

Open Awards pharmacy technician training qualification interim report, July 2023



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Event summary and conclusions

Awarding organisation	Open Awards
Qualification	Pharmacy Technician qualifications
Names of qualification	Open Awards Level 3 Diploma in the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Technicians (RQF) Open Awards Level 3 Diploma in the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Technicians (Integrated Apprenticeship) (RQF)
Event type	Interim
Event date	18 July 2023
Approval period	January 2020 – January 2026
Relevant requirements	Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacy technicians, October 2017
Outcome	Continued accreditation/recognition The recognition team agreed to recommend to the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) that the pharmacy technician qualifications provided by Open Awards should continue to be recognised for the remainder of the recognition period, subject to one condition and one recommendation.
Conditions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Open Awards must develop and implement a process to ensure that centre providers use equality and diversity data while designing and delivering courses. This is to ensure that centre providers' policies and procedures are fair and do not discriminate against trainees or applicants, and may include analysis of the data to identify themes, trends, and actions based on protected characteristics. This must be monitored in a meaningful way by Open Awards. This is because although the team could see evidence that Open Awards encourages centre providers to collect equality and diversity data, it was unclear how that data was used by centre providers, and monitored by Open Awards, to ensure it was being utilised in delivery of the qualification. This is to meet criterion 2.2 <p>Evidence of how the condition has been addressed must be sent to the GPhC, for approval by the recognition team. This must be done by 19 September 2023.</p>
Standing conditions	A link to the standing conditions can be found here .
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Open Awards should develop and implement a process to ensure that centre providers obtain views from a range of stakeholders,

	<p>specifically patients and the public. This is because the team could see that Open Awards is engaging with patients and public, but this should also be undertaken by centre providers. This relates to criterion 5.5.</p>
Registrar decision	<p>The Registrar is satisfied that Open Awards has met the requirement of continued approval in accordance with Part 5 article 42 paragraph 4(a)(b) of the Pharmacy Order 2010, in line with the Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacy technicians October 2017.</p> <p>The Registrar confirms that Open Awards is approved to continue to offer the Pharmacy Technician qualifications for the remainder of the recognition period. The Registrar notes that the condition as outlined in the report has been met.</p>
Key contact (provider)	Nina Hinton, Director of Business and Development
Awarding organisation representatives	<p>Nina Hinton, Director of Business and Development, Open Awards</p> <p>Richard Spencer, Director of Quality and Standards, Open Awards</p> <p>Robin Jackson, Director of Assessment Services, Open Awards</p> <p>Helen Abbott, External Quality Assurer, Open Awards</p> <p>Dean Moriarty, External Quality Assurer, Open Awards</p> <p>Avinash Malhi, Head of Centre, Inspire Middlesex (centre provider)</p> <p>Satvinder Mahal, pharmacist, lead tutor, Inspire Middlesex (centre provider)</p>
Recognition team	<p>Rebecca Chamberlain (Team Leader - pharmacy technician), Training Pharmacy Technician Independent Consultant</p> <p>Sheetal Jogia (team member - pharmacy technician), Head of Education and Training, Pharmacy Technical Services, Bart's Health Pharmaceuticals (BHP), Bart's Health NHS Trust</p> <p>Joanne Bye (team member - pharmacy technician), Principal Pharmacy Technician, Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (SNEEICB)</p> <p>Fiona Barber (team member - lay), Deputy Chair & Independent Lay member, East Leicestershire & Rutland CC</p>
GPhC representative	Rakesh Bhundia. Quality Assurance Officer (Education), General Pharmaceutical Council
Rapporteur	Ian Marshall, Proprietor, Caldarvan Research (Educational and Writing Services); Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology, University of Strathclyde

Introduction

Role of the GPhC

The General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) is the statutory regulator for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians and registered pharmacy premises in England, Scotland and Wales (the countries of Great Britain). In order to practise in Great Britain, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians must be registered with the GPhC and have satisfied us that they meet our detailed requirements. If you are a training provider or awarding body, you will need to follow the process set out **Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacy technicians, October 2017** to have your pharmacy technician competency and knowledge-based course/qualification approved by us.

