

**The Ninety-seventh Annual Meeting  
of the  
Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland**

**Via Zoom**

**Thursday, 13 October 2022 at 7.15pm**

**AGENDA**

1. Welcome
2. Matters of Accuracy
3. Minutes of 96<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting
4. President's Address
5. Director of Business Operations Financial Report
6. Questions to Regulator
7. Chair of the Pharmacy Forum NI's Address
8. Questions to Pharmacy Forum NI

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**MINUTES**

The meeting commenced at 19:15 with a welcome to all attendees by Julie Greenfield.

1. The Minutes of 96<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting were presented to the Annual General Meeting.
2. No matters of accuracy were raised.
3. The Minutes were proposed by Glynis McMurtry and seconded by Mark McCrudden.
4. Acting President's Address

On behalf of the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society NI, I would like to welcome you to our 97<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting. For any avoidance of confusion, this report covers the period 2021 to 2022.

Whilst not falling into that time frame, I would, at the outset, want to pay tribute to Dr Jim Livingstone. As I am sure you are all aware, Jim's 8-year tenure as President of the Pharmaceutical Society NI came to an end recently, with Dr Geraldine O'Hare having been appointed as President by the Minister of Health. Until Dr O'Hare takes up her position, the procedure is that the Vice President becomes the Acting President hence my presenting to the AGM this evening.

I would want to pay tribute to Jim for an excellent job in leading the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society for the last 8-years, through a period of significant change and challenge, not least the Covid-19 pandemic. Jim helped shape a new direction for Council, strengthening its governance, bringing strategic thinking front and centre, and developing the skills and knowledge of the members. His passion for the work of Council in public protection, having open and healthy debate and finding the best route forward in any situation, stood to him throughout his 8 years.

I know that the Executive Officers of the Society and Council members appreciated his strategic thinking, strong constructive challenge, and constant push for high standards, as much as his good humour and good company. He leaves the Pharmaceutical Society NI and the Council in a strong position going forward.

I would also like to welcome Dr Geraldine O'Hare onto Council as President. Dr O'Hare has a wealth of experience and track record of public service and helping

protect the public. We at Council and the staff team very much look forward to working with her in months ahead to deliver against our core objective of public protection.

Turning to the performance of the Regulator in the last year, 2021-22 has been another challenging year for pharmacists, healthcare professionals and all those working in the health and social care system. As we have transitioned to a new normal, it is worth reminding ourselves that in the first part of the financial year 2021-22 the Covid-19 pandemic continued to place significant pressures on healthcare and service provision.

The health care system is now having to cope with a backlog of cases and underlying health issues whilst continuing to embed new ways of working. We are, however, in a much better position than we were 12 months ago, and this is in no small part due to the skill, dedication and professionalism of pharmacists and healthcare workers across Northern Ireland. The Council of the Pharmaceutical Society NI congratulates all pharmacists and healthcare workers for their professionalism, selflessness, and unstinting dedication. During 2021-22, the pandemic continued to present organisational challenges. We again prioritised flexibility and agility in our approach to meeting our regulatory objectives and protecting the public.

We had to show significant flexibility and agility when the long-planned first UK-wide Common Registration Assessment had to be deferred in June 2021 due to the pandemic. With a view to not placing undue stress on trainees and significant disruption to the workforce, we successfully delivered a bespoke Northern Ireland registration assessment at short notice. We maintained the required levels of rigour and assurance to allow applicants to join the professional Register in the shortest possible time.

I congratulate the staff team involved on this achievement and would like to especially thank Ulster University for providing us with their facilities and exceptional levels of support and working with us in such a flexible and professional manner, to safely deliver on this vital aspect of regulation for the profession and the public.

Several issues have impacted on progress against the Corporate Strategy 2017-2022, not least the pandemic but also Brexit, staffing issues and delays by Government in bringing forward legislative reform. Council reviewed the current Corporate Strategy, which was due for a full review during 2022, and because of the strain on staff time and priorities, chose to extend its duration by a further 12 months with an addendum. Council's review has resulted in several of our objectives being amended or removed and replaced with new objectives to be completed this financial year. The Annual Report 2021-22 documents progress against those amended objectives and goals which are highlighted throughout the report. We look forward to working under the leadership of our new President to set the strategic path for the Regulator.

Our Registrar commenced maternity leave in July 2021. The Department is responsible for the appointment of a Registrar and a recruitment process was

commenced and concluded ahead of the Registrar's maternity leave commencing. In the event, in the period between interview and ministerial approval, which was subject to an unforeseen delay, the single appointable candidate accepted another position. Following a previously established procedure, the Minister appointed the Chief Executive as Interim Registrar in order that the statutory functions of the Registrar's office could continue. Despite further recruitment attempts, a replacement was not identified, and the role had to be carried out by the Chief Executive, supported by SMT colleagues, until June 2022. All of the statutory functions were covered but there were inevitable impacts on other senior management functions.

