General Pharmaceutical Council

SQA pharmacy technician course recognition event report – March 2020

Contents

Event summary and conclusions

Provider	SQA
Course	Pharmacy technician course
Event type	Recognition
Event date	18-19 March 2020
Accreditation period	May 2020 - May 2026
Outcome	Approval.
	The recognition team agreed to recommend to the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) that the Scottish Qualifications Authority should be recognised to award the SVQ in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 8, and a PDA in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 7 for pharmacy technician qualifications for a period of six years with an interim event in three years.
Conditions	There were no conditions.
Standing conditions	Please refer to Appendix 1.
Recommendations	No recommendations were made.
Registrar decision	Following the event, the Registrar of the GPhC accepted the recognition team's recommendation and approved the recognition of the SVQ in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 8, and a PDA in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 7 for pharmacy technician qualifications for a period of six years with an interim visit in three years.
Key contact (provider)	Jonathan Gillies, Qualifications Manager, Scottish Qualifications Authority
Accreditation team	Barbara Wensworth (Team Leader - Pharmacist) Freelance Pharmacy Lecturer, Standards Verifier, assessor and writer Donna Bartlett (Pharmacy Technician), Dispensary Team Leader Lancashire Teaching Hospitals Gail Holmes (Pharmacy Technician) Manager, Pharmacy Programmes, Bradford College Leonie Milliner (Lay member), Senior Education Adviser, General Optical Council
GPhC representative	Chris McKendrick, Quality Assurance Officer, GPhC
Rapporteur	Professor Brian Furman, Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology, University of Strathclyde

Introduction

Role of the GPhC

The General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) is the regulator for pharmacists, 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 in the **Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacy technicians, October 2017** to have your pharmacy technician competency and knowledge-based course/qualification approved by us.

The powers and obligations of the GPhC in relation to the accreditation of pharmacy education are legislated in the Pharmacy Order 2010. For more information, visit: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/231/contents/made

Background

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is the Awarding Body for pharmacy qualifications in Scotland. The SQA was recognised in July 2008 by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB), the then regulator, as an approved provider of the SVQ Level 3 Pharmacy Service Skills and an accredited provider of the National Certificate in Pharmaceutical Science. An accreditation and recognition event was held in July 2011 by the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC); this event considered the provision against the GPhC's 'Standards for the initial education and training of pharmacy technicians (2010)' which at that time reflected the updated qualifications relating to the Level 3 NVQ (QCF) Diploma Pharmacy Service Skills and Level 3 Diploma in Pharmaceutical Science. On that occasion, the accreditation team agreed to recommend to the Registrar of the General Pharmaceutical Council that the Scottish Qualifications Authority should be recognised as an awarding body, and that the National Certificate in Pharmacy Services should be accredited for a full period of three years, subject to meeting two conditions:

The SQA was required to investigate the issue of collecting equality and diversity data in Scotland in relation to the Equality Act 2010. This was to meet criterion 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 (2010 standards).

The SQA was required to change the guidance in specified pharmacy practice unit descriptors to ensure that a pharmacist or pharmacy technician teaches these units. This was to meet criterion 8.1 (2010 standards).

These conditions were met during the revision of the programme to meet the GPhC's 2017 standards for the initial education and training of pharmacy technicians. The pharmacy NOS (National Occupational Standards) were reviewed and revised by Skills for Health prior to the publication of the revised GPhC standards. The SVQ in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 8 has been mapped by Skills for Health to the majority of these revised standards; however, this process identified gaps in the SVQ in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 8, and these gaps, as well as the underpinning knowledge requirements, were addressed by the development of knowledge-only

units by the SQA. These knowledge-only units have been packaged together as a PDA (Professional Development Award) in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 7. Therefore, two qualifications, an SVQ in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 8, and a PDA in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 7, will be studied. These qualifications have been designed to complement each other in order to facilitate holistic delivery and assessment, ensuring that learners experience an enriched programme of learning. There will be one overarching certificate for the purpose of registration with the GPhC. A key change from the current provision is that training providers will be approved by SQA to offer the qualifications only if they are being delivered as part of a two-year pharmacy technician training programme.

A recognition event was scheduled for March 2020; this was undertaken against the GPhC's 2017 Standards of initial education and training for pharmacy technicians. The following is a record of that event.