The powers and obligations of the 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>

Purpose of this event

The purpose of the interim event is to review the performance of the qualification against the education and training of pharmacy technicians to ensure that delivery is consistent with the GPhC education standards. The interim event utilises trainee feedback and evaluation together with a review of documentation and a meeting with the awarding organisation representatives and relevant stakeholders.

Background

Open Awards approached the GPhC in 2019 with an application for recognition of a qualification to train pharmacy technicians. Open Awards had worked as part of a group of awarding organisations, facilitated by Skills for Health, and supported by Health Education England, throughout the development of this qualification. The development process included working closely with pharmacy technicians and pharmacists to design the learning outcomes, assessment criteria and indicative content, underpinned by an external consultation. A recognition event (Stage 1) relating to the GPhC learning outcomes was held on 11 April 2019. In line with the GPhC's standards for the initial education and training of pharmacy technicians, October 2017 (integrated knowledge and competency), a further event (Stage 2) took place on 5 November 2019 to review the Open Awards qualification's suitability for recognition; this event concentrated on the fulfilment of the GPhC accreditation and recognition standards and criteria and the awarding organisation's ability to deliver the qualification through their centre providers. The event was held on site at the provider's head office. The then recognition team agreed to recommend to the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) that Open Awards should be recognised to deliver the L3 Diploma in the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Technician (Qualification) for a period of six years with an interim visit in 3 years subject to one condition. The team recognised that in respect of the qualification delivery, substantive material needed to be developed by the centre providers. The condition was that there be a report sent to the GPhC on the development of qualification support materials, centre resource requirements, assessment strategies, and indicative content. The condition was complied with satisfactorily in January 2021.

The submission indicated that since the last GPhC event, Open Awards has focused on approving providers to deliver the Level 3 qualifications and to support them to devise their assessment strategies and delivery plans. There are now five providers delivering the qualifications across England. Five hundred and eighty learners have been registered up to June 2023. Eighty learners, to date, have achieved their qualification. The majority of learners are competing their education and training via the apprenticeship qualification, with only nine learners registered for the standalone qualification. For the apprenticeship qualification, Open Awards has worked with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) since the last GPhC recognition event to move to an integrated End-point Assessment. Internal procedures have been developed for completing a Final Awards Board once the apprentice moves through Gateway. Otherwise, there have been no other changes to the content of the qualification since the last GPhC event. Open Awards has engaged with the IfATE around the qualification and funding reforms at Level 3 for Post-16 trainees. Open Awards is submitting the Level 3 Diploma for the Principles and Practices for Pharmacy Technicians (RQF) to IfATE to request that it be funded under the new policy from September 2025. As the Level 3 Pharmacy Technician qualifications are assessed internally at centres, an Ofqual Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny (CASS) strategy has been introduced. This new requirement for the 2021/22 academic year is now in the Open Awards quality assurance cycle.

Documentation

Prior to the event, the provider submitted documentation to the GPhC in line with the agreed timescales. The documentation was reviewed by the recognition 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 via videoconference on 10 July 2023. 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 recognition team and GPhC representatives on 17 July 2023. The remainder of the event took place via videoconference on 18 July 2023 and comprised a series of meetings with the provider staff and one of the centre providers.

Declarations of interest

Rebecca Chamberlain declared that she had worked with Skills4pharmacy, one of Open Awards' centre training providers.

Schedule

Day 0 – 17 July 2023

13.30-16.00 Private meeting of the recognition team and GPhC representative

Day 1 – 18 July 2023

09.00-09.15 Private meeting of the recognition team and GPhC representative

09.15-11.15 Recognition panel meet with awarding organisation representatives

11.30-12.30 Meeting with a centre provider

13.30-14.00 Meeting on internal and external quality assurance of the course

14.15-14.45 Meeting to discuss apprenticeship structure

14.45-16.45 Private meeting of the accreditation team

16.45- 17.00 Deliver outcome to provider

Key findings - Part 1 - Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes were not reviewed at this interim event

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

Standard 1: Selection and entry requirements

Standard met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all four criteria relating to the selection and entry requirements continue to be met.

