Engaging members, informing stakeholders: a plan for improvement

A review of participation in RPS and a new corporate communications strategy

lutherpendragon

Introduction

In May 2022, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society commissioned Luther Pendragon to carry out an independent review of the participation of its members and of RPS communications concerning decisions taken on behalf of the profession through RPS Governance Boards.

Luther was tasked with examining:

> the extent to which RPS members, elected members and stakeholders feel engaged, informed, and empowered to influence decisions about RPS policy

> the extent to which they understand why decisions around organisational policy have been taken on their behalf by elected representatives

Luther would then use this understanding to set a strategy that will increase engagement and improve communication.

We were also tasked with providing advice on how to ensure RPS decision-making processes are open and transparent, with an emphasis on evidence-based decision-making, and recommend ways in which elected members are enabled to be publicly accountable for decisions taken by the organisation at Board and Assembly level.

To do this, we conducted in-depth reviews of member and Board and Assembly member engagement and participation. We sought their views, as well as the views of individuals and organisations outside the profession, about how participation can be developed and strengthened. We used a combination of focus groups, online surveys, one-to-one interviews and desk research to build a detailed understanding of views.

Overall, we found a membership with an appetite for more communications from and engagement with the RPS; elected members who ultimately want to do the right thing for the organisation, but who are often hampered by its governance structures; and external stakeholders keen to help the RPS become the bold leadership organisation its members need.

Drawing on this research base a strategy for improved engagement and communications is suggested. To help ensure the RPS is communicating in the right way, to drive interest and engagement from all its stakeholders, strategic principles have been set against which several action orientated recommendations are made.

This review came at a critical time for pharmacy, the future of professional leadership of the sector and the RPS itself. The pandemic had led to big challenges to the way in which the RPS communicated and engaged with its membership, and the impacts of decisions taken during such a difficult period for the health and care sector, are still being felt both internally and externally.

Additionally, shortly after appointing Luther Pendragon, a commission on professional leadership in pharmacy was announced by the four Chief Pharmaceutical Officers of the UK. Although this review was announced before the Commission, and its scope and focus are different, the work of the Commission still permeated conversations with stakeholders and in some cases, provided evidence and feedback, pertinent to the RPS's organisational response to the Commission.

How to read this report

This document sets put a proposed strategy and recommended actions for the RPS's communications and engagement. The suggested approach is drawn from a significant research base.

Member participation review

Board / Assembly member participation review

Stakeholder participation review

Communications strategy development

Chapter 1 describes the methodology for our research: what we did, when we did it and how

Chapter 2 sets out the suggested strategic principles upon which future communications and engagement are based

Chapter 3 sets out how the strategic principles can be applied through a series of recommended actions for communications and engagement

Chapter 4 sets out the main research findings

Chapters 5 to 7 contain the findings from each of the core groups of our stakeholder research: members, elected members and external stakeholders.

Additional desk research is set out in the appendix.

Chapter 1 - Methodology

To build the evidence base for this report, Luther created and conducted a robust research process, which involved three stages.

Member engagement

To ensure we heard from all RPS members who wanted to voice their opinions as part of this review, we established an online survey which was open from 14th June to 11th July 2022. All members were invited to respond to the survey by the RPS via email, and regular reminders were issued on social media and via email throughout the time the survey was open. In total, over 1,300 members responded to the survey, representing 3.4% of the total RPS membership.

Members who completed the survey were asked if they wanted to attend a focus group to discuss in further detail their responses to the survey questions. Over 500 responded that they would like to take part. From those responses, we randomly selected a representative sample[1] of members to invite to three focus groups, which we held on different days and at different times of day. In total, 16 members took part in the three focus groups. Luther team members facilitated the conversation in each group. No RPS representatives were present.

Board and Assembly Engagement

Luther established an online survey of elected members of the RPS which was open from 1st July to 19th July 2022. 34 elected members of the RPS's national Boards and from the Assembly participated in this survey, and the results therefore represented a comprehensive reflection of their views.

We asked elected members if they would like to attend a focus group to discuss their views further. 19 elected members said they would

like to do so. We invited all elected members to attend one of two focus groups, with the exception of Professor Claire Anderson since she had been the commissioner of our work. In total, 12 elected members attended the focus groups. Luther team members facilitated the conversation in each group. No other RPS representatives were present.

