

**National Pharmacy Association pharmacy support
staff courses reaccreditation event report,
November 2024**



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Event summary and conclusions

Provider	National Pharmacy Association
Course/Qualification	Support staff courses
Names of courses	Accredited Dispensary Assistant Course (ADAC) Medicines Counter Assistant Course (MCA) Introduction to Pharmacy Stock Control (PSC) Medicines Counter and Dispensing Course (MDCD) Delivering Medicines Safely and Effectively (DMSE) Accuracy Checking for Dispensers (ACD)
Event type	Reaccreditation
Event date	27-28 November 2024
Approval period	January 2025 – January 2028
Relevant requirements	<u>Requirements for the education and training of pharmacy support staff, October 2020</u>
Framework used	National Occupational Standards
Outcome	Approval
Conditions	There were no conditions.
Standing conditions	A link to the standing conditions can be found here .
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The NPA should consider reviewing the overall support staff assessment strategy to make sure it aligns with best practices regarding the permitted number of assessment attempts and the breadth of questions available within the MCQ bank. The accreditation team observed that both the number of assessment attempts allowed and the scope of the MCQ bank may benefit from such a review to ensure compliance with best assessment practices at RQF Level 2. This relates to criteria 3a and 3b.
Minor amendments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teaching and learning strategy should be updated to align with support staff requirements as opposed to those for pharmacy technicians. This relates to criterion 2e. The supervisor guide should be reviewed to ensure it includes the plagiarism and malpractice policy and procedures. This relates to criterion 4e.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student guide should be reviewed to ensure it includes advice about raising concerns. This relates to criterion 4f.
Registrar¹ decision	The Registrar ¹ accepted the team's recommendation and agreed that reaccreditation is confirmed until 2028.
Key contact (provider)	Kushal Patel, Quality Assurance Manager
Provider representatives	<p>Louise Baglole, Head of Professional Services and Development</p> <p>Katey Haycock, Learning and Development Manager</p> <p>Adrienne Horrocks, Learning and Development Pharmacist</p> <p>Rakhee Koshal, Learning and Development Pharmacist</p> <p>Bhavini Pindoria, Learning and Development Pharmacist</p> <p>Jared Rattenbury, E-learning Manager</p>
Accreditation team	<p>Rebecca Chamberlain* (Team leader), Self-employed Pharmacy Technician, Trainer and Associate</p> <p>Shahzad Ahmad (team member – pharmacist), Clinical Lead, NHS England Transformation Directorate</p> <p>Katie Brankin (team member – pharmacy technician), Pharmacy Lecturer, Edinburgh College and Pharmacy Technician, NHS Lothian</p> <p>Justine Caramé (team member – recently registered pharmacy technician), Medicines Management Technician</p> <p>Liz Harlaar (team member – lay), Independent Business Consultant</p> <p>*also attended the pre-event meeting on 5 November 2024</p>
GPhC representative	Chris McKendrick, Senior Quality Assurance Officer (Education), General Pharmaceutical Council
Rapporteur	Alison McVitty, Human Resources Consultant
Observers	There were no observers.

¹ Registrar or appointed delegate

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 the [website](#).

Documentation

Prior to the event, the Course provider (the provider) submitted documentation to the GPhC in line with the agreed timescales, including some documentation submitted after the pre-event meeting. The documentation was reviewed by the accreditation team (the 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 5 November 2024. 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 27 November 2024. The remainder of the event took place via videoconference on 28 November 2024 and comprised a series of meetings with the provider staff involved in the design of the courses.

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Schedule

Day 0: Accreditation team private meetings 27 November 2024

Private meeting of the accreditation team and GPhC representative

Discuss provision and agree final questions and allocation

Day 1: Reaccreditation event 28 November 2024

Private meeting of the accreditation team

Meeting with course provider

Learning outcomes testing session

Meeting with internal and external quality assurance of the course

Private meeting of the accreditation team

Deliver outcome 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 accreditation team was satisfied that **all 19 learning outcomes are 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 are met.

The provider confirmed that systems and policies are in place to meet its legal requirements for equality diversity and fairness, and shared its equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policy. During the presentation the team heard how the NPA actively promotes its organisational values, under the leadership of its new chief executive. The values reflect some core principles of EDI.

Since the last reaccreditation event, and prior to enrolling learners in 2022, the provider made several changes to address the two conditions that were imposed against this criterion.

Trainees now directly input their own EDI information online as part of the enrolment process, thereby protecting their personal data. The team sought to understand how and when EDI data was used and was assured by the provider that it continues to analyse and review the data annually. The quality assurance manager is involved in the annual review which seeks to identify any issues and agree potential changes. The team heard examples of some of the resulting changes made.

