

Complaints about the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland

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1. Introduction

The Pharmaceutical Society NI is the regulatory body for pharmacists in Northern Ireland. Our primary purpose is to ensure practising pharmacists in Northern Ireland are registered and fit to practise, keep their skills and knowledge up to date and deliver high quality safe care to patients. It is the organisation's responsibility to protect and maintain public safety in pharmacy by:

- Setting and promoting standards for pharmacists' admission to the Register and for remaining on the Register;
- Maintaining a publicly accessible register of pharmacists and pharmacy premises;
- Handling concerns about the Fitness to Practise of registrants, acting as a complaints portal and taking action to protect the public; and
- Ensuring high standards of education and training for pharmacists in Northern Ireland.

2. What to expect from us

2.1 The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland is committed to dealing with complaints about our service, which we call Organisational Complaints, in an impartial, proportionate, confidential, and timely manner.

2.2 When managing and investigating complaints about the Pharmaceutical Society NI, we follow the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's Principles of Good Administration and Complaints Handling,¹ which are:

- Getting it right;
- Being customer focused;
- Being open and accountable;
- Acting fairly and proportionately;
- Putting things right; and
- Seeking continuous improvement.

¹ The Ombudsman's Principles outline the approach that they believe public bodies should take when delivering good administration and customer service and how to respond when things go wrong.

- 2.3 We investigate complaints thoroughly and fairly to establish the facts and we make decisions that are proportionate, appropriate, and fair. We ensure that complaints are reviewed by someone not involved in the events leading to the complaint.
- 2.4 We value all complaints as an important and useful source of feedback about how we have performed and how we can improve in the future. We will
- 2.5 Acknowledge mistakes and/or where things have gone wrong, and we will apologise where appropriate and try to put things right.
- 2.6 This complaints procedure aims to help us resolve complaints as quickly as possible and as close as is possible to the point where our service is delivered. For those complaints that can't be resolved quickly, the procedure commits the Pharmaceutical Society NI to conducting thorough, impartial, and fair investigations. By adopting this approach, we can identify, and address service issues raised by complainants with the objective of continuously improving our service and preventing recurrences.

3. What this policy covers

- 3.1 The purpose of this policy is to enable anyone who comes into contact with our service and is unhappy or dissatisfied to complain to us about. This may include:
- 3.1.1 Something that we may have done, or should have done, such as:
- Failure to provide a service, or the provision of an inadequate service,
 - Unreasonable delays in the provision of our services,
- 3.1.2 Our policies or processes (including those linked to our statutory functions); or
- 3.1.3 How well we have treated, communicated or interacted with them,
- 3.1.4 Our failure to comply with applicable legal or administrative processes.

3.2 This guide is not for the following matters:

- 3.2.1 Concerns about pharmacy registrants or pharmacy premises. If you want to make a complaint about a pharmacy professional or premises, please visit our 'Reporting a concern' webpage or contact our Raising Concerns and Fitness to Practise Department;²
- 3.2.2 Changes to the law, government standards or guidance over which we have no direct control;
- 3.2.3 Outcomes of Fitness to Practise proceedings or other legal decisions;³
- 3.2.4 Situations where you have a statutory right of appeal;
- 3.2.5 Comments about Council policy in development or ongoing consultations unless the complaint is about a process matter. If you do have a comment about our policies, it will be considered as part of policy development. Please contact the Director of Business Operations;
- 3.2.6 Complaints about an education provider. For such complaints, you should raise the matter with the provider through their complaints' procedure;⁴
- 3.2.7 Complaints about the conduct of a Council member or concerns in relation to the probity of staff or Council members. The process of raising a complaint in these instances is detailed in the Corporate Governance Handbook 2021;⁵

² Procedure for raising a concerns about a registered pharmacist or pharmacy premises can be accessed here [Guidance-on-Raising-Concerns-about-a-Pharmacist-Pharmacy-or-Pharmacy-Owner-in-Northern-Ireland-1.pdf](#) ([psni.org.uk](#)) (accessed 1 Nov. 2022). Our Raising Concerns and Fitness to Practise Department can be contacted at concerns-ftp@psni.org.uk or by telephone on 02890326927

³ For further assistance please contact the Raising Concerns and Fitness to Practise Department at concerns-ftp@psni.org.uk or by telephone on 02890326927

⁴ The Northern Ireland Centre for Pharmacy Learning and Development complaints department can be contacted on nicpld@qub.ac.uk

⁵ The Corporate Governance Handbook 2021 can be accessed at <https://psni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Corporate-Governance-Handbook-January-2021-1.pdf> (accessed 1 Nov. 2022)

3.2.8 Concerns from staff about Pharmaceutical Society NI employees or Council members. In these instances, the procedures are detailed in the Corporate Governance Handbook or the internal grievance policy.

If you are not sure which policy to use, please tell us your concern and we will either direct you to the most appropriate team or let you know which organisations are better placed to investigate your complaint.

3.3 Annual Report

3.3.1 The Pharmaceutical Society NI is committed to reporting on all complaints received and the response to them in our Annual Report in compliance with our commitment to Openness and Transparency.

