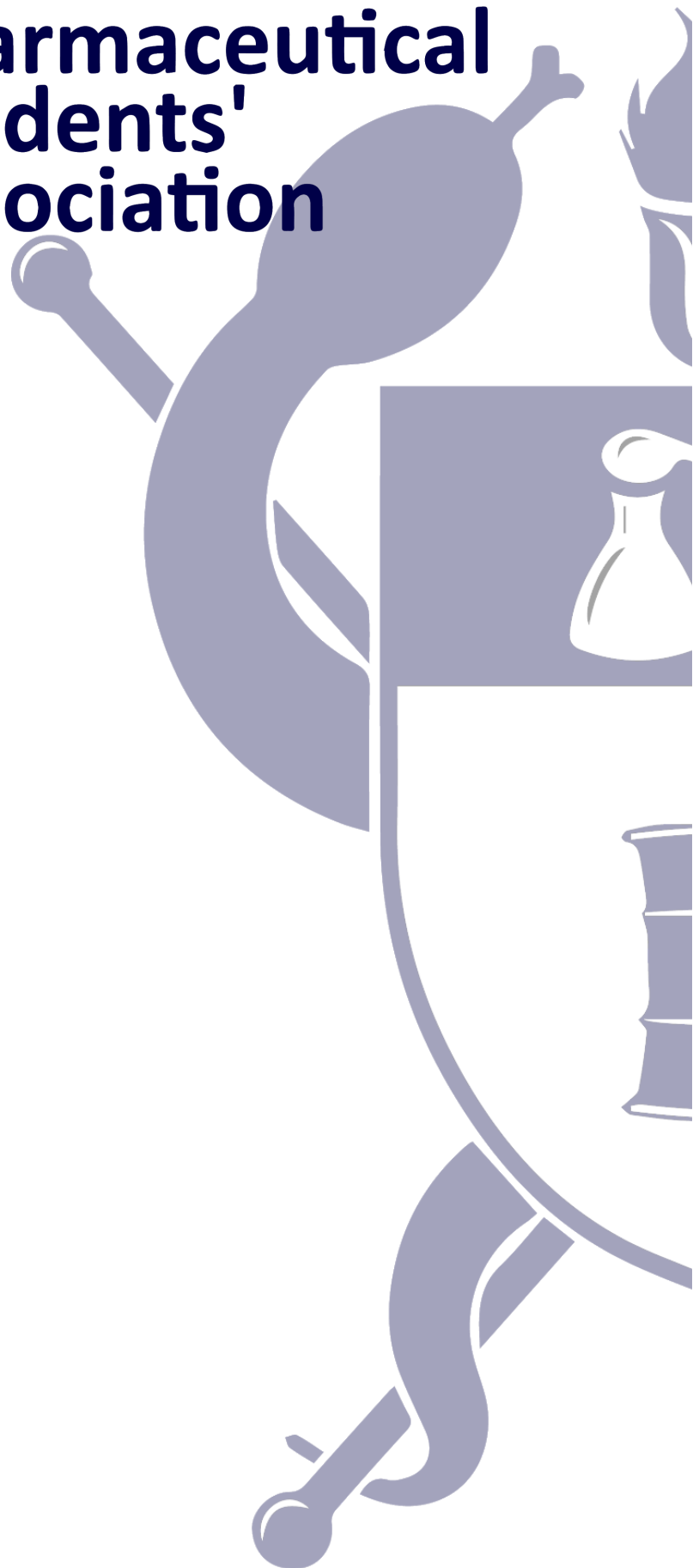# British Pharmaceutical Students' Association

Oriel Feedback Report 2020

An Assessment of Candidates' Responses (2020) and Comparative Review of Responses between two BPSA commissioned surveys (2019 and 2020)

28th February 2021

www.bpsa.co.uk

British Pharmaceutical Students' Association
The Official Student Organisation of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society

Contents

1: Introduction

The British Pharmaceutical Students' Association (BPSA) is the official student organisation of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the official representative body of pharmacy students and pre-registration pharmacists in Great Britain. Established in 1942, the Association aims to support, advocate for and represent students and trainees on their path towards registration.

In 2017 Oriel was rolled out to Pharmacy students. The BPSA worked to collect feedback from Oriel candidates about the process, from start to finish. Subsequently, a report was published outlining seven 'Key points' and ten 'Recommendations'. This report aims to:

1) Assess the most current feedback from the BPSA's 2020 Oriel survey.
2) Compare the feedback received from candidates between 2019 and 2020, highlighting the experiences during the year where MMI's were removed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and where the BPSA believes further work is required.

This report has been categorised into five question areas, based on the broad subject area that each question falls into. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Multiple Mini Interviews (MMIs) were cancelled and all applicants were ranked on scores obtained from Situational Judgement Tests (SJTs) and in the case of ties, the Numeracy assessment in the 2020 Oriel process. In light of this change, we have adapted the 2019 survey to remove questions on MMIs. This year Scottish pharmacy students were included in the Oriel system and our 2019 survey has been adapted to receive feedback on this.

The survey was opened following candidates receiving their Oriel ranking and pre-registration placement, until the end of 2020.

The 2020 survey attracted 266 respondents, whilst the 2019 survey attracted 143 respondents. The total number of candidates in 2020 has not been disclosed by Health Education England. However, our sample size is statistically significant for a cohort size of 3000 (95% confidence level, 6% margin of error). Unprivileged raw data can be provided by emailing secgen@bpsa.co.uk.

This report and the corresponding 2020 survey have been co-authored by **Bella Shah (Vice President 2020-2021), Kelsey Drummond (Secretary General 2020-2021), Alham Nagi (Education Development Officer 2020-2021) and Bethany Goodliffe (Engagement Officer 2020-2021)**.

