

Open Awards pharmacy technician re- recognition event report, December 2025



Contents

Event summary and conclusions	1
Introduction	3
Role of the GPhC.....	3
Background.....	3
Documentation.....	5
Pre-event.....	5
The event.....	5
Declarations of interest	5
Schedule	5
Attendees	5
Key findings - Part 1 Learning outcomes	6
Domain: Person-centred care and collaboration (learning outcomes 1 - 12)	6
Domain: Professionalism (learning outcomes 13 - 25).....	6
Domain: Leadership and management (learning outcomes 26 - 48)	6
Domain: Leadership and management (learning outcomes 49 – 53)	6
Key findings - Part 2 Standards for the initial education and training	7
Standard 1: Selection and entry requirements	7
Standard 2: Equality, diversity and inclusion.....	8
Standard 3: Management, resources and capacity.....	10
Standard 4: Monitoring, review and evaluation	13
Standard 5: Course design and delivery	14
Standard 6: Course assessment.....	16
External Quality Assurance (EQA) of the pharmacy technician (integrated) End Point Assessment (EPA) plan (apprenticeship pathway - England Only)	19
Annex A: Decision descriptors	21

Event summary and conclusions

Awarding organisation: Open Awards

Qualification: Pharmacy Technician

Names qualifications:

Open Awards Level 3 Diploma in the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Technicians (Integrated Apprenticeship) (RQF) 603/6988/7

Open Awards Level 3 Technical Occupational Entry in the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Technicians (Diploma) 610/4031/9 inclusive of the Open Awards Level 3 Diploma in the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Technicians (Wales) C00/4950/5

Event type: Re-recognition

Event date: 5 December 2025

Approval period: January 2026 – January 2032

Relevant requirements: Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacy technicians, October 2017

Outcome: The recognition team has agreed to recommend to the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) that the Pharmacy Technician qualification (including apprenticeship pathway) provided by Open Awards should be re-recognised for a further period of six years with an interim event at the mid-way point.

Conditions: There were no conditions.

Standing conditions: Find here [the standing conditions of accreditation](#).

Recommendations: No recommendations were made.

Minor amendments:

- The Qualification Guide for the Apprenticeship notes Science GCSE or vocational equivalent at Level 2 ‘preferably relating to pharmacy’, however then states Level 2 Pharmacy is not accepted for science. Clarity to the wording may be needed to avoid confusion.

Registrar¹ decision:

The Registrar is satisfied that Open Awards has met the requirement of continued recognition 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.

The Registrar confirms that Open Awards is approved to continue to offer the Pharmacy Technician qualifications for a period of 6 years with an interim event in 3 years.

Key contact (provider): Nina Hinton, Director of Business and Development, Open Awards

Recognition team:

¹ Registrar or appointed delegate

Dr James Desborough* (Team leader), Associate Professor in Pharmacy Practice, School of Pharmacy, University of East Anglia

Charlotte Patterson (team member – pharmacy technician), Pharmacy Technician Facilitator, Birmingham and Solihull training hub and Clinical Pharmacy Technician in primary care network

Katie Brankin (team member – pharmacy technician), Pharmacy Lecturer, Edinburgh College and Pharmacy Technician, NHS Lothian

Jerry Herring (team member – recently registered pharmacy technician), Lead Pharmacy Technician – Homecare and Tariff Excluded Oncology, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust

Liz Harlaar (team member – lay), Independent Business Consultant

*also attended the pre-event meeting on 10 November 2025

GPhC representative: Chris McKendrick, Senior Quality Assurance Officer (Education) General Pharmaceutical Council

Rapporteur: Alison McVitty, Freelance Human Resources Consultant

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 programme/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 the Legislation page on our website**.

Background

Open Awards was approved by the GPhC in 2020 to deliver a pharmacy technician qualification via its approved centre providers (the providers), and in 2021 was also approved to deliver a pharmacy technician apprenticeship via its providers. The Pharmacy Technician qualification is offered in two formats: as a standalone qualification (England or Wales), and as part of the ST0300 Level 3 Pharmacy Technician (Integrated) Apprenticeship Standard. The latter remains the most popular route. Open Awards currently has five providers delivering pharmacy qualifications, with potentially two further providers to be added in 2025/26.

Both the qualification and apprenticeship were reviewed at an interim event on 18 July 2023.

Since 2023, registration numbers have reduced overall due to one approved provider gaining direct accreditation with GPhC. However, with the approval of new providers in 2025, numbers are beginning to increase.

Since the last GPhC event, Open Awards engaged with the Department for Education (DfE), Skills England and Ofqual on the post-16 qualification reforms. The standalone Diploma was submitted as a Technical Occupational Entry qualification, and included a title change (Open Awards Level 3 Technical Occupational Entry in the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Technicians (Diploma)). There was a full review of all content, assessment strategy and delivery materials, and new sample assessments were developed to exemplify the approach to holistic internal assessment. This was as part of a wider objective to provide exemplar assignments/briefs for all units, and to reflect good practice identified through external quality assurance (EQA) activities.

The new version of the qualification went live from 1st September 2025. The previous title, offered as a standalone qualification in England, was withdrawn on 31st August 2025. It is however retained for delivery in Wales.

At the interim event, one condition was set and was subsequently judged as met by the previous recognition team. The condition was:

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 submission confirmed that following the interim event, the requirement for providers to use EDI data and for Open Awards to monitor it, was communicated at pharmacy standardisation meetings in 2023 and 2025. Clarification was given on how data could be captured and utilised, including integrating into schemes of work, delivery plans, and through learner and group profiles, with exemplar templates provided. The approach at Walsall College was highlighted as an example of how EDI data was being collected and used.

In addition, a provider survey was created, focusing on how protected characteristics and special requirements are identified and monitored, and analysed. The information was fed into the 2025 thematic review meeting. The EQA template was amended in July 2025 to capture how providers were analysing data for themes, trends, and actions based on protected characteristics. A thematic review conducted in September 2025 followed up on survey findings and discussed best practices.