Additionally, we held one-to-one interviews with the two non-elected members of the Assembly to ensure their inclusion in the process.

External stakeholder engagement

To engage external stakeholders, we invited each of the Chief Pharmaceutical Officers (CPhOs) from England, Scotland, and Wales to a half-hour interview. We issued several invitations to the three GB CPhOs and secured a one-to-one with Andrew Evans, the CPhO for Wales.

We also invited education stakeholders from England, Scotland, and Wales to half hour one-to-ones. We spoke to Professor Margaret Allen, Pharmacy Dean, Health Education and Improvement Wales and to Professor Anne Watson, Postgraduate Pharmacy Dean, NHS Education for Scotland. Although they initially expressed interest, we were unable to secure a meeting with the Pharmacy Deans for Health Education England.

1. A balance of the different types of membership, which reflected the composition of the RPS membership as a whole.

In addition to the primary research outlined above, we also conducted two pieces of desk research to understand what we could learn from other peer organisations and understand Government perceptions of the RPS. These were:

An analysis of social media accounts, websites, and media coverage of peer organisations performing a similar role to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS).

This assessed their strengths and areas for improvement to gain an insight into best practice for communication and stakeholder engagement by professional bodies.

The peer organisations we selected to include in this analysis were the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCP), Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP), Royal College of Physicians (RCP), and the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC). Our findings were captured over the months of June and July 2022.

A review of references to the RPS in the legislative assemblies of the UK and the devolved nations.

This research was designed to:

➤ understand the context in which the RPS is currently included in political debate

➤ assess levels of understanding of both the pharmacy profession and the RPS itself among these political audiences

➤ gauge levels of political support for both the profession and the RPS

Chapter 2 - Communications and Engagement Strategy

Distinguishing communication and engagement

In providing a strategy for both communications and engagement there is clearly a possibility that the two will overlap. To distinguish these within the strategy suggested below, Luther uses broad definitions for both to enable us to address them separately.

- **Communication:** Activities whereby we articulate or 'position' the RPS and when the RPS broadcasts this information using the channels available, for example posting news on the website.

- **Engagement:** Activity whereby communication is two-way, involving dialogue or exchange between two or more entities or people, for example the RPS responding to a social media post or someone responding to post from the RPS.

Strategic Principles for the RPS

The research undertaken with key audiences as the foundation of the project enables the proposal of a number of strategic principles. These can be used as a broad guide, a North Star for the RPS's future communication and engagement. The surveys completed and conversations held tell us that when it comes to engagement and communication, the RPS gets a lot of things right. As such, the aim of the broad principles suggested below is to re-frame and refine rather than to start from scratch; to plug some notable gaps in how the organisation engages and communicates and build upon the work the RPS already does in this area.

Overall, the strategy for the RPS is to assume greater control of its communications and make it work harder for the organisation and pharmacy more broadly. The RPS aims to lead its members rather than be member led. This must include being more confident when communicating some of its more difficult decisions, such as leaving FIP for example. Currently these are perceived as surfacing with members long after the decision is made. Instead of controlling the narrative by setting out the reasons and process of the decision up-front, the RPS can find itself on the back foot and under attack from a membership that feels disengaged and perceive the RPS as opaque and even 'secretive'. As a membership organisation, this is damaging for its reputation. Unaddressed, the approach will likely see greater disengagement and fewer members. The RPS must take command of its communications and narrative if it is to continue to be a potent force in UK pharmacy.

To steer the RPS towards this, Luther Pendragon suggests four main strategic principles for its engagement and communications. These are as follows:

Strategic Principles

Strategic Principle 1:
Take a proactive and considered approach

Strategic Principle 2:
Be more open and transparent

Strategic Principle 4:
Focus on collaboration and be visible

Strategic Principle 3:
Build member equity and agency

Strategic Principle 1:
Take a proactive and considered approach

The RPS can strive to be more proactive in its communication and engagement with key stakeholders and consider how this communication (or a shortage of it) will be received and interpreted.

