**General
Pharmaceutical
Council**

MediaPharm support staff courses reaccreditation and accreditation event report, parts 1 and 2, April 2021

Contents

Event summary and conclusions

Provider	MediaPharm
Course	Support staff courses
Names of courses	1. Medicines Counter Assistant (MCA): reaccreditation 2. Dispensing Assistant (DA): accreditation using currently accredited modules 3. Healthcare Assistant (HCA) to be renamed Pharmacy Assistant, combination of MCA and DA: reaccreditation 4. Medicines Stock Assistant: accreditation using currently accredited modules 5. Delivery Driver: accreditation 6. Homecare Customer Service Assistant: accreditation 7. Customer Service Assistant: accreditation 8. Accuracy Checking Dispenser: accreditation (desktop event – please see part 3 report)
Event type	Accreditation and Reaccreditation
Event date	13 April 2021
Approval period	September 2021 – September 2024
Relevant requirements	Requirements for the education and training of pharmacy support staff, October 2020
Framework used	National Occupational Standards
Outcome	Approval with condition The accreditation team agreed to recommend to the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) that the support staff courses listed above should be reaccredited or accredited for a period of three years, subject to one condition and two recommendations.
Conditions	1. That a robust recognition of prior learning policy be designed and implemented. This is to meet criterion 4d. Evidence of this must be submitted to the GPhC for review by the accreditation team by the 30 June 2021.
Standing conditions	A link to the standing conditions can be found here.
Recommendations	1. That the provider undertakes a review of the current quality assurance system in relation to assessment to ascertain if any improvements can be made, and to implement improvements as required. This recommendation is in relation to criteria 3a and 5a.

	2. That the provider undertakes a review of the current stakeholder engagement process to engage with a wider range of stakeholders in a meaningful way. This is in relation to criterion 5a.
Registrar decision	Following the event, the provider submitted a response to the condition of re/accreditation, and the accreditation team agreed it had been met satisfactorily. The Registrar of the GPhC accepted the team's recommendation and approved the re/accreditation of the support staff courses for a period of three years.
Key contact (provider)	Fawz Farhan, Course Manager
Accreditation/Recognition team	Leonie Milliner (team leader), Director of Education, General Optical Council Dr Ruth Edwards (team member – pharmacist), Head of Professional Experience, School of Pharmacy, Aston University Catherine Davies (team member – pharmacy technician), Freelance Education and Training Provider Donna Bartlett (team member – pharmacy technician), Dispensary Team Leader, Lancashire Teaching Hospitals
GPhC representative	Chris McKendrick, Quality Assurance Officer, GPhC
Rapporteur	Jane Smith, Chief Executive Officer, European Association for Cancer Research

Introduction

Role of the GPhC

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 approval process is based on the Requirements for the education and training of pharmacy support staff – October 2020.

GPhC in relation to the accreditation of pharmacy education are legislated in the Pharmacy Order 2010. For more information, visit: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/231/contents/made

Background

Mediapharm was established in 2001 as a distance learning course provider and now delivers a range of online/blended learning accredited pharmacy support staff courses alongside learning and development training and consultancy for pharmacy staff and employers in 300 pharmacies.

The Medicines Counter Assistant (MCA) programme delivered by Mediaharm was first accredited by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society in 2010, and was subsequently reaccredited by the GPhC in 2013 and 2018. At the 2018 event, a Healthcare Assistant programme, for those assisting in delivering a pharmacy service both at the medicines counter and in the dispensary, was accredited for the first time. The course has a current intake of around 150-200 trainees. The provider expects this to grow to 300 with the recent addition of two new pharmacy groups.

At the 2018 accreditation, both courses were subject to one condition and one recommendation. The condition was that the provider 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 reflect best practice in the sector. The provider reviewed and updated its quality assurance strategy and submitted a report to the GPhC in November 2019 giving an overview of the changes.

The recommendation was 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.

Since the last accreditation, a community pharmacy consultant IQA has reviewed and made further recommendations for changes to the quality assurance strategy. Further changes have included:

- making completion and submission of the observation checklist and sign off of workbooks a requirement;
- setting a minimum contact time between tutor and trainee of 8 hours;
- proactive monitoring of trainee progress;
- more robust sampling and plagiarism protection for the invigilated case study; and
- providing record sheets with feedback of sampling to the tutor for their development.