Whereas EDI was previously an addendum to courses, it is now included within the content of the courses to promote inclusivity and representation, for example, around the use of language and terminology. Course content is reviewed to ensure representation and continued compliance. Initials have replaced learner names to help avoid unintentional bias.

The provider described early consideration of any potential need for reasonable adjustments to support trainees. The Reasonable Adjustments policy is followed and there is a process for managing and reviewing the efficacy of reasonable adjustments that are made. Trainee needs are addressed on a case-by-case basis as each is different. The team was impressed by the online Learning Academy system demonstration and observed how the new functionality supports different learning needs. For example, the immersive reader and the ability to translate, dictate and change text size and screen colour. NPA provides support and guidance for both trainees and supervisors to help them identify, raise and respond appropriately to individual learning needs.

Criteria 2: Course curriculum

Criteria met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all six criteria relating to course curriculum are met. One criterion requires a minor amendment.

Learning outcomes for the six courses are mapped to the GPhC generic requirements for training pharmacy support staff and to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for role specific learning outcomes. Technical knowledge and skills for each role were determined by stakeholder input and using the knowledge of the NPA learning and development team, some of whom practice in other sectors. While mapping to the NOS standards remains unchanged since the last reaccreditation event, the courses contents have been updated.

The team noted that the NOS mapping for MCDC included an omission. This should be rectified for future events, to reflect the correct mapping to the criteria in the NOS standard PHARM2.

As learning outcomes are mapped in the course design, trainees demonstrate they meet the requirements by passing the assessments. The NPA submission showed course completion rates ranging between 30% and 40%. The team wished to understand the reasons for non-completion and any steps NPA was taking to reduce these. The provider advised the main reason for non-completion was high staff turnover in pharmacies, and explained how the NPA supports trainees to transfer courses where allowable, and otherwise supports them by helping build supervisor capability. The team noted the course completion rates in the NPA presentation were higher than in the submission and accepted this was because the number for leavers had been removed in the presentation figures.

The NPA teaching and learning strategy brings together knowledge, competence and work experience and learning is demonstrated in the workplace. The team noted that section one of the NPA support staff strategy refers to some outcomes which are relevant to pharmacy technician courses. There is direct reference to 'professional judgement' and 'communication with multidisciplinary teams' which do not appear in the support staff standards. The teaching and learning strategy should be updated to align with support staff requirements as opposed to those for pharmacy technicians. This relates to criterion 2e.

NPA stated that each course has been improved since the previous accreditation, with yearly course reviews from sector experts who are learning and development pharmacists and technicians. As part of its annual review, the provider draws on trainee feedback to identify and inform improvements. The team were assured that the NPA staff involved in course design, review and delivery, maintain an up-to-date knowledge of pharmacy and education practice. This is through continuous professional development activity and knowledge sharing. In addition, several staff members are qualified assessors and some hold qualifications in education and training.

The team heard detailed information about course changes and updates, for example, adding additional content, custom topics, and to reflect the changing roles of support staff in the wider context of pharmacy. The provider advised that content changes are reviewed by a second pharmacist.

The following changes were noted:

- a proposal to permit experienced delivery drivers to observe trainee drivers in practice and collaborate on trainee assessment. The team explored this further under criterion three
- updating and providing guidance around the online Drug Tariff in ADAC, with region specific guides for Scotland and Northern Ireland
- incorporating content on Pharmacy First to support MCA trainees in delivery
- changes to the ACD course, including using accredited pharmacy technician accuracy checkers as supervisors, and introducing additional stages that use MCQs. The team explored the latter aspects under criterion three.

The team noted the ongoing work on the ACD course and encourages the NPA to continue with its review to align the course provision with the hospital/secondary care sector.

Criteria 3: Assessment

Criteria met/will be met? Yes No

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

NPA's assessment strategy describes different types of assessments used for level 2 courses. Formative short answer questions (SAQs) are backed up with summative multiple-choice questions (MCQs) and observations in the workplace which allow assessment of competence in line with Miller's triangle.

The assessment methodology for the ACD course differs from other courses in that trainees discuss their answers to formative MCQs and activities with their supervisor, complete a portfolio type assignment, checking and error logs, an interview, and a final assessment test.

The provider outlined changes to the ACD course assessment since the last reaccreditation event, which included:

- allowing an accredited pharmacy technician accuracy checker to act as supervisor with a requirement for a minimum of three years' accuracy checking experience
- adding pre-test MCQs to assess readiness for the final assessment, and
- introducing a pre-interview stage using MCQs

The team sought to understand the rationale behind introducing the MCQs and heard how this was in response to trainee submissions lacking sufficient detail and delayed completions. The provider assured the team that knowledge was still being assessed at the right level by retaining a mix of SAQs and MCQs.