The submission indicated that providers must submit a delivery and assessment plan at the point of requesting approval to deliver the qualifications. This plan must include plans for induction, training and entry requirement checks. These procedures must ensure that their selection processes, prior to enrolment, are fair, legal and that they identify suitable applicants that will be fit to study as trainees. The team was told that external quality assurance (EQA) checks include compliance with entry requirements including maths/English/Science, DBS, and good character and health checks. If applicants do not have DBS clearance, then declarations from the learner, employer and provider will be required. When providers apply to be a Open Awards Centre, they submit a pre-approval request form, in which they must outline their recruitment processes. This, along with the provider's recruitment policies and procedures are checked by the EQA before approval is given. The team was told that EQA includes checking evidence that providers have complied with Equality and Diversity legislation, that staff involved in selection have been trained appropriately, and that selection data is reviewed internally to ensure fair access to all applicants. In addition, the EQA role is to check that providers have reviewed their own EDI data. The team was told that the employment status of the trainee is checked by the Open Awards quality team. The provider has to inform Open Awards of the employer as part of the applicant's registration, and a risk assessment of the premises is conducted to check that it is a registered pharmacy. The team learned that if a trainee were struggling, the recruitment and induction of the trainee is reviewed to check if they had been suitable for registration, although there has been no evidence of this to date. A provider interviewed told the team that it interviewed applicants who, if successful, then went on a work trial to illustrate what the job and course entailed. The application process would then be completed as above, and a training plan devised between the trainee and employer. The team was told that all applicants are treated equally with the same interview questions being asked by experienced administrative staff and a pharmacy professional. The team was told that there are no model answers and that final decisions are made by the Director of the centre.

Standard 2: Equality, diversity and inclusion

Standard met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that two of the three criteria relating to equality, diversity and inclusion requirements continue to be met with one criterion subject to a condition.

The submission stated that EQA reviews annually equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies, including checks that EDI is embedded into assessment and course delivery. The team was told that EQA checks learner handbooks, guidance, and teaching materials for the inclusion of EDI. Learners are asked about EDI matters which are covered in the early teaching, including issues of behaviour and respect. The team learned that Open Awards requires each centre provider to monitor their own data and, if necessary, to implement improvement in relation to progression/attainment/attrition rates. EQA monitors this, including reviewing evidence that the centre has analysed the data and identified any necessary actions. The team was told, and observed itself, that such reviews have been inconsistent across providers. The EQA interviewed agreed that such EDI data was acted upon by providers, but not in a systematic way, and that a similar conclusion had been reached at a recent Ofsted review. This was stated to be part of an improvement plan in which Open Awards will identify trends across all Centre providers by some interim sampling.

Open Awards is open to sharing any useful information emanating from EDI reviews with centre providers. To that end, Open Awards has recently recruited a full-time data analyst to enhance its data monitoring and evaluation. This role has created visual dashboards to allow a review of demographic data. In addition, a new pharmacy quality assurer will review progression data in real time with all providers on a demographic basis, with a view to influencing course design and providing a timely analysis of EDI data. A report based on Student and Patient Voice includes a review of the demographic data (gender, age, ethnicity, ability status). However, the team agreed that it be a **condition** that Open Awards must develop and implement a process to ensure that centre providers use equality and diversity data while designing and delivering courses. This is to ensure that centre providers' policies and procedures are fair and do not discriminate against trainees or applicants, and may include analysis of the data to identify themes, trends, and actions based on protected characteristics. This must be monitored in a meaningful way by Open Awards. This is because although the team could see evidence that Open Awards encourages centre providers to collect equality and diversity data, it was unclear how that data was used by centre providers, and monitored by Open Awards, to ensure it was being utilised in delivery of the qualification. This is to meet criterion 2.2.