2: Key Points

2.1 Key Findings

1. **The online application process must be improved to provide a better user experience**
2. **Specific IT improvements are required for the process of preferencing. This includes the revision of how filters can be made more effective.**
3. **Guidance and preparatory materials specific to pharmacy students on the SJT are desired by respondents.**
4. **The BPSA believes that more should be done to directly or indirectly take into account candidates' previous work experience and extracurricular activities.**
5. **Whilst most respondents completed the numeracy test in the given time, some extra time may have been welcomed.**

2.2 Key Recommendations

1) **Free Webinars around the process should be made available for students**
2) **The process must provide students the opportunity to demonstrate previous experience and skills, whether this is a short statement, interview or opportunity to justify responses. While adjustments were required as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's vital that this is considered for future recruitment and reintroduced when feasible.**
3) **Health Education England must work with other stakeholders to provide more preparatory materials and guidance to candidates around the Situational Judgement Test.**
4) **The British Pharmaceutical Students' Association must endeavor to provide Oriel feedback consistently in order to provide a national representation of candidates.**

3: Methods

3.1: Survey design

This survey was designed based on the questions written in the BPSA's 2019 Oriel feedback survey[1]. Changes to this survey included questions based on around Scottish students' experience and omission of the section on MMIs.

An opportunity for further comments was left after most questions in the 2020 survey **(see appendix 1).**

3.2: Statistical analysis

All references to quantitative data in this report relate to multiple choice responses.

3.2.1: Analysis of survey sample size

At the time of writing the BPSA does not have access to the total number of Oriel candidates for 2020, therefore a true statistical calculation cannot be carried out. Statistical analysis using the standard equation for survey sample size shows that the number of survey respondents (266) is proportional to a population of 3,000 if the confidence level is set to 95% and the margin of error is set to 6%.

3.2.2: Analysis of 2020 survey responses

Chi-squared calculations have been carried out at a significance level of 0.05 (α=0.05) to determine three levels of significance within the 2020 dataset for multiple choice questions (for multiple choice questions with only one option, only the first level of significance has been calculated):

1) If there are any statistically significant differences between any option
2) If there are any statistically significant differences between the three groups below:
    a) 'Very Good' and 'Good' = '$\sum$good'
    b) 'Very Poor' and 'Poor' = '$\sum$poor'
    c) 'Neutral' = 'Neutral'
3) If there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups below:
    a) 'Very Good' and 'Good' = '$\sum$good'
    b) 'Very Poor' and 'Poor' = '$\sum$poor'

Figure captions contain information about the statistical significance for figures where Chi-squared statistical tests have been applied. The caption relates to the two levels of significance e.g. "(Statistical significance, 1: Yes, 2: Yes, 3: Yes)" indicates that all levels of significance have been satisfied for the data in the figure.

3.2.3: Analysis of comparative data between the 2019 and 2020 data sets

Using the two-tailed Z-test, comparisons of 2019 and 2020 multiple choice results have been assessed for statistical significance ($p<0.05$). In order to carry this out, origin data from 2019 has been utilised per question. For some questions, as in 2020, the number of responses is not equal to the total number of survey respondents; this has been accounted for in all statistical and percentage calculations.

An asterix (*) has been used to indicate where there is a statistically significant difference between 2019 and 2020 data on the relevant figures. The statistical significance is specific to each response (for example 'Very Good' in 2019 and 'Very Good' in 2020).

4: Survey Results

All sections are presented with data from 2020 survey responses first, any comparisons between 2019 and 2020 results follow below analysis of the 2020 survey results.

4.1: Section One - Online Application Process

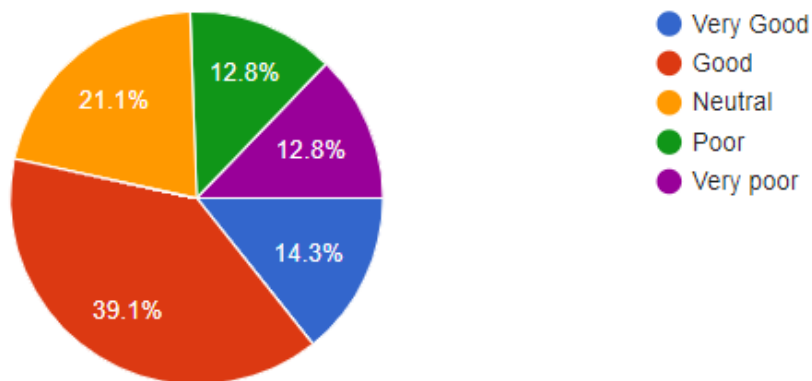### 4.1.1: What do you think of the online application process?

Figure 4.1.1.1: A larger proportion of respondents have a positive opinion of the online application process than a negative opinion, (number of respondents in 2020: 266), (statistical significance: 1: Yes, 2: Yes, 3: Yes).

This question received a positive general response, with a statistically significant majority of respondents believing the online application process was 'Very Good' or 'Good'.

Of the 105 qualitative responses received to this question, about half of respondents made reference to the website/portal not being user-friendly, including being difficult to navigate and glitching (n=52).

"It was difficult to navigate as a first-time user of the website. I think it would be useful if we had a guide video to help us navigate the website."

"The screen to preference your choices is very glitchy, and it's quite hard to find the placements that you are looking for."

"There was very little assistance when things went wrong and it all being on a website meant it was difficult to get in contact with an actual person to ask for help. I also thought the website was very confusing and difficult to navigate. It crashed multiple times."