Council was delighted to respond to the Department of Health's consultation, launched in March 2022, on the Introduction of Statutory Regulation of Pharmacy Technician Workforce in Northern Ireland. The Registration of Pharmacy Technicians has been a long-standing objective of Council. We are also extremely pleased that the Minister for Health has subsequently announced that we will be progressing the Registration of Pharmacy Technicians in Northern Ireland with a target completion date in 2024. Registering Pharmacy Technicians will provide enhanced public safety and is vital in relation to delivering wider service provision reforms planned for pharmacists and pharmacy in Northern Ireland.

In anticipation of future work in this area, the organisation employed an interim project manager to prepare the professions and provide a route for pharmacy technicians to join a professional register here. Whilst we are delighted with this progress, we sound a note of caution. The continued lack of a Northern Ireland Executive may impact upon the legislative aspects required to deliver this work in a timely manner – but we will do all we can to ensure the work we need to do is developed as far as is possible.

Progress on reforms related to the new Standards for Initial Education and Training of Pharmacists also gained pace in 2021-22. The Chief Executive has continued to Chair the Education Reform Implementation Group in Northern Ireland and have established an Education Reform Stakeholder Group.

I would like to thank the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer of Northern Ireland and the members of the implementation and stakeholder groups for their support, participation and note the significant progress they have made on delivering on their respective aspects of this important and exciting reform. It is planned that the new standards will be fully implemented by 2026, with all pharmacists joining the Register as Independent Prescribers from this point. As part of our preparatory work for this objective, in March 2022, we consulted on "in principle" changes to our regulations and standards for gaining entry onto stand-alone independent prescribing courses in parallel with work on embedding prescribing into the pre-registration journey.

As part of this broader reform package, 2021-22 has also seen the successful transition from a pre-registration training programme, run by the Society, to a Foundation Training Year, delivered by NICPLD. We have moved from delivery to providing quality assurance for the new programme. Again, I would like to

thank NICPLD for working with us on this successful transition and we look forward to working with them in the future as our respective roles continue to evolve.

In 2021-22, we also focused on post-registration education and professional development of pharmacists, holding successful stakeholder engagement in Northern Ireland, and agreeing to set up a UK-wide group in partnership with the GPhC. This new group will focus on assurance of post-registration practice and development of pharmacists, and we consider that it will assist in the planned transition from CPD to revalidation, or continuing fitness to practise, in Northern Ireland.

We are also pleased that DHSC in London has laid in the UK Parliament the necessary draft legislation to begin the planned reforms for the standards to be met by Responsible and Superintendent Pharmacists. We are working with the GPhC to prepare for the development and consultation of regulatory standards in this area. The legislation, which is due to be commenced in December 2022, will also provide us with the much-needed provision of a Deputy Registrar.

In a context of increased Fitness to Practise cases, Council approved the update and publication of our Manual for Fitness to Practise Committees. The publication of this document is intended to provide a useful public resource, which will be of particular interest to those involved in Fitness to Practise procedures including, pharmacists and those representing pharmacists. Its review, update, and related training to our Fitness to Practise Committees, will ensure committee members can continue to carry out their function as independent decision makers in a consistent way and in line with best practice.

Internally, we have made significant progress against our ICT strategy. Specifically, 2021-22 has seen the development of a new Customer Relationship Management system. This has enhanced the management of registration applications, CPD monitoring and Fitness to Practise processes and record keeping. This investment has enabled us to maintain our staff complement over many years despite a growing register. We have also completed the move to an entirely cloud-based system. The outcome of this work is greater assurance that, during exceptional events, we can successfully perform our regulatory functions and continue to protect the public.

I am pleased that the significant progress that I have highlighted to you has been achieved whilst the registration fee has remained static for another year, despite the challenging external context we are all facing.

I am pleased to pay tribute to Council members and the staff at the Pharmaceutical Society NI who, during a continued period of change for the organisation overlaid with the continuing effects of the pandemic, have ensured that the core business of public protection has been maintained, with significant progress in key areas, through their hard work, flexibility, and professionalism.

To our partners, and stakeholders, from across Northern Ireland, for your continued support throughout 2021-2022 we say thank you and look forward to continued work together in the current year.

Finally, but most importantly, I would again like to thank all our pharmacists who delivered what would have been thought impossible through the emerging pandemic and then again through vaccination programme in venues right across the country. When the public needed you – you were there and not found wanting. We pay tribute to you for an amazing contribution to our communities.

Thank you, this ends my report this evening.

## 5. Director of Business Operations' Financial Report

In 2021-22, the Pharmaceutical Society NI's total income decreased by £9k compared to the previous financial year to £1,335k (2020/21: £1,344k). The variance is made up of a decrease in the Department of Health Funded Attract, Recruit, Retain project of £50k, Tutors Course of £15k and Fitness to Practise Costs Recovery of £3k offset by an increase in retention fees £33k, an increase in registration £13k and examinations income of £12k. Our main source of income is derived from the renewal fees of pharmacists and pharmacies. Registration fees are derived from pre-registration students, new registrants from the pre-registration programme, those joining from another register, re-registration, and EEA applicants.

