

Reaccreditation of a Medicines Counter Assistant programme, Mediapharm

Report of a reaccreditation event, 17 July 2018

Introduction

The General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) is the statutory regulator for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians and is the accrediting body for pharmacy education in Great Britain.

The Medicines Counter Assistant (MCA) course provided by Mediapharm was accredited by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain in 2010 for a period of three years, subject to two conditions.

The MCA course was reaccredited in 2013-14 by the GPhC for a further period of three years, subject to one condition that:

- i. Mediapharm submits a report annually to the GPhC on the development of the programme, including the QA strategy and points raised during the accreditation event. The first report must be submitted in January 2015.

Due to the GPhC consultation in 2017 that looked at the education and training of unregistered pharmacy staff, level 2 (unregistered staff) accreditation activities were suspended and providers were given an extension, initially for a year, and then until the end May 2018. The Council agreed in May 2018 that the executive should continue to quality assure the education of unregistered staff, pending the outcome of further work. In line with the General Pharmaceutical Council's (GPhC's) process for reaccreditation of Medicines Counter Assistant courses, an event was scheduled for 17 July 2018 to review the programme's suitability for reaccreditation.

Reaccreditation was carried out in line with the General Pharmaceutical Council's processes and was to the General Pharmaceutical Council's 2010 standards for accreditation of Medicines Counter Assistant courses, which reflect the knowledge and understanding equivalent to the Pharmacy Services Skills level 2 NVQ (QCF).

Documentation

Documentation was submitted to the GPhC and a pre-event meeting was held on 02 July 2018. The submission referred to one 'hybrid' Healthcare Assistant (HCA) programme, with a separate Medicine Counter Assistant (MCA) exit point at the end of module 12. It was agreed that this exit point was not clearly articulated or defined for the purpose of the reaccreditation event. At the pre-event meeting the GPhC representatives sought clarification around the current MCA offering and the continued plans to run the programme post event, if any. It was agreed that the provider would retain its currently accredited MCA offering, with a defined and clearly articulated exit point, and also seek accreditation for a separate, enhanced DA programme at the accreditation event. Therefore, the event would be a reaccreditation of the current MCA offering and an accreditation of the new DA offering. The MCA provision will be modules 1-12 of the MediaPharm programme of modules and their associated assessment, while the DA provision will be the MCA provision plus the additional modules 13-17 and associated assessment. At the pre-event the provider was also advised of a number of areas within the course documentation that required updating or editing prior to the reaccreditation event. This is a report of the reaccreditation of the MCA course.

The event

The accreditation event was held on 17 July 2018 at the General Pharmaceutical Council offices, London and involved meetings between the GPhC's accreditation team and representatives of the course provider.

The Accreditation Team:

The GPhC accreditation team ('the team') comprised:

Name	Designation at the time of accreditation event
Ms Leonie Milliner*	Accreditation team leader, (lay) Chief Executive Officer, Association for Nutrition
Ms Catherine Davies	Accreditation team member (pharmacy technician), Freelance Education and Training provider
Ms Donna Bartlett	Accreditation team member (pharmacy technician), Locum Technician, Lancashire Teaching Hospitals
Ms Sabina Khanom	Accreditation team member (pharmacist), Patient safety lead (Primary Care), NHS Improvement England

along with:

Name	Designation at the time of visit
Ms Joanne Martin*	Quality Assurance Manager (Education), General Pharmaceutical Council
Mr Chris McKendrick	Quality Assurance Officer (Education), General Pharmaceutical Council
Dr Ian Marshall	Rapporteur, Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology, University of Strathclyde; Proprietor, Caldaran Research (Educational and Writing Services)