"The website was continually down. The website was closed for maintenance, but things didn't improve."

"Could be a better way of selecting responses. Drag and drop is very difficult with a long list."

There is a clear demand from the respondents of this survey for improvements to the overall interface. Despite the launch of a new and updated system last year (Oriel II), as expected by HEE, the online application user interface continues to receive negative feedback.
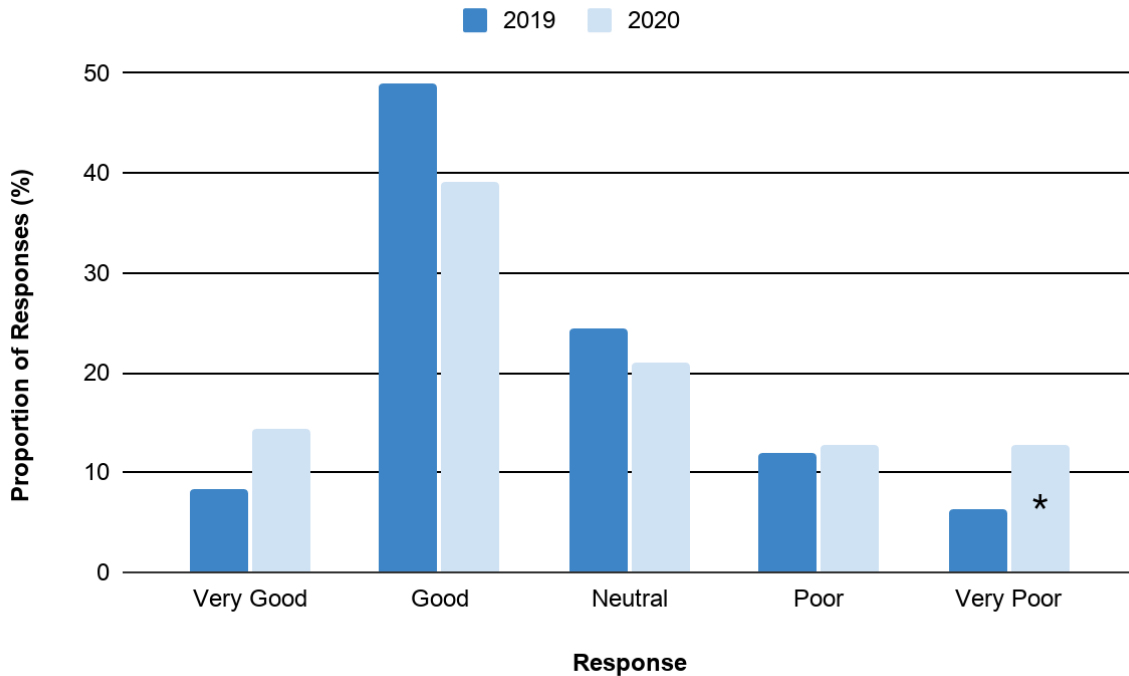

Figure 4.1.1.2: There was no statistically significant difference in responses between 2019 and 2020, with the exception of 'Very Poor', (number of respondents in 2019: 143, 2020: 266), (statistically significant differences indicated by *).

The 2020 responses were overall fairly similar to the 2019 responses to this question, with a statistically significant increase in the 'Very Poor' response.

4.1.2: What do you think of the applicant handbook?

In 2019, in long-text responses to question 4.1.2, it was highlighted that the applicant handbook was: "thorough", "useful" or "detailed" (n=7). Therefore, in 2019, we asked respondents the above question.
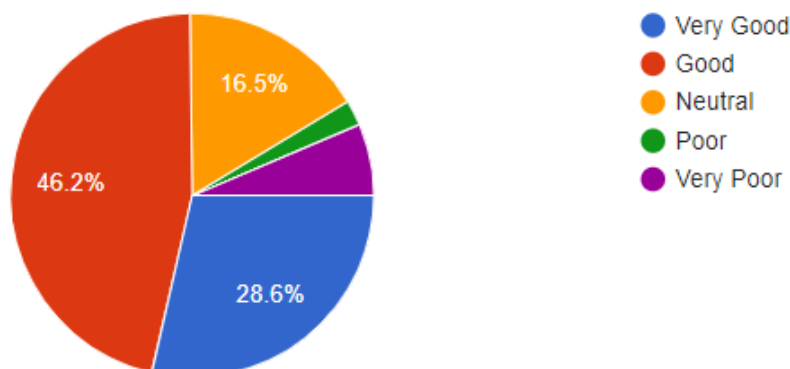

Figure 4.1.2.1: A statistically significant majority of respondents believe the applicant handbook was 'Very Good' or 'Good', (number of respondents in 2020: 266), (statistical significance, 1: Yes, 2: Yes, 3: Yes).

Overall, the feedback on the applicant handbook was very positive, with about three quarters of respondents believing it was 'Very Good' or 'Good'.

In written responses, multiple respondents stated that the handbook was 'clear', 'helpful', 'informative', 'easy to follow/use', and/or 'detailed' (n=14). Constructive feedback included:

"Some parts needed more information like the clearing section. I.e. when it happens, how it happens, and who will be able to go through that section."

"There should be tutorial videos alongside the handbook on how to use the oriel page as it is quite hard to navigate."

"The handbook should tell you where to find the scores for the SJT and numeracy test."

"It's a bit too long, but lacks some important info at the same time. Some stuff are very easy and don't need to be there while others are not there when they probably should be."

4.1.3: What do you think of the preferencing process?