There has been a significant increase of £32k in retention income compared to the previous year. This was in line with budget expectations, and we have seen a year-on-year increase in those remaining on the Register. Registration fees increased by £13k to £112k (2021: £99k). This increase is due to an increase in pharmacists joining from another register and re-registration applicants.

Our total expenditure was £97k higher compared with the previous financial year to £1,370k (2020/21: £1,273k). There were increases in certain cost categories such as an increase in Project Expenses of £81k, Statutory Committee Expenses of £46k, Computer Expenses of £23k, Recruitment of £14k and Legal and professional of 5k. This is offset by a reduction of Attract, Recruit, Retain expenditure of £47k, Depreciation of £7k, Salary and related costs £8k. There are offsetting marginal variances over several headings.

Staff & related costs reduced from £706k to £698k – broadly in line with budget. Project Expenses have increased by £81k to £106k (2020/21: £25k). This is due to a large investment in a CRM system designed to streamline the on-line registration application process and the management of Fitness to Practise cases. Computer Costs increased by £23k to £60k (2020/21: £37k) due to increased support costs now that all functions are cloud-based.

Due to the overall deficit in 2021-22, the reserves have fallen by £118k. There has been a £66k decrease in value of the investment portfolio during the year

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## 6. Questions to Regulator

The Policy Standards & Engagement Lead, Peter Hutchinson, gave apologies for Mark Neale, Director of Public Affairs, and invited questions from the attendees.

- *Michael Guerin:* In light of the operational loss of £34k against projects, the devaluation of investments and likelihood, in the current climate, of continued loss, what plans are in place to reduce costs to reflect the likely deficit for 2022-23?

*CEO:* The organisation is constantly attempting to reduce costs. The Register has increased by 50% over the past ten years but staff levels have remained the same. Projects are investments and are taken from reserves. We had a small operating surplus. Council policy is to fund current and day to day activities from fee income. It is not anticipated that fees will increase in the coming year.

- *Michael Guerin:* There are significant costs associated with salaries and it can be expected that, for 2-3 years, there will be a shortfall in investment income. This would likely impact on the organisation's ability to deliver and an associated increase in fees.

*CEO:* An increase in fees would be very unlikely. The organisation has healthy reserves. The investment portfolio has grown well over the seven years and is worth more than our investment. We are in regular contact with the investment brokers who attend Council periodically and will be attending Council in the New Year. We will also be reviewing the Strategic Reserves Policy in 2023.

## Address by the Chair of Pharmacy Forum Northern Ireland – Eamon O'Donnell

As Chair of the Pharmacy Forum NI Board, I am pleased to present a summary of the work undertaken by the Pharmacy Forum in 21/22 as well as the main outcomes and achievements of the past financial year; the detail of which is contained in our full annual report, and I would encourage everyone to read it if they have not already done so.

Having stepped into the role of Chairperson of The Forum Board last year, I have enjoyed support from the equally recently appointed Vice-Chair, Dr Oisín Kavanagh, but have also relied on guidance from former Chair, Sheelin McKeagney; our close collaboration has ensured a seamless transition and continuity during a time when our profession has faced many new challenges.

I remember last year, the president's address opened with, "A year ago, no-one would have predicted another extraordinary year"; one year on and it feels like this is still a fitting opener.

As a profession, pharmacy has shown great capability, flexibility, and resilience in its efforts to continue to support in the fight against Covid-19, which was last year dubbed our 'Goliath'. Added to this, we are also affected by the ongoing political impasse and energy/cost of living crisis, perhaps the landscape, with all of its challenges can now be more suitably likened to 'The Labours of Hercules'.

The future of pharmacy, and how the Forum, and other professional leadership bodies, can best support and advocate for our members and the patients we serve, has significantly dominated discussion and developments over the past year.

In March 2022, work began in earnest on the development of the Forum's new 2022-25 Corporate Strategy, following the formal constitution of three new Board members. Work on this has been completed and our new three-year strategy is due to be launched imminently.

Unavoidable and ongoing delays, due to the impact of the pandemic, had stifled our efforts to update the previous Corporate Strategy, which meant that Pharmacy Forum NI extended the existing strategy in 2021-22. The current corporate plan is available on our website and more detail on our revised strategy will be available in due course.

Our Strategy employs an outcomes-based approach focused on objectives, which are based on how our work will make a difference to pharmacists, pharmacy, patients and other stakeholders.

Activity is prioritised under five key work strands:

1. Leadership;
2. Excellence;
3. Development;
4. Technology; and,



## 5. Support.

I will provide an overview of some of the work we have completed in service to these work strands.

Our support function has been an important element of the work we have undertaken this year. Keen to support our colleagues during the pandemic, The forum was able to secure continued funding through to March 2022 to continue the Pharmacy Team's Health & Wellbeing support service. Importantly, this has allowed us to broaden the scope of support available and provided 24/7 access for anyone working within our healthcare teams.