Other changes have been made to the courses as a result of the pharmacy contract, the new GPhC requirements for support staff and more recently the coronavirus pandemic:

- Providing more mentor support to relieve the pressure on in-store tutors.
- Piloting the addition of an invigilated final course assessment to allow for the removal of invigilation of the 17 individual module assessments.
- Giving more flexibility for completion time; pressures during the pandemic have meant some trainees have had their training interrupted and were taking longer to complete, while others had more time to devote to training.
- Giving trainees flexibility to complete modules in any order so that topics are fit better with the pharmacy's training schedule and seasonal calendar
- Creation of a tutor academy with training and resources to help pharmacists and pharmacy technicians develop the skills they need to support trainees through accredited programmes.

- Better signposting from the accredited courses to new product launches, statutory and mandatory training and training required for Pharmacy Quality Payments.
- Introducing reporting technology on the online training platform so that employers and tutors have a better overview of progress through the course and are supported to identify trainees who are not on track.
- Upgrading to a new version of the online training platform with additional functionality to improve the trainee experience.

As a result of stakeholder and client feedback and in response to the new GPhC requirements for support staff training, the provider now intends to expand its portfolio of accredited courses. Accordingly, this event considered both the reaccreditation of the MCA and Healthcare Assistant (to be renamed Pharmacy Assistant) courses, the reaccreditation of a new Dispensing Assistant course combining accredited modules from the MCA and Pharmacy Assistant courses, and the reaccreditation of a suite of new courses for Drivers, Customer Service Assistants, Medicines Stock Assistants and Homecare Customer Service Assistants.

Documentation

Prior to the event, the provider submitted documentation to the GPhC in line with the agreed timescales. The documentation was reviewed by the accreditation team and it was deemed to be satisfactory to provide a basis for discussion.

Pre-event

In advance of the main event, a pre-event meeting took place by videoconference on 24 March 2021. The purpose of the pre-event meeting was to prepare for the event, allow the GPhC and the provider to ask any questions or seek clarification, and to finalise arrangements for the event.

The event

The event began with a private meeting of the accreditation team and GPhC representatives on 12 April 2021. The remainder of the event took place by video-conference on 13 April 2021, and comprised a series of meetings with the provider staff involved in the design of the course(s)/qualification(s).

The accreditation of the Accuracy Checking Dispenser course was conducted by a desktop review by the accreditation team, Catherine Davies abstained from a decision on this course, and the recommendation to the registrar was based on the majority decision. Commentary by the team and subsequent responses from the provider have been copied and pasted into the part 3 report.

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Schedule

The event

Meeting number	Meeting	Time
Day 1 – 12 April 2021		
1.	Private meeting of accreditation team and GPhC representatives	14:00 – 16:30
Day 2 – 13 April 2021		
2.	Private meeting of accreditation team and GPhC representatives	09:30 – 10:00
3.	Accreditation team and GPhC representatives meet with the course provider/awarding organisation representatives	10:00 – 12:30
4.	Meeting with internal and external quality assurance representatives	12:30 – 13:15
5.	Meeting to discuss the learning outcomes	14:15 – 15:00
6.	Private meeting of accreditation team and GPhC representatives	15:00 – 16:00
7.	Feedback to the awarding organisation representatives	16:00 – 16:15

Key findings - Part 1 - Outcomes for all support staff

During the event the accreditation team reviewed all 19 outcomes for all support staff. To gain additional assurance the accreditation team also explored a sample of four learning outcomes during a separate meeting with the provider and was satisfied that **all 19 learning outcomes would be met** to the level required by the GPhC requirements.

Key findings - Part 2: Standards for the initial education and training

Criteria 1: equality, diversity and inclusion

Criteria met? Yes ☒ No ☐ (accreditation team use only)

The team was satisfied that all three criteria relating to equality, diversity and inclusion are or will be met.

The provider has an Equality and Diversity Policy which applies to staff, trainees and customers using its training. Staff are required to complete equality and diversity training. For trainees and their employers, equality and diversity issues are covered in the Learning Contract and the Employer Learning Contract.

Equality and diversity issues are taken into account in the design of the online delivery of the courses. For example, videos and infographics are used to accompany modules to help those with different learning needs and disabilities such as dyslexia and processing disorders. Screen layout, colours and fonts, placement of buttons and text boxes are also considered in the light of current best practice guidance. For trainees that have difficulties with online access, the provider offers alternative paper-based learning.

