

Reaccreditation of a Medicines Counter Assistant training programme, Scientia Skills Ltd

Report of a reaccreditation event, 18 September 2015

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.

Scientia Skills was first accredited by the previous regulator, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPSGB), in July 2010 to provide a Medicines Counter Assistant training programme for a period of 3 years. In line with the General Pharmaceutical Council's process for reaccreditation, an event was scheduled for 17 June 2013 to review the programme's suitability for reaccreditation. On that occasion, the accreditation team agreed to recommend to the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council that the programme should be reaccredited for a full period of three years, subject to the condition that there must be parity between the online and paper-based form of assessment. This condition was to meet criterion 2a, because the team viewed the current process as advantageous to candidates undertaking the paper-based test. These candidates were able to view the whole paper from the beginning, whereas those candidates undertaking the online assessment could not go back and forth if they wanted to check their work. Moreover, the environment and conditions under which the test was taken were different and could be viewed as providing an unequal opportunity for the candidates taking the paper-based assessment. This condition was met and the online system now allows the whole paper to be viewed, with candidates being able to attempt questions in any order and to review/correct their responses before final submission.

A reaccreditation event was scheduled for 18 September 2015. 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 three units of the Pharmacy Services Skills level 2 NVQ (QCF) (see Appendix 1).

Documentation

Documentation was submitted to the GPhC and a pre-event meeting was held on 20 August 2015. At the pre-event meeting, Scientia Skills was advised of a number of areas within the course documentation, especially relating to the mapping of the programme to units Pharm 05 (unit 4) Pharm 07 (unit 5) and Pharm 32 (Unit 15) of the Pharmacy services skills S/NVQ level 2 (QCF), that required updating prior to the reaccreditation event. The following documents were submitted by the provider in advance of the reaccreditation event:

- Completed application template for accreditation of a medicines counter assistant programme
- Supporting materials: See Appendix 3

The event

The reaccreditation event was held on 18 September 2015 at the General Pharmaceutical Council, 25, Canada Square, London E14 5LQ and comprised a series of meetings with representatives of the training provider and current trainees on the programme.

The Accreditation Team:

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

Name	Designation at the time of accreditation event
Mr Peter Curphey*	Accreditation team leader, Pharmacy Consultant
Ms Catherine Davies	Accreditation team member (pharmacy technician), Health Science Co-ordinator, Stoke on Trent College
Ms Emma Walker	Accreditation team member (pharmacy technician), VQ Training Specialist, London Pharmacy Education and Training
Ms Leonie Milliner	Accreditation team member (Lay member) Chief Executive Association for Nutrition

along with:

Name	Designation at the time of visit
Ms Jenny Clapham*	Quality Assurance Officer (Education), General Pharmaceutical Council
Professor Brian Furman	Rapporteur, Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology, University of Strathclyde