Currently, Boards report feeling poorly informed and that recent decisions came out of 'left field'. Audiences feel that they hear about decisions much later after they've been made. In order to keep members informed, communications should be more proactive, identifying and considering the decisions likely to impact members and communicating these effectively. By being more proactive the RPS will have greater control over timing and messaging. By assuming control there will also be less scope for rumour and speculation among audiences, which can give rise to misunderstanding. Although not all decisions will please all members, being proactive will build goodwill with audiences in the long-term.

The RPS runs an effective press office function, reacting quickly to give comment and represent the views of pharmacy. It can build on this presence and increasingly work proactively with the media to communicate on the topics members want to see, such as its vision and insights on the world of pharmacy.

Strategic Principle 2:
Be more open and transparent

A keystone of the RPS's approach must be transparent communications and engagement with stakeholders. This includes being open about the decisions it makes, how it makes them and the rationale for doing so.

The RPS will also be more explicit about its purpose and function, something audiences say they are not always clear about.

Currently the majority of elected Board members do not report feeling well-informed about decisions made in Assembly. Members report that Boards and the Assembly operate too secretly. Issues cited include decisions over the FIP and Royal College status. In order to build and maintain the trust of stakeholders, the RPS must consistently be transparent and clear about its decisions and the process by which these are being made. This principle, when applied in parallel with taking a proactive approach to communicating, will be effective in building clarity on decisions and purpose, and demonstrate a leadership that is confident in representing its members.

Three in five members believe that the RPS is influential in shaping policy; demonstrating this work more openly will further build credibility among this audience.

Strategic Principle 3:
Build member equity and agency

To foster greater engagement the RPS will demonstrate how decisions and effort is equitable across stakeholder groups, providing them agency in the direction of the organisation and, more broadly, pharmacy in the UK.

RPS members say they want to feel that they can participate in decisions being made, however many perceive that this is not the case. A quarter of elected members also rate their ability to participate in decisions as poor. Among the comments from elected members was the sense that the membership feel that Boards do not have a voice. Equally it was felt that decisions made in the Assembly were often weighted more towards England. Perhaps, as a consequence, elected members felt that communication between the Boards and the Assembly was largely poor.

Strategic Principle 4:
Focus on collaboration and be visible

The RPS and its members will benefit from a focus on greater levels of collaborative engagement; learning, making decisions and generating insights with others.

Member acknowledgement and validation are vital to ongoing engagement. Many report feeling disengaged. Around 70% of members who responded to our survey want to participate in decisions taken on their behalf and around half say they want more involvement in decisions. Elected members want to be involved more and say that, in particular, they want to collaborate with other organisations.

There is also an appetite for more face-to-face interaction. The RPS could facilitate dialogue at round table events, update stakeholders on progress and help them understand what certain decisions are taken but also take soundings on decisions ahead.

By listening to stakeholders and working with them, the RPS can also collaborate on thought leadership type work, generating insights that members want and including them in the research for this. This might also include working with other bodies, all of which is useful in building understanding and advocacy.

The impact of Governance

The communications strategy set out in this document, executed well, can remedy many of the issues unearthed in the research. However, when considering equity and agency, the governance of the RPS will likely continue to hamper the organisation. 68% of members state that they would like to participate in the decisions the RPS takes on their behalf.

However, the complex and cumbersome governance construct creates opacity and disengages members on the decisions made on their behalf. It is therefore unsurprising that voting turnout is low when we consider that the democratically elected members have little decision-making power, meet the Assembly too seldom, and themselves often feel their views and opinions go unheard. Although not part of the scope here, we would suggest that governance be reviewed and addressed as a priority.

Throughout the process there were many remarks and suggestions regarding the governance of the RPS. These comments are contained within this document.

Chapter 3 - Application of Strategic Principles

What follows are the specific recommended actions for RPS to consider, based on the strategic principles set out above. There are 28 recommendations in total. These are drawn from the research base in Chapter 4 and the appendix. In order to allow the reader to reference where in the evidence base the recommendation is derived a reference system has been included. Each engagement recommendation has a reference (E1, E2, E3...) and each communication recommendation is also referenced (C1, C2, C3...). The findings in the research chapters are punctuated with the majority of these recommendations.