Equality and diversity are covered in all the provider's courses. The principles outlined in the GPhC core learning outcomes and National Occupational Standards are covered in the foundation modules and in the role-specific training with the additional context of person-centred care. The Equality and Diversity Level 1 training (from Health Education England) is made available from the learning platform.

Systems are in place to capture equality and diversity data via enrolment forms, helpdesk queries and end of course feedback. These data are used to inform policies and processes as well as being acted on individually where advice or adjustments are required. Staff training has been updated as a result of the analysis of these data and some changes have been made to course content. For example, case studies have been updated to reflect more diverse patient and carer populations.

Reasonable adjustments are made to training and assessment when needed. Trainees are asked to disclose learning needs at enrolment and are signposted to support as appropriate. The most common adjustment is for additional time to be given for assessments. Other adjustments are made on a case-by-case basis after discussion between the candidate and the provider. The provider liaises with the tutor to ensure that adjustments are made.

Criteria 2: course curriculum

Criteria met? Yes ☒ No ☐ (accreditation team use only)

The team was satisfied that all six criteria relating to course curriculum are or will be met.

All trainees on all courses are now required to complete seven foundation modules that meet the GPhC core learning outcomes, before completing role-specific training. The foundation modules are:

- Introduction to Pharmacy
- Working with Customers
- Working in a Team
- Introduction to Communication
- Introduction to Data Security Awareness
- Introduction to Health & Safety
- Introduction to Safeguarding

The provider was seeking reaccreditation for two courses:

- Medicines Counter Assistant (MCA), comprised of 12 modules (in addition to the foundation modules) that meet the relevant National Occupational Standard (NOS) for assisting in the sale of medicines and products and receiving prescriptions and issuing prescribed items. The modules are:
    - Working in a Pharmacy
    - Pain
    - Summer Health
    - Women's Health
    - Children's Health
    - Winter Health
    - Skin Problems
    - Indigestion and Bowel Problems
    - Footcare and First Aid
    - Healthy Living
    - Mouthcare
    - Eyes, Ears and Scalp
- Healthcare Assistant (HCA) to be renamed Pharmacy Assistant, comprised of the foundation and MCA course modules followed by an additional 5 dispensary modules.
    - Communication
    - Laws
    - Teamwork
    - Dispensing
    - Stock

In addition, the provider has designed a new course from existing modules in accredited courses:

- Dispensing Assistant (DA): comprised of the foundation modules, the Working in a Pharmacy module from the MCA course and the five Dispensary modules from the Pharmacy Assistant course.

The provider is also seeking accreditation for four new courses, comprised of the foundation modules and relevant role-specific content:

- Medicines Stock Assistant
- Delivery Driver

- Homecare Customer Service Assistants
- Customer Service Assistant

The courses are all delivered as blended learning, with content available online and tasks to be completed in the workplace. They are mapped to the relevant NOS (see Part 3 reports). Demand for a course is typically identified by employers. The provider engages with employers to understand in detail the role that is undertaken. This includes interviews with support staff and site visits to pharmacies as well as dialogue with employers. If a training need is identified, the provider reviews the role against the NOS and maps specific functions to both the NOS and the GPhC learning outcomes for all support staff. Content and assessments are then developed to ensure that the NOS and learning outcomes are delivered and assessed at the appropriate level (RQF level 2).

A quality assurance consultant with significant experience of teaching and assessing Level 2 and Level 3 pharmacy services courses and qualifications has been engaged to assist with the course design and benchmarking the courses at RQF Level 2. The provider also reviewed other courses currently available at similar levels and mapped against the NOS. The team was satisfied that appropriate benchmarking has been undertaken at the course design stage and advised the provider to periodically benchmark the NOS to RQF Level 2 to satisfy themselves that the course continues to be delivered and assessed at this level.

The purpose, learning outcomes and content of the courses are detailed to the trainee at the outset of the course. This information is included in the Trainee Handbook and the Observational Checklist.

Trainees are permitted to have content from older courses and qualifications recognised towards the current course. In order to ensure that the outcomes of the NOS will be met, the provider will look in detail at the content of previous courses and map this to the current provision. They will consider imposing a time limit on the completion of previous courses, to ensure that knowledge and experience are up to date.