Open Awards also confirmed the ongoing use of internal resources for EDI data monitoring and analysis, with a view to influencing course design.

There was also one recommendation made at the interim event, which was 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.

The submission highlighted Open Awards proactive approach to gathering stakeholder feedback, including from providers, who are required to complete stakeholder engagement to feed into design and review processes. The compliance reviews conducted with providers looks for evidence of feedback collected, including from patients. The submission indicated that obtaining patient and public feedback continues to be a challenge for both Open Awards and providers, but is sought where feasible. Examples of where surveys and employer-mediated feedback has worked well has been shared among providers to support improvements in this area, and Open Awards continues to encourage and support providers to integrate patient perspectives into quality reviews. The team explored this area further during the event, and this is reflected in the commentary under Standard 5 of this report.

Open Awards' own stakeholder engagement activity in 2024 included detailed employer engagement as part of the Skills England, DfE and Ofqual submission, and an employer survey in 2025 sought views on current entry requirements and the possibility of introducing remote assessor observations. An action has also been identified continue to seek contact with learners during EQA checks for direct feedback throughout the year.

Since the last event, Open Awards has established an in-house EQA role which has strengthened internal expertise and resulted in improved support to providers throughout the academic year. An external quality assurer may also be engaged to mitigate against any potential conflicts of interest, and to ensure long-term capacity.

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 (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 via videoconference on 10/11/2025. 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 4 December 2025. The remainder of the event took place via videoconference on 5 December 2025 and comprised a series of meetings with the awarding organisation staff and stakeholders involved in the design of the qualification.

Declarations of interest

Charlotte Patterson declared a professional working relationship with a representative from Walsall College (who was not present at the event). The team noted this and did not consider there to be any conflict of interest.

Schedule

1. Questions to awarding organisation
2. Meeting with sample of centre providers and associated IQA representatives
3. Meeting with qualification EQA representatives
4. Deliver outcome to awarding organisation

Attendees

Awarding organisation representatives:

Richard Spencer, Director of Quality and Data, Open Awards

Nina Hinton, Director of Business and Development, Open Awards

Clare Filipowicz, Quality Assurer, Open Awards

Andrew Bardsley, Head of Quality of Standards, Open Awards

Robin Jackson, Director of Assessment, Open Awards

Key findings - Part 1 Learning outcomes

The structure of the qualification and the separate apprenticeship have not changed since the original recognition event, and both remain registered with Ofqual. Updates to the qualification and apprenticeship units, as well as the assessment strategy, were reviewed as part of this recognition event. On this basis, the recognition team is satisfied that the pharmacy technician **learning outcomes continue to be met**.

A detailed list of learning outcomes can be found in the **Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacy technicians, October 2017**

Domain: Person-centred care and collaboration (learning outcomes 1 - 12)

Table 1: Learning outcomes' assessment decision for learning outcomes 1 to 12

Learning outcomes	Met/will be met	Not met
Learning outcome 1 - 12	✓	☐

Domain: Professionalism (learning outcomes 13 - 25)

Table 2: Learning outcomes' assessment decision for learning outcomes 13 to 25

Learning outcomes	Met/will be met	Not met
Learning outcome 13 - 25	✓	☐

Domain: Leadership and management (learning outcomes 26 - 48)

Table 3: Learning outcomes' assessment decision for learning outcomes 26 to 48

Learning outcomes	Met/will be met	Not met
Learning outcome 26 - 48	✓	☐

Domain: Leadership and management (learning outcomes 49 – 53)

Table 4: Learning outcomes' assessment decision for learning outcomes 49 to 53

Learning outcomes	Met/will be met	Not met
Learning outcome 49 - 53	✓	☐

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

Standard 1: Selection and entry requirements

Table 5: Standard 1 – outcome decision

Standards	Met/will be met	Not met
Standard 1	✓	☐

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

The submission advised how Open Awards ensures it meets this criterion by implementing mandatory entry requirements and requiring certain checks and agreements before a learner can commence the course. The requirements are detailed in the published qualification specification, and providers are required to ensure the entry requirements are consistently applied. Implementation is confirmed through pre-verification checks, ongoing EQA and compliance activities.

The team enquired as to how Open Awards' processes assure that centre providers apply the selection criteria and processes consistently and heard that this is done through EQA sampling, based on the Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny (CASS) strategy, a minimum of three times per year. The EQA process checks learner records and e-portfolio evidence of qualifications. The number of learners sampled depends on the risk rating of the provider. Providers' processes are checked at the pre-verification stage before learners may be registered. New providers have a first EQA visit typically within three to four months.

The submission confirmed there have been no changes to the entry requirements since the interim event.

Open Awards has considered provider feedback on the requirement for Maths and English being a potential barrier to entry, with some other courses accepting other forms of Level 2 assessment. The submission confirmed that Open Awards will maintain the current requirements for Maths and English. The team sought to understand more about this decision in the context of widening participation and was told the issue is being kept under review. Open Awards acknowledged the inconsistency among providers but was satisfied that Maths and English continue to be required for learners to access assessments and demonstrate competency, in particular in regard to assignments and professional discussions. It was felt that alternatives to Maths and English would not provide assurance of competency at the same level. Open Awards continues to take feedback on the entry requirements, and the team heard about collaboration with providers to ensure that learners who are at the right level, but who are unable to produce the relevant certification, are not disadvantaged.

As mentioned above, the entry requirements remain unchanged since the last event, and this includes the requirement for trainees to be employed, or be in a training role, at a suitable pharmacy-related workplace. The team followed up to ask about the three months of experience being gained before the course start date, and any guidelines in place for providers. It was confirmed that that trainees are not permitted to dispense before the required knowledge is in place, and this is covered in the pre-verification checks. If trainees are already employed in a pharmacy technician role, but have not yet

started a qualification, they still need to be supervised. The Open Awards team recognised that the guidance around this was not explicit and noted an action to make this clearer in the qualification guide.