Our Pharmacy Futures NI campaign has been applauded since its inception and I've noted that Minister Swann has approved funding for our medic counterparts to replicate our attract, recruit, and retain initiative; a project delivered by ourselves to increase the visibility of pharmacy as a career choice in NI (imitation is the greatest form of flattery).

Whilst we have completed significant work providing digital and physical media to students, teachers and educational establishments, and a few careers fairs on the way, this year our efforts were employed as part of a more restricted campaign; we know that we can make a greater impact with continued funding and hope that we can continue this work this financial year, specifically looking at how we can apply this program to support recruitment and retention of pharmacy technicians.

In May of this year, the Forum developed responses to two landmark consultations in relation to hub and spoke dispensing and to the regulation of pharmacy technicians in Northern Ireland. Both pieces of work will transform operations and structures within pharmacy and the health sector generally. I am pleased we were able to provide a strong voice on behalf of the profession in our responses to these important pieces of work. These two consultation pieces sit amongst a collection of twenty individual consultation responses which have been worked on and completed, by not only our Board, but also our Policy and Practice Committee, Education and Research Committee and various special interest and short-life working groups throughout the year.

The Forum continues to be, "locally active and nationally minded"; we've been consulting and working collaboratively with Department of Health Northern Ireland, amongst other key stakeholders across NI and GB, including RPS, GPhC and the PSNI. At last count, there are no fewer than twenty-three stakeholder workstreams within which we are participating; the issues dealt with by these groups will have far reaching implications for the future of the profession and provide the key drivers for radical transformation, both now and in the years ahead.

The most recent of which, and perhaps that with the most far-reaching implications, is the UK wide Commission on Pharmacy Professional Leadership; the Commission includes representation from the Pharmacy Forum NI in addition to others nominated

to the Commission from Northern Ireland. The initiative to look at the future of professional leadership is one we broadly welcome. As professional leadership organisations it is critical that we are critical of our functions, and we take time to listen to the membership and identify what professional leadership needs to look like moving forward.

The call for evidence from all pharmacists and areas of practice has just concluded and the working groups considering the evidence and reporting to the Commission are happening across the autumn. We look forward to seeing the outputs and the professions response.

We have additionally been working alongside Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) colleagues on insulin safety; a collaboration which sees us come to the mid-point of our three-part webinar series on insulin safety next week on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October.

Pharmacy Forum NI continued to encourage and support Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) in the Northern Ireland pharmacy workplace through its three-part EDI webinar series titled, 'Creating the Right Culture', which concluded in November last year. All three Webinars are available to download from our new EDI Resource Hub on the Forum website. The Hub itself continues to be a rich resource for signposting and guidance. Looking ahead we will continue to incorporate EDI initiatives in our activities as a part of our strategy.

The rebalancing Pharmacy Programme Board's work has formally finished, and the board has closed after two draft orders were laid before Westminster. Pharmacy Forum NI has been part of this Board since 2013. It is anticipated that the Community Pharmacy Supervision Practice Group, a group that includes Pharmacy Forum NI, will pick up the mantle from the Board.

For more detail on the Board's work, its final outcomes, see our Annual Report.

We continue to promote a zero-tolerance policy to violence and aggression by members of the public directed at our healthcare teams, especially after the violent attacks on community pharmacy throughout 2022 and notably in the Greater Belfast area. Our aim is to build on existing strategies, but importantly to work with other stakeholders to improve outcomes and support those colleagues who serve our public every day; there is more to do here, and we look forward to supporting this endeavour.

The Rewarding Excellence Event planned in 2021 was postponed, again due to Covid-19 until later this month, when our three new Fellows will at last, after a long wait, finally be conferred. Undergraduate Gold Medals were awarded to the student with the overall highest mark in the final year of their MPharm in Northern Ireland's two Schools of Pharmacy.

I was delighted last week to attend the QUB Award Ceremony and in November will attend the Ulster University. It was really quite inspiring to hear about the work our undergraduates are completing, demonstrating exemplar skill, enthusiasm and dedication to their studies. It is quite comforting to know that the 'conveyor belt' is brimming with exceptional talent and future pharmacy leaders.

In terms of leading on best practice, we continue to work collaboratively with GB stakeholders to co-produce and endorse professional guidance and standards to ensure they are applicable UK-wide. This represents a pragmatic approach in terms of best use of resource, but also allows us to draw on the richness it brings in terms of a 'whole system' perspective, which includes technicians as an established profession in GB.

Collaborative projects have included working alongside the NI Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery to complete a review of the RPS/RCN Guidance on the Administration of Medications in Healthcare Settings. We participated in the review of the RPS' Competency Framework for All Prescribers, which we have endorsed as the national standard for IPs and other non-medical prescribers. The Forum have also been invited to join the newly-established Post-Registration Assurance of Practice Group – this will enable the UK pharmacy regulators to determine whether the necessary quality control, quality management and quality assurance mechanisms exist post-registration for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to protect the public and give them assurance that they will receive safe and effective care when using pharmacy services. This will be ongoing across 2022-23.

