



# Association of Pharmacy Technicians United Kingdom

## Pharmacy Assistant Apprenticeship Trailblazer Consultation: January 2017

As a result of the work of the Pharmacy Apprenticeship Trailblazer Employer Group, the Pharmacy Services Assistant Apprenticeship Standard, to ultimately replace the current Level 2 Apprenticeship Framework, is now ready for consultation prior to submission. Please find attached the draft Standard, and below is a link to the consultation survey, for completion with reference to the document:  
Consultation Survey on Draft Level 2 Trailblazer Standard

Feedback Questions: We want your thoughts

When considering the following questions, please refer to the draft Pharmacy Services Assistant standard attached to the email you received.

### 1. What sector do you work in?

Community Pharmacy  
Hospital Pharmacy (NHS)  
Hospital Pharmacy (Private)  
Dispensing Doctors  
Internet Pharmacy  
Other (please specify)

Association of Pharmacy Technicians United Kingdom (APTUK).

APTUK is the professional leadership body for pharmacy technicians and represents these staff across all countries in the UK who work in all sectors of pharmacy and particularly those listed above. Pharmacy Technicians work very closely with Pharmacy Assistants and often manage, supervise and train these staff. They are involved in performance managing this staff group as well as being involved and responsible for the assessment of the Pharmacy Assistants competence against the current approved pharmacy assistant's qualifications, ie NVQ Assessors and Internal Quality Assurers. As such APTUK have immense interest in the Pharmacy Assistant Apprenticeship Trailblazer standards and are committed to supporting the development ensuring that they are suitable and achievable for staff across a wide range of sectors, particularly as the whole of pharmacy workforce and team upskill to meet future healthcare challenges.

### 2. Is the draft occupation representative of your sector, and does this accurately reflect the future role of the Pharmacy Services Assistant (PSA) within your sector? Why?

In putting this consultation response together, the view and opinions of all the APTUK National Officers have been sought. The National Officers work across a number of pharmacy sectors including hospital, both District Generals and Teaching Trusts, and community with many having operational management positions across this staff group and responsibility for training, development and assessment. The National Officers work across a wide geographical area of England including London, South East, South West, Midlands and North East & West of England.

It is the collective opinion of APTUK, whilst considering and supporting the vision of future practise, that although the draft occupation statement broadly reflects the Pharmacy Assistant role, the standard in its entirety would not be achievable for Pharmacy Assistants working in specific sectors and areas of Pharmacy. APTUK also believes that reviewing the visible inconsistencies in the style and language throughout the standard would provide clearer information for the apprentice and employers.

Reflecting on the occupational statement itself, APTUK believe that, to enable the apprentice to be fully aware of the role, it needs to include clearer examples of practise, rather than just a general statement of delivering pharmacy and medicines services across a variety of pharmacy environments. Whilst acknowledging that the



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statement needs to be concise, it should reflect more the tasks that the apprentice will be involved in and what the pharmacy environments might be. In line with other apprentice standards for healthcare professions, healthcare support worker (HSW) as an example, it would be useful to clearly state what the role could include and what the pharmacy environments might be. Eg: HSW includes 'You will carry out well-defined routine clinical duties like monitoring an individual's conditions (by checking things like blood pressure, temperature or weight), checking on their overall progress, comfort and wellbeing.' 'Healthcare settings may include hospitals, community clinics or health centres, individuals' homes, nursing/care homes, hospices, mental health settings and GP surgeries. List is not exhaustive.' These examples provide the apprentice with a clear understanding of the role. In terms of the PSA explanation 'assisting in the preparation and assembly of medicines and products', what does this really tell the apprentice. In terms of the examples:

Supply of medicines and products: APTUK believe that 'issuing to patients and other healthcare professionals' should be 'assisting with the issuing....' as this would more fully reflect the role and pharmacy regulatory requirements: please see <https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/education/support-staff/dispensing-assistant> that explains the Medicines Counter Assistant and Dispensing/Pharmacy Assistant roles.

Also referring to 'providing advice on administration', APTUK believes that this isn't clear and could potentially be misleading. Assuming that this relates to telling the patient how to take the medicine, this needs a clearer description.

Public Health: APTUK believes that this needs a clearer explanation on what the apprentice will be involved in as 'understanding healthy lifestyle choices' is concerned with knowledge rather than what the role/job involves.

