

**Skills 4 Pharmacy support staff course
reaccreditation event report, October 2023**



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Event summary and conclusions

Provider	Skills 4 Pharmacy
Course	Support staff course
Names of course/qualification	Skills 4 Pharmacy Level 2 Pharmacy Services Apprenticeship
Event type	Reaccreditation
Event date	06 October 2023
Approval period	January 2024 – January 2027
Relevant requirements	Requirements for the education and training of pharmacy support staff, October 2020
Framework used	Apprenticeship Framework (England) and National Occupational Standards
Outcome	<p>Approval.</p> <p>The accreditation team has agreed to recommend to the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) that the Support Staff Apprenticeship course provided by Skills 4 Pharmacy should be reaccredited for a period of three years.</p>
Conditions	There were no conditions.
Standing conditions	A link to the standing conditions can be found here .
Recommendations	No recommendations were made.
Registrar decision	<p>The Registrar is satisfied that Skills 4 Pharmacy 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 Requirements for the education and training of pharmacy support staff, October 2020</p> <p>The Registrar confirms that Skills 4 Pharmacy is approved to continue to offer the support staff apprenticeship course, for a period of 3 years.</p>
Key contact (provider)	Amerjit Singh. Managing Director*
Provider representatives	<p>Jamie Crinigan, Operations Director, Skills 4 Pharmacy*</p> <p>Amerjit Singh, Managing Director, Skills 4 Pharmacy</p> <p>Sam Collins, Quality Manager, Skills 4 Pharmacy</p>

	<p>Michelle Whitehead, External Quality Assurer, Independent Consultant*</p> <p>Sarah Rhodes, Quality and Curriculum Lead, Skills 4 Pharmacy</p> <p>Lakshmi Kaur Singh, Quality and Curriculum Lead & Tutor, Skills 4 Pharmacy</p> <p>Jean Bennett, Quality and Curriculum Lead & Tutor, Skills 4 Pharmacy</p>
Accreditation team	<p>Ruth Edwards (Team Leader - pharmacist), Head of School of Pharmacy, University of Wolverhampton*</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>Leanne Bartholomew (team member - pharmacy technician), Principal Pharmacy Technician, Suffolk and North East Sussex, ICB</p> <p>Liz Harlaar (team member - lay), Independent Business Consultant</p>
GPhC representative	<p>Rakesh Bhundia, Quality Assurance Officer (Education), General Pharmaceutical Council*</p>
Rapporteur	<p>Ian Marshall, Proprietor, Caldarvan Research (Educational and Writing Services); Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology, University of Strathclyde</p>

*Attended pre-event meeting on 28 September 2023

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.

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/ukxi/2010/231/contents/made>

Since 2020, Skills 4 Pharmacy has been accredited by the GPhC for the delivery of the level 2 apprenticeship and its components. The development of the level 2 qualification was driven by the sector requirements for a more inclusive learning option to meet the requirements of the level 2 initial training and education requirements for pharmacy support staff. At the 2020 accreditation event, while acknowledging the apprenticeship agreement, the accreditation team agreed that this did not meet criterion 4.c. Therefore, it was a condition that the provider must develop a formal learning agreement for all trainees which must describe the range of roles and responsibilities, including those of the trainee, employer, and course provider. Copies of this agreement must be provided to all involved. This condition was met within the required timescale.

Documentation

Prior to the event, the provider submitted documentation to the GPhC later than 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 at by videoconference on 28 September 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 accreditation team and GPhC representatives on 5 October 2023. The remainder of the event took place by videoconference on 6 October 2023 and comprised a series of meetings with the provider staff involved in the design of the course and a small group of five support staff trainees.

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Schedule

Day 1: Pharmacy technician focus 5 October 2023

	09:15 – 11:45	Private meeting of the accreditation team and GPhC representative Discuss provision and agree final questions and allocation
	11:45 – 12:30	Lunch
1.	12:30 – 15:00	Presentation from provider (20 mins max) Questions to provider focused on accreditation of pharmacy technician provision (to include apprenticeship questions)
	15:00 – 15:15	Break
2.	15:15 – 16:00	Pharmacy technician learning outcome testing session
	16:00 – 16:15	Break
3.	16:15 – 17:00	Meeting with stakeholders involved in the design of the pharmacy technician provision