The documentation stated that since the last GPhC event, Open Awards has completed a full review of the reasonable adjustment processes within its database. The EQA gives advice on an ad hoc basis on reasonable adjustments. However, Open Awards does not set assignments. Providers must design their own assignments, decide on adjustments and keep an appropriate log. Any reasonable adjustment requests relating to EPA must be reviewed by Open Awards. EQA can suggest changing assessment methods and timings. Providers can allow extensions to time allowed for assignments by up to 25 percent without permission from Open Awards. The provider interviewed told the team that it was lenient with timings which were considered on a case-by-case basis for trainees with special needs.

Standard 3: Management, resources and capacity

Standard met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all seven criteria relating to management, resources and capacity requirements continue to be met.

All providers must meet Open Awards policies and procedures for the delivery, assessment and internal quality assurance of its qualifications. Providers go through an approval process before they can request approval for specific qualifications. This includes EQA checking that key roles are covered by qualified staff, and that all required resources are in place. Since the last GPhC event, there has been an example of a provider not having the required staffing in place for Internal Quality Assurance due to staff turnover. This was identified through pre-verification activities and interim arrangements put in place by Open Awards to complete 100% EQA until they had recruited. The team learned that the number of annual cohorts to be delivered annually is planned to increase from 32 to 40, but that this increase will be due to new providers coming on stream rather than an increase in the capacity of existing providers. The new pharmacy quality assurer (see Standard 2 above) will provide support for this increase, although the existing contracted EQAs will continue to be used. The provider interviewed told the team that all its teaching staff is pharmacy-qualified, with a pharmacist, a pharmacy foundation trainee, and pharmacy technicians.

Before a provider can begin delivering pharmacy-related qualifications, they must be both an approved provider for Open Awards generally, and have specific qualification approval. Since the last GPhC event, a Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny strategy (CASS) has been introduced. The team was told that this includes detail of how qualifications are risk-rated and how the rating informs the approval and pre-verification processes. The CASS strategy has provided opportunity for more interim sampling and feedback. The team was told that there have been discussions with the QA team re: holistic assessment of pharmacy qualifications, i.e. units may be assessed over months/years, and the challenges this creates with interim sampling of units. Both the standalone and integrated apprenticeship Diploma for the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Technicians have been categorised as high-risk and have had attendant high sampling, 100 percent for the first few cohorts. Therefore, full pre-verification is required to ensure providers have robust management plans in place before they start delivering the qualification.

Learner agreements are a requirement of all providers, and their use is checked at EQA events. Open Awards has templates for such agreements but the team was told that most providers use their own versions. EQAs check completed templates for evidence that conversations are taking place between employers and trainees. EQAs can also listen at 12-week reviews to audio recordings of feedback sessions between trainees and mentors. Providers risk-rate employers, particularly if there are several trainees at a single site. EQA checks on the link between providers and employers and will contact employers directly if necessary.

Feedback from trainees is reviewed through EQA activities with providers to ensure the student voice is included in reviews of courses and used to identify improvements. EQAs told the team that there will be more standardisation of feedback to trainees in future as currently there is variation within and across centres. It was stated that feedback needs to be clear, and more developmental and more support will be put in place to expedite this. Employer stakeholder engagement will be increased from September 2023 in preparation of a full review of the qualification content in 2024. To date, there has been a non-subject expert, Quality and Standards Advisor that has been responsible for the overall external quality assurance strategy and support for providers. Subject specialist external quality assurers have reviewed delivery and assessment plans, and confirmed the award of credit. To avoid confusion of roles, an internal subject specialist EQA is currently being recruiting. This role will

be responsible for providing day-to-day support to providers, including delivering training and standardisation, and completing all EQA and compliance activities.

