

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

In Person and Via Teams

Thursday, 17 October 2024 at 7.15pm

AGENDA

1. Welcome
2. Minutes of 98th Annual General Meeting
3. Matters of Accuracy
4. Adoption of the Minutes
5. President of the Pharmaceutical Society NI's Address
6. Financial Statement
7. Caretaker CEO of the Pharmaceutical Society NI's address and Questions for the Pharmaceutical Society NI
8. Chair of the Pharmacy Forum NI's Address
9. Questions for Pharmacy Forum NI
10. Thanks and Close

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

In Person and Via Teams

Thursday, 17 October 2024 at 7.15pm

MINUTES

1. The meeting commenced at 7.15pm with a welcome to all attendees by Mrs Anne McAlister, Vice-Chair, Pharmacy Forum NI. Apologies noted from Ms Alison Ragg and Mr Lee Wilson.
2. The Minutes of 98th Annual General Meeting were presented to the Annual General Meeting.
3. No matters of accuracy were raised.
4. The Minutes were adopted having been proposed by Mr Brendan Garland and seconded by Prof Paul McCarron.
5. **President of the Pharmaceutical Society NI's Address
[Dr Geraldine O'Hare]**

Good evening, everyone and thank you very much Anne for your kind welcome and my thanks to Pharmacy Forum for organising this AGM this evening.

Firstly, a very warm welcome to Society House and the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland.

Thank you for joining us this evening in person and online, after what I do know, has already been a very long and busy day for you all.

Your support this evening is very much appreciated.

I am delighted to see so many of you here, and as President, and on behalf of the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society NI, I welcome you to our 99th Annual General Meeting and the launch of the Annual Report for the period 2023-2024. This is my second AGM with the Society, and it is my great honour to lead the organisation into its 100th year, marking the Centenary of the Pharmaceutical Society here in N Ireland. It is my hope, and indeed my plan, that you as registrants will be part of the momentous year that we will enter into in 2025.

This evening, by way of update on behalf of the organisation, I will provide a comprehensive overview of our strategic position and direction, and also some key operational business areas that will have a bearing on that direction.

I would like to begin by acknowledging those individuals who have left the Society over this year, including our former Chief Executive, Michaela McAleer and Director of Public Affairs, Mark Neale. We wish them all the best in their new roles and extend our thanks to them for their commitment and dedication to the organisation during their tenures.

I am also delighted to acknowledge our pharmacy trainees and our universities. This year, local candidates sitting the Common Registration Assessment run jointly by the General Pharmaceutical Council and the Pharmaceutical Society NI achieved an impressive pass rate of 91.8% in June 2024. This is undoubtedly a true reflection of the standard of training for candidates entering pharmacy, and may I take this opportunity to congratulate each and every one of them, and our sincere thanks to our wonderful universities and trainers for their ongoing exceptional teaching and commitment to the calibre of students and professionals you are all producing. Your work continues to make pharmacy the highly sought after career so many want to aspire to.

Once again, the Society enabled successful applicants to join the professional Register in the shortest possible time, while maintaining the required levels of rigour and assurance, and I am very grateful to all our staff for making this happen.

Turning to our performance over the past year, in March 2024, the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) published our Annual Performance Review. A number of issues across three of the regulatory standards were identified where we fell short.

Although it is disappointing, we accept these findings in full and have used them very much as a driver and a platform to review and modernise our internal processes and renew our commitment to ensuring that the very highest standards are maintained. We have been, and are continuing, to work closely with the PSA and other stakeholders, and there is a robust programme of performance monitoring and review in place in order to ensure that there is evidential performance improvement and that the learning transforms operational practices going forward.