Day 2: Pharmacy support staff focus 6 October 2023

	09:00 – 09:15	Private meeting of the accreditation team
4.	09:15 – 10:00	Meeting with support staff students
	10:00 – 10:15	Break
5.	10:15 – 12:00	Questions to provider focused on reaccreditation of support staff provision (to include apprenticeship questions)

	12:00 – 13:00	Lunch
6.	13:00 – 14:00	Support staff learning outcome testing session (NOS focus)
	14:00 – 14:15	Break
7.	14:15 – 14:45	Meeting with internal and external quality assurance of the courses (both pharmacy technician and support staff)
	14:45 – 16:45	Private meeting of accreditation team
8.	16:45 – 17:00	Deliver outcomes to provider

Key findings - Part 1 - Outcomes for all support staff

During the event the accreditation team reviewed the provision against all 19 outcomes required for all pharmacy support staff roles. To gain additional assurance, the accreditation team also explored a sample of 6 learning outcomes during a separate meeting with the provider and was satisfied that **all 19 learning outcomes continue to 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/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all three criteria relating to equality, diversity and inclusion continue to be met

The submitted documentation stated that course content includes equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) throughout. Thus, the principles of the Equality Act 2010 are introduced in the induction workbook. This is continued into the induction process, where learners complete a number of online learning modules as part of self-directed learning. Skills 4 Pharmacy has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Reasonable Adjustments Policy. EDI data are monitored through BUD, an e-portfolio system to manage learners' evidence collection for competencies and for submission of their knowledge-based assessments. This allows management of the learner's progress from enrolment to completion. The team was told that any changes are normally effected quickly but may be slower if trainees require extra tuition in maths or English. Relevant current topics are discussed in the course, including dealing with neurodiversity. Special educational needs are highlighted at enrolment, allowing tutors to make adjustments to teaching and assessments and to provide additional support as necessary. The team was told that it is important that workplace educational supervisors are aware of learners' special needs. In this respect, the team was told that Skills 4 Pharmacy will generally engage with employers once the trainee is settled in their employment.

In response to recently collected data, the assessment strategy has been adjusted to accurately reflect the End-point Assessment (EPA) process so that learners are prepared for the assessment methods used at EPA. Teaching and assessment times have been adjusted to accommodate learners' cultural or religious needs. Learners are offered reasonable adjustments not only for their GPhC-accredited qualification, but also for EPA. The team was told that EDI data is monitored formally every month to identify any trends or needs.

Criteria 2: Course curriculum

Criteria met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all six criteria relating to course curriculum continue to be met

The submission indicated that the course was written to meet the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education, Apprenticeship Standard for Pharmacy Services Assistants ST0299, and was

mapped to the GPhC's requirements for the initial education and training of pharmacy support workers.

The course considers the needs of current stakeholders, most of whom are community pharmacy owners. The apprenticeship standard specifies the core roles expected of pharmacy support assistants but does not cover more specialist roles, for example, the sale of non-prescribed medicines. The relevant NOS has been used to create an optional domain to cover this knowledge and competencies. In this respect, the team noted that PHARM4 and PHARM28 are optional modules provided by the provider due to stakeholder demands. The team wished to know how knowledge and skills are covered for these NOSs and which assessment methods are used and was told that the Over-the-Counter medicines module (PHARM4) is delivered at level 2 although the NOS is at level 3. PHARM28 will require clinical knowledge and assessors use professional judgement with a Skills 4 Pharmacy tutor as observer. The knowledge required is pitched at the correct level according to the employer's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

The apprenticeship standard was determined and set by groups of sector specialists. The course is aligned to the apprenticeship knowledge skills and behaviours (KSBs) for level 2 pharmacy service assistants. The course content has evolved from courses delivered under the umbrella of an awarding organisation. This has been subject to scrutiny from internal and external quality assurance processes. Learning theory has been applied in line with Bloom's taxonomies. The curriculum is sequenced to make information easy to learn and to promote retention. Apprentices learn professional behaviours, person-centred care, health and safety, teamwork, communication and law & ethics before progressing onto high-risk activities such as dispensing and the supply of medicinal and non-medicinal products. Apprentices will explore ethical considerations in pharmacy services and the importance of maintaining professionalism. Discussions, case studies, and scenarios will encourage reflection on ethical decision-making and appropriate behaviour in the healthcare settings. The team was told that there will be a mini-EPA at the end of the teaching of each domain with MCQs, and observations of dispensing and stock management. All apprentices will be asked the same questions. This will inform tutors of the possibility of trainees gaining a distinction at EPA.