The provider proposed a change to the DMSE course to allow qualified delivery drivers to sign off competencies for trainees. The team accepted the rationale behind the proposal which was based on the practicality and availability of pharmacy professionals accompanying delivery drivers on the road. The team sought assurance on the training that would be provided to ensure delivery drivers would carry out observations appropriately. This will require delivery drivers to read the supervisor guide. Additional information will be added to the guide to support them with feeding back to the supervisor and collaborating on sign off. The team agreed the proposed change on the basis that qualified delivery drivers would receive the training and support as outlined, and that their feedback would contribute towards the sign off, with supervisors retaining responsibility for signing off the competencies for delivery driver trainees.

NPA has introduced a Recognition of Prior Learning policy (applicable only to NPA courses), which recognises a trainee's earlier achievements towards a qualification. The policy will only be used for MDCD and will enable the provider to ascertain if there are any gaps and then certify learners who have completed all the knowledge and skills required for MCA or ADAC.

The team was assured that NPA follows a structured review process to manage changes to course content or assessments, and that the quality assurance manager reviews and approves changes before implementation.

Supervisor observations are a key addition to NPA's assessment methodology, and it is mandatory for trainees to have a supervisor on all level 2 courses. It is not possible to continue on a course without them. Supervisor observations are mapped to outcomes that are better suited to observation as opposed to question and answer. NPA provides supervisor training and guidance which ensures clarity

and direction for completing observations.

Trainees receive feedback on their progress at various stages. MCQ assessments provide instant feedback which encourages continuation. Trainees may also seek feedback from course leads where they have failed a formative MCQ assessment. Supervisors act as mentors for trainees throughout the course and provide feedback after observing activities and following final sign off.

Trainees must pass the summative assessments for all course modules. MCQ pass marks are set at 80%. Trainees are not permitted to resubmit any assessment but are allowed three attempts in total (two re-sits). For summative assessments, if a trainee fails the third attempt (second re-sit), they will be discontinued from the course.

The team wished to understand the rationale behind the four attempts allowed for the final ACD practical checking test. The provider advised this was historical practice and that a fourth attempt was uncommon. The pass mark for the ACD course is different from other courses and trainees must get everything right to pass. The team also queried the unlimited attempts allowed for completing competency booklets in all courses except ACD. The provider confirmed that in reality there were not unlimited attempts, and that this element of the course is similar to a portfolio-based assignment where trainees work on refining a final submission. Trainees would be discontinued from the course if there were serious concerns about them meeting the standards. Processes are in place for identifying and supporting trainees who may be experiencing difficulties.

The team considered all discussions around the permitted number of assessment attempts, and recommended that the NPA should consider how to align these with best practice, as part of a wider review of the overall support staff assessment strategy.

The team sought reassurance around the robustness of MCA and ADAC reassessments, and how the provider ensured assessment integrity in using the question bank. The provider articulated a clear rationale for the question bank size, management and application, and the quality assurance manager confirmed the adequacy of the approach. However, the team's view was that a larger question bank would improve the robustness of the assessment process. The team recommended that NPA should benchmark the use of question banks, as part of a wider review of the overall support staff assessment strategy.

Quality assurance procedures ensure trainees complete the formative aspects of the course to a satisfactory standard. The quality assurance manager samples around 5% of competency booklets. All booklets are checked by the e-learning manager before a certificate is issued.

The assessment regulations ensure that only trainees who can practice safely and effectively are given a certificate. Patient safety is emphasised in course topics, important areas are weighted in assessments, and vital daily tasks are part of the competence observation assessment. ACD trainees must submit a significant number of items they have checked, and again on re-validation, to prove they have been checking competently. Supervisors are encouraged to flag unsafe practice to the course lead and they can also prevent certification if they have any concerns of unsafe practice as part of the end of course report. Since the last reaccreditation event, the provider has added specific guidance on addressing unsafe practice to the competency booklet. This gives supervisors clear direction on ending an observation immediately and providing feedback to the trainee on why it was necessary. This addressed a condition imposed by the last accreditation team in 2021.

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 are met. Two criteria require minor amendments.

The provider continues to invest in its online Learning Academy, with enhancements providing additional support resources for trainees and supervisors. NPA has responded to trainee feedback to introduce a progress bar that helps trainees track their progress and pick up where they left off. Additions to the frequently asked questions improve query management and resolution, and a tab style layout increases content accessibility. Dedicated administration and e-learning teams are on hand to support trainees with individual technical or other issues, drawing on the expertise of NPA specialist teams as required.

The team noted in terms of tracking trainee progression that NPA has recently implemented a new, comprehensive reporting tool on the Salesforce platform. It delivers enhanced reporting for members and the head office to help them keep trainees on track and enable them to intervene where support is required.

The team was satisfied that the provider maintains adequate resources to enable trainees to meet course outcomes. This includes printed and online resources, facilities and equipment, IT systems, team structures, and qualified teaching and development staff. The team heard consistent evidence of a continuous improvement ethos that enhances the student experience. The provider has revamped course completion certifications, which are e-certificates with e-badges and barcodes that can reveal the course units and highlight achievements.