In 2019, in long-text responses to question 4.1.3, it was highlighted that "a better mechanism to identify placements was necessary, specifically by improving the filters'' (n=13). Therefore, in 2020, we asked respondents the above question.
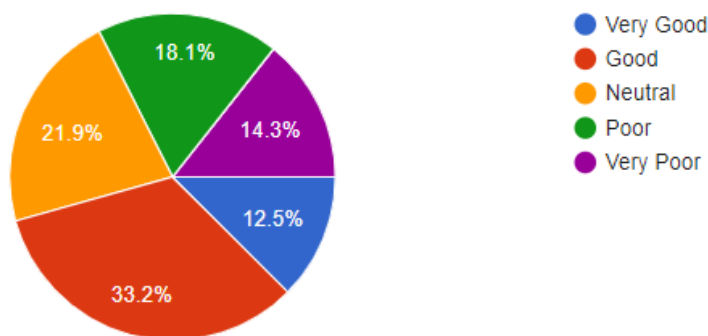

Figure 4.1.3.1: Multiple choice responses provide no clear united opinion on the preferencing process. Statistical significance was only shown at level 1 significance, indicating at least one unspecified option was statistically different from at least one other option, (number of respondents in 2020: 265), (statistical significance, 1: Yes, 2: No, 3: No).

This question received a mix of responses, with no clear statistically significant majority towards either extremity along the spectrum of options. However, written responses clearly indicate that improvement is required, particularly in two areas: identifying a placement and allocating a rank to placements.

Several respondents emphasised that the preferencing process was 'slow' and 'laggy' (n=38), and suggested a better mechanism is necessary to move and organise options when preferencing (n=30).

"Very glitchy page and it's hard to move the choices around without difficulty. It's also hard to find the placements that you are looking for. "

"The system is slow to move preferences over and when it does it automatically puts the preference in position 1 meaning you then have to drag it to the desired position, making the process overall very tedious."

"The system makes the preferencing process even more time consuming as it lags and crashes very often. It takes awhile to select and move a place across the columns."

"The system used could be improved upon, understandably sometimes slow to respond. Initially, the process can be quite confusing but does improve over time of using the system. A possible improvement could be selecting your ranking position rather than a click and drag approach"

''Wish there was were more filter opens (e.g. miles from a certain post code).''

4.2: Section Two - Scottish Students Experience of Oriel

This year, unlike those previous, Scottish pharmacy students sat the Oriel recruitment process and our survey has included questions to receive feedback from Scottish applicants.

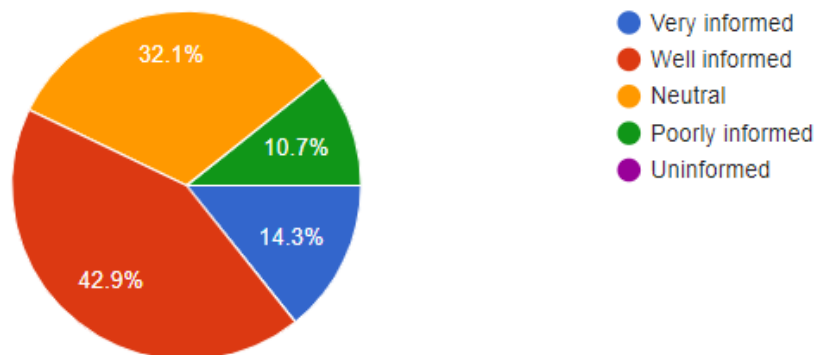### 4.2.1: How informed did you feel about the oriel process?

Figure 4.2.1.1: The Majority of respondents felt as though they were informed of the change of process, (number of respondents, 2020: 28), (statistical significance, 1: Yes, 2: Yes, 3: Yes).

Respondents expressed how they found the webinar around the process helpful and valued having practice questions.

4.2.2: Did you feel supported with the change in system?
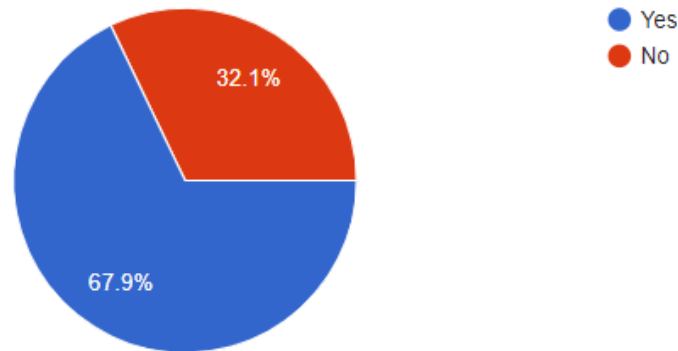

Figure 4.2.2.1: 67.9% of scottish students felt supported with the change to recruitment process, (number of respondents, 2020: 28), (statistical significance, 1: Yes, 2: Yes, 3: Yes).

The majority of Scottish students felt supported with the change in system. Additional comments made highlighted how there was a lack of resources in preparation for the assessment (n=3) and that there was a lack of experience with the SJT questions (n=2). As a result, there was a divide as people who could pay for the RPS resources could access this whereas others could not. Of those who used practice questions to prepare there were comments made regarding the difficulty in the questions compared to those in the assessment (n=3) and that questions in the assessment were not always clear and at times misleading (n=3).

"As a Scottish student a couple of the scenarios seemed irrelevant to my practice in Scotland or real options were omitted"

"I personally struggled as I didn't get enough support due to my lack of background on the sjt questions. As a foreign student, we come from different backgrounds and how we react to certain situations differ. It was not really helpful telling us that there were no right answers to the sjt questions. Also, there was no detailed guidance to help with the mindset needed to answer the sjts. I think more guidance should be given to people who have no work experience and come from a background where things are done differently. I also think more time should have been allocated for the numeracy questions."