The team asked what the mechanisms were to ensure that the pharmacy environment and supervision remain in place throughout training, outside of the annual EQA process. It was explained that the pre-verification process checks that providers have a process in place for checking this. In addition, the learner tripartite agreement sets out relevant roles and responsibilities, which are monitored through EQA activity, when the appropriateness of the environment is also checked.

Wishing to hear how Open Awards assures there are no conflicts of interest with a potential supervisor within the trainee selection processes. The team was advised there are checks to ensure providers have a conflicts of interest policy in place and that they maintain a conflicts of interest log. Compliance reviews also check what providers have in place. Otherwise conflicts of interest are managed at local supervision level. During the meeting with providers, the team also heard about the processes that check and monitor conflicts of interest at enrolling and onboarding stage, and as part of regular tripartite reviews. There was an example of processes operating in practice, when an educational supervisor had to be change as a result of a conflict of interest being identified.

The submission referred to Open Awards' annual reviews of learner data, last undertaken in early 2024, and confirmed that this did not highlight any issues with regards to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in context of the selection process. Learner demographic data indicators are now mandatory fields at registration to allow for fuller data and more detailed reporting in the 2025/26 academic year.

The team identified a minor amendment in regard to the Qualification Guide for the Apprenticeship. The Guide notes Science GCSE or vocational equivalent at Level 2 'preferably relating to pharmacy', however then states Level 2 Pharmacy is not accepted for science. The team suggested that the wording may need to be clarified to avoid confusion.

Standard 2: Equality, diversity and inclusion

Table 6: Standard 2 – outcome decision

Standards	Met/will be met	Not met
Standard 2	✓	☐

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

The submission confirmed the biennial review of Open Awards' EDI and reasonable adjustments and special considerations policies, last undertaken in 2024. Providers must have their own EDI policies in place, and policy requirements are checked at provider approval stage and reviewed through annual EQA activity, including checks that EDI is embedded into assessment and course design and delivery. A thematic review completed in 2025 was an example of policy application working in practice, and how delivery is adapted to meet the needs of trainees with protected characteristics and special requirements.

Providers are supported to devise their own internal assessments that meet the needs of their learners and the requirements of the qualification. An example of the output of the work with providers was the move away from significant written evidence and multiple-choice questions to improve accessibility to assessment.

Through the revalidation process, EDI data is considered to identify any impact in practice on achievement and retention rates of learners. Annual reviews of learner data undertaken in early 2024 did not highlight any EDI issues.

In response to the condition set at the previous interim event, the submission advised that Open Awards increased its engagement with providers around the expectations of utilising EDI data for monitoring, learning and improvement. EQA and compliance reports have identified that providers all actively use EDI data to adapt delivery, assessment and learner support arrangements, particularly through flexibly teaching, accessible materials, and targeted interventions for learners with additional or protected characteristics. Open Awards now requests copies of providers' self-assessment plans as part of the compliance activities, giving insight into where they are monitoring and using data and specifically for their pharmacy provision. The team wished to explore how this had changed the training, and heard that providers are required to have self-evaluation/trends reports, put support plans in place, and embed requirements in assessment plans. Standardisation work has also focused on arrangements providers would put in place to accommodate learners with protected characteristics. An example was provided of reviewing sample assessments to support learner demographics, especially where English was not the first language. As a result, the amount of writing required was reduced and new sample assessments were introduced.

The team referred to the thematic review and queried the target date of 1 June 2026 for evidence that providers are utilising EDI in design/to drive course adjustments, when the issue was raised in 2023. It was clarified that this was a revised target date, following work that had been completed and reviewed. New assessment guidance was introduced, and providers have been set actions. The June 2026 target date is to allow for implementation, when a further review and actions are anticipated, as part of a cycle of continuous improvement.

The submission advised that records of reasonable adjustments made by providers, not requiring advance approval by Open Awards, are reviewed as part of EQA activities. A revised system introduced in 2023 enables greater analysis of the types of reasonable adjustments requested and reasons for them, and this is also checked during compliance reviews. No reasonable adjustments had however been recorded at any of the pharmacy providers. The team queried this, in light of many other courses commonly seeing between 5-10% of learners requiring adjustments. It was explained that providers are allowed to make reasonable adjustments where assignments and assessments are not taking place under controlled conditions. Open Awards approval must be sought if these are under controlled conditions. No units in the pharmacy qualifications involve controlled conditions, and therefore no approval requests have been received. Providers maintain an internal log of reasonable adjustments, which are reviewed as part of EQA activity. At the meeting with providers the team also heard about when reasonable adjustments are identified and reviewed, mechanisms for providing appropriate support, types of adjustments that have been provided, and reporting processes to Open Awards.

Open Awards' presentation referred to a relatively new process for assignment extensions. The team wished to hear more about this and was advised that the process has not yet gone live. There is an existing process for requesting extensions which is ongoing. The new process will formalise and standardise existing practice when implemented.

Standard 3: Management, resources and capacity

Table 7: Standard 3 – outcome decision

Standards	Met/will be met	Not met
Standard 3	✓	☐

The team was satisfied that all seven criteria relating to monitoring, review and evaluation requirements are or will be or continue to be met.

The submission confirmed that Open Awards has made no substantive changes to the requirements of providers in relation to the management, resources and capacity since the last event. Open Awards continues to manage its responsibilities through a range of policies and practices across dedicated teams. Organisation-wide risk registers are maintained by the senior management team and overseen by the Board of Trustees. Risks for individual providers are managed in line with the CASS Policy, with each provider given a risk rating, and actions placed on providers to mitigate the risks identified. Provider delivery is managed through a governance and oversight framework from provider approval stage, through pre-verification checks, EQA and compliance activities, and learner agreements.