3.4 Discrimination and Bias

3.4.1 The Pharmaceutical Society NI is committed to guarding against the risk of discrimination when carrying out its functions. Should you feel we have not maintained our high standards in this regard, we welcome the submission of an organisational complaint so we can investigate the matter.

4 How do I complain and who do I complain to?

4.1 You can raise your complaint to us verbally by email or in writing to the Director of Business Operations.⁶ Please give us as much detail about your complaint as possible to enable us to deal with your complaint as quickly as possible.

4.2 A complaint can be made directly by an individual or through a third party, for example, a family member, a support organisation or a friend. If a third party is making a complaint on behalf of an individual, we will require the written consent of the individual on whose behalf the complaint is being made.

4.3 If you have a disability or accessibility needs and require support, please tell us your requirements and we will endeavour to provide you with support to assist you in submitting the complaint.

⁶ Director of Business Operations on 0289032 6927, OrgComplaints@psni.org.uk or by post to, The Director of Business Operations, Pharmaceutical Society NI, 71 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1HL

- 4.4 We encourage you to raise your complaint to us within **seven working days** from the incident occurring or from when you were aware of the problem. If the complaint is outside this period, we will consider investigating it if there is good reason for the delay and it is still possible to complete a fair and effective investigation into the matter.

5 **How we handle complaints.**

The Director of Business Operations oversees our complaints process which includes notifying you of the outcome. The process is outlined in a chart at Appendix 1.

5.1 Complaints about Senior Pharmaceutical Society NI officials

If a complaint is about a member of the senior management team, this will be overseen by the Chief Executive Officer and if about the Chief Executive Officer, by the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society NI.

5.2 Process

- 5.2.1 We have a two-stage handling procedure. At each stage, it will help us to resolve your complaint quickly if you can give us as much clarity and detail as possible including providing any documentation.

5.2.2 Acknowledgement

We will write to acknowledge your complaint within **three working days**. We may also ask you to confirm any aspect about which we are unclear and/or provide further details. We will acknowledge any further information you provide at this stage within **three working days** and start to investigate your complaint.

6. **Complaint Stages**

Stage 1

This is the first opportunity for us to resolve your complaint. We expect the majority of complaints to be resolved at this stage.

On receipt of your complaint, the Director of Business Operations will contact the relevant manager, or another appropriate person not involved in the events leading to the complaint and ask them to investigate and respond to your complaint.

We will send you a written explanation of what happened, details of how the situation has been or will be addressed and the likely timescale for this, where appropriate.

We aim to respond fully within **15 working days** of acknowledging your full complaint.

We ask that, throughout the process, you respond to a written communication within a reasonable time or that you request further time, if required. Failure to respond within **20 working days** may result in the investigation of the complaint being discontinued. You will be informed if the Pharmaceutical Society NI is taking this action.

Stage 2

If you are dissatisfied with our response at Stage 1, you may request a review by the Chief Executive. This request must be submitted within **20 working days** of our response.

Your request, together with all correspondence relating to it, should be sent to the Chief Executive who will review your complaint, plus the response, carry out any further investigation they deem necessary and make a decision.

We aim to respond fully within **20 working days** of acknowledging your request for review.

If we have to change any of our timescales, we will let you know and explain why, for example, where the matters you raise require more detailed work.

7. What can the outcome of my complaint be?

Once we have examined your complaint, we will write to you to explain the findings and outcomes at all stages.

It may be that your complaint is fully or partially upheld or that it is not upheld.

We will let you know what happened and, if we found mistakes, we will acknowledge them, let you know how the situation has been or will be addressed and the likely timescale, where appropriate.

There is no further internal appeal mechanism after Stage 2. If you disagree with the final response, you can raise your concerns

with the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) who regulate our activity.⁷ Alternatively, you may seek independent legal advice.

8. What we expect from you

The Pharmaceutical Society NI recognises that bringing a complaint can be a stressful experience. However, we expect any person who contacts us to respect our staff. A lack of respect may result in the withdrawal or restriction of our service. In some cases, we may need to limit or control our contact with someone in the interests of our staff, other people who use our services and/or the individual themselves.

9. How we use your information

We manage your information in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 and our Privacy Policy. You can find out more about this and your rights under data protection legislation on our website.⁸

We also produce regular reports on complaints' data to our governing Council to see how well we are dealing with complaints and meeting your needs. We remove all confidential information from these reports to protect the identity of those involved.

We may also share your personal data with other parties if required by law, where ordered by a court or where it is otherwise in the public interest. Where possible, we remove any identifiable information before we share it with any other party.

Your complaint file will be retained securely in accordance with our Retention Schedule after which it will be confidentially destroyed. Should you wish for your personal information related to the complaint to be deleted prior to this, please contact, the Director of Business Operations.

⁷ The Professional Standard Authority contact details can be accessed [here](https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/contact-us) <https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/contact-us> (accessed Nov. 2023)

⁸ Data Protection <https://www.psn.org.uk/psni/governance/data-protection/> (accessed January 2024)

10. Requests for alternative formats

A request for a copy of this guide in an alternative format can be made to the Director of Business Operations.

Appendix 1

Complaints about the Pharmaceutical Society NI flow chart