Application of Principles - Engagement

Strategic Principle 1:
Take a proactive and considered approach

E1: Establish a new protocol for communications and engagement around Assembly and Board decision-making. This needs to address a number of matters, including: early flagging of where decisions or debates will take place; setting out in advance the process by which the decision will be made and what the timeline is and highlighting complications, for example commercial considerations. This process should also articulate the impact of the decision on members, illustrating that they are the core consideration. Post this process, the RPS must articulate the rationale of the decisions, and any outcomes or next steps.

E2: Provide summary of Assembly items in advance. The RPS should always consult members on high impact decisions which are likely to affect the membership or the profession as a whole. In circumstances where this is not practical, it should inform members of the decision(s) currently in discussion by making Board and Assembly meeting agendas, and relevant supporting papers readily available and drawing

members' attention to them. This should be done well in advance so that members and their Board representatives have opportunity to discuss these in advance.

Focus groups fed back that email would be the preferred method for sharing this type of information.

E3: Create a dedicated channel for members to get in touch about decisions by the Assembly. This could be a dedicated email inbox or social media channel.

Strategic Principle 2:
Be more open and transparent

E4: Explain the decisions being made and consult on them. More elected members feel poorly informed (35%) than well informed (32%) about decisions taken by the Assembly. Elected members stated that the Assembly should provide a briefing document to them ahead of the Assembly meetings, so they have time to discuss and collate responses and feed these back via their Assembly representative. They should then receive a clear note on 'you said, we did' to explain the decisions taken as a response

to the feedback. This should be shared with all three Boards.

E5: Many members felt that increasing transparency was crucial and providing clear communication and assurance that governance processes are followed was an essential part of this. One member stated that 'making the system as clear and open as possible would I think improve engagement as it would allow members to see that the system is fair.'

An example and test of this approach will be if the RPS remains of the view that it will not pursue Royal College status within the next five years, or if it changes this decision. It needs to communicate clearly to both members and external stakeholders the reasons why.

Strategic Principle 3:
Build member equity and agency

E6: More frequent and more focused meetings between the Assembly and the Boards. It was thought that the Assembly and the Boards met too infrequently and that the time in between was too long for meaningful engagement. Others commented that the agenda for these meetings attempted to cover too many issues and so was not an effective forum. By increasing the cadence and focus all parties will gain greater value and member views given more time to air.

E7: Engagement and discussion is needed on the issue of representation. The majority of respondents who highlighted representation as an issue felt that Scottish and Welsh voices are underrepresented in the Assembly, and that the English Board's views carry more weight. However, one member expressed the opposite view. Representation needs to feel equitable, if members are to feel a sense of agency over issues and decisions that are important to their devolved healthcare system.

Strategic Principle 4:
Focus on collaboration and be visible

E8: Assembly should assess how it can best utilise the specific experience and knowledge of Board members. In interviews, some said that the voices being heard were limited. By understanding the skill sets of Board members collaboration can be more valuable and meaningful to both the RPS and stakeholders. This information might already exist within the RPS.

E9: Be visible and engaged locally. Focus groups and interviewees expressed a desire to have more engagement at a local level, citing that this was a way that the RPS used to engage with members. It was thought that these were successful by many, though some reiterated the issue that soundings were not listened to. Any future engagement on this level would require a need to demonstrate that member views were considered.

E10: The level and frequency of communications from the centre of the RPS (the Executive and the Assembly) to external stakeholders needs to increase, particularly around key organisational decisions. The Chief Executive Officer should commit to quarterly meetings with the pharmacy deans in each country – and look for opportunities to include the RPS President in these meetings. If the RPS is planning to make decisions which are fundamental to the future of the profession, external stakeholders should be used as a trusted sounding board and should be involved in the early stages of the decision-making.

E11: Find ways of bringing together pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to speak with one voice wherever possible, while still recognising the different skills and roles of both. The RPS should meet with the APTUK within three months, with the aim of securing an agreement to produce more joint statements going forward and engage policymakers together.

Application of Principles - Communication

Strategic Principle 1:
Take a proactive and considered approach

C1: Posting live from meetings on a point-by-point basis must be reconsidered. Although the approach is undoubtedly proactive and done in the spirit of transparency, elected members find this process unhelpful and feel that it can provide a fait accompli to issues they believe still require debate. It can also lead to information being presented bluntly, without explanation, which members view as informal and unprofessional.