Standard 4: Monitoring, review and evaluation

Standard met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all five criteria relating to monitoring, review and evaluation requirements continue to be met.

The submission stated that Open Awards operates a risk-based approach for the monitoring and management of courses at individual providers. Each provider is risk-rated in line with the CASS strategy and a pharmacy-specific risk rating is attached. In line with the CASS strategy, all aspects of the provider's course are confirmed by EQA for pre-verification compliance. Risk ratings are reviewed at each EQA activity including the completion of any identified actions set via a Provider Improvement Action Plan. As the Level 3 pharmacy qualifications are categorised as high-risk, they are subject to 100% sampling. This is managed through interim sampling and summative sampling. In addition, EQA and compliance checks include provider policies, staffing and resources, and their processes for monitoring and evaluation effectiveness of their courses. Open Awards has delivered training and standardisation events for centres since the last GPhC event. This has included specific training on developing assessments at Level 3, and using observations/professional discussions. Further training is being planned for 2023/24 academic year, including peer observations, managing holistic observations, writing multiple-choice questions, and providing developmental feedback.

The team wished to know Open Awards' expectation of providers with respect to their internal quality assurance (IQA) and was told that there are provider handbooks and quality assurance requirements; providers are expected to self-assess their provision and then quality improvement plans are agreed with Open Awards. Annual compliance activity is a minimum with high-risk providers being subject to more frequent checks. Centre providers had been used to having assignments and assessments provided but although Open Awards provides sample templates, providers are expected to devise their own assignments and assessments. The development of in-house assessments has resulted in a need for more internal quality assurance. EQAs can check any new approaches to these.

The team also wished to know how Open Awards monitors and evaluates the standards of teaching and learning provided by centres. It was told that EQA reviews schemes of work, teaching materials, and lesson plans on an ongoing basis, and suggests changes in teaching and learning through sampling answers. Again, this is done on a risk-based approach with some providers requiring on-site visits, although this has not happened with any pharmacy-based centres. The team was told that high-risk providers may be subject to short-notice visits which may include observation of teaching and 100 percent sampling of work. The team was told that observation of teaching had not occurred in the last 12 months, but that it was planned for the next cycle of EQA events. Any Ofsted or other reports are also considered, and the educational level of the material and delivery is checked for appropriateness. The team was told by the provider interviewed that it had undergone two EQA events to date. This had represented a comprehensive audit, highlighting resources and checking the communication

between the employer and the provider. The team was told that as a result of EQA activities, there had been some changes in delivery to reflect the need to assess competence in the workplace. Thus, previously another awarding organisation had provided the assessments, with a predetermined pass mark. Now the provider has to devise the assessments and ensure that the trainees meet all the learning outcomes.

Open Awards has an error-reporting process within its database that enables reporting of errors/incidents across providers, qualifications, and specific areas of delivery. There have been two errors relating to these qualifications since the last GPhC event. These were minor errors in formatting/spelling in published unit content that no impact on the delivery or assessment of the qualification, and, as described under Standard 3, the provider that was approved to deliver pharmacy qualifications without having the required IQA resource in place.

A necessary area of improvement has been identified as the amount of feedback given to trainee Pharmacy Technicians throughout the course but particularly at the beginning of the course. EQA has identified that providers do give learners appropriate and timely feedback focused on summative assessments. A student survey identified that students would benefit from formal feedback throughout their formative assessments and teaching/learning to help them prepare for assessments, and the workplace. This is being addressed with specific providers but training will be provided in September 2023 to focus on providing quality developmental feedback.

The provider interviewed told the team that feedback from learners is gathered from bi-yearly student surveys and at three-monthly tripartite reviews amongst the trainee, employer and provider. Feedback is included in a report to the monthly centre governance group. The quality of teaching is assessed by IQAs. The main issue raised by trainees has been the desire for more face-to-face teaching; this has led to an adjustment of the timetable.

Standard 5: Course design and delivery

Standard met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all ten criteria relating to the course design and delivery requirements continue to be met.