I am delighted this year at the AGM to welcome the return of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Assembly, which is a significant development in terms of securing legislative changes and reform that may be required. The Society is currently involved in Department of Health working groups and has set up an internal project team to drive important regulatory reforms, ensuring the timely modernisation of regulations. Over the past year, we have also worked with the Department and other partners on legislative changes, essential for registering pharmacy technicians, which is key to enhancing pharmacy services in Northern Ireland. This year and next, we will engage in consultations on qualifications, fees, and CPD requirements for pharmacy technicians, preparing to welcome them to the Society's professional register. These significant steps are in line with the draft Programme for Government and the stated intention therein to move to a model of care which is centred around patient needs and taking proactive steps to cure, care for and prevent illness. Indeed, our new corporate strategy will recognise the higher expectation of the role that pharmacists will play in the earlier stages of health and care pathways.

We are also collaborating with the Northern Ireland Centre for Pharmacy Learning and Development and the Department of Health for the launch of the first Foundation Year Training under the new 2021 Training Standards. These standards ensure that all qualifying pharmacists can independently prescribe, with a curriculum focusing on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. We are currently developing the consultation which will outline the changes required to the General regulations (1994) that will ensure that all those who complete the new Foundation Training Year Programme, will be eligible to apply for registration with the Society, upon passing the Common Registration Assessment. At this point let me say how delighted I was that we were able to host in this very room, Prof Roisin O'Hare, the Lead Teacher Practitioner Pharmacist for Northern Ireland who, along with Trust pharmacists, interviewed final year MPharm students seeking to be admitted to their hospital pharmacy placements, as part of their Foundation Training Year. It was our pleasure to host you all here in Society House and having sat in on one of the sessions, I was truly inspired by the innovative approach adopted and I did confess at the time, that I was likely to steal such approach for a similar process I am embarking on with Psychologist Trainees!

The Society has concluded its consultation on the Knowledge of English regulations, has listened to feedback and is now in discussion with the Department of Health, to ensure that the safeguards achieve their intended purpose and further support the delivery of high-quality safe services for patients.

The Society is also keen to engage with registrants to modernise its CPD framework, aiming to transition to a revalidation model similar to some other regulators. This would involve changing CPD regulations to create a flexible legislative basis for assessing continued fitness to practice through CPD. We intend to establish a specific working group to advance this work in the coming months, in parallel with improving the guidance and support offered to those submitting portfolios in the current online system.

We also completed our consultation on a revised Code of Conduct in collaboration with an advisory group of stakeholders, public and pharmacy representatives. I would like to thank them for their time and assure them that following consideration of the public responses and their comments, there will be a further opportunity to comment on the draft, and we expect to conclude this work in early 2025. This key document, combined with a refreshed Corporate Strategy which I shall come to shortly, will be some of the cornerstones of the renewed Society.

Safe staffing levels of appropriately skilled and qualified staff are essential to deliver safe and effective services to the public and support pharmacists' health and wellbeing. The Pharmaceutical Society NI has consulted on safe staffing levels and we have discussed the results with the Department. We are pleased to report that the link between effective inspections of safe staffing levels and an appropriate standards framework, or legislation, was acknowledged by the Department in its recent HSC-wide consultation which we fully support. In order to progress this matter, the Department of Health will commence the 2018 Premises Standards and we look forward to working with the Department on this matter.

Such is the transition and the reorganisation that we have experienced, we know that change can bring challenges, but it also presents opportunities for the Society and as Sir Richard Branson once said, "Every success story is a tale of constant adaption, revision and change". It is clear that the Pharmaceutical Society NI needs to change. We need to transform our thinking and our approach if we are to be a modern and progressive regulator. Indeed, some of you will remember that last year, I outlined how we had embarked upon that modernisation journey with a determination to optimise available technology and to engage in better and more meaningful ways with registrant pharmacists and other key stakeholders. Council has recently approved a revised communications and engagement strategy and I, as President, have engaged with many of you and that will continue, including maintaining and strengthening the links that we have with the Department of Health, which I welcome.

This process is also about being confident in our future and in our ability to get it right in terms of our relationship with registrants and stakeholders, and adopting a relentless focus on continuous improvement in order to future-proof pharmacy regulation for the next generation and those thereafter in protecting the public and providing high standards of care to the public.