Group email is considered a preferred method of communication for decisions by the Assembly. A summary email should be sent to Board members and the wider RPS membership, providing more detail about the decision that has been taken, its context and next steps.

C2: Be more proactive about communication on the topics audiences want to hear about.

The key topics on which elected members want more communication can be divided into four categories:

1. The decisions taken by the RPS, including:

- Being clearer on governance processes
- Key organisational decisions taken and a brief explanation of the rationale behind the decision
- RPS strategy
- Collaboration with other bodies
- How to get involved with decision-making
- Voting behaviours

2. The external work RPS is doing. This includes:

- Any Government lobbying, including responding to consultations and meeting with MPs
- Public support of pharmacists and their teams

- Success stories
- Media coverage

3. Pharmacy experience

- Stress reduction
- Healthy living
- Issues that have an impact on individuals in terms of their day to day working life
- NHS developments like the creation of ICBs and how this affects pharmacy
- Primary care pharmacy

4. Education

- Education content
- Opportunities to use pharmacy training as an introduction to careers in clinical informatics.
- Leadership planning
- Workforce planning

Understanding what the RPS's audiences want to gain more insight on is key to producing content that resonates. We therefore suggest surveying members regularly to understand this and then feeding the results into the overall content programme.

C3: Align communications and content with the lives and concerns of pharmacists. A number of peer organisations, such as the RCP and RCGP, harness the zeitgeist to communicate with members and the media. These organisations capitalise on topics of universal interest such as the impact of the cost of living, pressures on the health service and even the impact of the rail strikes, capitalising on the news agenda to highlight the profession's issues and the role it plays.

C4: Make greater use of the media as a way to proactively get messages, vision and insights to audiences. The RPS runs an effective and busy press office, fielding enquiries regularly and commenting on pharmacy in the news agenda. The RPS can utilise these relationships for the things it now wants to communicate; be it a vision

for pharmacy, insights on the work of pharmacists or the big decisions that will shape pharmacy and the RPS in the future.

C5: The RPS should ensure consistency between website and social media assets. For example, communications should always be digestible, tailored to the channel and complementary as between channels. At present, the relaying of information from Assembly meetings is difficult to follow on social media and not available at the same time elsewhere.

Strategic Principle 2:
Be more open and transparent

C6: Create communication material, possibly an animation, to restate and be clear on how the RPS makes its decisions. Members felt that increased transparency was crucial and providing clear communication and assurance that governance processes are followed was an essential part of this. Many felt unclear on how the RPS makes the decisions it does and the procedures that govern this. Being transparent and doing this concisely will help remedy this issue. A short animated video could live on the RPS website and also be used on social media channels ahead of key decisions going through the Assembly.

C7: Set out the vision: Some members said that that they didn't fully understand what the RPS stood for and that it had spread its focus too thinly. This must be more clearly defined and articulated to all stakeholders. The RPS should ensure that a clear set of objectives, suitably prioritised and updated as necessary, guides its strategy and that progress against these objectives and priorities is communicated to members, so that they can see value in their membership. The RPS should publish a clear plan to accompany its five-year strategy within the next three months.

Format options could include a video address by the Assembly, rather than relying on members to digest a written document.

C8: Use the website to power your messages and content. The current set up of the RPS website is dominated by commercial content. This includes membership pricing and posts about signing up. However, the homepage could be used more dynamically to highlight issues and decisions affecting members, calling for input, voting or setting out the new vision, as above. This will also make the website more 'vital' for members.

The website and social media channels should more clearly signpost information and resources, and opportunities to get involved, collaborate, express opinions, contribute to policy development and learn.

C9: The RPS should provide regular, clear, country specific updates to members and to elected members on its policy influencing and political engagement. This could be achieved through creating a specific section of the RPS website dedicated to showcasing the RPS's responses to consultations and engagement with policymakers, rather than using the news section of the website. The communications need to clearly reflect the devolution of pharmacy services.

Strategic Principle 3:
Build member equity and agency

C10: Be clear on how member voices are heard and represented in the RPS. Members reported being uncertain on how representatives are elected. It is thought that a better understanding would promote engagement and turnout.