Link to Qualifications: the link provided in the draft standard hyperlinks to the General Pharmaceutical Council webpage for 'Approved Pharmacy Technician course'. It should link to the 'Dispensing Assistant training' content. It would also be useful to give a more detailed explanation of what 'GPhC recognised qualification' means. I.e. what is GPhC etc, as the apprentice should understand that Pharmacy is a profession that is regulated.

Review: The apprenticeship should be reviewed after 3 years. This is a minor point, however, APTUK suggests adding that the apprenticeship standard should be reviewed in ....., as this was misinterpreted within our discussions.

### **3. Would the knowledge in this standard enable PSAs to support your sector in the delivery of pharmacy services? Comments?**

APTUK mostly believes that the knowledge content would allow delivery of pharmacy services across all of the pharmacy sectors; however APTUK has a number of specific comments:

Dispensing procedures, and practices:

pharmacy calculations would be better described as 'basic pharmacy calculations'

documentation relating to administration supply , APTUK is unclear on what this means and feels that this needs a clearer explanation

APTUK believes that the Pharmacy Assistant in order to dispense/assembly/assist in issuing and to communicate with other healthcare colleagues and patients/public/carer, that there should be a basic level of knowledge on the actions and uses of medicines for commonly non-prescribed and prescribed medicines.

Pharmacy Law and Ethics: APTUK believes that it would be clearer to title this as 'Legislation and Regulation to give a broader title that could then encompass knowledge gaps that APTUK have identified. This could then encompass both pharmacy and general legislation that is related to pharmacy, such as equality and diversity, safeguarding etc. Also the apprentice should have knowledge of the GPhC regulatory role and standards that are set relating to their role, ie GPhC premises standards and what that means for all pharmacy staff. This relates to governance in general and understanding the political and national requirements of working in healthcare environments plus also understanding the NHS as an organisational,



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NHS Constitution, Duty of Care etc. Understanding on confidentiality and data management, APTUK feels sits better under Information Technology

Information Technology: APTUK suggests that this could be retitled Information Management and Technology as this will need to encompass the NHS Digital agenda. This should also include understanding of Summary Care Records.

Operational Practice: APTUK believes that this should also include policies and protocols plus how to raise concerns, error reporting etc, organisational governance.

Why it is important to communicate effectively at work: to provide consistency in the apprentice standard style should this be titled 'Effective Communication' and the why..... etc. Also APTUK believes that this should be concerned with and expanded to cover all communication not just about poor communication and communication having additional requirements.

The management of medicines and the supply chain: APTUK believes that this needs explanation and expanding to be clear to the apprentice and employers

Person Centred Care: in the descriptions APTUK believe that gaining consent needs more explanation, it needs to have context

The sorts of messages ..... This bullet point needs a title: APTUK suggests that this is Public Health as this would link with the occupational role statement. Also that the bullet point 'Other organisations which can support the wellbeing of a patient' could link into this as its concerned with signposting to other healthcare provision etc. Also APTUK suggest rewording 'sorts of messages' as this is not helpful, clear or measurable.

How to identify risks and hazards in a workplace environment & What appropriate action should be taken in response to incidents or emergencies following local guidelines. APTUK believe these are both connected to Health, Safety & Security and it would be useful to link these together under this heading. This should also include 'Infection Control'.

#### **4. Would the skills in this standard enable PSAs to support your sector in the delivery of pharmacy services? Comments?**

APTUK have considered the current and possible future ways of working, relating to the NHS England 5year Forward View, Community Pharmacy Forward View, Carter Review, Murry Review and Substantiality and Transformation Plan agenda whilst responding to this question. However, APTUK have concerns that the core skills listed to be achieved by all Pharmacy Assistant Apprentices is not currently achievable in practise by all employing organisations and this may be a limiting factor for some employers. APTUK recognise that this provides a tension between current and future practise. However if the direction of travel is to apply the approved trailblazer apprenticeship standard in 2017, this may limit recruitment onto the apprenticeship as it may be unachievable. APTUK believes this is achievable in the community sector, as the core skills are all related to pharmacy services delivered on a daily basis in this sector. In hospitals, this may not be the case, as Pharmacy Assistants are often employed in specific areas, i.e. Technical Services or Stores/Distribution or Dispensary. Whilst there is an argument that training staff to work in all areas could provide greater flexibility and support service provision of the future plus 7 day working, and some Trusts are moving towards this, the current reality is that 'one size does not fit all' and this would be a challenge. This has been highlighted based on current workforce delivery in a number of Trusts where National Officers currently work. APTUK believes this would move Pharmacy Assistants in secondary care from 'specialists' to 'generalists' and whilst this might be favourable, there has not been sufficient discussion to support this either during the Trailblazer Group meetings or through a wider consultation process. APTUK believes that the profession and employers have not had sufficient information or time to fully agree to a wider set of core skills. Including 'Dispensing' in the core skills effectively means that all Pharmacy Assistants in secondary care would need to rota and be trained in a 'dispensary' setting. Currently for some employers this might mean training staff to dispense when the service requires them to assist in the pharmacy production process in Technical Services. The same would