The Forum continues to support best practice in CPD by delivering online resources and a one-to-one service where peer facilitators can support members with their CPD portfolio submission. We have delivered several sessions across the year to support those who did not meet standard on first submission.

Significant change to the PSNI CPD Framework in June 2021 has necessitated the revision of the current CPD support and facilitation resources for our members in 2022-23 and has already included the recruitment of new CPD facilitators.

At present, over the last few weeks, we are supporting this year's cohort who have not met standard on first submission. Importantly, we plan an outreach to identify how we can best support our members through this process and to understand the impact of the new framework on their professional practice.

We've been delighted to appoint three new apprentice members to our Board and Committees. The apprentices are early career pharmacists, who join us for a year-long programme commencing in January each year.

We are equally delighted that the work of the CW Young Charitable Trust continues in supporting research in pharmacy practice. The winning project this year is entitled, 'Valuing Community Pharmacy Services in Northern Ireland', a project which has already published work examining the impact of remote services.

The Forum continued to make optimum use of new technologies communicate and interact with our members and stakeholders, notably updating our website to provide a home for our EDI hub, also by continuing to use Twitter as an essential feed of real-time information and outreach, as well as our monthly Newsletter which continues to keep our members informed of Forum activity and developments within the profession.

Bringing it back to our support functions, this week we marked the World Mental Health Day on October 10<sup>th</sup>. With the challenges outlined earlier, and increased demand on the healthcare services we are relied upon to provide, I would encourage all colleagues to take the time to be proactive about their mental health. If I can, I would like again, as in previous AGMs, to raise awareness of our Pharmacist Advice and Support Service (PASS).

We can help pharmacists, former pharmacists, foundation year trainees and their families in times of need. The range of services are free, confidential and PASS is a registered charity with the Charities Commission NI.

This year PASS has been a continued vital resource for many, allowing us to provide grants and counselling services to those who have needed it. Importantly, this year, we have been able to provide specialist high intensity counselling. Having received feedback from service users, we know that this service has been critical helping our colleagues to stay in work and return to work following absence. Our full outreach is detailed in our Annual Report.

We would like to extend our thanks, on behalf of those who have benefitted from PASS services, to everyone who already donates. As a charity, it is vital that we can continue to offer a range of services and the financial support received from pharmacists ensures that we can continue to do so. We urge you to please consider donating. You can do so online at: [www.pfni.org.uk/pass/donate](http://www.pfni.org.uk/pass/donate)

As I have mentioned, the profession is undergoing significant change and transformation; it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the work completed over the last number of years by our recently retired president Dr Jim Livingstone, but also by Trevor Patterson CEO, for whom this will be his last AGM following his decision to retire later this year. I would like to place on record our thanks to them both for their efforts in support of pharmacy regulation in recent years and to wish them well in their future endeavours. We look forward to continuing our good relationship and collaboration with The Society as we welcome the new President, Dr Geraldine O'Hare, and the next CEO.

I would also like to place on record my personal thanks to our exceptional Forum staff, who continue to deliver great things every day and to everyone who has contributed to our Board, Committees, Working Groups and outreach programmes in pursuit of advancing professional practice.

### Questions and Answers

Dr Oisín Kavanagh requested members to ask questions on work carried out throughout the past year and work going forward into the next financial year. Dr Kavanagh advised he was supported by Prof Paul McCarron and Eamon O'Donnell in responding to questions.

Michael Guerin thanked Eamon O'Donnell for a very comprehensive overview of Pharmacy Forum NI work and directed a question to Pharmaceutical Society NI.

"This was the first year of the Common Registration Assessment, having been previously delayed, and taking place with a background of severe workforce issues. I have concerns around the perception of pharmacy and encouraging young people to join the register in light of PSNI communications with trainees".

Michael Guerin cited PSNI objective 6, 'to communicate effectively and be accessible and responsive'. In light of this, he asked, "how do you think communications were delivered this year to Foundation Year Trainees?"

Michael Guerin went on to advise it was very important as the perception of this, by undergraduates, will dictate how they warm to the profession. He also asked, "what can be learned by this year's experiences? How can Pharmacy Forum NI and Pharmaceutical Society NI reflect on this?" Michael Guerin also advised that he employed twenty-two foundation trainees and observed first-hand the stress of the trainees in relation to the management of the process.

Dr Kavanagh advised he was aware Northern Ireland was not the only country experiencing difficulties and the Pharmacy Forum NI had supported trainees. Dr Kavanagh invited Prof Paul McCarron as Chair of Education Committee to add his thoughts.

Michael Guerin advised that whilst it may have been worse somewhere else this was not a concern to those sitting the Common Registration Assessment in Northern Ireland. He advised it will put young people off becoming pharmacists if not managed in a much more progressive manner.

