; 314 (7997). <https://doi.org/10.1211/PJ.2025.1.355146>