Wishing to know more about the risk management plan, the team was advised how it is reviewed every two years, or sooner should issues arise in between. The plan sits within the remit of the Quality and Standards team. The team noted a typographical error in the date of the risk management plan, which was confirmed as being May 2025, not 2015. During Open Awards' presentation the team heard how risks had been managed with two previous providers, and in follow up asked what changes had been made to ensure Open Awards was better placed to pick up issues earlier. Open Awards' response highlighted the employment of a full-time quality assurer, which enables more frequent EQA and issues to be picked up sooner. Through this role, close working relationships have been formed with all providers who are now comfortable to raise issues. Contingency arrangements are in place to ensure cover for the new QA role, should it be required.

There are individual actions for providers to mitigate risks. If a provider is rated as high risk, there are monthly checks for any incomplete actions. For medium risk-rated providers this is reduced to every three months, and for low-risk rated providers it is managed through the EQA process. The team asked what sanctions or mitigations might be put in place if a centre is identified as high risk, and was advised that a range of sanctions is available, for example, placing a provider on stop, up to withdrawing recognition if there were serious or repeated malpractice. An example was shared of a provider being placed on stop when its staff quota fell below the required level for delivery. Open Awards endeavours to support providers who find it challenging to secure qualified IQAs. Links have been established between trusted providers in the form of a matching service, so that contacts for appropriately qualified and experienced staff/contractors may be shared. Open Awards has found this also supports standardisation.

The submission highlighted how trainees must have a learning agreement which includes an outline of the roles and responsibilities of all parties. Providers are required to explain how they will ensure learning agreements are fully implemented, and must work with employers to ensure they maintain evidence of learning agreements being implemented and how learners are supported during the course. The team referenced feedback from the learner survey and asked how Open Awards seeks assurance from providers that learning agreements are indeed implemented in full. The team was told that learning agreements are checked as part of EQA activity, and conversations are held with individual

learners and employers to help identify any deviations. No instances of non-compliance were reported.

The roles and responsibilities of Open Awards and its providers is contained in a provider agreement. The team noted that the next review of this is due in the 2025/26 academic year and asked what this would entail. The team was told the agreement was being strengthened, partly in response to issues experienced with a former provider, but also to ensure continuity of support to learners should their provider enter administration. Open Awards has started to monitor providers' financial profiles, checks for which will be incorporated into the monthly reviews for high-risk providers. The review of the provider agreement will also consider data requirements, with a view to enhancing the quality of providers' EDI data collection and input.

The team wished to understand what had changed since the results of the learner survey and were advised of action taken when the survey analysis showed that learners were conflating learning agreements and training plans, leading to non-compliance with the learning agreement. Reflecting on the learner survey results, the team asked what action had been taken in response to 40% of learners reporting dissatisfaction with the information they received before starting the course by the provider. The team were advised that the qualification guide and sample assessments were reviewed and shared with learners. This information previously sat behind a provider log-in but is now available on the website. Supporting work has also been done through standardisation activity. In addition, Open Awards responded to providers individually, communicating the results of the learner survey and placing actions on providers to act on the feedback. Provider responses on what they are doing differently is currently pending.

Highlighting the expansion of training sectors, for example, prisons and primary care, the team asked how Open Awards ensures that learning agreements are suitable and reflect the placement environment, and heard that the learning agreement requires employers to demonstrate that they have considered how learners will gain access to the experience they need to gather evidence.

The submission explained that subject specialist experts are utilised in the design and review stages of qualification development/revalidation, including registered pharmacy technician subject specialists and EQAs. Open Awards has continued to grow its pool of pharmacy technician subject specialists over the last two years, and in response to the team's questions, confirmed there were now seven to eight subject specialists helping with, for example, course design, writing sample assessments, EQA and end point assessments (EPA). Subject specialists are recruited through advertised competitions, and there are ongoing reviews of continuous professional development (CPD) and conflicts of interest, as well as performance reviews for all external contractors.

With the diversification of pharmacy sectors, including primary care and prisons, the team asked if there were any challenges to ensuring IQAs have working knowledge of the learners' working environment. It was highlighted that EQA sampling checks IQAs' and assessors' occupational experience by reviewing their CPD, CVs, experience and their upskilling to ensure familiarity with the relevant working environment.

The team asked how Open Awards ensures that providers meet the requirement for pharmacy professional involvement, as staff turnover at centre providers can be a significant issue. The team was advised that Open Awards ensures that providers have contingency plans in place, such as their own bank of external contractors. This is checked at approval stage and as part of compliance reviews. Providers are also required to make sure learners are informed of any staff shortages. Open Awards has established the matching service to link providers and to support resourcing, and will only step in as a last resort to help providers with contingency planning. In one serious case where a provider had lost

their IQA, Open Awards liaised with Skills for Pharmacy to help with delivery and assessment. Learner email addresses are now captured at the registration stage, as a direct route of contact for learner support should that be required.

The submission highlighted that the requirements for the qualifications and experience of staff are outlined in the qualification specification, and these are checked as part of the application and pre-verification process for those organisations who apply to become a recognised Open Awards provider. The team asked about the qualifications that Open Awards accepts for its own assessors and for those employed by the provider who are conducting internal assessment of trainees. It heard that Open Awards has an approved list of providers for assessor qualifications, which is Level 3 CAVA or equivalent. This is published in the qualifications guide, and the communication around it has been strengthened since the last event. There is also an expectation that assessors will have carried on in practice and have completed CPD or top up training.

The submission referred to Open Awards offering national standardisation events and qualification specific forums, and the team enquired as to whether these are mandatory or optional. It was advised that the standardisation meeting is mandatory, and if missed, providers must catchup. If providers do not attend standardisation meetings, this can lead to sanctions being imposed. The uptake however was reported as good, with multiple representatives from providers in attendance. If important information is shared during standardisation meetings, Open Awards contacts providers separately. Presentations have also been turned into online training packages to avoid people having to sit through multiple sessions, and follow up questions can be asked to check understanding. Providers must also complete internal standardisation activities to ensure assessors make consistent and valid assessment decisions.