Documentation

Prior to the event, the provider submitted documentation to the GPhC in line with the agreed timescales. The documentation was reviewed by the accreditation team and it was deemed to provide a satisfactory basis for discussion.

Pre-visit

In advance of the main event, a pre-visit meeting took place by teleconference on 12 March 2020. The purpose of the pre-visit 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 18 March 2020; because of the coronavirus outbreak, this was undertaken using Skype. The remainder of the event took place via Skype on 19 March 2020, and comprised a series of meetings with the SQA representatives and stakeholders involved in the design of the course.

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Key findings - Part 1: learning outcomes

During the event the recognition team reviewed all 53 learning outcomes relating to the pharmacy technician qualification. The team was satisfied that **all 53 learning outcomes would be met** during the qualification to the level required by the GPhC standards.

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

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

Standard 1: Selection and entry requirements

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

The entry requirements state that learners would benefit from having attained the required skills, knowledge and understanding by attainment of SCQF level 5 qualifications (equivalent to GCSE), for example, in biology, chemistry, mathematics and English. Applicants must be working in a pharmacy environment, or have secured a placement as a pre-registration trainee pharmacy technician; they must be supervised by a pharmacy professional. The admissions policy of each approved training provider must ensure that the selection processes are fair and legal, and that they can identify suitable applicants who will be fit to practise as trainees. The entry requirements include guidance on the attitudes and behaviours appropriate to a trainee healthcare professional. Selection must be undertaken by pharmacy professionals and must include good character checks to ensure that learners have the appropriate characteristics, attitudes and qualities to act professionally, to provide person-centred care, and to prioritise patient safety. Selection must also take into account health and the ability to undertake the academic challenges of the pre-registration trainee pharmacy technician programme, as well as the ability to undertake the job role. All applicants are interviewed to determine these qualities; the interview includes a skills test to identify accuracy, attention to detail, and the ability to follow instructions, as well as a discussion to identify good listening skills, and the ability to explain matters clearly. Centres must also ensure that all learners, including those whose first language is not English, have sufficient English language competence for safe and effective practice.

Standard 2: Equality, diversity and inclusion

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

The SQA is committed to equality of opportunity and to a culture that respects difference. The SQA's policy on the equality of access to its qualifications reflects the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and supports the principle of equal opportunities in employment, education and training, as well as opposing all forms of unlawful discrimination on the grounds of

disability, race, age, religion or belief, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy or sexual orientation. All SQA staff members are trained in equality and diversity to ensure that equality is fully considered and embedded within the qualifications. Generic and pharmacy-specific aspects of equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded in all units, including how to apply professional standards and how to communicate with patients, adjusting communication where necessary to accommodate patients' needs. Issues around informed consent and the inclusion of patients in decisions relating to their treatment are addressed, and trainees are assessed on their understanding of the relevant legislation. The SQA reviews all new qualifications to identify any aspects that might adversely impact on learners with protected characteristics and aims to remove such aspects wherever possible. Assessment and quality assurance methods are sensitive to the needs of all learners but must not compromise the overarching aims of fairness and consistency. Arrangements are provided to allow disabled learners and/or those with additional support needs to access assessments without compromising their integrity; reasonable adjustments are made in accordance with relevant legislation. In order to become an SQA-approved centre, centres must provide evidence that their policies and procedures give learners equal opportunities for assessment. This includes an effective internal quality assurance system for identifying and verifying learners' eligibility needs for assessment arrangements. Centres must ensure that they are fully conversant with all relevant assessment arrangements guidance on the SQA's website, and that policies and processes align with this guidance. The SQA regularly gathers feedback, both internally and externally, from a number of different groups, and aims to obtain views as its equality outcomes and contributory actions are developed into more detailed work plans. The equality outcomes will guide the SQA's efforts to integrate equality further into planning and decision-making. All members of staff involved in the production of assessment materials will receive appropriate training and have access to effective guidance on designing inclusive assessments, in order to ensure that no assessments pose any unnecessary barriers to learners in relation to any of the protected characteristics, as well as reflecting the full diversity of society.