Courses are clearly set out online. The system also tracks progress and sets reminders to help trainees stay on track. This is explained in the Trainee Handbook. The online layout is based on workplace learning principles and best practice. The platform gives trainees the flexibility to complete training in different branches, at home, or on mobile devices and gives tutors access to trainee completion records and reminders

Course content and assessments can be provided in paper format rather than online. In the case of assessments with randomly generated questions, the provider will manage this by either allowing the tutor to read out the question from the screen and input answers on the trainee's behalf, or by generating the assessment at head office and send it to the trainee for completion under invigilation.

There is a process for review and updating of content. The online format means amendments to reflect changes in practice and law can be implemented swiftly and these are flagged up when the trainee opens their account. This means that trainees who have completed the affected module or have completed the programme also receive the information.

Criteria 3: assessment

Criteria met? Yes ☒ No ☐ (accreditation team use only)

The team was satisfied that all four criteria relating to assessment are or will be met. One recommendation was made.

An assessment strategy sets out how trainees will be assessed to allow confirmation of knowledge, practical ability and safe practice. It also sets out how the assessments are reviewed and quality assured. The assessments are also mapped to the required learning outcomes.

Assessments for each course are a mixture of:

- Online module and course MCQ assessments to test knowledge.
- Randomly selected case studies. These are conducted by the tutor who has discussion points available to help assess knowledge and understanding of the scenario presented. The tutor acts as an expert witness to verify completion to required standards.
- Observation of practical ability by the tutor guided by an observation checklist. The observation covers the practical aspects of the NOS and is completed over the space of at least a week. The checklist requires comment from the tutor as an expert witness as to how the trainee shows competence, and acts as a 'declaration of competence' sign off on practical ability and knowledge covering the NOS standards by a registered pharmacy professional.

Assessment regulations have been developed to ensure only those that have gained the required knowledge and met the required performance criteria can progress and pass the course. Processes are in place to identify and support underperforming trainees.

The Trainee Handbook sets out the expectation of trainees working in a pharmacy setting to prioritise patient safety. The Handbook also explains that learning outcomes are achieved through assessment and expert witness sign off of practice with the ultimate aim of protecting patient safety. The workbooks, case studies and observation checklists are designed to help tutors monitor and verify that support staff are practising safely and effectively. Case studies and observation checklists are submitted to the provider before the final course MCQ assessment is released.

The provider generates and analyses data from online assessments. For example, questions that are frequently answered incorrectly are reviewed to see if they are unclear or with a view to covering the topic more fully in the course. This also provides reassurance that all trainees meet all learning outcomes.

Exceptional circumstances can lead to a trainee being eligible for a fourth resit of a failed assessment. There are no fixed criteria for these decisions, with cases being reviewed on an individual basis.

The provider assures itself that tutor assessments are consistent across practice settings by giving tutors sample answers for case studies and observations to provide a baseline on which to base their assessments. The provider takes a 10% sample of case studies and workbooks each year, with reviews taking place each quarter. The review focuses on the trainee's work and on the feedback provided by the tutor. Feedback is rated as either 'good' or 'inadequate'. For any inadequate ratings, the tutor is contacted to explore issues and identify means of improvement.

Although the team acknowledge the sampling-based model to assessment, it would like to see an increased use of risk assessment to inform reviews and sampling of assessment materials and decisions. This is especially important given the increase of new courses offered and projected increase in the number of trainees on the courses. It is therefore a **recommendation** that the provider undertake a review of the current quality assurance system in relation to assessment to ascertain if any improvements can be made, and to implement improvements as required.

If a trainee fails an assessment attempt, the tutor is required to go through the assessment with the trainee, identify gaps in knowledge and signpost them to resources and support before they resit the assessment. The observation checklist also provides an opportunity for the tutor to review practice and give feedback. The case studies are designed to be delivered as a discussion, again providing an opportunity for feedback.

Criteria 4: management, resources and capacity

Criteria met? Yes ☐ No ☒ (accreditation team use only)

The team was satisfied that seven of the eight criteria relating to management, resources and capacity are or will be met with one criterion subject to a condition.

The team found that resources, systems and processes are adequate at present, but advised the provider to have due regard to scaling up in all areas should the number of trainees increase significantly.

A Learning Contract is presented to the trainee to show the roles and responsibilities of trainee, tutor (representing the employer) and the provider. This must be read, understood and signed by both trainee and tutor to confirm agreement. The trainee cannot start the programme until this has been signed. It is reviewed annually to see if anything needs adding or changing. The provider monitors trainee completion times and if there are concerns will check that the learning contract is being adhered to.   There is a separate Employer Learning Contract that needs to be agreed before enrolling the trainee onto the course.