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be true for Pharmacy Assistants working in Stores/Distribution. There are a number of Pharmacy Assistants who work within the Home Care service whom would not be able to achieve all of the core skills.

APTUK highly recommends that this concern is discussed by the profession and wider scoping is undertaken to ensure the draft standard is achievable.

In addition to the above, APTUK has a number of specific comments:

Teamwork:

APTUK believes that 'accountable' should be removed from the first bullet point, as this staff group are practising under the supervision of others who would be accountable.

Support the team in the development of others: APTUK suggests that this be reworded to 'Assist the team in the development..... as only experienced Pharmacy Assistants would train others.

Dispensing:

issue prescribed items- APTUK believes this should be 'assist' in the issue of prescribed items to reflect the current GPhC regulatory requirements for Pharmacy Assistants as these standards are still in place and the trailblazer should reflect these: Policy on minimum training requirements for dispensing /pharmacy assistants and medicines counter assistants; Section 3.1.

Health and Safety

Legislation, policies and local ways of working: APTUK suggests that this is reworded to enable the skill to be carried out. It's currently writing as a knowledge requirement.

What to do in situations that could cause harm to themselves and others; how to handle hazardous materials and substances; and what to do when there is an accident. APTUK suggests that this includes what to do in the case of an error, how and where to report.

## **5. Does the knowledge adequately support the skills required by PSAs in your sector? Comments?**

APTUK considers that the core knowledge broadly supports the core skills; however we suggest that it would be clearer if they skills and knowledge were presented alongside each other. This would then give transparency between the knowledge and skills. This would make it easier for the potential apprentice to see and understand what is required. Again HCSW standard provides a clear example.

## **6. Do the behaviours reflect those required of PSAs in your sector? Comments?**

APTUK considers the behaviours to broadly reflect those required of a healthcare worker. They could however include 'work to best practice', 'show self-awareness and discretion'. It would also be useful, to relate to teamwork, for the behaviours to respect colleagues as well as patients.

In terms of 'problem solving and decision making, APTUK suggests that decision making should be context of the Pharmacy Assistant role and should be described as such, within limits of own job role and own limitations, which connects with self-awareness above.

## **7. Do the options represent what is required for PSAs in your sector? Comments?**

APTUK believes that the options are not achievable for Pharmacy Assistants working in some areas and current work models, particularly where a secondary care organisation does not deliver Technical Services. Also as indicated above Pharmacy Assistants may only work in a Stores/Distribution area. Although Pharmacy Assistants are beginning to work in medicines management areas this may give an immediate challenge until practise evolves.

To alleviate this immediate and current barrier, APTUK suggests that expanding ordering stock that is currently within the stock management is another option.

For example: Support the ordering of pharmaceutical stock



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In addition to the above APTUK believes that 'Support the provision of a medicines management service to wards' should be 'Support the provision of a medicines management service to patients/people/persons', as the service is not to an environment but for the patient.

Lastly, based on collective opinion from National Officer experts, APTUK believes that Manufacturing Areas: Aseptic, sterile and non-sterile manufacturing should be divided into TWO separate options as there are a minimal number of Trusts that have sterile & non-sterile production units. Although the knowledge for working in either Aseptic Services or Batch production would be the same, the skills would be different. Aseptic technique is a different skill from preparation of sterile and non-sterile products. To provide further expert opinion on this APTUK suggests that Technical Specialist Education and Training group is contacted.

### **8. Are the knowledge, skills and behaviours correct for each option? Comments?**

As indicated in the response to Q4, APTUK have considered the current and the vision for future ways of working under political and national policies and guidance and broadly consider the options to reflect the required knowledge, skills and behaviours. However APTUK has additional comments specific to the options in the draft standards.