Standard 3: Management, resources and capacity

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

In order to become an SQA-approved centre, centres must provide evidence to support the application, both in relation to the systems in place and the qualification itself, the evidence being scrutinised through the processes of systems and qualifications approval and verification (see standard 4). This evidence must cover systems, policies and procedures for the management of the centre, the processes for reviewing the learning and assessment materials, and details of the assessment environments, as well as the equipment, resources and staff to support the delivery of the qualification; there must also be evidence of how the centre supports learners throughout their qualification, including ensuring that learners will meet regularly with their assessor to review their progress. There must be a learner induction checklist covering all SQA requirements, including the content and structure of the qualification, the roles and responsibilities of the learner, assessor, and internal verifier, the guidance and support provided, the modes and format of assessment, and how feedback on assessments will be provided, as well as the procedures for handling complaints/grievances. Evidence must also

be provided concerning the systems, policies and procedures to ensure that all assessment decisions will be consistent with qualification standards, and how the centre will maintain records of the internal verification process. Agreements must be in place outlining the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in delivering the course. Evidence must also cover qualifications and experience of each member of staff who will be an assessor and/or an internal verifier; assessors, internal verifiers and expert witnesses must be pharmacists or pharmacy technicians. Additionally, due to the work placement element of the training programme, the service level agreement between the training provider, employer and NHS Education for Scotland outlines the training provider's commitment to providing an induction to all learners prior to commencing their work placement; this should cover briefings on health and safety, GDPR, workplace dress code, and behaviour and professional standards, as well as the GPhC's guide to raising concerns about pharmacy education and training.

The Professional Development Award (PDA) in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 7 was designed and developed in partnership with a number of key stakeholders, including employer and further education representatives. Specific units contributing to this qualification (clinical governance and risk management in pharmacy, health promotion in pharmacy, professional practice in pharmacy, storage and use of medicines and the supply of prescribed medicines) must be taught by either a pharmacist or pharmacy technician; moreover, a pharmacist or pharmacy technician must take overall responsibility for other units, particularly those focussed on therapeutics, although pharmacologists or other scientists may be involved in the delivery of these units. Where a team teaching approach is used, the unit(s) must be planned with input from a pharmacist or pharmacy technician, to ensure that the unit content is placed within a pharmacy context.

Standard 4: Monitoring, review and evaluation

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

The PDA in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 7 was designed and developed in partnership with a number of key stakeholders, including NHS Education for Scotland, NHS pharmacy employer representatives, Community Pharmacy Scotland, pharmacy education and training specialists, training providers and pharmacy learners; this ensured that advances in pharmacy practice, changes to national standards/frameworks and developments within a wider healthcare context were all taken into consideration. Although a wide range of stakeholders were involved, there was no direct participation of patients or members of the public, who had contributed only indirectly through, for example, NHS Education for Scotland. The recognition team would encourage the SQA to ensure that in the future there is direct involvement of patients and members of the public in stakeholder events. The SQA has robust, rigorous and transparent external quality assurance processes and procedures to ensure that courses leading to the PDA in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 7 and the SVQ in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 8 are monitored, reviewed and evaluated systematically. The SQA will be responsible for the ongoing review and maintenance of the PDA in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 7, while Skills for Health will be responsible for the ongoing review and maintenance of the SVQ in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 8. Two main processes are involved in monitoring, review and evaluation, these being 'systems verification' and 'qualification verification'. Systems verification is the process by

which SQA ensures that centres are managing their systems and resources to meet SQA's quality assurance criteria, while qualification verification is the process by which SQA ensures that centres are assessing their learners in line with national standards, and that assessment decisions comply with SQA's quality assurance criteria. SQA-approved centres must have robust, rigorous and transparent internal quality assurance processes to ensure that courses are monitored, reviewed and evaluated systematically. All centres will have a systems verification visit within the first year after gaining approval as a centre, and subsequent visits will be scheduled as needed; qualification verification visits to centres take place annually. Evidence required for a systems/qualification verification visit addresses the management of centres and their resources, support for learners, and processes for internal assessment and verification and for external assessment; internal verification ensures that all learners entered for the same qualification are assessed fairly and consistently to the specified standard and is a crucial element of the SQA's quality assurance. The SQA will be responsible for the evaluation of assessments through the annual external verification visits. Feedback is required to be gathered from learners and used to inform improvements. During their induction, learners will be advised as to how feedback will be provided to them throughout the course, as well as how they can provide feedback on their course; colleges and employers will have formal agreements in place that outline how feedback will be provided.