NPA has transparent procedures for dealing with course plagiarism and malpractice that may be identified by trainees, supervisors, peers or NPA staff. Any malpractice concerns (which covers plagiarism) are escalated to the quality assurance manager. The provider highlighted that plagiarism is harder to detect on level two courses as trainees are answering short questions and MCQs. There were no instances of plagiarism and malpractice reported at this level. The malpractice and plagiarism policy is included in the student guide, but it was not in the submitted version of the supervisor guide. The provider should review the supervisor guide to ensure the policy and procedures for plagiarism and malpractice are also included there.

Trainees may also raise wider concerns, for example, about the practice of others, the potential for patient harm, an unsafe training environment, or illegal practice. NPA has procedures for managing such concerns. The ADAC and MCA course content covers whistleblowing and concerns. The team noted that the submitted version of the student guide did not include advice about raising concerns and recommended that NPA should review the student guide to ensure it includes a section about this.

The team were assured that the quality assurance process identifies, monitors and manages concerns about individual trainees.

Criteria 5: Quality management

Criteria met/will be met? Yes No

The team was satisfied that all four criteria relating to quality management are met.

The NPA learning and development team carries out full reviews of each course annually, and six monthly for the law and ethics and drug tariff sections as these topics involve more changes. The full review process includes a second review by another team member or the quality assurance manager. Urgent updates are actioned immediately.

The type of changes made include removing references to discontinued products, and reflecting changes made to legislation, guidance and pharmacy practice or services. The team heard numerous specific examples of changes and updates made to all six courses since the last reaccreditation event, including the drug tariff. Additional team commentary on course changes is included under criterion three.

NPA quality assures assessment decisions in different ways. The functionality of the online system enables questions to be analysed and amended, and learning resource tools support supervisor assessment decision making. The provider relies on the integrity and competence of the supervisor for appropriately signing off trainees. It does not quality assure every assessment decision in competency booklets, but rather this is done by sampling. This is discussed under criterion three.

Feedback is systematically collected from trainees and supervisors as part of the annual review process, and this in turn informs course reviews. The provider examines this data annually and actions improvements as necessary. Examples included addressing issues raised about forms, passwords and logging in.

In addition, the NPA engages with stakeholders, members, patients and the public and incorporates their feedback in the review of processes. NPA staff involved in the design, delivery and review of courses keep up to date with current practice, and this is referred to under criterion two. This means that developments in medicines, medical devices, pharmacy law, pharmacy practice and national guidelines are all reflected in course content. An example of a timely update of an important development is the addition of Pharmacy First content.

Criteria 6: Supporting learners and the learning experience

Criteria met/will be met? Yes No

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

The team noted that the NPA provides a range of resources to support trainees and supervisors. The website hosts a student support guide which provides pre-enrolment information and highlights how trainees will require certain opportunities to complete the course. In addition, the supervisor guide provides information on the supervisor role and on supporting trainees, for example, on coaching, feedback, observing competencies, and how to support trainees in a pharmacy environment.

Each trainee must have a designated supervisor, and they cannot enrol without one. A learning contract is signed by the provider, trainee, and supervisor at the start of each course, where it is agreed that a designated supervisor will be regularly supervising the trainee. Should a supervisor leave part way through a course, then the course is suspended until a new supervisor is in place.

Regular NPA reviews ensure course materials and content cover requirements. Module workbooks provide trainees with topic information, and course books signpost to different resources. New enhanced reporting systems flag when trainees fall behind, and if this happens, the trainee and supervisor will receive an email directing them to contact NPA. There is a process for following up when there has been no contact, to find out why a trainee is behind and how NPA may support them. If supervisors are struggling with how to support trainees, they are encouraged to contact the Member Services department. The course lead manages any such issues. Where a trainee is not making progress, and the supervisor has not been in contact with NPA, the provider is proactive in reaching out to the supervisor, or, if the concern is specific or content related, contacting the trainee.

Trainees have access to NPA staff who can help them with academic and pastoral issues. Trainees can access the Member Services team for support from Monday to Friday, between 9am and 5pm, via telephone and e-mail. Pastoral care queries are managed through the course lead, who can seek support and guidance from the wider management team and the quality assurance manager on more complex issues. Learning and development pharmacists and pharmacy technicians undertake safeguarding training which supports the pastoral care provision.

NPA gathers end of course feedback from trainees and supervisors to continuously improve courses and to ensure ongoing trainee and member satisfaction with NPA's provision. NPA's satisfaction process is incentivised to try to gather as much information as possible.

Key findings - Part 3 - Role-specific learning outcomes

Please see the individual part 3 course reports for commentary.