Prof. Paul McCarron advised he wished to address the 'perception of the CRA', noting students in NI performed above the national average, with a pass rate of 83%, however this was not as good as Scotland or Wales. Queens students performed well with a pass rate of 92%, Ulster students pass rate was 77% and better preparation was required going forward.

Prof. McCarron advised the undergraduates were very well prepared and Ulster University was working with those who sat the assessment – some expressed concerns about how the exam was administered. Prof. McCarron advised Queens University Belfast did the same. Prof McCarron went on to advise the Education Committee were investigating how things could be improved, in particular calculations training and clinical training.

Michael Guerin thanked Prof. McCarron for his honest reflection and advised that having spoken to students the concern was about communications, with no access or response at times around dates, processes etc of the CRA.

Dr Kavanagh asked if this concern should be levied at the Pharmaceutical Society NI, further advising the Pharmacy Forum NI did bring concerns to the Pharmaceutical Society NI.

Trevor Patterson advised the Annual Report under discussion related to year ending 31 May 2022. The assessment examination being referred to in this report relates to June 2021. Due to the pandemic, the Pharmaceutical Society NI were able to convert an online examination into a paper examination, organising venues quickly. Trevor Patterson thanked Prof. McCarron and Ulster University for their help and advised Northern Ireland was the only country able to do so and communications were the best they could be in the circumstances. The Society was dealing with a moving situation with Ulster University and Methodist College as venues in challenging times.

For clarity, Trevor Patterson asked Michael Guerin if he was referring to June 2022 examination and he advised he was.

Trevor Patterson advised he did not feel there were issues with communications, advising issues reported in the press were in the main relating mostly to Great Britain. There were a very limited number of issues in the Northern Ireland venues and a member of the inspectorate team was in the venues as an observer. Full invigilator reports came back from the venues and there was no evidence of cheating, no improper use of equipment.

Trevor Patterson advised in Northern Ireland there had been ten appeals, of which eight were upheld, from a cohort of roughly 140 students. As a result of appeals being upheld, this increased the NI pass rate to a very satisfactory 88%.

Problems that did occur were not acceptable and Pharmaceutical Society NI was working with the GPhC to ensure this does not happen going forward. Trevor Patterson went on to explain the issues in NI were mainly due to computer equipment either running slowly or failing to respond resulting in delays to the start of the CRA for some students. Most of everything else noted in the press were issues in GB and not NI. The Pharmaceutical Society NI were working closely with GPhC for the November

2022 assessment. There will be three venues with inspectors in place from the Pharmaceutical Society NI.

Michael Guerin thanked Trevor Patterson but advised this still does not provide a good perception to new undergraduates about the profession they are getting into. He asked Council to reflect on communications to employers of trainee pharmacists, particularly as it was difficult to ascertain when they would have a result which would allow them to register with the Pharmaceutical Society NI. There was a significant delay in identifying when they could register, given the workforce pressures. He asked Council to reflect on its responsiveness and communications and how these could be improved alongside the exam process next year to everyone's benefit.

Dr Kavanagh asked what the Pharmacy Forum NI could have done to improve things. Michael Guerin advised Pharmacy Forum NI did not represent their concerns at Pharmaceutical Society NI level.

Prof McCarron advised through the Education Committee remit, the Pharmacy Forum NI reached out to graduates that had experienced difficulties to offer additional training and support, including making the Belfast campus available to bring together individuals for additional tutorial sessions. Prof. McCarron advised outreach to nineteen young people with only three expressing an interest. Effort was made to reach out, but perhaps this poor response rate was due to poor communications in general, but given the importance, the response rate should have been higher. Prof McCarron advised it was disappointing, despite efforts of Pharmacy Forum NI. Michael Guerin advised Pharmacy Forum NI should also reflect on its communications.

Trevor Patterson advised Pharmaceutical Society NI was constantly reviewing timeframes and how things are done, recognising there are issues and ongoing workforce pressures. Looking at the 2021 year he advised the Pharmaceutical Society NI could not have done things any quicker regarding getting individuals onto the register and were significantly faster than colleagues in GB – by a period of months.

Regarding the June 2022 assessment, Trevor Patterson advised the Council would respond by advising the most important role of the Pharmaceutical Society NI is to keep a register that demonstrates integrity and quality assured. It must be accurate and only contain people who are eligible to be on it. There are processes to be followed after individuals present results in order to join the register and it is simply not a matter of adding the names to the list.

Trevor Patterson urged members to look at other professions to get an idea of their timeframes for registration, stating it was a significantly longer process and was happy to accept suggestions for improvement.

Dr Kavanagh advised he would be keen to take up the conversation on behalf of Pharmacy Forum NI at a later date.

Laim Bradley, speaking as a contractor directly to Trevor Patterson, advised that in the current year he could not be given a date that enabled him to commence employment of a recently qualified pharmacist. He advised, he made repeated attempts to gain information, but could only get the answer very close to the registration time. He went on to advise that next year the Pharmaceutical Society NI should provide a date so young people know when they can commence employment.