In relation to the 2025 GPhC Guidance on Supervising Pharmacy Professionals in Training, the team asked how Open Awards ensures that providers have amended their delivery accordingly for trainees inducted in September 2024 and early 2025, prior to this publication. The team was advised that this has been partly covered in EQA checks, which are ongoing as the guidance is relatively new. A specific action for the next EQA is to contact educational supervisors to check their understanding of the changes and how these have been fed to them.

The submission advised how key roles and responsibilities for those involved in managing and delivering the course are defined in providers' management and delivery and assessments plans. Learner agreements must be in place to formalise the roles. Wishing to understand how Open Awards ensures that tri-partite meetings happen regularly, it heard how these are checked at every EQA review, encompassing everything in learners' e-portfolios. Reviews are uploaded as evidence and these are examined to see what was discussed, and if the employer, provider and learner all had input. The team was told that in one case, a provider was put on stop because the tripartite reviews were not happening regularly, and also because work was not being assessed in a timely manner.

The requirements for supporting pre-registration trainees are outlined in the qualification specification and their implementation is reviewed through EQA activities. This includes access to suitable supervision, role models, and multidisciplinary teams. It is a requirement for each learner to be allocated a Designated Educational Supervisor (DES) and the EQA form was updated in 2025 to confirm compliance with this requirement. Learners must be given time to study and study time is agreed between the learner, the DES, and the provider. Since the last event, Open Awards has had a focus on the area of learner supervision and feedback. The quality of feedback to learners is monitored during EQA visits to ensure feedback is ongoing and consistent. Open Awards has noted an improvement in developmental feedback provided to learners in recent standardisation activities.

Standard 4: Monitoring, review and evaluation

Table 8: Standard 4 – outcome decision

Standards	Met/will be met	Not met
Standard 4	✓	☐

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

The submission confirmed how Open Awards' Quality Assurance (QA) process supports providers in improving standards. This is achieved through established QA policies and practices, and a dedicated subject specialist EQA leading a holistic EQA approach that ensures all aspects of the qualification are monitored and reviewed. Any actions identified through EQA are monitored, with timely completion of actions being one of the risk factors that influences a provider's risk rating.

Risks are managed in line with Open Awards' CASS strategy, with providers risk-rated, and a pharmacy-specific risk rating attached to providers delivering additional qualifications. Risk ratings are reviewed during EQA activity alongside the completion of any identified actions. The qualifications are categorised as high-risk and are therefore subject to 100% sampling.

Providers are required to have IQA procedures in place to review delivery and assessment practices, including internal standardisation, self-assessments and course reviews.

In response to the team's question about Open Awards' overall enrolment to completion data, Open Awards advised there were no major concerns regarding learners completing within planned timeframes. The team heard that learners are registered with intended start and end dates and that processes are in place to monitor their progress. This is managed through Open Awards' quality team, where centres are chased, actions set, and followed up through EQA activity.

The submission highlighted that as the qualifications are Ofqual regulated, they are managed in line with the CASS policy. Assessment strategies are in place and communicated to providers through the qualification specification. This covers quality management structures and responsibilities, and procedures for monitoring and evaluation. In addition, annual reviews of EDI data, achievement rates and reasons for withdrawal have been introduced from 2025/26.

A provider's Ofsted report is considered at approval stage and through compliance reviews. There are additional EQA checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment if a provider is not Ofsted regulated. Pre-verification checks on delivery and assessment plans are completed before providers commence delivery of the qualification, ensuring alignment with Open Awards' QA procedures, Skills for Health Assessment Principles for Occupational Competence, and GPhC Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacy technicians.

The submission highlighted Open Awards' validation policy, which ensures that any feedback or significant changes in practice is recorded and fed into qualification reviews. Providers are updated through standardisation events, thematic reviews, and lead independent assessor reports. They are expected to proactively respond to the external environment, and to work with employers to update training and course materials, and assignment briefs. Quarterly provider meetings are an opportunity for discussing how the external environment and pharmacy is changing and to agree adaptations. The EQA also communicates any required changes to providers and an example was shared of Open Awards issuing a joint statement to providers in collaboration with Pearson when action was needed to avoid

learners being allowed multiple attempts to pass when there were errors. The team wished to hear more about how Open Awards ensures providers are actively updating their course materials and delivery in response to changes in the sector. It heard that all assignment briefs are reviewed during the pre-verification process and checked as part of routine EQA. Each unit is checked for up-to-date content. There should also be evidence of providers communicating changes that are significant, and of learners being made aware of updates and what happens when they become registered.

The submission highlighted how the EQA communicates required changes to providers and an example was shared of Open Awards issuing a joint statement to providers in collaboration with Pearson when action was needed to avoid learners being allowed multiple attempts to pass when there were errors.

The redevelopment of the Level 3 Pharmacy Technician qualifications as part of the Department for Education Post-16 qualification reforms was highlighted as an example of adapting to external changes to ensure continued funding and relevance. The submission highlighted the continued shift towards digital and online communication driving adaptation to the changing digital environment. Providers must also now develop AI policies to standardise AI use without compromising academic integrity.

The qualification specification stipulates that providers must detail how they provide feedback to trainees and how it is used in monitoring, review and evaluation processes. Compliance is confirmed through EQA activities. An example was highlighted of Open Awards responding to learner feedback that identified a desire for increased formal feedback. This led to additional guidance and training for providers on the quality and timing of feedback in relation to teaching/learning and assessment decisions. This was actioned in 2023 and again in 2025 through standardisation meetings and thematic reviews and has increased consistency across providers.