*attended the pre-event meeting on 20 August 2015

Declarations of interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

The accreditation criteria

	Accreditation team's commentary
1. The Training Programme	<p>The programme, which is taught at Qualifications Credit framework level 2, is for staff members involved in the sale of over the counter medicines and who have not already completed a recognised pharmacy counter assistant training programme. The programme is mapped to the relevant units of the Medicines Counter Assistant template (see Appendix 2) and comprises a Trainee Guide, Tutor Guide and 11 workbooks covering the essentials of pharmacy, and the provision of advice on a range of common disorders and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Trainees are assessed on content of the material in the workbooks. The assessments comprise the activities required of trainees that run throughout each workbook and that are reviewed by the tutor, as well as 10 multiple choice questions (MCQs) undertaken at the end of each workbook. The latter assessment has a passmark of 70% and can be taken online or in paper format; 53% of trainees had used the online tests, compared with 47% using the paper-based system. Trainees are regularly reviewed against a checklist by their tutors, who must be either pharmacists or pharmacy technicians; at the end of the programme, tutors are required to sign a declaration of competence for each trainee. The programme requires 12-52 weeks for completion with an average completion time of 35 weeks.</p> <p>All four criteria relating to the training programme (Appendix 1) are met.</p>
2. Academic Management Structures	<p>There are systems in place for reviewing tests the MCQ tests and activities associated with each of the workbooks. Each candidate is allowed a maximum of four attempts to pass each test; those failing after a second attempt receive appropriate feedback and support and very few trainees require a fourth attempt. The protocols for using online or paper-based tests were described in the documentation and some aspects were demonstrated to the team; these protocols ensure that on repeat testing trainees will not encounter the same questions twice. The system requires the presence of the tutor, who logs on for the candidate using a secure, unique password that is generated for each day. For each test, 10 questions are randomly selected from a bank of 40 for each workbook. These questions are devised and reviewed by a Quality Assurance Panel, which also adjudicates on queries from candidates or tutors concerning any problems relating to questions; there is also an external, independent Pharmacist Associate who will investigate situations arising from a candidate's dissatisfaction with the Quality Assurance Panel's decision. The Review Panel changes the questions every six months and reviews questions monthly for ambiguity, fairness and difficulty. The system provides feedback to the trainees on which answers were correct/incorrect; feedback was considered to be important to support learning and to ensure that trainees do not continue into practice with incorrect knowledge. The team was reassured that the number of questions in the bank, along with the random selection process, was sufficient to ensure that knowledge of these could not be transmitted to other trainees. However, the team was concerned that the quality assurance of the questions and the question paper was not undertaken independently of the group responsible for writing the questions; this resulted in a recommendation (See 'Summary and conclusion') that Scientia Skills should review the quality assurance processes for the programme, in particular the mechanisms for assuring the assessments and course materials, in order to ensure the independent nature of these quality assurance processes.</p>

	<p>The Quality Assurance Panel also reviews the whole programme every six months; these reviews use information gathered through online/paper-based questionnaires which are submitted by all tutors and trainees, once the trainee has completed the programme. Completing trainees are required to submit their feedback questionnaires before they are issued with their certificates. Feedback is also obtained from trainees who have failed the programme, in order to ensure that all possible support had been provided. There are also reviews every two months and any updates necessitated by changes/advances in pharmacy practice are posted on the website for those trainees using the online system, or are printed and posted to those using the paper-based system; these changes are subsequently incorporated into the hard copies of workbooks on reprinting.</p> <p>All four criteria relating to Academic and Management Structures (Appendix 1) are met.</p>
<p>3. Resources</p>	<p>Trainees are accepted on the basis of contractors'/clients' decisions to register their staff members on the programme. Between July 2013 and July 2015, there had been 245 registered trainees; 237 trainees had completed successfully during this period, with only three failures; 97 had left the programme. The planned number of trainees for the period 2015-2016 is around 300. Each trainee has a tutor who is either a pharmacist or a pharmacy technician based in the trainee's workplace; where no tutor is available, Scientia Skills Ltd undertakes to provide one. Tutors provide support for the trainees, who are also encouraged to seek support from their workplace colleagues, although there is no formal mentorship arrangement. The tutors' responsibilities are defined in a 'Tutor Guide' handbook and the trainees are also made aware of what they can expect from their tutors, for example, in relation to frequency of meetings, through the 'Trainee Guide', which also includes advice for trainees on contacting Scientia Skills for assistance/guidance if they are experiencing problems with their tutors, as well as signposting them to other organisations from which they can seek support. There is no formal induction process for tutors, but the Tutor Guide handbook describes how the company can be contacted by telephone or e-mail for support and advice. The programme is managed by the full-time director of the company, along with a support executive and part-time learning and development support for the tutors and trainees; there are also two non-executive Associates who are contracted to provide support and advice as and when required. The staffing level is monitored and additional staff members are employed when necessary; the staffing level was considered sufficient to deal with the current volume of trainees but staffing is monitored regularly and an increase of 20% above the predicted numbers will initiate the appointment of a further member of staff.</p> <p>Resources include a tracking system that generates a report for each trainee; this can be accessed by the client/contractor and provides detailed information on the trainee, including dates when the trainee is due to take tests for each workbook, the marks achieved for each test and the completion date for the programme. This information is retained for each trainee as a record, which also includes a full history with details such as ethnicity and disabilities. The system also allows the tracking of individual pharmacies within a multiple. Reports are also generated for tutors, this being especially valuable where tutors may have several trainees. Where there has been no contact with trainees over a four-week period, or where they had not completed a test, the trainees are contacted to discuss any problems and to keep them motivated. Moreover, those trainees failing on a second sitting would be contacted by one</p>

	of Scientia's pharmacists to go through the questions and to provide guidance on the relevant sections of the workbook.
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All eight criteria relating to Resources (Appendix 1) are met.