*attended pre-visit meeting on 02 July 2018

Declarations of interest

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

The accreditation criteria

	Accreditation team's commentary
1. The Training Programme	<p>All seven criteria relating to the training programme are met with one criterion subject to amendments to the published documentation.</p> <p>The course has been developed by taking into consideration the National Occupational Standards (NOS) as well as the NVQ Level 2 (QCF) and competency and the Diploma in Pharmaceutical Science Level 2 knowledge. The team agreed that the documentation submitted specified the sixteen units defined by the above standards. The course consists of an induction programme designed to give trainees the essentials and to work within their competency in the first 4 weeks of starting, followed by 17 modules. After completing the first 12 modules, the trainee is considered competent to work on the counter and is equivalent to having completed the MCA programme. The programme is delivered online and uses a blended learning approach that reflects Mediapharm research into working practices and learner preferences of the pharmacy team, including use of mobile devices, place of learning, 'just in case' vs 'just in time' learning, gamification and shortening attention spans for formal learning. It was explained that trainees for the Medicines Counter Assistants programme will undertake modules 1-12 of the overall programme, that is: 1. Working in a Pharmacy, 2. Pain, 3. Summer Health, 4. Women's Health, 5. Children's Health, 6. Winter Health, 7. Skin Problems, 8. Indigestion and Bowel Problems, 9. Footcare and First Aid, 10. Healthy Living, 11. Mouthcare, 12. Eyes, Ears and Scalp. The team had sent its comments on the mapping</p>

	<p>exercise of the course to the NOS and NVQ Standards to the provider which, in turn, had commented and made relevant draft alterations to the module documentation. However, the team was cognisant of the fact that these draft alterations had not been finalised in a published online form. Accordingly, the team agreed that the relevant criterion would be met subject to the module documentation being amended formally and sent to the GPhC for approval by the team within a period of four weeks. It was confirmed to the team that the assessment regimen had been reviewed externally on two occasions by external experts. Trainees interviewed by teleconference told the team that the assessments were clear and fair.</p>
<p>2. Academic Management Structures</p>	<p>Three of the four criteria relating to Academic and Management Structures are met.</p> <p>The team, being cognisant of the fact that the programme is delivered online, observed that, despite the objective nature of the online assessments, a considerable amount of human input and associated quality assurance must be involved in the assessment of the case study element of the assessments, and in the assessments of competences. The team noted that the provider's representatives were somewhat unsure when explaining the quality assurance processes in place. The team was told that there is sampling of the tutors, and that the results are examined, for example, in cases where trainees require more than one attempt to pass. The provider's representatives agreed that the case study assessments can be subjective and again indicated that they would examine poor marks. It was stressed that the tutors are provided with guidance notes pertaining to the case studies, so that the tutors know what they are looking for. In this respect, the team was able to interview a small sample of tutors by teleconference and heard that although some tutors were sufficiently confident in their own experience to assess the case studies, others were less sure of the value of the guidance notes. The provider's representatives indicated to the team that they relied on the guidance notes to ensure consistency between different tutors and confirmed that the assessment of both the case studies and the competences is personal and is marked on a pass/fail basis. The case studies are written by the module authors and are reviewed by grassroots pharmacists and by a stakeholder panel, considering any major changes. The cases are refreshed as required, reviewed on a quarterly basis, and overhauled prior to each accreditation event. There is a question bank with a process for balancing the selected questions for an assessment. The questions are randomly selected for different candidates but can be grouped if necessary. Mediapharm must be approached by a tutor or trainee on behalf of any trainee failing an assessment three times and requesting an exceptional fourth attempt. In the hypothetical case of a trainee taking four attempts and then failing a subsequent module, the team was told that the case would likely be escalated to the trainee's superintendent pharmacist for consideration. There has been a soft-launch of the assessment of competencies with a pilot sample scheme having been organised. There has been training to upskill the tutors in the assessment of competence; this will be associated with a CPD module for tutors. The team learned that there is random sampling for quality assurance of the delivery of the programme, to provide clarification of what is expected from tutors and trainees; this may involve visits to pharmacies by the provider.</p> <p>The provider's stakeholder panel has been selected from grassroots pharmacists, representatives from clinical commissioning groups, assistants, with a mix of managers, head office staff and pharmacists. The group meets quarterly, usually by teleconference. Recent items of discussion have included baby care, healthy living pharmacies, and public health. Although there are no patients on the</p>