That leads me to our forthcoming Corporate Strategy. This is an important document as it will present our vision, direction and plan. The process began, as you know, this year and although we had originally hoped to launch the strategy in 2024, this was not possible due to organisational changes, and thus our timing to implement and deliver, and to begin to realise the strategic objectives were not right at this time.

We will however finalise the Strategy in 2025, and my thanks to all of you who have engaged in the process of consultation with us so far. We have listened to your views and agree with a lot of the feedback we have received, and we will undertake to work together in bringing about the necessary reforms for the Society as we enter into our Centenary Year.

The new strategy will build on the progress that has been made and will reset challenging and ambitious goals for the future. It will focus on transformation and modernisation, looking ahead to the future for pharmacy and healthcare regulation, as proposed through the ongoing work to bring about full-scale reform of the regulatory frameworks of all the healthcare professional regulators. The key elements of the reform programme will be the introduction of a modern, fit-for-purpose regulatory system.

The strategy also has a strong emphasis on benchmarking against best practice in regulatory performance, and the need for development of an agile and innovative culture with respect, compassion and dignity at its heart, as a vital enabler for the required transformation. This, as many of you will have read, was one of the key findings and points highlighted in the recent NMC Independent Review of Culture, a necessary read and learning for us all. As President, I continue to work closely with other healthcare regulators in the UK and Ireland, and we meet regularly to collaborate and to share learning and experiences in order to continually improve how we regulate health professionals.

Mr Gary McMurray, Chair of the Finance and Performance Committee will present the financial statement shortly. Although we have always endeavoured to minimise the additional financial burden on registrants and to that end, have not increased fees since 2016, we have now reached the point where an uplift is necessary. In response, my commitment to you is to implement the required reform and changes, with the highest levels of standards, patient care and business efficiency as we move forward.

Before I conclude, let me share some thoughts on our forthcoming Centenary. Centenaries only come around once in a lifetime, and I can be fairly confident that none of us here in this hall, will be around to celebrate the next one ... so let's mark this first Centenary together. In thinking about it, I often wonder what people thought in 1925 the next 100 years would be like as they embarked on their story and their journey. My vision is to have pharmacists look back 100 years from now, very proud of what has been achieved, and a desire to continue the legacy that you and others have already contributed to, and with the outstanding recognition that the profession contributes to in the healthcare journey of our public, many displayed here this evening on these wonderful Boards in Society House.

As 2025 fast approaches, we are finalising plans to reflect a theme of promoting pharmacy and celebrating the contribution of pharmacists, and the Society over the last hundred years. Our first event will be a Welcome Ceremony and Networking Evening for newly registered pharmacists in November. That will include supper and a fireside chat with Mr Tom Eakin who served as President during the Society's 50th anniversary year. Other exciting things are planned but I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without specifically flagging our gala celebration dinner which is planned for November 2025 in Belfast City Hall.

In conclusion, we all know that health and social care delivery has to change, and it will change. Part of that required change will be a greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention, and the need to address health inequalities. Pharmacists will continue to play an integral and increasingly significant role, particularly in the earlier stages of health and care pathways. The Pharmaceutical Society NI needs to respond effectively in continuing to provide high standards of regulation and leadership for the profession, but also in advocating to ensure that the public receives the highest quality pharmaceutical services available. I hope this evening that I have shared our determination to do just and that I have outlined our future direction of travel for all.

As always, it gives me great pleasure to extend my sincere thanks to Council members and the staff at the Pharmaceutical Society NI, who have ensured that the core business of public protection has been maintained, and is at the core of what we do, through their hard work, flexibility, and their professionalism throughout what has been a challenging year. I would also like to acknowledge our Council members who completed their tenures this year and to whom we are indebted for all their hard work, commitment and unwavering support. To Ms Carol Moore, Prof Patrick Murphy and Ms Coleen Duffy, our sincere thanks on behalf of the Society.