Trevor Patterson advised the Pharmaceutical Society NI establish with the GPhC and Board of Assessors when the results can be provided. The Pharmaceutical Society NI advise individuals they aim to have individuals on the register within ten working days from receipt of all documentation. A guarantee cannot be given as to a definite date as there may be issues with their forms and declarations, which cannot be actioned significantly in advance. Everything added to the register must be quality assured and it is not simply an administrator adding a name to the register.

Trevor Patterson advised that typically if all material required is received by Pharmaceutical Society NI, and it is correct, they expect to have the individual processed and added to the register within ten working days.

Trevor Patterson invited Laura Hughes to provide an overview of the registration process. Laura Hughes advised the team worked tirelessly over the summer months to get the full 2022 cohort registered on time. The website published the anticipated registration date for those taking the summer 2022 assessment and throughout the process the Pharmaceutical Society NI remained committed to that timeline. Expectations are placed on the trainee that they have all documentation with Pharmaceutical Society NI by the specified date; those who met this were registered within the timeframe and those who asked for a date were often those who did not adhere to the process. A substantial amount of time was spent with NICPLD chasing up outstanding documentation. This is a lesson for NICPLD also on how the student reflects on how they provide the appropriate documentation to the Regulator in order to secure their registration date. Outwardly, it may look like the Pharmaceutical Society NI did not make the effort to get the trainees onto the register, mindful of the pandemic and workplace pressures. Laura Hughes advised the Pharmaceutical Society NI did not falter on the commitment to the date and a lot came down to the trainee and this is where the process fell down, advising again the Pharmaceutical Society NI cannot register a trainee who has not supplied the appropriate documentation. The register must contain people with integrity and all sense checks must be carried out – simply adding the trainees when they pass the assessment is not appropriate and there are responsibilities placed on both the student and the Pharmaceutical Society NI.



Liam Bradley advised he understood the process, however, advised he had been trying from spring/early summer to get dates from Pharmaceutical Society NI as to when individuals would enter the workforce and it was very late when a date was received. Liam Bradley asked that the date is agreed and made available sooner to aid planning with the onus on the individual to provide the correct documentation. There is the need for a definite timeline, and providing they comply, then everyone knows the date they can enter the profession. Liam Bradley noted that in the face of huge student debts, it is important that trainees know they can take up employment and start earning and paying off debts.

Laura Hughes advised this seemed reasonable and would take the comments on communications as constructive feedback advising the Pharmaceutical Society NI was committed to its communications strategy in relation to students and going forward will look into better communication with contractors.

Laura Hughes advised, regarding the November 2022 assessment, that this cohort have been heavily communicated with, including timeline for registration. The Registrar confirmed at every stage the Pharmaceutical Society NI will try and pull back on that time if possible.

In relation to the Common Registration Assessment, there is a different process to sitting the exam and the quality assurance process to go through to get the final results released. The Pharmaceutical Society NI worked closely with the GPhC and the quality assurance entity and pulled back the timeframe from six weeks to four weeks. At every point of the process the Pharmaceutical Society NI looked at making efficiencies, mindful of the pandemic and trying to support the profession. Staff worked very hard behind the scenes to make the registration happen in the timeliest manner. The team will reflect on communications going forward and anything that can be done differently to support contractors the Pharmaceutical Society NI will endeavour to do.

Peter Rice wished to discuss CPD and patient safety. Peter advised he had been selected for assessment three times in the last six years, having achieved a 100% pass rate each time. Peter asked for information on how the algorithm for selection was arrived at, advising he had twelve pharmacists working in his organisation and some have never been selected in twenty-five years.

Peter Rice went on to ask if the system provided for appropriate assessment of CPD and whether individuals are fit to be on the register?

Peter Rice also asked a further question in relation to the temporary register, stating he was aware of individuals on this register for three years without CPD assessment or payment of fees. He asked for the Pharmaceutical Society to give an indication of how this will continue to be managed and how contractors can continue to be assured those on the temporary register are fit to practice?

Trevor Patterson responded by advising there was no algorithm. It is identified there are individuals deemed to be higher risk, not suggesting Peter was in this group, for example, return to practice, not on a register for a period of time, the Pharmaceutical Society NI will take a sample of these individuals. A random number generator selects others and Trevor Patterson was surprised to hear how often Peter Rice had been selected. Peter Rice responded by suggesting the random number generator needs to be looked into and is confident he will continue to pass CPD, has no objection to being continually assessed, but feels it is inappropriate and does not adequately reflect the duty of the Pharmaceutical Society NI to assess the competency of the full register. Peter Rice went on to say that if he was seen as high risk, he hoped it would be raised directly with him.

Trevor Patterson stressed being selected for assessment should not be seen as a punishment. Everyone is expected to submit a compliant portfolio. The assessment process is designed to be an enticement for individuals to ensure they complete it. As 10% is selected this means nine out of ten each year are not selected. If the belief is that more should be selected, then this has cost implications.