Criteria 3: Assessment

Criteria met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all four criteria relating to assessment continue to be met

The Quality Handbook and Internal Quality Assessment (IQA) handbook set out the quality expectations and activities to ensure that all learning outcomes and apprenticeship requirements have been met by the learner. For each domain, there is a bank of multiple-choice questions that have been mapped to the knowledge-based assessment criteria. Planning and assessment take place through the e-portfolio, BUD. Assessment criteria are recorded with pre-mapped and standardised assessment criteria recorded within the learner progress record. The team learned that there are quarterly delivery team meetings plus a session with the entire tutor team to ensure that all are aware of the assessment methods used.

The assessment strategy gives guidance on requirements for the apprentice to successfully complete the accredited course. This needs to be achieved prior to gateway. It is a mandatory for apprentices to submit a minimum of 5 pieces of evidence within their portfolio as part of EPA. The e-portfolio,

BUD, has set parameters for evidence requirements, progression against and achievement of Key Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) and will not allow sign-off until they have been met. The team was told that supplementary MCQs are set, after further tuition, if learners fail MCQs. Any areas of concern can be dealt with through 1:1 tutor sessions. There are no restrictions on the number of resits at level 2 and any missed elements can be moved forward to the next assessment to allow trainees time to prepare.

Throughout the course, learners will receive feedback to ensure continuous improvement and support. They will receive feedback on mainly verbal assessments at level 2 from both their assigned tutor and their educational supervisor. The team was told that feedback is standardised for consistency and correct level.

All tutors and expert witnesses are pharmacy professionals, with a professional responsibility to supervise trainees and check that their work is at the correct standard of safety. Each learner has an educational supervisor and/or an expert witness in the workplace who acts as a mentor. Tutors complete standardised feedback for each piece of evidence. Learners have a progress review every 8-12 weeks. Planning is also through the e-portfolio and all tasks set by the tutor are timebound, but the tutor can adjust timings to meet the individual needs of learners.

Criteria 4: Management, resources and capacity

Criteria met/will be met? Yes No

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

The submission explained that Skills 4 Pharmacy is an online virtual college and as such the need for physical resources is reduced. Learners must have suitable IT hardware to access the online sessions and the e-portfolio. Both systems have an application available free of charge which can be used on a laptop, tablet or smartphone. Each learner has a dedicated lead tutor and other tutors can assist with delivery and assessment if required. Internal quality assurers (IQAs) and course leads are also able to deliver teaching of sessions should the need arise.

During enrolment, learners are issued with a tripartite agreement in line with Apprenticeship regulations. The roles and responsibilities learner, employers and Skills4Pharmacy are discussed during the induction and enrolment process.

Apprenticeship learners receive their final certificate from the EPA organisation. Skills 4 Pharmacy will issue a certificate that states they have completed the course upon successfully completing their EPA. Learners that take the optional OTC domain or accuracy-checking domain will receive a certificate stating that they have achieved the requirements to enable them to advise on and sell non-prescription medicines and products or accurately check medicines.

Learner feedback sessions will be held as part of lesson observations. Furthermore, learner surveys take place for feedback at key points of the apprenticeship. The complaints procedure is described on the website along with other procedures. All feedback, including complaints, is seen as positive. Complaints are dealt with promptly.

There is a team of 18 tutors spread across the UK. All staff members responsible for delivering pharmacy qualifications are registered with the GPhC, possessing a range of experience, including pharmacy technicians from community, primary care, and hospital backgrounds, as well as

pharmacists from community and primary care settings. All tutors and assessors hold appropriate assessor and teaching qualifications. The team was told that monthly management meetings consider staff caseloads. It was explained that level 2 and level 3 courses are taught by separate groups of tutors and that all staff teaching are qualified above level 2. The team was told that learners and employers are made aware of the malpractice policy on the company website. There is a concerns policy and the team was given an example of how a concern about a learner with autism had been resolved. Learners have access to Skills 4 Pharmacy tutors and staff if they need to raise concerns and are also able to record concerns in their e-portfolio.

Criteria 5: Quality management

Criteria met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all four criteria relating to quality management continue to be met

A Quality Handbook and Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Handbook detail the quality assurance processes, including the roles and responsibilities of all staff involved. Part of the process is to interview learners and expert witnesses. IQAs will provide feedback and create an action plan for improvements that will be checked at the next sampling activity to ensure that actions have been carried out.