I am very pleased to welcome four new Council Members with effect from 4 November, and we also welcome our new Vice President, Mr Mark McCrudden, himself a pharmacist who we are delighted to be working with. I am grateful to Mr Jonathan Patton who agreed, on a temporary basis, to serve as our Caretaker Chief

Executive from May to September 2024, before returning to his other roles and of course to Mrs Joan Duffy, the Society's Director of Business Operations, who currently holds this position until we appoint a new Chief Executive, hopefully in the coming weeks.

Finally, my thanks once again to all of our registrants, and to all who are here this evening for your ongoing support and your commitment and for all your hard work in your vast range of roles which you do with such passion and compassion. I continue to be struck by your unwavering vocation to your critical roles, the exceptional difference you make in improving the health of the public and for your drive and motivation to innovate and create new ways of doing things to deliver the best outcomes for the people of N Ireland. Thank you for this, I remain incredibly proud to be associated with such a respected profession, and my thanks to you all for your support to me as President of the Pharmaceutical Society NI. It is my great privilege.

I look forward to our continued work and engagement together and I am delighted that this can continue this evening as I invite you to meet some of our new staff and our Council members over a coffee when the formal proceedings conclude.

Thank you very much.

Mrs Anne McAlister thanked Dr Geraldine O'Hare and invited Mr Gary McMurray to present the financial report of the Pharmaceutical Society NI.

6. Financial Statement [Mr Gary McMurray]

Slide 1

Good evening and thank you President Geraldine for the introduction.

As Geraldine said I am the Chair of the Society's Finance & Performance Committee and it is my role this evening to provide an overview of the Society's financial performance for the financial year to 31 May 2024. There are copies of the full set of accounts and supporting report on the year's activities on your seats this evening and they are also available to view on the Society's website. The accounts were approved at the Society's Council meeting on 24 September and were laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly by the Department of Health on 2 October 2024.

At the outset I am pleased to confirm that the Society's auditors provided an unqualified audit report for the year past.

I will now give an overview of the financial results. I will endeavour to keep this at a reasonably high level but will be happy to try and answer any questions you may have at the end of the presentation.

Slide 2

This slide provides an overview of financial performance with comparatives against the previous three financial years. In particular, I would draw your attention to the following points:-

- Income has remained largely static over the past 4 years reflecting modest growth through new registrants coming on board whilst registrant retention fees have remained unchanged since 2016 and premises fees have remained unchanged since 2010.
- Expenditure has been rising steadily over the period and, whilst we will be looking at the detail behind this in a subsequent slide, I am sure everyone present will recognise the inflationary pressures that all organisations have been faced with over the past 4 years and the Society is no different.
- After accounting for movements in our investment portfolio and taxation you will note that we have seen increasing deficits over the past three years which is obviously not a sustainable position. I will come back to this point subsequently.

Slide 3

Looking at our Income in a little more detail.

Our primary source of Income as previously stated is Retention Fees from our registered members.

Premises licence fee income has remained largely static and again reflects a significant period since these were last increased - 2010.

Registration fee income decreased by £8,000 in the period which largely reflects accounting treatment as the prior year comparative figure included some deferred income.

Slide 4

Turning to the Expenditure incurred by the Society and again focussing on the main items which in turn represent approximately 90% of total expenditure.

- Whilst salary costs appear to have decreased during the year this reflects a number of employment gaps which have subsequently been recruited for and filled. As I am sure you are aware it is a challenging recruitment marketplace and there is a necessity to ensure the Society's staffing complement has the right skills and capabilities to help move the Society forward and be a modern and progressive organisation that delivers for its registrant members, for its stakeholders and most importantly for the protection of the public. This necessitates paying market rates to attract the right calibre of staff and consequently salary related costs in the current financial year will show a material increase from those in last year's accounts.

