

Failure to Include Pharmacy Among 1,000 New Third Level Places an ‘Inexplicable Oversight’



Minister has Been Warned About the Growing Shortage of Community Pharmacists

The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has described the failure to include a single space for pharmacy students in the list of new 1,000 college places announced today as an inexplicable oversight. The IPU has said that Ireland can no longer rely on overseas training for pharmacists and that a failure to increase training places is beginning to impact on patient care.

A recent survey of over 1,000 pharmacists conducted by the IPU, with the support of Behaviour & Attitudes (B&A), revealed the scale of the shortage. The majority of pharmacists believe that there is an insufficient number of pharmacists working in the system today to meet patient requirements.

Following the announcement today of over 1,000 new college places, which did not include any pharmacy places, community pharmacist and IPU Honorary Treasurer, Tom Murray expressed his dismay and disappointment, “The extreme shortage of community pharmacists has been consistently raised in public and with the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Simon Harris TD. We wrote to him outlining the problem as early as last September and the extreme manpower shortage in community pharmacy was highlighted in Dáil Eireann within the last two weeks. It is deeply disappointing and concerning that the sector has been completely overlooked in today’s announcement.

“The addition of pharmacists to the Government’s Critical Skills Occupation List just last week illustrates the Government’s awareness of the need for additional professionals in the community pharmacy sector. This illustrates the short sightedness of the recent decision by Minister Harris and points to a worrying lack of coherence within government.

“The fact of the matter is that Ireland is simply not training enough pharmacists. Half of those who work in the sector today were forced to train overseas. This is untenable in a modern healthcare system. In July 2021, the Minister publicly announced that an increase in pharmacy places was forthcoming. The failure to honour that commitment will further heap pressure on the system.

Mr Murray concluded by calling on both Minister Harris and Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly TD to show some leadership in addressing the problem. “Minister Harris claimed this morning to be listening to the sectors where there is a societal need for an increase in education places. Perhaps he needs to pay more attention or listen more closely. While the Minister for Health needs to advocate more loudly for the sector, to ensure those training places that are so vital, are introduced without any further delay. A failure to deliver will have a negative impact on pharmacy services and in turn patient care”, he concluded.