

# The Yorkshire approach to training accredited checking technicians

By David Corral, MRPharmS and Margaret Culshaw, MRPharmS

Rather than training accredited checking technicians “in house” at individual trusts, chief pharmacists in Yorkshire have commissioned a county-wide training programme. This article describes the course and the feedback received

**A**t Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust it was widely recognised that more accredited checking technicians were needed. The delivery of enhanced pharmacy services was planned, to accompany a hospital redevelopment programme, and this required pharmacists to delegate some dispensary duties so they could spend more time on wards.

Training leads for technicians were already in post, so it was initially decided that an in-house accuracy checking programme would be developed. However, it became apparent that, because of other commitments (such as NVQ training) resources at the trust would not be adequate to train the required number of technicians quickly enough. Similar problems were being encountered at other trusts in the county.

In 2005 the chief pharmacists in Yorkshire worked together to agree on the underpinning knowledge and evidence of competence required of checking technicians (see Panel 1). They then approached higher education institutions to design a course to deliver these requirements, and the University of Huddersfield was chosen. This article describes the course and discusses its impact at Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Hospitals Trust.

## The course

It was decided that the accuracy checking course would be a module of the newly-developed foundation degree in medicines management and pharmacy services. The option of relying solely on distance learning was considered, but dismissed in light of the

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### Panel 1: Course content

The course was designed to give technicians a background knowledge of:

- Technician's roles and responsibilities
- Policy and context of training
- Effective teamwork
- Initiatives to create a safer NHS
- Practical aspects of pharmaceutical packaging, drug nomenclature, safer dispensing, error reduction, causes of error and drug dose calculations
- Communication skills

benefits of having some time out from the workplace and the opportunity to network with colleagues from a variety of backgrounds. Attendance at university also allows techniques such as role play to be used to simulate situations that might occur in the workplace.

The course is designed so that technicians attend for three days (20 hours) of face-to-face teaching over eight weeks. They complete work-based tasks after each study day. Underpinning knowledge is assessed by a written test. Technicians are required to have a portfolio of 1,000 items checked in their workplace before they can be accredited. The nominal time commitment for completion of the training package is 200 hours.

Once the module had been developed, pharmacy managers at the trust decided to send staff on the course in groups of four. Course dates were agreed up to a year in advance, with courses not running, for example, over school holidays.

The module requires students to have a workplace mentor, who can be a pharmacist or a technician with a checking role. So far, all of the mentors at the Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Hospitals Trust have been pharmacists, who attended a half-day

briefing session at the University of Huddersfield before their mentees started the course. Feedback from mentors indicates that the briefing is worthwhile and that acting as a mentor has made them reflect on their own practice, as well as enhancing the working relationship with the technicians. Comments include: “The whole course provides a fantastic opportunity for technicians. Pharmacists, especially if returning to practise, could benefit too.”

## One year later

The accuracy checking module has run three times, with four students from the trust attending as part of each cohort. Specific time to complete their work-based tasks has been allocated to technicians and technician checking is now established at the trust.

Those pharmacy technicians involved have had the opportunity to evaluate their training and to provide feedback to their managers and to the University of Huddersfield. They have been positive about the training course, believing that it has benefited both themselves as individuals and the service they provide. They have commented that they consider themselves “supported” and “professional” in their checking role and that they have been given not only the skills they need but confidence to question and to contribute to changes in practice. Pharmacists have seen the tasks set as “a great opportunity to reflect on the whole dispensing process”. The ideas proposed by technicians through networking with their peers at other trusts have provoked discussion among the whole pharmacy team and there are plans to try and implement some of them at the trust.

### Further information

Further information about the University of Huddersfield accuracy checking module is available at [www.hud.ac.uk/sas/pharmacy](http://www.hud.ac.uk/sas/pharmacy)