The submission explained that there have been no changes to the learning outcomes, assessment criteria, or indicative content of the qualifications. A full review will begin in 2024 of the content taking into account stakeholder feedback, and in line with the Open Awards revalidation policy. Open Awards completes pre-verification activities to ensure that delivery and assessment plans are in place before centres deliver the courses. The quality of these plans and their implementation is reviewed at least annually through EQA and compliance activities. Since the last GPhC event, standardisation activities and training has been delivered to enable providers to share their experiences and learn from each other. This has included sessions on developing assignments at Level 3.

Further to the conditions of the initial recognition event, Open Awards reviewed the order of delivery of the units within the qualification. Centres may choose not to assess units in their entirety before beginning the teaching of another unit. Open Awards recommends a holistic approach to assessment, meaning centres may choose to teach several units concurrently, allowing learners to form links between the content, before assessing the learner holistically. However, it is recommended that the knowledge-based assessment criteria, are completed before moving onto the competency-based

assessment criteria. It also recommended that delivery plans start with the Health and Safety unit and Person-Centre Care unit as these underpin all the competency-based assessment criteria, as well as being essential for the day-to-day occupational role. In addition, that the science units are covered at an early stage to support the development of underpinning knowledge, alongside the Actions and Uses of Medicine unit. Pre-verification requires centres to evidence their rationale for the order of unit delivery considering patient and learner safety, and roles being undertaken from Day One. An area of potential development identified through patient feedback is that of the change to communication involving digital and online services. This will be included in the full review of the qualification scheduled to be completed by January 2026.

The team wished to know how providers have engaged with patients, public and employers since the start of the delivery of the qualification. The EQA cited the COVID-19 pandemic as having been a challenge to engaging with patients/public until recently.

The provider interviewed told it that the system of workplace supervision is highlighted to employers. Mentors selected are all pharmacists that are aware of the GPhC standards. If employers are struggling, the provider would act as an intermediate between the employer and the trainee. The example was given of the use of a sign-in sheet to verify attendance. There is observation of interaction with patients during counselling and dispensing, but the team was told that there is no access to patients at the provider centre. The EQAs interviewed agreed that this was an area for development with Open Awards information being shared with providers. The team agreed that it be a **recommendation** that Open Awards should develop and implement a process to ensure that centre providers obtain views from a range of stakeholders, specifically patients and the public. This is because the team could see that Open Awards is engaging with patients and public, but this should also be undertaken by centre providers. This relates to criterion 5.5.

Standard 6: Course assessment

Standard met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all ten criteria relating to the course assessment requirements continue to be met.

As described above, providers are required to produce their own delivery and assessment plans. These are reviewed at pre-verification and checked at least annually through EQA and compliance activities. The Skills for Health Assessment Principles are being reviewed in 2023 and any changes will apply to the pharmacy-related qualifications; providers will be invited to a training webinar on the revised principles. As pharmacy-related qualifications are categorised as high-risk in the CASS policy, assessments are subject to 100 percent sampling. Risk assessments in relation to patient safety are confirmed through EQA compliance checks, as well as an annual review of the provider's policy for managing risk. Health and safety and person-centred care are taught at the beginning of the course to emphasise patient safety.

The initial focus on assessments was on providing one-to-one support to providers to review their assessments to ensure that they met Open Awards criteria and would effectively assess students' knowledge and skills. Open Awards produced a limited number of sample assessments in 2021 to support the standardisation and training across providers, but it is recognised that there is a need to produce a full series of exemplar assessments and assignment briefs. EQA has identified that some

providers are relying heavily on examinations and essay-style questions, and that assessment has remained linear, for example, unit by unit, rather than holistic. Student feedback suggests that this has led to the feeling of over-assessment. A subject expert has been commissioned to develop a full set of example assignments that cover all units holistically.