- Statutory Expenses reflect the costs of managing and delivering Fitness to Practice processes. The Society is undertaking a detailed review of how it handles Fitness to Practice cases to improve, where possible, case handling timelines and reduce costs.
- Legal, Professional & Consultancy Fees are incurred as and when required. As the Society is a relatively small team external professional and consultancy assistance will be contracted as and when required, rather than retaining in-house expertise at a higher cost in order to manage overall cost base.
- Facilities & Office Expenses have shown a small increase largely reflecting inflationary pressures across a number of categories and some necessary premises maintenance work.
- Governance costs have increased by £22k to £82k due to the instigation of several short-life working groups aimed at modernising the organisation and enhanced Learning & Development activity during the year.
- Computer Expenses increased by £17k to £87k primarily due to the full support costs for our Regulatory software being incurred for the first time.

Slide 5

As I have stated earlier in the presentation the Council of the Society in reviewing registrant fees on an annual basis has, over the period of COVID and the subsequent cost of living crisis, opted to maintain fees at the 2016 level rather than pass on fee increases to registrants.

The consequence of this approach has been to absorb the annual deficits that have been incurred from our accumulated Reserves. This has been possible only because of the prudent financial management approach adopted in prior years by Council to accumulate and invest previous surpluses. The Council has a Strategic Reserves Policy which stipulates the minimum acceptable level of reserves to enable the Society to continue to deliver on its statutory and public duties in the event of unforeseen circumstances. The Society has now reached the minimum acceptable level of reserves and is therefore not in a position to absorb further losses.

As has already been highlighted by the President it is Council's desire to move the Society forward through a transformation and modernisation programme over the next three years. This however will require investment to be made by the Society in addition to the investment already made in recruitment to fill key positions over recent months. The Society can no longer absorb these costs, together with existing deficits, from reserves and therefore will now be embarking on a consultation process, in conjunction with the Department for Health, around fees – this process will commence in the near future, and we will of necessity be engaging with all registrant members and other interested parties around this.

In closing I would like to thank our Caretaker CEO, Mrs Joan Duffy, and her team for all the work that has gone into both the preparation of the annual accounts and indeed the management of the Society's finances over the past year.

Thank you for your attention and I will now hand over to Joan but will be happy to endeavour to answer any questions you may have around the financial accounts during the Q&A session.

7. Caretaker CEO of the Pharmaceutical Society NI's Address (Mrs Joan Duffy) and Questions for the Pharmaceutical Society NI

Good evening and can I add my welcome to you all.

It is my privilege to stand before you as caretaker Chief Executive and it is in that caretaker capacity that I would just like to say a few words.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the very significant contribution that the President and individual Council Members have made to the Society over the past year. Their collective experience, knowledge and professionalism has been truly invaluable.

I must also thank my senior management team and all of the staff for their dedication and unwavering support over the past month or so.

I have been truly humbled by the unity that we have all shared. There is definitely a good vibe about the place and a real 'together we can' attitude and it certainly makes my job much easier.

All in all, I think there is a very refreshing air of change within the Society and a clear desire to embrace new opportunities. We must foster and encourage that. And if we do, I am confident that the Society will thrive and have the ability to adapt in order to meet the demands of Northern Ireland's changing health and care environment as time moves on. Thank you.

Mrs Anne McAlister thanked Dr Geraldine O'Hare, Mr Gary McMurray and Mrs Joan Duffy for their addresses and invited questions from attendees.

Prof Paul McCarron: Prof McCarron noted an increase in fees is to be anticipated and for new registrants beginning their journey it was a lot of money. Prof McCarron raised a question in relation to whether the Society would consider a discount for new students joining the register and advised it was important to encourage them to stay. Prof McCarron noted it was important the Society was sympathetic to their needs.

Mr Gary McMurray: Mr McMurray thanked Prof McCarron for his question and noted it was a valid one and not something the Society had considered in the past but certainly something to consider in the current fees proposition. Mr McMurray went on to advise there had not been an increase in fees for a number of years and the Society was operating in a deficit. He advised the Society needed to be proportionate and address the deficit through registrant, student and premises fees.

Dr Brenda Bradley: Dr Bradley thanked the Society for the informative presentations and advised it was good to hear there are changes being implemented with CPD and these were very much needed. Dr Bradley asked when the proposed consultation was likely to be launched and if changes would be made prior to the next CPD submission period.