	<p>stakeholder panel, the patient voice is represented through Dementia Friends, advising on training for dealing with patients and their carers, and advised by Alzheimer’s Society. Trainees interviewed by teleconference told the team that updates are obvious on log-in.</p> <p>Probably due to the small number of trainees to date, there have not been any appeals against assessment decisions. In any future appeal, a Mediapharm internal mentor would communicate with the trainee, and the Director of Learning with the tutor. Any appeal against Mediapharm would be addressed by an internal mentor but might involve the pharmacy company head office. The team was told that any such cases would be referred to an independent assessor, although it was confirmed that there is no written policy on this process at the moment. The team noted that any appeal must be based on a defect in the assessment process rather than against an assessment decision on academic grounds and was told that this referred to the automated regulations for MCQ assessments, but that the regulations needed to be clarified with respect to appeals against decisions on the case studies and competency assessments. The team agreed that it should be a recommendation that the provider should submit to the GPhC the revised examination and appeals regulations to ensure assessment and appeal decisions are fair, robust and draw on best practice within the sector.</p> <p>Noting the outcome of previous reaccreditations in 2010 and 2013 which imposed a condition relating to quality assurance of the programme and the subsequent submission of annual reports and association by the provider, the team agreed that it should be a condition of reaccreditation that the provider must develop and implement a robust and consistently applied quality assurance strategy for the programme and its assessment and processes for the strategy’s continuous review which reflects best practice in the sector. The provider must submit the strategy and provide an annual report demonstrating its fitness for purpose. This relates to criterion 2a. which was not met.</p>
<p>3. Resources</p>	<p>All eight criteria relating to Resources are met.</p> <p>The course is funded as part of a pharmacy subscription to the Mediapharm learning platform. The platform gives pharmacy staff a learning account from which to access the healthcare assistant course as well as a range of supporting material to enhance their learning including monthly category updates, product training, resources and a calendar. The pharmacy manager also receives on-demand access to reports to monitor staff progress and support them. The course team includes the Course Director and the Course Manager along with two course consultants that act in an advisory capacity and four central learning mentors, pharmacists employed on a freelance basis to support trainees and tutors. The attrition rate was estimated at 10% per year. The team was told that the provider was examining ways that it could support trainees and tutors to improve the completion rate. The programme is reviewed every year and feedback rather than data influences course developments. The provider is aware that learning can be personalised for certain trainees by using video presentations rather than pdf documents.</p> <p>The team was concerned that the sample certificates provided as evidence did not clearly differentiate between learners that had passed the Dispensing Assistant course and Medicines Counter Assistant course, and found the title used on both certificates,</p>

	<p>'Healthcare Assistant' confusing. The team was told that the exit point for the Medicines Counter Assistant results in the issue of a digital badge rather than a certificate. The team leader made it clear to the provider's representatives that the awards to the Dispensing Assistants and Medicines Counter Assistants must be differentiated clearly and the provider agreed to action this, modifying the existing Medicines Counter Assistant certificate and the new Dispensing Assistant certificate. Should there be a problem after the automated download of the certificate, for example, a complaint against a tutor, it is possible to suspend the certificate, and the certificate states that any new employer is encouraged to contact Mediapharm for its validation. Pharmacy technicians can now act as tutors for Medicines Counter Assistants; the documentation will be updated to reflect this. There is an online tutor pack with learning and development support material to help with taking assessment decisions, including those based on observation of the trainees. Tutors are required to agree to a learning contract with their trainee to support the trainee. The team was told that although the programme is an e-learning course, in-person sampling of the tutors will take place. If a tutor is identified as not meeting the requirements of the learning contract, an interim Mediapharm tutor would assume the role. The on-site tutor will act as the personal tutor for the trainee to provide immediate advice and support on both academic and pastoral matters; trainees also have access to a Mediapharm learning mentor. Trainees interviewed told the team that the in-store pharmacists were always available for help with understanding concepts and competencies.</p>
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Summary and conclusions

The team agreed to recommend to the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council that MediaPharm should be accredited as a Medicines Counter Assistant course provider for a period of 3 years. There is **one (1) condition** and **one (1) recommendation**:

The condition is:

1. The provider must develop and implement a robust and consistently applied quality assurance strategy for the programme and its assessment and processes for this strategy's continuous review which reflects best practice in the sector. The provider must submit the strategy and provide an annual report demonstrating its fitness for purpose. This is to meet criterion 2(a)

The recommendation is:

2. The provider should submit to the GPhC the revised examination and appeals regulations to ensure assessment and appeal decisions are fair, robust and draw on best practice within the sector. This to meet criterion 2(c).