Summary and conclusions

The team has agreed to recommend to the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) that Scientia Skills Ltd should be reaccredited as a Medicines Counter Assistant training course provider for a further period of three years. There were no conditions.

The team made the following recommendation:

1. Scientia Skills Ltd should review the quality assurance processes for its programme, in particular the mechanisms for assuring the assessments and course materials to ensure the independent nature of the QA processes.

Standing conditions of accreditation:

1. The full record and report include 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.
2. Any required amendments to be made to documents for accuracy or completeness have been identified and are detailed in the record. The provider must confirm the changes have been made but the GPhC does not require documents to be submitted for its approval.
3. The provider must respond to the definitive version of the record and report within three months of receipt. The summary report, along with the provider's response, will be published on the GPhC's website and remain for the duration of the accreditation period. The record remains confidential to the provider and the GPhC.
4. On an annual basis, all institutions and other providers approved by the GPhC must give such information and assistance as the GPhC may reasonably require including changes to the curriculum and/or resources.

The provider was asked to note the following:

1. The programme is not reaccredited until approval has been given by the Registrar.
2. The team's recommendations are not binding on the Registrar, who may accept, modify or reject them.
3. The accreditation team's feedback is confidential until it has been ratified by the Registrar of the GPhC but may be shared with staff and students internally.

The *Pharmacy Order 2010* states:

Schedule 1

The Council's duties in respect of publications

1. (2) The Council may from time to time publish or provide in such manner as it sees fit guidance to registrants, employers and such other persons as it considers appropriate in respect of the standards for the education, training, supervision and performance of persons who are not registrants but who provide services in connection with those provided by registrants.

Reference: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/231/contents/made>

Following the above event, the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council subsequently accepted the accreditation team's recommendation and approved the course for reaccreditation for a further period of three years, until the end of November 2018.

Appendix 1 - Accreditation Criteria

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)
- 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. Assessments have been developed by subject experts from the Pharmacy sector and directly relate to modules contained in the syllabus for the Medicines Counter Assistants template.

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: a) What is listed in them b) How to use them c) Why it is important that SOPs should be followed at all times	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P8-9, 25-29
4.2. A factual knowledge of the legal responsibility and authority of the pharmacist and others in the organisation	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P10-15
4.3. A working knowledge of legal and ethical requirements for confidentiality	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P1-4
<i>Specific health related knowledge and skills</i>		
4.4. A working knowledge of the main actions and side effects of the active ingredients within commonly used non-prescription medicines	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1 Workbook 2: The essential sof pharmacy 2 Workbooks 3-11 descriptions of active ingredients and their actions and side effects	P46, P56-57 P5-10
4.5. A working knowledge of the differences between: a) General Sales List (GSL) medicines b) Pharmacy (P) c) Prescription Only Medicines (POM) items	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P16-19
<i>Procedures and techniques</i>		
4.6. A working knowledge of the use of questioning techniques such as 2WHAM	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P42-55

	Workbooks 3-11 WWHAM boxes throughout	
4.7. A working knowledge of the needs of different types of individuals	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	p21-23, p30-38
4.8. A working knowledge of the sources of information to access	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1 Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P8-10 P12-14
4.9. A working knowledge of the information that is suitable to give individuals	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1 Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2 Workbooks 3-11 throughout	P8-10 P12-14
4.10. A working knowledge of the type of information/advice that needs to be referred to a pharmacist or a pharmacy technician	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P1, p5-8, p30, p39-41