Selling OTC medicines under the supervision of a pharmacist

APTUK suggests that this is renamed 'under the supervision of a pharmacy healthcare professional' to be consistent with published policy documents.

Current legislation and SOPs relating to the sale of OTC medicines and products APTUK suggests that this also includes protocols.

Information and advice suitable to give to individuals about minor ailments which can be treated in a pharmacy and those symptoms and requests which need referring to another member of the team: APTUK suggests that 'another member of the team' is reworded to be another pharmacy healthcare professional.

Identify requests for advice or treatment of minor ailments which must be referred to the appropriate team member according to organisational procedures: APTUK suggests that 'another member of the team' is reworded to be another pharmacy healthcare professional.

Manufacturing Areas: Aseptic, sterile and non-sterile manufacturing

Audits and quality assurance: APTUK believes that this should be basic knowledge as Pharmacy Assistants may be involved in audits but generally only participating in them. Although they should understand principles of Quality Assurance, which would be covered in GMP, it would be in relation to their practise, ie gathering QA samples etc. Again it would be useful to seek advice from Technical Specialist Education and Training group and refer back to the National Occupational Standards.

Skills

- Assist in the manufacturing and assembly of medicines and products
- Assist in the preparation of manufactured products
- Assist in the completion of the required records and documentation

APTUK suggests, ensuring consistency within the apprenticeship standard, that the skills should link to the description documented in the option. Ie, the option indicates the following areas Aseptic, sterile and non-sterile manufacturing. The skills listed do not reflect these.

Support the provision of a medicines management service to wards

APTUK believes that the knowledge listed generally supports the Pharmacy Assistants role or potential role as indicated by the option title. However, further clarity is needed on the specific role to be able to judge whether the knowledge is appropriate.

Reflecting on the skills, APTUK feels that it's unclear within the skills descriptions what the Pharmacy Assistant will be required to carry out and actually do. It appears the task relates to Patients Own Drugs



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(POD) and assessing the suitability for these to be used in hospital as ongoing treatment. The option title appears to be broader than this. APTUK suggests that this is reviewed to avoid confusion and misinterpretation.

Referring to the POD assessment task, APTUK believes that the Pharmacy Assistant should have a basic knowledge of the actions and uses of commonly prescribed medicines and be able to identify high risk medicines that may need referral. There also needs to be further emphasis on the consequences of error and recording and reporting.

APTUK believes that a basic knowledge of medicines is needed to ensure patient safety.

### **9. Which of the option(s) would PSAs in your sector be able to complete? Please select one or more.**

Selling OTC(Over the Counter)Medicines under the supervision of a pharmacist

Support the provision of a medicines management service to wards

Dispensing Review of Use of Medicines (DRUM) in Dispensing Doctors' Practices

None of the above

Please see response to Q7

### **Comments?**

As an overarching comment APTUK are highlighting that the draft Pharmacy Assistant trailblazer standard is bringing together the current pharmacy assistant and senior pharmacy assistant roles that are common place within hospital pharmacy. It also appears to bring together the Medicines Counter Assistant and Dispensing Assistant role that are seen in community pharmacy. Whilst this could be seen as an advantage, there is concern that some Pharmacy Assistants practise at a level and scope that is perfectly adequate for their job role but would struggle to performance across a wider and broader role. In order to deliver across a wider spectrum, the knowledge and skills laid out in this draft standard are considered as documented in this response; however, it does appear that there are two different Pharmacy Assistants being described. APTUK believes to fully meet the needs of pharmacy services, the current pharmacy regulatory requirements for training and assessment of MCAs and Dispensing/Pharmacy Assistants and to ensure patient safety is upheld there is a need for both a Pharmacy Assistant and a Senior Pharmacy Assistant, as non-pharmacy registrants. APTUK believes that this would better support the depth and breadth of the knowledge and skills needed to reflect the higher level patient facing roles such as Pharmacy Assistants undertaking PODs and potentially supporting medicines optimisation in a community pharmacy environment. Also to support the Pharmacy Assistant roles where team leadership and supporting the training of others may be part of the job role. APTUK ask that the Skills Funding Agency and the Pharmacy Trailblazer Chair give this due consideration.

### **10. How many learners would you anticipate enrolling onto this standard over the course of a year?**

This response is from the Professional Leadership Body for Pharmacy Technicians.

Consultation response

Tess Fenn APTUK President on behalf of the APTUK Directors & Professional Committee

21.1.17