Peter Rice suggested a more representative sample is needed and the question is how does CPD assessment appropriately provide safety if ten percent are assessed, and the same person is assessed every one or two years? Being selected does not put an individual at a disadvantage as everyone is expected to submit a compliant portfolio as per the legislation.

Trevor Patterson stressed it was an automatic process and those who do not comply do not meet certain characteristics – number of cycles, number of hours etc. A need was identified to look at whether people who have been assessed should perhaps be excluded from the random sample going forward. If selected twice in a five-year period, then perhaps the individual should be removed from the random sample for example. Laura Hughes confirmed this is something that can be investigated.

Laura Huges assured there was no element of bias or personal input from anyone and the process was a completely randomised process. It could possibly be down to capturing an inappropriate amount of time and perhaps the system was flagging this up, leading to selection. Personal circumstances of individuals are not known but there are factors that heighten the probability of selection, which is right and proper. Change of the scope of practice is another factor. Laura Hughes summed up by stating this was constructive feedback and something that should be looked at and it was not a fair position to have been selected three times in the last six years. Laura advised no-one sees who has been selected until the system produces the list.

Reference the temporary register, Trevor Patterson advised this register is entirely at the decision of the Minister and circumstances surrounding this register are written

into the legislation. The intention behind this register was not to have things like fitness to practice processes, CPD and fees disincentivise pharmacists to come forward or choosing to be on the temporary register. The Pharmaceutical Society NI website and literature state anyone on the temporary register should be subject to additional checks and balances by their employer because the Pharmaceutical Society NI are not empowered to carry out these checks. The temporary register was scheduled to close 30 September 2022, however, the UK Health Secretary, Therese Coffey, made the decision to extend this date. The Pharmaceutical Society NI delivered the decision but have no influence over it, nor the circumstances of those on the register.

Laura Hughes noted no one imagined the space we would be in and that the temporary register would persist for so long. It was a welcome function that supported the profession when it needed to. The latest recent update will see it extended for a further two years, meaning some are on this register almost five years. As the pandemic and conditions persisted and the need was there, it ensured there was no burden placed on those who chose to help and support the profession. The point made about the temporary register is fair and has not escaped the Pharmaceutical Society NI in terms of notification of the latest extension to the temporary register.

Mark Timoney directed his comments to the Pharmacy Forum NI, noting the Forum participation in the Rebalancing Board in the past. He explained, pharmacists witness frontline demand and we have welcomed the increase in pharmacists' responsibilities in the clinical setting - no longer is the role standard dispensing with associated clinical checks. There is an increased demand from the public in response to symptoms, facilitating allied healthcare professionals and a host of other activities. To assure development on the call for pharmacists and services in a professional capacity, will the Forum be responding to the challenge set down when the Rebalancing Board closed and stated Ministers would not prescribe what were safe and effective, well governed systems, within pharmacy, but it would be for the regulators to do so? Scenarios around modernised working practices should be proffered so the regulator could be satisfied.

Mark Timoney asked if the Forum would be getting to grips with describing some of these scenarios so the regulator is satisfied that appropriate supervision can be delivered in a pharmacy setting that will reassure the public, patients, and pharmacists that they are in a position to deliver safe and effective services to the highest standards. Mark Timoney stated this was all by way of comment to ensure the Pharmaceutical Society NI is satisfactorily engaged in the process to describe scenarios post-Covid that will inform appropriate regulatory arrangements in the future.

Julie Greenfield advised there were limited resources, and the Forum are at the table when national conversations are happening. The ambition is to create a UK-wide pharmacy practice supervision group to tease out the scenarios and to feed into the

conversations. The Forum was working collaboratively with RPS, APTUK and others to bring this alive in the coming year.

Julie Greenfield advised that the Commission on Pharmacy Leadership Group is involved in the bigger conversations in relation to what is needed to support practice. A number of working sub-groups will meet in the autumn and this will feed into the Commission Steering Group. She explained, is very much about listening to the profession in terms of what they need and want to support practice and looking forward to what is needed to support pharmacists in their careers; what the blueprint looks like, will come out of this process. Individuals then need to take up the mantle and make it happen.

It is a two-stage process – the blueprint followed by how we meet it, involving all stakeholders.

In NI we must make sure there is the guidance and standards needed to support pharmacists in their practice. The Forum relies heavily on working collaboratively with others to inform UK-wide guidance. The Forum is present at national conversations, looking at future development needs and how best we can best support with guidance and collaborative working.

Julie Greenfield advised APTUK were being brought into those conversations and would be working collaboratively with this group in the near future.

Eamon O'Donnell brought the AGM to a close with final reflections on the great strides our profession is making and how we are redefining our place within the health sector. He explained that, as is the case every year, our challenge remains to continue to embrace these changes and strive to provide the highest standards of patient care. He thanked The Forum and PSNI staff for organising tonight.

Eamon O'Donnell thanked all staff members for arranging the AGM and for the continued hard work. Everyone was thanked for their participation and engagement throughout the year. He concluded by wishing everyone a good evening.

Meeting concluded 8.40pm.