There is a Pharmacy Qualification Support Team (QST) which meets annually, the remit of which is to monitor, evaluate, and address issues relating to the delivery, assessment and verification of the group award, including resources and quality assurance processes; all SQA-approved centres, as well as key stakeholders, will be members of the Pharmacy QST.

Standard 5: Course design and delivery

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

The PDA in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 7 was developed to meet both the underpinning knowledge requirements of the SVQ in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 8, and to contribute to the revised standards for the initial education and training of pharmacy technicians; it was designed to be delivered alongside the SVQ in Pharmacy Services to ensure the integration of knowledge, competency and work experience. Delivering the two qualifications simultaneously will allow learners to learn, while experiencing clinical, operational and scientific practices and procedures. Both qualifications must be undertaken concurrently while working in a pharmacy environment; therefore, centres will not be approved by the SQA to deliver either of these as standalone qualifications unless a formal partnership agreement is in place. Successful trainees will be awarded a Diploma in Pharmacy Services made up of the two individual qualifications. The curricula for both courses have been mapped to the 53 learning outcomes specified by the GPhC (see Part 1 of this report). The GPhC's 'standards for pharmacy professionals' are introduced to learners during their induction and are embedded throughout both the SVQ and the PDA in Pharmacy Services, ensuring that trainees contribute to delivering and improving the health, safety and wellbeing of patients and the public throughout their training. The 'professional practice in pharmacy' unit introduces trainees to the key aspects of practice, ensuring their fitness to practise as pharmacy professionals. In this unit, trainees will develop their knowledge and understanding of the standards for pharmacy professionals, and fitness to

practise procedures, and will be able to apply these to their own practice; this unit also introduces trainees to the role of the General Pharmaceutical Council, including the purpose and process of registration. Pre-registration trainee pharmacy technicians will always be supervised using an agreed system in all learning and training environments to ensure patient safety, with learners being supported by educational supervisors, and workplace mentors. The service level agreement between the training provider, employer and NHS Education for Scotland outlines the commitment from each party to the supervision of learners to ensure that learners only carry out tasks in which they are competent and to ensure that patient safety is not compromised. The SVQ and PDA in Pharmacy Services must be delivered and assessed by registered pharmacists or pharmacy technicians who are specialists in this field, ensuring that learners are monitored, assessed and supported throughout their training, so that they can practise safely; trainees demonstrating unsafe practice are not permitted to pass. Where serious concerns are identified that may affect a pre-registration trainee pharmacy technician's suitability for future registration, the training provider will report these concerns to the GPhC.

Standard 6: Course assessment

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

The assessment of the SVQ must follow the requirements of the Skills for Health Assessment Strategy for the SVQs in Pharmacy Services; assessment guidelines to support centres are provided by the SQA. The assessment strategy outlines the requirements for educational supervisors and assessors, and the assessor guidelines describe the marking criteria; these include the type, and quantity of evidence needed and the conditions under which it should be obtained. The evidence that must be provided in order to become an SQA-approved centre includes the requirement for an assessment arrangements policy statement for learners with disabilities and/or additional support needs, appeals procedure, internal verification policies and procedures, re-assessment policies and procedures, and documented processes for data management. All assessment decisions must be internally verified by the college; SQA also carries out annual external verification for all training providers to ensure that national standards are being maintained consistently across all centres.

Each SVQ unit has its own statement of standards detailing the knowledge, understanding and competencies that must be demonstrated. The learning programme will include a mixture of assessment methods, including direct observation of practice in the workplace, examinations, case studies, portfolios, projects, oral questioning, personal statements, and professional and reflective discussions. As the SVQ in Pharmacy Services is a work-based qualification, a significant proportion of assessment decisions concerned with competence will take place in the workplace, and the assessment strategy also outlines acceptable sources of workplace evidence, which must be derived from the learner's performance, assessed through direct observation of practice. There may also be observation by an expert witness and professional discussions with a qualified assessor, direct questioning, and assignments, as well as assessment of products generated during the learners' normal work practices. Where a cut-off score is used in an examination-based assessment, this will be 60%; for assessments of competence, 100% mastery is required to achieve a pass. In order to achieve the qualification and apply for registration, all component units must be passed and learners must be able to demonstrate all of the required knowledge and competency statements. Learner evidence demonstrating achievement of all

requirements must be retained by the training provider. Condonation, compensation, trailing and multiple resit opportunities are not permitted; normally one, or exceptionally two, re-assessment opportunities are permitted. Training providers must have processes and procedures in place to ensure that pharmacy technicians receive appropriate and timely feedback on their performance. Centres must also provide evidence of how they will support learners throughout their qualification, including the processes for ensuring that learners will meet regularly with their assessor to review their progress.