Ms Emer Hopkins: Ms Hopkins noted she was relatively new to the Society and had familiarised herself with the CPD process advising she was aware there had been technical issues and noted the complex nature of CPD requirements. Ms Hopkins went on to explain it was a robust system and the system of peer review and assurance was very good. Ms Hopkins noted it was different to other regulators, who focused on reflective practice and a system of revalidation. Further engagement was planned with the profession in early 2025 and the Society was currently working on better guidance documentation, example cycles and improved networking opportunities, all with the aim of improving the pass rate and continuing to ensure the bar was set high. Further explaining the forthcoming engagement, Ms Hopkins stated it would be wide and deep with a working group being formed to take views of the profession moving forward. This would culminate in a consultation towards the end of 2025 (after this period of engagement with the profession) and this would mean no change to the current process with the 2025 submission unchanged.

Dr Bradley advised members the profession had issues with CPD and further guidance was needed. Dr Bradley offered help and support in taking the project forward and this was noted and appreciated.

Mr Peter McGowan: Mr McGowan, via email, asked if any further thought had been given to the process of selecting registrants for assessment and how could registrants be assured that they would not be selected often.

Ms Emer Hopkins: Ms Hopkins stated she wished to know if a registrant was being sampled often and would investigate. She went on to advise everyone had to work to the same process and getting selected should not be cause for concern.

Mrs Judith Gray: Mrs Gray noted it appeared necessary to increase fees after looking at the financial report. Mrs Gray asked if there was the potential to pay by direct debit at intervals over the year.

Mr Gary McMurray: Mr McMurray noted legislative changes were needed to facilitate this option and the Society was working with the Department of Health to progress this with discussions ongoing. Mr McMurray went on to state the process was not as straightforward as initially thought and believed the process of increasing fees and introducing a direct debit payment system could be introduced in tandem. Mr McMurray ended by noting other organisations had introduced direct debit payments and the Society should be progressive.

Mr Michael Guerin: Mr Guerin noted reserves had fallen and were not sustainable. He asked Mr McMurray if he agreed a credible strategy from the Society was needed that registrants could buy into that could be achieved over the next 3 – 5 years as opposed to a larger spike. Mr Guerin asked what the increase would be.

Mr Gary McMurray: Mr McMurray agreed there had been a significant run off of reserves. Regular steady increases were ideal however the Society did not want to increase fees during Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. He advised the Society now had to catch up and address the deficit and noted the strategy going forward was a programme of modernisation, finalising the Corporate Strategy (which could not be launched this year) and consulting with the profession and others regarding fees. Mr McMurray confirmed the percentage increase had not been finalised and the Society were still working on budgets and costing exercises advising the Society were engaging with the Department of Health and the profession via a full detailed consultation exercise and listening to feedback.

Mr Michael Guerin: Professional, Legal and Consultancy Fees increased from £52k to £202k. Mr Guerin asked Mr McMurray to provide a breakdown of this substantial increase as it stands out as a significant amount in the accounts.

Mr Gary McMurray: Mr McMurray noted the Society had to deal with difficult and challenging internal processes and informed members that advice had to be sought externally in relation to HR and legal issues which could not be discussed in a public forum. There were also costs associated with the Corporate Strategy review, legislative changes and legislative review work. Mr McMurray stressed these were all one-off fees with the bulk of them generated in relation to HR issues.

Mr Michael Guerin: Mr Guerin thanked Mr McMurray for his response and offered his assistance stressing again the need to look at a 3–5 year strategy that may provide a better result for the profession as opposed to a lump sum.

Dr Gareth Gilvary: Dr Gilvary noted three standards (4, 10 and 15) were not met in the PSA report and they were self-identified. Dr Gilvary asked if this was the case why did they persist and was the Society confident they would not reoccur.