The full record and report includes other comments from the team and the Registrar regards the record and report in its entirety as its formal view on provision. Providers are required to take all comments into account as part of the reaccreditation process.

As a result of this event, a private record and a public report will be prepared and sent to the provider for it to comment on matters of factual accuracy. Once agreed by the Registrar, both documents will be sent to the provider for its records and the report, along with a formal response from the provider, will be posted on the Council's website for the duration of the accreditation period.

There is a *standing condition* for all course providers, which is that documentary references to the pharmacy regulator must be to the General Pharmaceutical Council. Also, if any other amendments are required to be made to documents for accuracy or completeness, they will be detailed in the record. The provider must detail the changes which have been made with reference to the specific document in the mapping document will be sent to the provider. The provider must also forward each of its certificates to the GPhC for approval.

Please note that the team's recommendations are not binding on the Registrar, who may accept, modify or reject them. Please note that the accreditation team's feedback is confidential until it has been ratified by the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council but it may be shared with staff and trainees internally.

Appendix 1 - Accreditation Criteria for Medicines Counter Assistant training programmes

1. The training programme

- a. The course content covers the knowledge and understanding associated with units Pharm 05 (unit 4) Pharm 07 (unit 5) and Pharm 32 (Unit 15) of the Pharmacy services skills S/NVQ level 2 (QCF) (pre 2016)
- b. The programme is taught at Qualifications Credit Framework level 2.
- c. The programme is planned with reference to the Medicines Counter Assistant template.
- d. For each unit, the transfer of underpinning knowledge into the workplace is demonstrated through the use of a variety of methods

2. Academic and Management Structures

- a. Assessment process and strategies assure appropriate standards in assessment and that students are able to demonstrate fitness for purpose.
- b. In the processes of programme review and development, the training provider has taken account of advances in pharmacy practice, for instance recent POM to P reclassifications, and developments potentially impacting on pharmacy.
- c. Course regulations include procedures for appeals against assessment decisions
- d. Course regulations include procedures for dealing with suspected plagiarism and/or malpractice

3. Resources

- a. Buildings, human, equipment, and other resources available to the training provider are sufficient for the effective delivery of the course to the numbers of students on the course, and overall.
- b. Record keeping systems are able to generate data on candidates completing, completion rates, student sector of practice and disability.
- c. Systems are in place for issuing certificates of completion to successful students in the GPhC's approved format
- d. There is an appropriate mix of tutors, mentors and assessors.
- e. The student has access to a personal tutor or tutors for academic guidance and pastoral care.
- f. The student is instructed in the use of information resources.
- g. There are adequate student feedback mechanisms in place.
- h. The training provider seeks to provide the student with a positive learning experience.

Appendix 2 - Mapping to the programmes requirements

An accredited Medicines Counter Assistant course must cover the content of Units 4 (Pharm 05), 5 (Pharm 07) and 15 (Pharm 32) of the NVQ (QCF) level 2 Pharmacy Services

Unit 4 - Assist in the sale of medicines and products		
To demonstrate knowledge and understanding in this NOS , assistants should be able to apply:	Name of document and unit/module number	Page
<i>Legislation, policy and good practice</i>		
4.1. A working knowledge of the pharmacy protocol on the sale of medicines and SOPs including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) What is listed in them b) How to use them 	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Medicines Counter	1

c) Why it is important that SOPs should be followed at all times	Confidentiality Selling medicines Procedures	1 5 7
4.2. A factual knowledge of the legal responsibility and authority of the pharmacist and others in the organisation	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Colleagues	3
4.3. A working knowledge of legal and ethical requirements for confidentiality	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Confidentiality	1
4.4. A working knowledge of the main actions and side effects of the active ingredients within commonly used non-prescription medicines	Throughout Modules 2-12	
4.5. A working knowledge of the differences between: a) General Sales List (GSL) medicines b) Pharmacy (P) c) Prescription Only Medicines (POM) items	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Medicines	3
<i>Procedures and techniques</i>		
4.6. A working knowledge of the use of questioning techniques such as 2WHAM	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections:	