Standard 5: Course design and delivery

Table 9: Standard 5 – outcome decision

Standards	Met/will be met	Not met
Standard 5	✓	☐

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

The submission confirmed that there have been no substantive changes to the content of Open Awards’ qualifications. The qualifications are mapped to the National Occupational Standards, GPhC outcomes and the apprenticeship standard (ST0300). The units combine knowledge and skills-based criteria, and assessment must take place in the workplace. Learners must meet all assessment criteria to demonstrate competence.

Assessment incorporates marked assignments for knowledge-based criteria, and holistic workplace observations for skills-based criteria. Since the last event, sample assignments have been produced to support providers with designing their own internal assessments. Formative competence assessment logs are completed for some units where trainees check a minimum number of items accurately to demonstrate practical competency.

The submission highlighted that Open Awards requires training providers and employers to act in line with the GPhC’s standards for pharmacy professionals and Guidance on supervising pharmacy learners in practice. All units in the qualification have been mapped to the GPhC learning outcomes, and all units are mandatory, ensuring learners achieve all outcomes. Open Awards provides guidance on the order of

delivery of units to support competency development related to knowledge, skills and behaviours. Providers must develop their own delivery and assessment plans outlining how they will meet the requirements of Open Awards' qualification specification, which outlines the qualification content, assessment strategy and requirements for course delivery.

The submission described the mechanisms Open Awards uses to gather feedback from training providers, employers, learners and patients, including from providers who are required to undertake similar stakeholder engagement. Feedback from providers and assessors has led to practical adjustments, such as revised unit sequencing, shorter and more focused assignments, and more engaging online delivery. Employer feedback has led to adaptations such as flexible lesson scheduling, revised delivery sequencing, and improved communication on off-the-job training expectations. Learner feedback has driven improvements in the redesigning of tasks and the introduction of varied assessment methods. A thematic review in September 2025 saw Open Awards and providers share stakeholder feedback and produce a shared action plan.

The submission highlighted that obtaining feedback from patients and the public continues to be a challenge for both Open Awards and providers, and the team wished to hear more about this. The team asked what steps Open Awards is taking to improve the collection and integration of patient and public feedback into course design and delivery, and a number of actions were described. Providers have been set an action as part of the thematic review, and good practice was shared of how one provider was collecting patient feedback through learners and employers. Open Awards is also working at a wider national level and has approached the Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK (APTUK) for support with obtaining patient feedback. The team also heard from providers directly how some were ensuring the views of patients and the public are taken into account in course design and delivery. This included using patient surveys, holding sessions with stakeholders such as NHS hospitals and the community, obtaining case studies from charities and community groups, and through trainees in their workplaces. Some of the providers confirmed it was more difficult to obtain direct feedback from patients and the public.

Referring to the mandatory workplace supervision element of the qualification, the submission confirmed that providers must implement robust supervision systems in collaboration with learners and employers to ensure patient safety. The team asked what actions would follow any decision to stop an assessment in circumstances where a risk to patient safety had been identified. It was told that in such cases, the assessment should be stopped immediately, should be logged, the learner and educational supervisor informed of the reasons, and Open Awards should also be advised. Before an assessment, regular risk assessments need to have been undertaken, learners must have read the relevant standard operating procedures (SOPs) and explicit consent must be obtained if a third party is involved in an observation. Open Awards advised that the requirements are covered in the qualification specification, although, as this is a lengthy document, it may be beneficial to document these as a standalone process.

The learning agreement sets out roles and responsibilities, the supervision requirements, and how trainees will be supported. The requirements for supervision are communicated to providers through the qualification specification, and implementation confirmed through EQA activities. The team wished to understand how Open Awards monitors the quality and consistency of supervision across providers and workplace settings and heard how this is done from different angles. The best evidence has been found to come directly from learners, with other evidence gathered through tripartite reviews, employer involvement and expert witness testimonies. Open Awards mandates in-person observations to better identify any issues and advised that action is taken where support is not being provided at the right level. Standardisation activities also promote the quality and consistency of approaches across providers.

The submission highlighted the primary purpose of the qualifications, which is to confirm occupational competence and enable learners to obtain a "licence to practise" and register with the GPhC. Providers must actively use the GPhC's standards for pharmacy professionals in all courses and course regulations are designed to prioritise professionalism, patient safety, and safe and effective practice.

The team asked how Open Awards ensures consistency between subject experts and external quality assurers around portfolios and assessment. It heard that consistency is promoted through the qualification content and sample assessments, which act as guides; EQA training, which ensures a consistent focus on relevant areas; and through the pre-verification checking process, IQA and EQA.

The submission confirmed that Open Awards has procedures for managing concerns, and checks are made to ensure providers have similarly established procedures. Where fitness to practice issues arise, supervisors have a duty to report these to the relevant provider. Serious concerns must be reported to the GPhC. Errors or serious concerns that could impact patient safety must reported to Open Awards, and consideration is given as to whether it should be reported to the GPhC. The team asked what guidance is provided to providers around the process for advising the GPhC of fitness to practice concerns. It was advised that, through standardisation activities, communication was strengthened around the GPhC standards, education and training standards and GPhC’s whistleblowing policy, to ensure learners, employers and providers were all aware of these. This is evaluated through conversations with learners to check understanding, reviewing provider handbooks to ensure the information is being conveyed, and through compliance reviews. In its meeting with providers the team also heard that relevant processes and reporting procedures were in place for responding to safeguarding and fitness to practice issues, including reporting to Open Awards and escalation to GPhC.

Standard 6: Course assessment

Table 10: Standard 6 – outcome decision

Standards	Met/will be met	Not met
Standard 6	✓	☐

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

The submission advised that Open Awards’ assessment strategies were reviewed in 2024/25 as part of the submission to Skills England, DfE and Ofqual. Providers are required to have a delivery and assessment plan that details how their course is fully compliant with the requirements of the assessment strategies. In addition, assessment practices must adhere to the Skills for Health Assessment Principles which were reviewed in 2023, when Open Awards was part of the review group.