All assessors must be registered pharmacists or pharmacy technicians and be specialists in their fields; learners must be monitored, assessed and supported throughout their training to ensure that they can practise safely and effectively. Assessors and internal verifiers must have the required up-to-date occupational experience and/or subject understanding, and, where stipulated, relevant qualifications and CPD. They also need to be competent in assessment (or internal verification) of the type involved in the qualification.

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

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

The evidence that must be provided in order to become an SQA-approved centre includes demonstration of robust systems to support trainees and a clear description as to who is responsible for each part of the process in those systems. At all times during the assessment process, from planning through to making assessment decisions, there should be ongoing, clear and constructive feedback to trainee pharmacy technicians, who should meet regularly with workplace colleagues to discuss and document their progress. All approved centres will have robust trainee induction processes, outlining the support available to them and covering academic study, general welfare and career advice. There must be a complaints policy and associated procedures, and a learner induction checklist covering all SQA requirements (see narrative under standard 3). The learner induction must include information on the complaint/grievance procedures and the available guidance and support. The induction will also cover the GPhC's guide to raising concerns about pharmacy education and training.

The SVQ in Pharmacy Services must be delivered and assessed by pharmacists or pharmacy technicians who are competent in the area of practice. As described in the narrative under standard 3, five of the eleven units in the PDA in Pharmacy Services at SCQF level 7 must also be delivered by a pharmacist or pharmacy technician, with a pharmacist or pharmacy technician having overall responsibility for the delivery of the remaining six units. Trainees will therefore work with pharmacists and/or pharmacy technicians both in the workplace and at the college. Additionally, trainees will work with other members of the pharmacy team and relevant healthcare professionals as part of a multi-disciplinary team throughout their training. All those supporting pre-registration trainee pharmacy technicians must be familiar with the GPhC's guidance on tutoring pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. Service level agreements must outline the expectations of the centre and the employer in relation to resources, responsibilities, monitoring, assessment and partnership review to support the learner to meet the requirements of the programme. Dedicated workplace educational supervisors will be in

place to co-ordinate the training programme and to liaise regularly with the college and work-based assessors.

Appendix 1 - Standing conditions

The following are standing conditions of accreditation and apply to all providers:

1. The record and report include other comments from the team and the provider/awarding body are required to take all comments into account as part of the accreditation/recognition process. The provider/awarding body must confirm to the GPhC that required amendments have been made.

2. The provider/awarding body must respond to the definitive version of the record and report within three months of receipt. The summary report, along with the provider's response, will be published on the GPhC's website for the duration of the accreditation/recognition period.

3. The provider/awarding body must seek approval from the GPhC for any substantial change (or proposed change) which is, or has the potential to be, material to the delivery of an accredited/recognised course/qualification. This includes, but is not limited to:
   a. the content, structure or delivery of the accredited/recognised course/qualification;
   b. ownership or management structure of the institution;
   c. resources and/or funding;
   d. trainee numbers and/or admissions policy;
   e. changes/conditions imposed by qualification regulators;
   f. any existing partnership, licensing or franchise agreement;
   g. staff associated with the course.

4. The provider/awarding body must make trainees and potential trainees aware that successful completion of an accredited course or recognised qualification is not a guarantee of future employment as a pharmacy technician.

5. The provider/awarding body must make trainees and potential trainees aware of the existence and website address where they can view the GPhC's accreditation/recognition reports and the timescales for future accreditation/recognition events.

6. Whenever required to do so by the GPhC, providers/awarding bodies must give such information and assistance as the GPhC may reasonably require in connection with the exercise of its functions. Any information in relation to fulfilment of these standing conditions must be provided in a proactive and timely manner.