Ms Emer Hopkins: Ms Hopkins noted it was disappointing to have not met three standards and something the Society does not want to repeat, explaining fixes have been put in place. The Society was committed to good auditing with internal processes and checks put in place to remedy the situation. Ongoing meetings and reporting to the PSA ensured issues were being addressed. The flow of information is on a continuous basis with large pieces of evidence being provided as part of the full programme of modernisation. The most difficult area to address is Fitness to Practice delays which are due in the main to the fact the cases were complex and often relied on other external processes and interdependencies. The current system of case handling has changed and has benefited from the introduction of improved IT and additional personnel. Whilst this is recent it is happening at pace. The 12-month period of review by PSA is coming to an end and the Society would be judged on performance during this period. Ms Hopkins concluded that she was confident the Society would meet 2 of the 3 standards not met in the previous year. It is hoped the outcome of the assessment will be in March 2025.

Dr Gareth Gilvary: Dr Gilvary noted he was surprised one case had been going on for 223 weeks and accepts the complexity of some cases. Dr Gilvary noted the report detailed the Society would meet all standards in 4 out of the next 5 years and asked why not 5 out of 5.

Ms Emer Hopkins: Ms Hopkins explained the standards were the basic tenants of good regulation. The Society will aim to achieve all the standards over the period, just as registrants have to meet standards set by the Society. The organisation is small and some of the issues are complex and the Society is working hard to address them, commenting on the incredible amount of work and effort by all staff and the continued momentum needed to continue to achieve the highest standards.

Mrs Anne McAlister concluded the question-and-answer session and invited Mr Sheelin McKeagney to deliver the Pharmacy Forum address.

8. Chair of the Pharmacy Forum NI's Address [Mr Sheelin McKeagney]

Good evening. As Chair of the Pharmacy Forum Board, I am pleased to present this summary of the work undertaken by the staff, Board and committees of the Forum in the year 2023/24.

You will be able to read more detail about everything covered in this speech in the Annual Report that you all now have a copy of, but first, on behalf of the profession I would like to extend a warm welcome into post of acting Chief Executive Officer, Mrs Joan Duffy. Joan is no stranger to us and Joan; we look forward to working with you over the coming months. I would like to pay tribute to Mr Jonathon Patton for his sterling work prior to you taking up the role. He brought a steady hand to the ship when it was needed.

Every year I make this speech I comment that it has been a busy year for the Forum, and this year is no different.

Pharmacy continues to be central to healthcare provision in Northern Ireland and we are proud to be a part of that profession.

In the Forum, we spend our time and energy promoting and enabling pharmacists to provide care and professional service to the patients that they care for in our Health & Social Care system.

We do this through collaboration with all key stakeholders and partners both on the island and in other parts of the UK and EU. We use the expertise & professionalism of our colleagues and board to deliver for our profession, our patients and wider society.

It is an honour and a privilege to hold the position of Chair of the Pharmacy Forum, and I am delighted to say that Mrs Anne McAlister joins me as Vice-Chair. She brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the Forum and Anne, we are very grateful for all your work, expertise and input.

As if she is not busy enough, Anne has also taken on the responsibility of chairing the Policy and Practice Committee.

We are also pleased to be joined by newly co-opted members this year,

Ms Fiona O'Neill (Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists), Dr Aaron Courtney and Dr Fonde Nkonki.

I wish to express my thanks to retired members Mr Andrew Cheung, Dr Oisín Kavanagh and Ms Susanne Cassells for their hard work and support.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge our outgoing Forum and PASS Coordinator, Dr Jenny Millar, and we wish her well in her new role across the corridor. We welcome Ms Katie McQuade and Mr Bradley Mallon to the Forum staff.

Last year I mentioned our three-year Corporate Plan was published in the spring of 2023. We are mid-way through that plan and the board and staff team continue to work their way through that plan and will provide the road map for the development of our work until 2026.

Our five key guiding principles continue to be:

- Leadership
- Support
- Innovation
- Excellence
- Development

The board and the membership will be kept fully informed with regard to the progress on the work plan via our newsletters and social media channels. We keep a regular stream of communications with our membership and the wider public.