"There isn't enough clear information. It's not a normal job application process, which is fine, but there doesn't seem to be an understanding that it isn't a normal process".

"Given the difference between the Scottish and English systems I was disappointed that on several occasions I heard professionals advising English students to apply for NES as well because it was a simple form and they would only sit one assessment effectively doubling their chances. The process this year striped candidates down to just a number as there was no opportunity to talk about personal experience or justify reasoning. I was a bit disappointed"

4.3: Section Three - Situational Judgement Test (SJT)

The Situational Judgement Test (SJT) in 2020 accounted for 100% of a candidate's total score[2].

4.3.1: What did you think of the situational judgement test (SJT)?
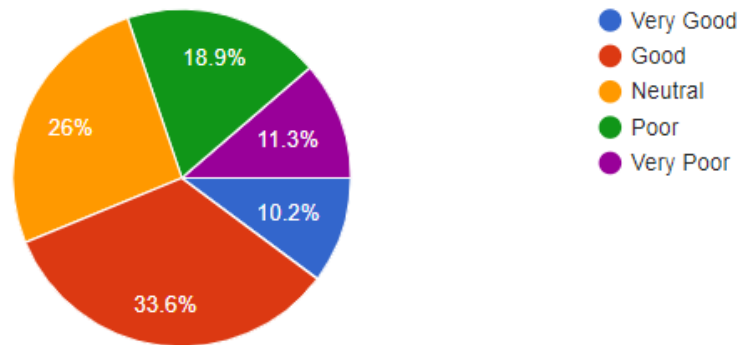

Figure 4.3.1.1: Fewer respondents had a negative opinion of the SJT, (number of respondents, 2020: 265), (statistical significance, 1: Yes, 2: Yes, 3: Yes).

Responses show a statistically significant proportion of respondents (43.8%) feel the SJT is 'Good' or 'Very Good'. This is closely followed by 26% having a 'Neutral' opinion. Written responses provide an insight into how improvements can be made to prepare students for the SJT. Many respondents believe that more guidance/training material is needed (n=29). Some candidates believed there were too many questions or that the SJT was too/very long (n=12). Other comments to note were that respondents stated that the nature of the SJT is too subjective as an assessment tool (n=10) and did not allow candidates to be assessed in terms of their skills and abilities (n=34).

> "It was very black and white. Either you pick the right answer or you don't. Throughout my learning I have been told situations will be grey and there will not always be a right answer & it will depend on your justification as to which action you take. There was no opportunity to express reasoning or additional action you might take based on experience. As a Scottish student a couple of the scenarios seemed irrelevant to my practice in Scotland or real options were omitted"
>
> "I feel pharmacy can be a very ethical place to work in. Everyone has their own point of views and if they have a valid justification it is fair. The SJT has such similar answers to choose from and all them being correct. Some people will have different ways of approaching things, this doesn't mean it's wrong. Having answers solely based on 1-5 or 3 most appropriate is not fair. The SJT should have clearly legal and illegal aspects... right and wrong answers. Since the answers right now can still be justified and correct. Maybe they should add a justification section as this will make each and every students opinion and mind thinking clear."

Comparison of results from 2019 and 2020 for this question do not indicate a significant change in opinion. Compared to 2019 with 46.2%, there was a slight decrease in respondents who had a positive experience, to 43.8%. The pronounced observation to note from **figure 4.4.1.2** is that there was a statistically significant increase in candidates answering the above question with the option 'Very Poor'.
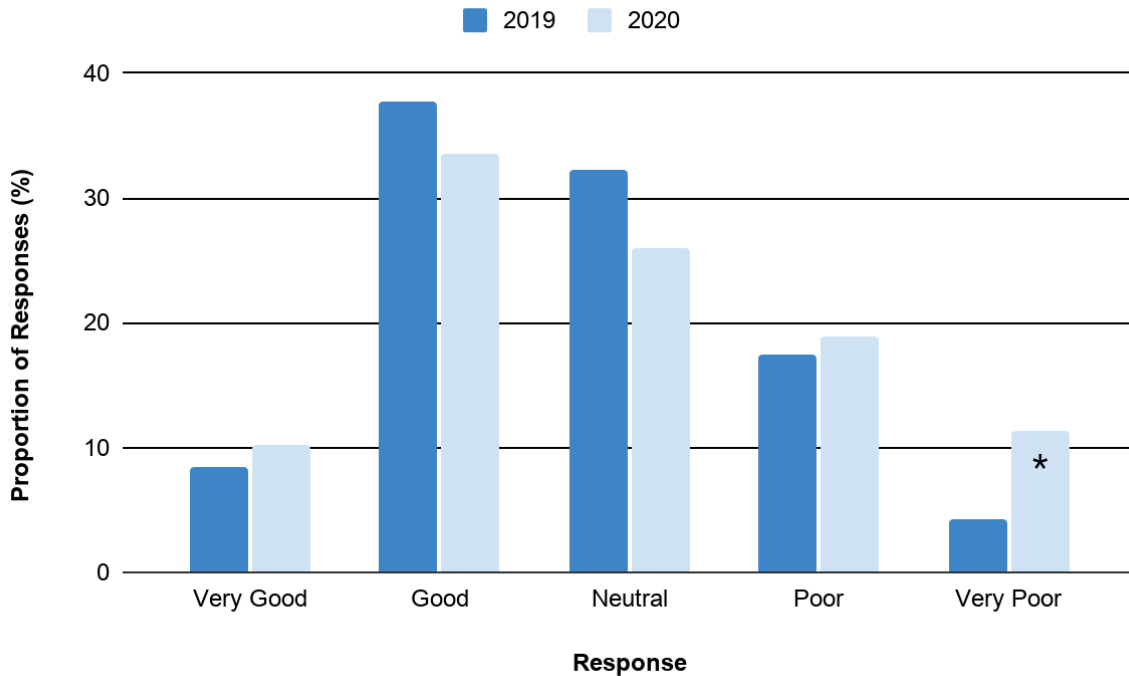

Figure 4.4.1.2: Comparison of 2019 and 2020 indicates that there were statistically significantly more respondents in 2020 who believed the SJT was 'Very Poor', (number of respondents 2019: 143, 2020: 265), (statistically significant differences indicated by *).