	WWHAM	6
	ASMETHOD	6
4.7. A working knowledge of the needs of different types of individuals	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Customers Special cases	2 8
4.8. A working knowledge of the sources of information to access	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Information sources	7
4.9. A working knowledge of the information that is suitable to give individuals	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Information sources	7
4.10. A working knowledge of the type of information/advice that needs to be referred to a pharmacist or a pharmacy technician	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Selling medicines WWHAM	5 6

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Unit 5 - Receive prescriptions from individuals		
To demonstrate knowledge and understanding in this NOS , assistants should be able to apply:	Name of document and unit/module number	Page
Legislation, policy and good practice		
5.1 A working knowledge of the importance of working within the limits of their own role and recognising when to refer to an appropriate person	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Taking in prescriptions and handing out medicines	7, 8
5.2 A working knowledge of Standard Operating Procedures regarding the receiving of prescriptions and the importance of adhering to them at all times	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Taking in prescriptions	7, 8
5.3 A working knowledge of current legislation relating to prescription charges and exemptions and differences in practice across the UK	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Prescription charges	11
5.4 A working knowledge of regulations and procedures relating to prescriptions for clinical trials	N/A	
5.5 A working knowledge of the relevant national and local guidelines, policies and procedures that are available and how and when they should be accessed	14 part 1	1, 2
5.6 A working knowledge of the different types of prescribers	1 part 4	11
Specific health related knowledge and skills		
5.7 A working knowledge of the different types of prescriptions and when they are used	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy	

	Sections: NHS prescriptions Understanding private prescriptions	10 12
5.8 A working knowledge of exemptions and how individuals can claim refunds, including the use of official forms and prepayment certificates	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: NHS prescriptions Prepayment Refunds	11 11 12
Procedures and techniques		
5.9 A working knowledge of how to deal with individuals with special needs	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Customers Special cases	2 8
5.10 A working knowledge of the transactional and administration procedures as required by governmental regulations and those that apply to the workplace	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Taking in prescriptions and handing out medicines Understanding the prescription form	7 9

Records and documentation		
5.11 A working knowledge of the importance of maintaining dispensary records	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Records	1

Unit 15 - Assist in the issuing of prescribed items		
To demonstrate knowledge and understanding in this NOS , assistants should be able to apply :	Name of document and unit/module number	Page
Legislation, policy and good practice		
15.1 A working knowledge of the limits of their own role and when to refer to an appropriate person	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Taking in prescriptions and handing out medicines	7, 8
15.2 A working knowledge of principles for issuing dispensed medicines and products and the local Standard Operating Procedures that relate to this	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Taking in prescriptions and handing out medicines Guidelines for handing out prescriptions	7, 8 12
15.3 A working knowledge of the current ethical and legal requirements that govern the issuing of a prescription	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections:	

	Taking in prescriptions and handing out medicines	8
	Guidelines for handing out prescriptions	12
Procedures and techniques		
15.4 A working knowledge of how to deal with individuals with special needs	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Special cases	8
15.5 A working knowledge of the importance of confirming the individual's identity before issuing dispensed items	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Giving out dispensed medicines Guidelines for handing out prescriptions	8 12
15.6 A working knowledge of the importance of providing information on: a) the storage and maintenance of prescribed items b) possible side effects	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Knowing more about medicines Counselling	5 8
Records and documentation		
15.7 A factual knowledge of the importance of maintaining dispensary records including the use of the dispensary computer	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Records	1

15.8 A factual knowledge of how medicines are administered	Module 1 – Working in a Pharmacy Sections: Formulation	5
Materials and equipment		
15.9 A working knowledge of the importance of selecting the correct equipment for use	16 part 2	2
15.10 A working knowledge of the properties of different types of container types and when to use each	16 part 2	2