The team wished to understand how centres are continuing to align with the assessment strategy, with particular reference to the use of artificial intelligence (AI). The team heard that AI is a significant issue and has been a topic covered at all recent standardisation meetings. Compliance reviews check that providers have AI policies in place, and while Turnitin software is being used by most providers, the professional discussion is felt to be the most robust way of checking learners’ understanding. One provider has introduced additional professional discussions.

Since the last event, additional guidance has been produced to further support a consistent assessment approach across providers. The guidance outlines types of internal assessment, the level of control required and guidance around the use of AI. Over the last two years there has been a move away from

multiple-choice question assessments and written assignments to a more holistic assessment utilising professional discussions, project-based assessments, reflective practice and observations. The team asked how Open Awards ensures balance and equity between providers in a holistic assessment approach. It was advised that the guidance on this has been strengthened, with sample assessments also helping. Checks are carried out at pre-verification stage and assignments are also reviewed. Open Awards reported a positive impact from streamlining the approach, proportionate to the qualification.

The submission advised that assessments are carried out by appropriately trained and qualified individuals who are competent to assess the performance of trainee pharmacy technicians. Assessors and IQAs must be GPhC registered and occupationally competent. EQAs monitor processes and practices to ensure they meet Open Awards qualification, and regulatory requirements, ensuring consistency in standards.

It was highlighted that providers have been asked for feedback on whether it is appropriate to reduce the number of face-to-face observations to two, to align with Pearson, and to provide some flexibility on additional observations required. Feedback received has been mixed. It was anticipated that a final decision would be made by December 2025, and any changes would be implemented from January 2026. The team asked what criteria will guide decision making around reducing the number of face-to-face observations and how assessment integrity would be ensured. It was clarified that the proposal was not to reduce the number of observations overall, but was to consider whether one could be done remotely. This would be in line with Pearson's approach, and given the shared nature of the qualification it would be desirable to maintain consistency. The risk of reducing quality was acknowledged, and Open Awards will continue to seek feedback from providers to understand how they manage remote observations effectively.

The submission highlighted how the assessment strategy is developed to be robust, reliable, and valid, specifically confirming that a trainee's practice is safe. Foundational health and safety knowledge is imparted to trainees at induction stage, and the order of unit delivery is designed to ensure knowledge is included at an early stage to promote safe practice, for example, around health and safety, person-centred practice and safeguarding. Providers must ensure appropriate risk assessments are conducted to ensure patients' safety throughout the course. Significant assessment is undertaken in the workplace to enable robust assessment that a trainee pharmacy technician is practising safely. The submission confirmed a two-fold approach to monitoring systems. Firstly, by Open Awards monitoring providers, and secondly by providers monitoring learning and training environments.

The pre-verification was highlighted as a critical quality assurance process conducted to ensure that providers meet the requirements for delivering the qualifications in full. It aims to pre-emptively address potential issues like inadequate support or communication and ensure the overall quality and safety of the training provision. Approved providers must develop their own delivery and assessment plan outlining how they will meet the requirements of the qualification specification. Providers' delivery plans will set out how the requirements of the assessment strategy are met, including how trainees' progress will be monitored and evidenced throughout the course. The assessment strategy requires mandatory workplace observation to be completed by a qualified assessor, who must also assess any additional evidence provided by an employer such as witness statements. Course providers are responsible for all assessment decisions, including IQA activities and claiming results.

Throughout the course, providers must ensure that learners receive regular supervision and feedback. This should include feedback on their assessment and occupational performance, behaviour, and professional development in relation to GPhC Standards. The formal learning agreement between the

provider, learner, and employer defines roles, responsibilities, and support mechanisms. Tripartite reviews are crucial for discussing learners' progress, and EQAs check for evidence of these reviews.

The submission highlighted that learner surveys previously identified feedback as an area for improvement across providers. This resulted in additional training, guidance and standardisation activities being undertaken, and has led to a positive improvement across providers. In the meeting with providers, the team explored how they ensure learners receive appropriate and timely feedback. The team heard how the provision of feedback is supported by internal assessment/verification strategies with defined turnaround times for submissions and resubmissions. One to one meetings with learners, where feedback is discussed, form part of the records available for review in EQA.

The subject specialist EQA role, which is now in-house, enables Open Awards to provide increased support to approved providers. Open Awards retains responsibility for the EQA of all assessment processes undertaken by approved providers.

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

Table 11: Standard 7 – outcome decision

Standards	Met/will be met	Not met
Standard 7	✓	☐

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

The submission highlighted that providers must have resources, systems and processes for supporting learners throughout their course, covering Initial Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) and enrolment, induction, teaching and learning (academic study), welfare in the training environment and workplace, and careers advice and guidance, including progression opportunities. Providers are mandated to provide learner access to support for their academic and general welfare needs, and the training environment is expected to be supportive and inclusive. Supervisors are expected to encourage learners, with support encompassing pastoral care. Open Awards monitors provider compliance by checking for individual learner plans, evidence of screening for additional needs, and the application of reasonable adjustments.

Providers must work with the learner and their employer to establish robust supervision systems that ensure patient safety, including supervision of learners and risk assessments. Supervision arrangements must be in line with GPhC's Guidance on supervising pharmacy learners in practice (June 2025).

Earlier learner feedback had indicated that managing time around study and work can be challenging, and in response, Open Awards identified an action to provide more explicit guidance on workload and time to learn in the qualification specifications. More recent evidence shows that providers have embedded these requirements into learning agreements and discussed workloads and time in tripartite reviews.