4.3.2: Did you complete the SJT in the given time?

In 2017, in long-text responses to question 4.4.1, it was highlighted that "some candidates thought that they were given too much time to complete the SJT (n=9)". Therefore, in 2019 and 2020, we asked respondents the above question to determine the feasibility of shortening the SJT.
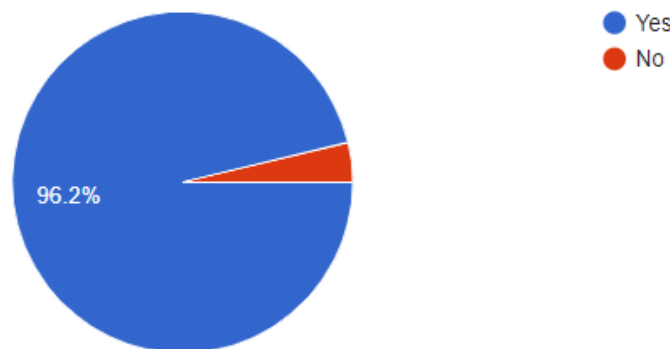

Figure 4.3.2.1: Over 96.2% of respondents completed the SJT in the given time, (number of respondents 2020: 265), (statistical significance 1: Yes).

Quantitative assessment clearly shows that the vast majority of respondents were able to complete the SJT in the given time. Numerous respondents commented on completing the SJTs in time, but feeling rushed or not having enough time to check answers. (n=8). Other comments include:

> *"The time is enough but the question is too much. Maybe separate them so people are able to focus more."*
>
> *"The time was not enough to read a long scenario and analyse the confusing options."*
>
> *"The time was not enough to read a long scenario and analyse the confusing options."*
>
> *"Not enough time, some questions ambiguous. There should be an option to justify our answers as a way of gaining extra marks."*
>
> *"The time was good, I would not have been able to finish it in less time."*

4.4: Section Four - Numeracy Test

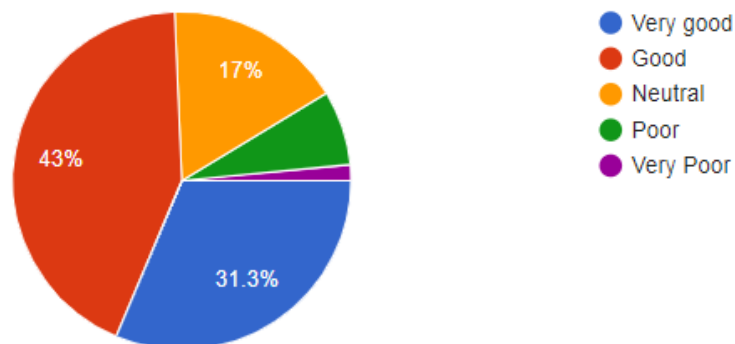### 4.4.1: What did you think of the numeracy test?

Figure 4.4.1.1: Respondents generally thought the numeracy test was 'Very Good' or 'Good', with few respondents reporting negative experiences in this question, (number of respondents in 2020: 265), (statistical significance, 1: Yes, 2: Yes, 3: Yes).

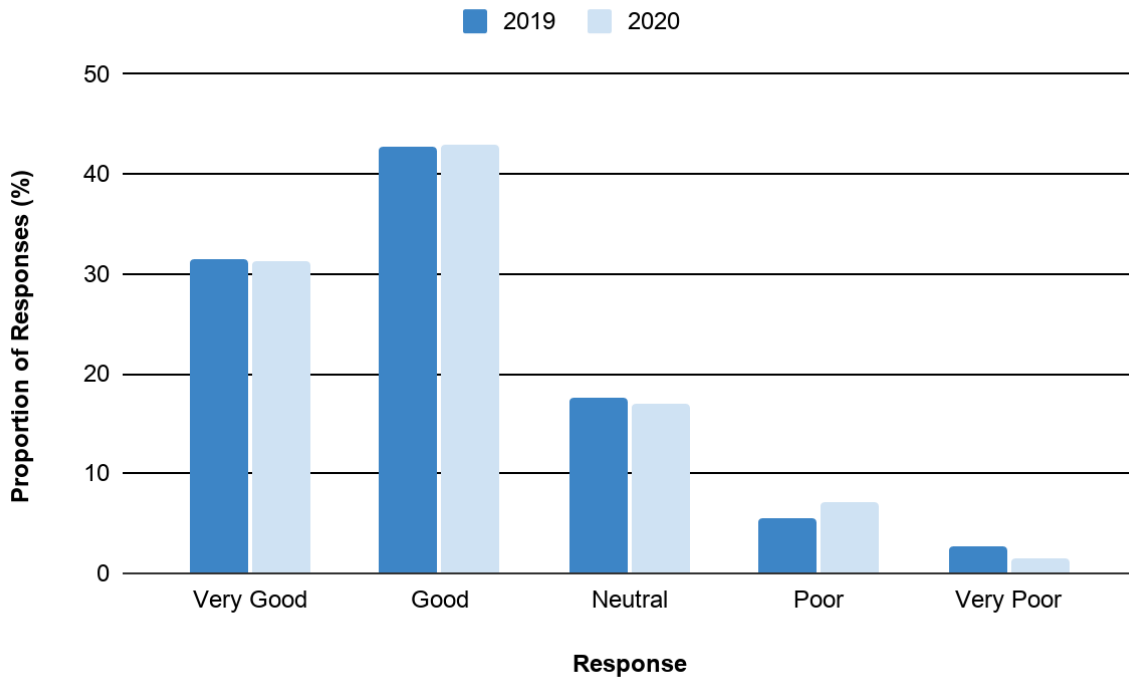A statistical significant difference was identified between positive and negative responses to this question in 2020.