One of my personal highlights during this year was the Rewarding Excellence Event held in February 2024 in City Hall which allowed the Forum to confer Fellowship on three deserving pharmacists, recognising their outstanding contributions to pharmacy in Northern Ireland, as well as the exceptional achievements of those at the beginning of their careers. Prof Roisin O'Hare, Mr Michael Guerin and Dr Brenda Bradley were well deserving recipients. We were especially delighted that the then Minister of Health, Mr Robin Swann, chose this to be one of his first ministerial events.

A significant development has begun in the UK with regard to the leadership of our profession. The UK Pharmacy Professional Leadership Advisory Board: A new body, chaired by Independent Chair Sir Hugh Taylor. The Board's role is to advocate, oversee and support collaborative working by the Pharmacy Leadership Bodies and Specialist Pharmacy Groups to deliver the vision for pharmacy professional leadership (PPL). It has interests from the breadth of the UK and the various professional groupings across the UK. This includes representation from NI, mostly so by Mr Raymond Anderson, a past president of this organisation, myself, and representatives from the Society who are all part of this new body. This work is supported by the four CPOs from each of the four countries. We will be meeting with our local Chief Pharmacist over the next week or so to discuss how we work with this body as we go forward.

Of note is the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's decision to change its governance structure and to seek to become a Royal College of Pharmacy, representing all pharmacy professionals and from all parts of the world. It is an ambitious development, about which we are keen to learn more. To that end we have agreed that the President of the RPS will come and speak to us in the near future.

This is a once-in-a-generation change to the arrangements of professional leadership, and the Forum has been and will continue to represent the interests of Northern Ireland pharmacists as part of this UK-wide work.

Moving to the work of the Pharmacists Advice & Support Service (PASS), as always, we are extremely proud of the support that we give through PASS.

PASS is available to all registered pharmacists, former pharmacists, Foundation Year Trainees, and dependants of all the above.

In the year 2023/24 PASS provided financial support and many counselling sessions (by telephone, online and in-person) via our partners at Inspire.

PASS also signposted other service users to external sources of advice and support.

I am very grateful to the members of the PASS committee. Their work, passion and compassion for our applicants is unbounded. I would like to pay a special tribute to Mrs Muriel Singleton. Muriel needs no introduction in this room. A stalwart of our profession, who gave tirelessly to the PASS committee. She brought a level of calm pragmatism to our committee and made a massive difference to our applicants. Muriel, thank you for all your efforts over the years.

PASS continues to promote its services at various events throughout the year.

Please consider donating to the PASS charity online by logging on to www.pfni.org.uk/pass/donate.

I would like to conclude by thanking Pharmacy Forum staff, my fellow Board members, our committee members, and the wider membership.

I look forward to yet another busy and productive year in 2024/25.

Thank you for your time and support.

9. Questions for Pharmacy Forum NI

Mrs Joan Duffy thanked Mr Sheelin McKeagney for his address and invited questions from attendees.

Prof Cathy Harrison: Prof Harrison noted RPS had indicated they planned to become a Royal College of Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians, advising this was currently only a GB wide proposal. Mrs Harrison asked if Pharmacy Forum had given any thought to the impact the proposed changes would have on Northern Ireland and the opportunities should this be UK wide.

Mr Sheelin McKeagney: Mr McKeagney advised the discussions were at a high level with the RPS senior team in discussions throughout GB. Mr McKeagney pointed out the RPS President would be joining an upcoming Pharmacy Forum Board meeting to appraise members of the current position.

Mr Michael Guerin: Mr Guerin noted RPS had launched an insurance product with Eon and asked if Pharmacy Forum had any intention of aligning itself with such a product.

Mr Sheelin McKeagney: Mr McKeagney stated he was not aware of any such product, and the answer was no.

10. Thanks and Close:

Mr McKeagney thanked everyone for attending the AGM, including those who joined online, as well as the IT and Society staff who helped put the evening's proceedings together. The Meeting was duly closed.

Meeting concluded at 8.20pm.