Trainees are made aware of course and examination regulations via the Handbook and other online resources made available to them when they enrol for the course. They can also seek support and advice from a mentor at any point. The process for trainees to raise concerns during their course is also set out in the handbook and the learning contract. One of the course mentors is also available at any time if a trainee feels unable to raise issues with their tutor or employer.

The provider has not received a formal complaint, but does have a complaints process with clear timescales and stages. If necessary, a complaint can be escalated to an external third party.

The team asked for more details of the provider's policy and processes for the recognition of prior learning (RPL). The provider stated that the policy is not yet written. Although the team acknowledge that a policy has been considered, there was little evidence of how this would be implemented for each course type. It is therefore a **condition** of accreditation and reaccreditation that a robust RPL policy should be designed and implemented. Evidence of this must be submitted to the GPhC for review by the accreditation team by the 30 June 2021.

Criteria 5: quality management

The team was satisfied that all four criteria relating to quality management are or will be met. One criterion requires minor amendment and one recommendation was made.

The Quality Assurance Strategy for the courses has been revised since the last accreditation, with input from an external quality assurance consultant. Quality assurance review and evaluation procedures are also in place and include processes for quality assuring content and delivery, and staff and trainee support. The quality assurance consultant has had some input into the design of the new courses, especially the curriculum and assessment content, with a view to minimum safe practice. On an on-going basis, he reviews tutor feedback and gives comments to the provider with recommendations for action. (Refer to Criteria 3 for a recommendation relating to the quality assurance of assessments).

Stakeholder input was sought to inform the original MCA and DA course design. Since then, patient groups have been consulted on the design of specific modules. For example, baby services groups, dementia support groups, and suicide training networks have all been involved. Although the accreditation team noted this stakeholder and patient engagement, it would like to see a broader range of stakeholders, including patients and the public, involved in the development and review of the courses. This should happen periodically to reflect changes in pharmacy services. It is therefore a **recommendation** that the provider undertake a review of their current stakeholder engagement process to engage with a wider range of stakeholders in a meaningful way.

Feedback is collected from trainees and employers via:

- End of module feedback
- End of course feedback
- Helpdesk enquiries
- Monthly calls with pharmacy group employer superintendent or learning and development (L&D) lead
- Ad hoc calls from owners
- A pharmacy expert panel focus group

Feedback is reviewed quarterly and decisions made on actions and timelines.

There is no formal record of the quality assurance consultant's involvement in the sampling and feedback process; a signature box should be added to the verification template, alongside that of the tutor and mentor.

Appropriate processes are in place to ensure course content is updated according to changes in law and good practice. Tutors and trainees receive ad hoc notice of any changes to practice via the provider. More routine changes are made to documentation on a quarterly or annual basis, as appropriate.

Criteria 6: supporting learners and the learning experience

Criteria met? Yes ☒ No ☐ (accreditation team use only)

The team was satisfied that all five criteria relating to supporting learners and the learning experience are or will be met.

Trainees are provided with guidance on how they will be supported via the Trainee Handbook and the Learning Contract. The tutor who will be supporting them and supervising them at the workplace is also provided with their own training account and a tutor pack with guidance notes. Trainees also have access to a mentor employed by the provider to support them in their learning, address any problems and provide pastoral care in confidence. Confidentiality is assured via the use of a generic Helpdesk email address which is used to request personal contact with a tutor.

The Employer Learning Contract that details the commitment that employers need to give to trainees and their tutors to support training. If the needs of the trainee are not being met by the tutor, the provider will contact the tutor and/or the employer to facilitate a resolution. Where there is disruption in tutor support, for example absence or use of locums, the provider will contact the employer to ascertain how and if the obligation can be met. A mentor can take on the role of tutor until the situation is resolved but the observation checklist and declaration of competence must always be signed off by a designated expert witness allocated by the employer.

The provider detailed plans to support students during the 'teach out' of the currently accredited courses (MCA and Pharmacy Assistant). In discussion with the team at the event, the provider stated that they would now only allow a one year teach out period. After this, trainees will be advised to start the course again, with no recognition of prior learning. This is to ensure knowledge and skills are up to date.

Part 3 - Role-specific learning outcomes

Please see the individual courses' part 3 reports for commentary.