Figure 4.4.1.2: There was no statistically significant difference in any single response between 2019 and 2020, (number of respondents in 2019: 143, 2020: 265), (statistically significant differences indicated by *).

The 2020 responses were overall very similar to the 2019 responses to this question, there was no statistically significant difference within each response option between the surveys.

4.4.2: Did you complete the numeracy test in the given time?

In 2017, in long-text responses to question 4.5.1, it was highlighted that "many applicants complained that there was not enough time to complete calculations quickly and accurately (n=52)". Therefore, in 2019 and 2020, we asked respondents the above question.
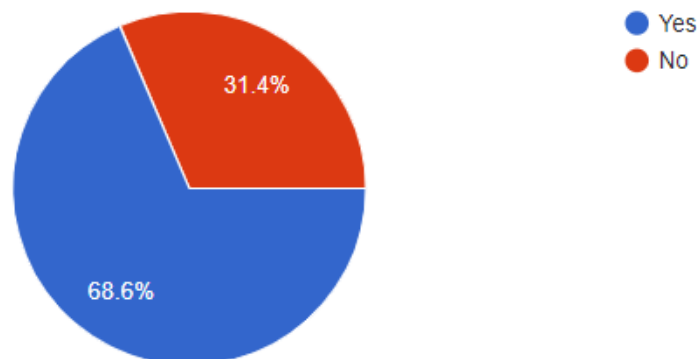

Figure 4.4.2.1: Over 60% of respondents reported that they did complete the numeracy test in the given time, (number of respondents in 2020: 264), (statistical significance, 1: Yes).

The data provided by this question shows that a statistically significant majority (>68% of respondents) completed the numeracy test in the given time. Whilst this is the case, written responses indicate respondents that did complete the test would have liked more time for the test/were pushed for time (n=13). A handful of respondents mentioned that the questions were lengthy (n=7).

Compared to 2019, the percentage of respondents who stated to have completed the numeracy test in the given time dropped from 85.3% to 68.6% in 2020.

> "I found the questions misleading as we were told they'd be of a standard and had some practice questions from RPS which I did very well in. However the questions in the exam were much more wordy and time consuming. We were led to believe there would only be a few wordy questions and that some would be as simple as converting from g to kg, therefore I took longer on the first few questions as I assumed they would get easier. I thought this was unfair. There should've been more examples. "

4.5: Section Five - Overall Experience

4.5.1: How would you rate your overall experience of applying for pre-registration training?
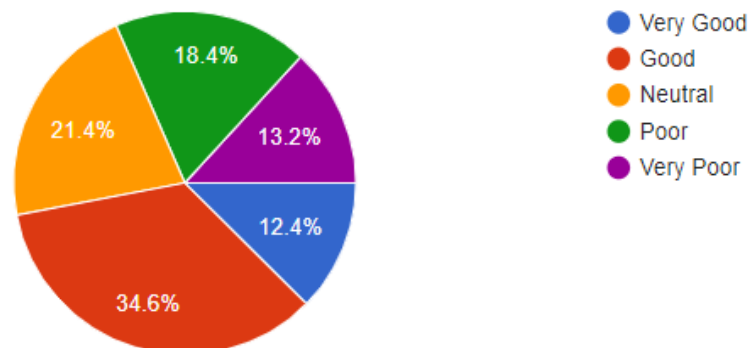

Figure 4.5.1.1: 31.6% of respondents rated their overall experience as 'Poor' or 'Very Poor'; this compares to 47% of respondents rating their overall experience as 'Good' or 'Very Good', (number of respondents in 2020: 266), (statistical significance, 1: Yes, 2: Yes, 3: Yes).

This final question is the culmination of respondents' opinions following a survey which examines several areas of Oriel. This paints an overall positive picture of Oriel by respondents as almost 50% of respondents rated their overall experience as 'Very Good' or 'Good'. It is of some concern that a large proportion of respondents, accounting for the second-largest proportion of responses, remained neutral on this question; however, there is a statistically significant decrease in this response option compared to 2019 when this response also accounted for the second-largest proportion of responses.