The team wished to know how centre assessment strategies include methodology to assess decisions of competence in the workplace. It was told that this is included in the Open Awards L3 qualification specification. Compliance is monitored by EQA, checking that observations of the trainee are taking place in the workplace; centre providers also undertake workplace observations. The assessment strategy for this activity is discussed between the EQA and provider.

For both the integrated apprenticeship and standalone qualification, EQA of assessment decisions is completed by subject specialists that meet the requirements of Open Awards, IfATE, GPhC, and Skills for Health. The type and quality of feedback to students is reviewed through EQA. There have been no significant concerns identified with this across providers. However, as described under Standard 4, the student survey identified that some students felt that increased developmental feedback at an earlier stage would be helpful in their preparation for assessments, and performance in the workplace. This is being addressed with specific providers and training will be provided in September 2023 on providing quality feedback.

Standard 7: Pre-registration trainee pharmacy technician support and the learning experience

Standard met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all seven criteria relating to pre-registration trainee pharmacy technician support and the learning experience requirements continue to be met.

Each provider must have a student support policy in place. This must include information on information, advice and guidance, induction, supervision, personal and academic support, assessment deadlines and timescales, resits, and expectations around behaviour and professionalism.

Student feedback has identified that the majority of students felt supported by providers and employers, with particularly positive feedback received around employer support. Individual concerns are being addressed with the learners and their providers. Since the last GPhC event, Open Awards has developed a range of online courses for students around study skills, time management, and mental health and wellbeing. Learning agreements must be in place for all Trainee Pharmacy Technicians. The agreements ensure that all criteria within Standard 7 are covered. Students' understanding of their learner agreements and Individual Learning Plans will form part of a thematic review of student support and the learner agreement. The provider interviewed confirmed that although it is not happening at the moment, at review meetings the pharmacist mentor will have to sign-off that the trainee is aware of the GPhC guide to raising concerns about pharmacy education and training. The EQAs interviewed told the team that providers were aware of the Open Awards complaints procedure and whistleblowing policy, and that students they had interviewed had understood them. They indicated that Open Awards will share best practice in this area across providers.

Apprenticeship pathway and End Point Assessment (EPA)

The submission explained that since the last GPhC event, Open Awards has developed a separate integrated apprenticeship qualification. The qualification is separate from the standalone qualification to facilitate monitoring and management of the different programmes. The content of the units is the same in both qualifications. The main difference between the programmes is that the integrated apprenticeship qualification cannot be awarded until the apprentice has progressed through Gateway and completes a final End-Point Assessment (EPA). Open Awards worked with IfATE, GPhC, and other EPA Organisations to integrate the EPA into the qualification. This removes the need for additional assessment of the apprentice.

The Final Awards Board includes representatives from the assessment delivery team, and quality assurance team at Open Awards, along with an independent subject expert. The team was told that the Board is as independent as Open Awards can make it. It is chaired by a pharmacy expert. The Awards Board provides oversight of the processes being followed for the qualification, including checking that EQA reports are in place, results have been sampled and verified, and all Gateway documentation has been provided and checked. Sample Gateway evidence is used to ensure that anyone who passes has the appropriate knowledge and skills. An EPA Handbook has been produced for providers and students that includes full details on how the qualification is managed, and the arrangements for Gateway and Final Awards Boards. There is an annual review of the apprenticeship provision, including a review of the data and outcomes by the Lead Independent EPA Assessor. This was last completed in September 2022, with the next review scheduled for September 2023. The team wished to know how the identified areas for development were processed. It was told that there is no capacity to make any requirement for changes, but that issues can be highlighted if in the best interest of the apprentices. The team was told that there is a 60-page EPA handbook for the use of the apprentice, employer and provider.

When asked about challenges relating to the apprenticeship route, the team was told that there have been some problems with the Level 3 transition into the integrated plan. Another has been the 24-month rule for completion which does not equate to 24 months of experience; this can be an issue for someone who has work experience outside the UK when there is a six- or twelve-month requirement. However, the team was assured that all these challenges have been addressed.