Learners can provide feedback during group feedback sessions, surveys and progress reviews. The submission indicated that a common theme had appeared recently that learners were having difficulty in accessing curriculum content and therefore struggled to monitor their progress. As a result, BUD was implemented with the curriculum fully available to learners, allowing them to monitor progress not only against KSBs but their GPhC-accredited course. The team was told that BUD was implemented around 18 months ago, and had allowed tracking of learners' progress in real time with enhanced tracking, reporting and measuring of caseloads. Both students and employers also have access. Students interviewed spoke highly of the value of the system.

Skills 4 Pharmacy has been subject to external quality assurance from awarding organisations and has used this audit as a method of self-assessment and improvement. The organisation is graded currently as low-risk for compliance with Open Awards, including the RQF Diploma in the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Technicians. Skills4Pharmacy is a recognised provider for pharmacy apprenticeships and is able to offer these for the NHS via the Salisbury Managed Procurement Services. Skills 4 Pharmacy has been awarded a contract for provision at a national level at level 2 and level 3. The team noted that part of the Internal Quality Assurance process is to interview learners and expert witnesses; it was told that this is part of the quality cycle and may take the form of lesson observations or telephone conversations. Any urgent feedback will be prioritised for action.

The delivery team members are registered pharmacy professionals and have a responsibility to maintain their currency of practice. Learners work in pharmacies and are trained in the workplace to current practices. Course leads have reviewed all resources and ensured that content has been updated to current working practices. Currently, BUD curriculum version 2.1 is in test mode where compliance checks are being undertaken to release updated content.

BUD records all data from the point of enrolment. This is shared with the delivery team to meet learners' individual needs. It is regularly updated and exit information is added to allow identification of success rates and the destination of learners. This facilitates improvements in retention rates and

advises learners of progression after their current course. There are monthly meetings with employers along with an annual employer survey, although it was stated that employer feedback was mixed and that the company is exploring better methods of obtaining feedback.

The team was told that any changes/developments in medicines, medical devices, pharmacy law, pharmacy practice and national guidelines are identified through normal professional contacts and channels, and are reflected in the curriculum almost immediately. The course team is aware of impending developments through its horizon-scanning and contacts with the NHS and industry. It was pointed out to the provider that any future substantial changes to the accredited programme or to the resources must be reported to the GPhC. The team was told that the provider checks for attainment gaps relating to EDI issues and makes appropriate changes. Such changes have included recruiting a new staff member to support entrants without GCE maths or English, and making adjustments to support a learner with autism.

Criteria 6: Supporting learners and the learning experience

Criteria met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all five criteria relating to supporting learners and the learning experience continue to be met

The submission indicated that details of appeals, malpractice and disciplinary procedures are included in the learner's induction workbooks and the IQA handbook. Information about welfare arrangements and safeguarding is also included. An Expert Witness pack provides information for the educational supervisors and expert witness together with relevant GPhC guidance. Policies and procedures are available on the Skills 4 Pharmacy website.

Each learner is allocated a dedicated tutor that guides them through the course. Tutors liaise with the safeguarding team and refer any learners appropriately to support learners' needs. The workplace-based educational supervisor and/or expert witnesses are identified at the recruitment stage. They are listed on the learners' BUD accounts with contact details. This data is securely stored on BUD and allows the Skills 4 Pharmacy team to contact the work-based support team and provide updates and additional support if required. The team wished to know what pastoral support is available to learners outside of their dedicated tutor and was told that there is extensive staff support, including a mental health first-aider, along with the ability to refer to outside agencies for support.

The team was told that the provider receives around 200 pieces of feedback every week, including showing good support for the interactive online sessions. As part of its policy of performance improvement, new staff members receive extra training from an external agency to improve their skills.

Apprenticeship pathway and End Point Assessment (EPA)

A brief overview of the apprenticeship structure EPA integration of the apprenticeship route.

The submission stated that once the GPhC-accredited qualification is completed over a period of 12 months, gateway is triggered once all criteria/assessment methods have been completed. Learners must gain a pass at their skill scan to then be ready for their gateway meeting. At the learner's gateway meeting, the learner, tutor and employer will meet and confirm that the learner is ready for EPA. It is at

this stage that EPA is triggered and commenced.

Key findings - Part 3 - Role-specific learning outcomes

Please see the individual course part 3 report for commentary.