Statistical comparison of 2019 and 2020 responses to this question shows that there has been a significant increase in respondents reporting an overall 'Very Good', but also 'Very

poor', opinion of Oriel. The percentage of respondents who rated their overall experience as 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' has risen from 22.4% to 31.6%.
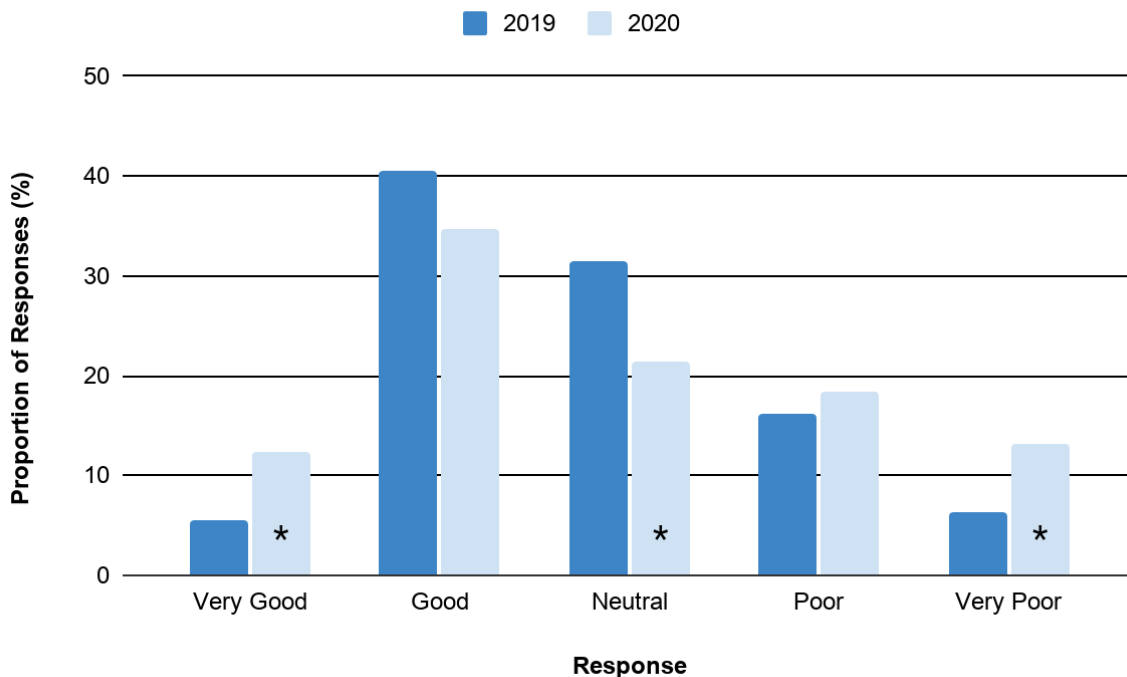

Figure 4.5.1.2: Comparison of 2019 and 2020 responses shows a statistically significant difference in the 'Very Good', 'Neutral' and 'Very Poor' response groups, overall indicating similar, yet more contrary opinions of Oriel in 2020, (number of respondents in 2019: 143, 2020: 266), (statistically significant differences indicated by *).

Some final comments from candidates include:

"Since hearing about Oriel, we were told that this process is about more than just a test and to do more outside of uni. However, yet again, 'bookworms' prevailed. It was disheartening to feel like the extra work put in outside of uni had gone to waste, when it would be considered in a job application on a CV, which this somewhat is."

''I understand that the recruitment process had to be adapted due to COVID-19, however, I believe that cancelling the interviews altogether and relying completely on the situational judgment exam for the rankings was not fair. Students excel in different attributes, completing an interview is a more accurate representation of the level of that student and whether they are suitable as you can see first hand the students communication skills, their experiences and their knowledge.''

''I was satisfied and I found fair the fact that people are not judged for their background (ex nationality, work experience) or university and grades, as I believe that having good marks is not enough to become a good pharmacist. At the same time I do not feel that an impersonal multiple choice test is enough either to test my empathy, critical way of thinking, person centred care and in general the GPhC Standards that each one of us needs to follow throughout the process of becoming a pharmacist.''

5: Closing Statement

In 2020, three years following on from the BPSA's 2017 report, there have been multiple improvements to Oriel as well as significant modifications as a result of the global pandemic. However, some recommendations raised in the 2017 and 2019 reports are highlighted in this report too. The reason for this is that improvement is still needed in these areas. This report has also identified other potential areas for improvement, which are highlighted throughout the report and the recommendations. The BPSA must continue to collect data from future cohorts of Oriel in order to fairly represent the views of the student population on this key element of initial education and training.

6: References

1) Health Education England, NHS Wales. Pre-registration Pharmacist Recruitment Applicant Handbook [Internet]. 2019 July [Cited on 2nd February 2021]. Available from: PreregistrationPharmacyRecruitmentApplicantGuidecommencing2020.pdf (sath.nhs.uk)
2) Paterson A. The British Pharmaceutical Students' Association Oriel Applicant Feedback: HEE Pre-registration Pharmacy Recruitment Operational Group Meeting [Internet]. 2017 November [Cited on 8th December 2019]. Available from: https://www.bpsa.co.uk/static/pdf/c297fbfbf2d9b3524ab2860186d5eeb7.pdf

7: Appendices

7.1: Appendix 1: Survey Questions
*Indicates where a response is required question to proceed

Section One - Demographics

1) Which country do you study in?

Scottish Students Experience of Oriel (optional section)
1) How informed did you feel about the oriel process?
2) Did you feel supported with the change in system?
3) If no, please elaborate and highlight anything that could of improved this
4) Further Comments

Section Two - Online Application Process

1) What do you think of the online application process?*
2) Further Comments
3) What do you think of the applicant handbook?*
4) Further Comments
5) What do you think of the preferencing process?*
6) Further Comments

Section Three - Situational Judgement Test (SJT)

1) What did you think of the situational judgement test (SJT)?*
2) Further Comments
3) Did you complete the SJT in the given time?*
4) Further Comments

Section Four - Numeracy Test

1) What do you think of the numeracy test?*
2) Further Comments
3) Did you complete the numeracy test in the given time?*
4) Further Comments

Section Five - Overall Experience

1) How would you rate your overall experience of applying for pre-registration training?*
2) Further Comments

[END OF REPORT]