

13 February 2026

Mr Keith McBride
Clerk to the Health Committee
Room 419,
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

By email only to: committee.health@niassembly.gov.uk

Dear Keith,

Re: The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (General) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

I am writing to advise that the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland proposes to amend the Pharmaceutical Society of NI (General) Regulations 1994 under powers conferred by Article 5(1) of the Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976. The proposed statutory rule, to be entitled “The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (General) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026” will be subject to the negative resolution procedure before the Northern Ireland Assembly. A near-final version of the Statutory Rule is enclosed. This remains subject to final scrutiny checks and final approval from the Department of Health in accordance with Article 25A(2) of the Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976.

Purpose of the Statutory Rule

The proposed amendments are two-fold:

1. An increase in pharmacist initial registration and annual retention fees from £398 to £477.
2. A change to the method of notification of fees demands, moving from postal notification only to providing the option of notification via post or email for pharmacists, Foundation Training Year Trainees and applicants for the Common Registration Assessment.

A third proposal to permit payment of fees via instalments was previously consulted upon. Subsequent legal advice indicates this can be implemented administratively and does not require a legislative amendment. It therefore it does not form part of the draft Statutory Rule.

Background

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (the Society) has a dual mandate as both regulator and professional leadership body for the pharmacy profession in Northern Ireland. In recent years, the Society has faced increasing organisational pressures, including financial instability, evolving healthcare demands and heightened regulatory scrutiny.

The Society derives income from two primary sources:

- Pharmacy premises retention fees, paid by businesses to join and/or remain on the Register of Pharmacy Premises, enabling the operation of pharmacy business from those premises. These fees are currently £155 and were last increased in 2011. The Department of Health has the authority to set this fee; accordingly, it does not form part of this proposal.
- Registration and retention fees that pharmacists in Northern Ireland, payable by those seeking to join and/or remain on the Register of pharmacists, enabling them to practice in Northern Ireland. These fees are currently £398 and were last increased in 2016. The Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland has the authority to set these fees, subject to approval by the Department of Health. An increase to these fees is now proposed.

Due to rising regulatory costs, stagnant income and unprecedented inflation, the Society is facing significant financial challenges. Since 2021, the Society has operated in deficit and has relied on reserves to meet shortfalls. To maintain its ability to deliver core statutory functions, additional revenue is required.

Consultation

An eight-week public consultation was undertaken between 27 January 2025 and 24 March 2025. This included:

- An online survey
- Six online engagement events
- Engagement with pharmacy representative bodies
- Written and verbal submissions from registrants

A total of 750 consultation responses were received. While the majority of respondents were not in favour of the proposed fee increase, there was support for the introduction of a direct debit payment scheme and alternative notification methods.

The Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland carefully considered all responses at a public extraordinary meeting on Tuesday 15 April 2025. In reaching its decision to proceed with the fee increase, the Council sought to balance the financial pressures facing registrants with the need to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Society and the effective discharge of its statutory functions in the interests of patient safety and public protection.

Details of the consultation and response is available at:

- http://psni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Consultation-Registration-and-Retention-Fees-for-Pharmacists-31_01_2025_14_00.pdf
- <https://psni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Fees-Consultation-Outcome-Report-Paper-150425.pdf>

It is intended that the legislation will come into operation in advance of the 2026 retention period, which is scheduled to begin on 1 June 2026. To meet the statutory 21-day rule and allow adequate notice for pharmacists, it is hoped the legislation can be made before the Easter recess period commencing on 28 March 2026.

Equality Impact

The policy was screened in accordance with Section 75 equality duties during the development of the regulations. It was concluded that the proposed amendments are not anticipated to have a negative impact on any persons with protected characteristics.

Financial Implications

The measures being introduced in the draft regulations will result in additional costs for registrants of the Pharmaceutical Society NI. However, these measures are necessary to ensure the Society is adequately resourced to discharge its statutory duties. Failure to implement the proposed changes would likely result in significant operational risks.

Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

The draft regulations will not introduce any provisions that would be incompatible with Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

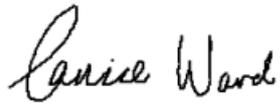
Proposed timing of consideration of the SL1

This SL1 has been submitted to the Committee in accordance with the minimum four-week timeframe, to facilitate consideration by the Committee at its meeting on 19 March 2026.

Proposed Operational Date

It is proposed that the regulations will come into operation on 1 June 2026. The draft of the proposed Statutory Rule and Explanatory Memorandum are attached. I would be grateful if you would bring this matter to the attention of the Committee at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Canice Ward". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mr Canice Ward
Chief Executive Officer of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland

Enclosed:

Draft Statutory Rule and Explanatory Memorandum to The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (General) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

Copy: Dr Geraldine O'Hare, President of the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland – geraldine.ohare@psni.org.uk

NI Human Rights Commission – info@nihrc.org

Equality Commission NI – information@equalityni.org