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	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1 Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P5-8, p30, p33 P16-17, p28, p35, p38, p41-43
5.2 A working knowledge of Standard Operating Procedures regarding the receiving of prescriptions and the importance of adhering to them at all times	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1 Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P25-29 P38
5.3 A working knowledge of current legislation relating to prescription charges and exemptions and differences in practice across the UK	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P29-36
5.4 A working knowledge of regulations and procedures relating to prescriptions for clinical trials	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P32-33
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	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P29-36
5.6 A working knowledge of the different types of prescribers	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P17

Specific health related knowledge and skills		
5.7 A working knowledge of the different types of prescriptions and when they are used	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P18-27
5.8 A working knowledge of the details required on a prescription and why they are necessary	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P24-27
5.9 A working knowledge of exemptions and how individuals can claim refunds, including the use of official forms and prepayment certificates	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P29-34
Procedures and techniques		
5.10 A working knowledge of how to deal with individuals with special needs	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P21-23, p30-38
5.11 A working knowledge of the transactional and administration procedures as required by governmental regulations and those that apply to the workplace	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P14-15, p29-34, p46
Records and documentation		
5.12 A working knowledge of the importance of maintaining dispensary records	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1 Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P20-21 P46

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	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P41-43
15.2 A working knowledge of principles for issuing dispensed medicines and products and the local Standard Operating Procedures that relate to this	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1 Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P25-29 P39-43
15.3 A working knowledge of the current ethical and legal requirements that govern the issuing of a prescription	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P41
Procedures and techniques		
15.4 A working knowledge of how to deal with individuals with special needs	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P21-23, p30-38
15.5 A working knowledge of the importance of confirming the individual's identity before issuing dispensed items	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P39, p41

15.6 A working knowledge of the importance of providing information on: a) the storage and maintenance of prescribed items b) possible side effects	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P9. P46
	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P41-45
Records and documentation		
15.7 A factual knowledge of the importance of maintaining dispensary records including the use of the dispensary computer	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P21-21
	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P46
15.8 A factual knowledge of how medicines are administered	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P1-4
Materials and equipment		
15.9 A working knowledge of the importance of selecting the correct equipment for use	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P1-4
15.10 A working knowledge of the properties of different types of container types and when to use each	Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1	P36
	Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2	P1-4

Appendix 3 – Supporting documentation

1. CVs for Rachel Marchant, Emma Grace, Emma Lewis, Matthew Howard, Trudi Loader, Helen Root
2. Welcome to the Medicine Counter Assistant Programme letter (included in the box with the training materials)
3. Medicine Counter Assistant Programme Regulations (including appeals, assessment and plagiarism) (included in the box with the training materials and on the reverse of the above Welcome letter)
4. Medicine Counter Assistant Programme registration form for the programme (included in the box with the training materials)
5. MCA Letter for registration – paper testing (following the receipt of the registration form)
6. MCA Letter for registration – online testing (following the receipt of the registration form)
7. MCA letter for paper test
8. Sample paper test (The essentials of pharmacy 1 Test 1)
9. MCA online testing instruction page
10. Tutor Guide (learning contract p21)
11. Trainee Guide (learning contract p19)
12. Workbook 1: The essentials of pharmacy 1
13. MCQs for workbook 1
14. Workbook 2: The essentials of pharmacy 2
15. MCQs for workbook 2
16. Workbook 3: Advising on pain
17. MCQs for workbook 3
18. Workbook 4: Advising on coughs and colds
19. MCQs for workbook 4
20. Workbook 5: Advising on digestive disorders
21. MCQs for workbook 5
22. Workbook 6: Advising on hay fever, sleep and eye disorders
23. MCQs for workbook 6
24. Workbook 7: Advising on skin problems
25. MCQs for workbook 7
26. Workbook 8: Advising on travel health

27. MCQs for workbook 8
28. Workbook 9: Advising on infant feeding and childhood ailments
29. MCQs for workbook 9
30. Workbook 10; Advising on contraception, conception and urinary tract disorders
31. MCQs for workbook 10
32. Workbook 11: Advising on a healthy lifestyle
33. MCQs for workbook 11
34. Medicines Counter Assistant Tutor questionnaire
35. Medicines Counter Assistant Programme Trainee questionnaire
36. Sample certificate
37. MCA Letter to accompany certificate