Learners must be employed, or be in a training role at a suitable pharmacy-related workplace which should include access to suitable supervision, role models/pharmacy professionals and multi-disciplinary teams. This requirement is explicitly outlined in the qualification specification, and must be covered in providers' delivery and assessment plans, learning agreements and employer risk assessments. The

learning agreement sets out roles for the learner, provider and employer, how trainees will be supported throughout the course, and a commitment of all parties to regular interaction with workplace colleagues. An example learning agreement specifies that the provider must ensure all supervisors and assessors provide interactions and support consistent with GPhC's Guidance on tutoring pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

Open Awards requires providers to evidence that trainees will work with a range of professionals, including registered pharmacy professionals, other members of the pharmacy team, other teaching staff, and relevant healthcare professionals with a range of experience/qualifications. Providers must also ensure opportunities for learners to work with other health or care professionals and learners during their training, which may involve working in different settings like GP practices, clinics, hospital wards, or with district nurses.

Tripartite meetings are adjusted to account for individual learner needs. The team asked how Open Awards ensures each provider has systems in place to meet and discuss student progress, and that the systems are utilised. A number of different ways were highlighted, including tripartite reviews, through EQA, governance meetings to discuss learner progress (also at individual learner level), and ensuring the full involvement of educational supervisors. Concerns are addressed, and if learners are not being supported this can result in the provider being placed on stop.

Providers must include training on relevant policies and procedures during learner induction, covering both the provider and the employer environments. Information should be provided about raising concerns, and the procedures for reporting concerns. Learners' knowledge in this area is explicitly assessed within the qualification, to include recognising their own poor performance and responding appropriately, recognising the poor performance of others and taking appropriate action, and explaining the whistleblowing procedure in line with regulatory guidelines.

Open Awards requires everyone supporting pre-registration trainee pharmacy technicians to take account of the GPhC's guidance on tutoring for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in their work through requirements set for approved providers.

External Quality Assurance (EQA) of the pharmacy technician (integrated) End Point Assessment (EPA) plan (apprenticeship pathway - England Only)

Open Awards is currently accredited by GPhC to offer the apprenticeship pathway/ end-point assessment (EPA) for the ST0300 Pharmacy Technician (Integrated) apprenticeship standard. The qualification can only be awarded when the apprentice has progressed through Gateway and the full requirements of the EPA. This includes independent confirmation of achievement through external quality assurance scrutiny in line with the GPhC recognised qualification. This is undertaken by an EQA, engaged by Open Awards, who is independent from the apprentice, employer and provider. An additional quality assurance step is a separate, independent final review by a Final Awards Board (FAB) post-Gateway.

The FAB provides oversight of the processes 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. There are policies in place for managing appeals and complaints relating to EPA/ FABs, and to ensure any appeals and complaints are treated impartially.

The Gateway is triggered by the submission of the formal Gateway Declaration forms to Open Awards. This can only happen following a gateway meeting between the apprentice, employer and provider

where it is confirmed that the apprentice is consistently working at the level set out in the occupational standard and that all the pre-requisite gateway requirements for EPA have been met

At Gateway, the declaration forms are checked for completion and to ensure the full requirements of the EPA have been evidenced, as per the assessment plan. As an integrated apprenticeship route, there are no additional learning outcomes or assessment criteria for the EPA component, and the EPA confirms the apprentice meets the award requirements.

Following successful Gateway checks, the apprentice's achievement of the qualification and apprenticeship is recommended to a FAB for ratification. This involves an external and independent subject expert who has no conflict of interest being responsible for the final decision. All evidence is reviewed during a FAB, and some random sampling and scrutiny takes place to ensure Gateway checks have been sufficiently rigorous. FABs are convened monthly by Open Awards to ensure apprentices can be awarded without undue delay, and outcomes are communicated via an agreed mechanism with GPhC to enable timely confirmation of achievement to support individuals with their registration application.

Going forward, Open Awards' Gateway checks and FAB process can accommodate the Apprenticeship Funding Rules 2025 to 2026 minimum requirement for 509 off-the-job training hours for the ST0300 apprenticeship standard.

In line with the EQA Principles used by Skills England, the submission confirmed arrangements are in place to ensure the delivery of EPA is relevant and reliable, and in respect of the qualification, that EQA is efficient, positive and enables learning. The Level 3 Diploma which forms the integrated apprenticeship, is recognised by the GPhC as meeting the Initial Education and Training Standards for Pharmacy Technicians and all units are mapped to the GPhC learning outcomes. As there is no additional assessment burden associated with the EPA component, the EPA is directly relevant to the core qualification content and occupational standard. Providers' approval, delivery and quality assurance arrangements align with the apprenticeship assessment plan requirements and are designed to prioritise professionalism, patient safety, and safe and effective practice.

The submission highlighted that Open Awards' courses must have a robust, reliable and valid assessment strategy, with the ST0300 assessment strategy last reviewed in February 2025 and due again in Spring 2026. Use of a small number of independent EQAs in the assessment process promotes consistency in decision making.

Open Awards operates a systematic approach to monitoring, review, and evaluation of EPA, documenting and addressing identified issues within agreed timescales. Thematic reviews are conducted by the EQAs and Open Awards Quality Team to evaluate how stakeholder feedback is used to enhance the effectiveness of pharmacy qualifications. Feedback from stakeholders is crucial for informing validation of the qualification content and for driving continuous improvement in qualification delivery and assessment. With specific reference to EPA, Gateway documentation and FAB procedures are subject to regular review, at least annually, to ensure they reflect any significant changes, for example, following an assessment strategy review, or release of apprenticeship funding rules. The Skills England standards webpage is regularly monitored for changes to the published apprenticeship standard and assessment plan.

Annex A: Decision descriptors

Table 12: Decision making descriptors

Decision	Descriptor
Met/will be met	The accreditation team is assured after reviewing the available evidence that this criterion/learning outcome is met (or will be met at the point of delivery).
Not met	The accreditation team does not have assurance after reviewing the available evidence that this criterion or learning outcome is met.



General Pharmaceutical Council

www.pharmacyregulation.org

info@pharmacyregulation.org