C11: Amplify the social media from the devolved nation Boards. More engagement and a sense of cohesion can be achieved by retweeting and sharing social media posts from RPS Scotland and Wales. This greater focus on the nations would increase the RPS's visibility among members and build a sense of mutual support. For example, at the time of writing, RPS Scotland recently announced the formation of a new Scottish Pharmacy Board – the RPS had not yet retweeted or appeared to amplify this.

C12: Elected members prefer communication on decision-making via group email or email from a contact within the Assembly. Social media posts mean that discussions are more difficult or can appear messy to external observers.

C13: Non-elected Assembly members should receive the same level of communications as elected Board members – and may require additional context and background dependent on their area of expertise.

Strategic Principle 4:
Focus on collaboration and be visible

C14: Don't overly rely on social media. Many members reported that they don't always have the time or technical skills to keep tuned in to social media posts and so often things are missed. This might foster the impression that decisions are being made in secret or that the RPS is not communicating with members effectively or regularly. As in the engagement section, email is often a preferred method of communicating and people do value face-to-face communications and engagement on policy issues and decision-making.

C15: The RPS should begin work immediately on delivering a rolling programme of face-to-face events for members. Elected members should be heavily involved in these face-to-face events, in order to raise their profile among members. In order to do this, elected members will require the full support of the RPS.

C16: Use the website as a tool for collaboration. A number of peer organisations including the RCP use their websites and digital media to drive member involvement in decision-making and gaining valuable input. The RCP used their website to collate member feedback on their attitude to the Health & Care Bill. The RPS can emulate this approach and, as before, make their web presence a more potent tool for member communications and engagement.

C17: Collaborate to build thought leadership with impact. The RPS should prioritise pushing their own media agenda in order to have more control over their public narrative as well as to be seen as a leading voice in their area. The RPS can work with members, using surveys and opinion polls, and other professional bodies when it comes to developing thought leadership in pharmacy. Inclusion and collaboration will increase the richness of thought leadership content and will also foster greater levels of advocacy among those involved with the project.

Additional observations and reccomendations

A number of tactical opportunities for improved communications emerged through the conversations that although not strategically important, are nonetheless worth considering. These are listed here:

The RPS should examine, together with the Pharmaceutical Journal, whether it is practically and financially feasible to make the PJ available in other formats, and not just on the PJ website. For example, members would value a complete pdf version and would find it easier to navigate.

Chapter 4 - Main research findings

Summary

Across the different streams of research conducted by Luther for this review, we found significant commonality of views among RPS members, Board and Assembly members, and external stakeholders.

We heard a membership the vast majority of whom want increased communications and opportunities to engage with their leadership body.

We heard Board and Assembly members who feel the current governance structure does not allow either themselves or the members to understand the work which the RPS is doing.

We heard external stakeholders who are keen to see the RPS flourish, but who require clearer, direct lines of communication with the executive team.

From all, we heard appreciation of the good work that the RPS does, but a sense that too often this goes unnoticed, and a desire for it to be communicated more effectively, more often and more loudly.

The themes that we uncovered all lead to perceptions of the RPS as a complex and opaque organisation, which is not currently getting its communications and engagement right. We examine this in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Governance structures

Governance structures were raised as an issue mainly by Board and Assembly members, and by external stakeholders, and much less so by members. Most found the current structures confusing and complicated. Board members felt that

decisions are often made by the Assembly, either without consideration of the views of the Board, or without properly explaining if and how the Boards' views had been considered. Often it was unclear to them which reason was correct.

Similarly, external stakeholders felt that they were not involved in decisions taken by the RPS Assembly, or discussions leading to those decisions. This is despite usually having positive relationships with their respective country Boards. This was felt particularly keenly around the decision not to pursue Royal College status within the next five years.

Among members, while governance structures were not often raised directly, many felt that they had not been included in significant decisions which the RPS had taken and there was often confusion around who makes decisions on their behalf, and how.

Transparency

Linked to the discussion around how decisions are made, and how audiences come to hear about them, was the theme of transparency. As with governance, although different groups experienced this in different ways, all felt that there is a certain opaqueness about the RPS, which dampens their willingness to engage.

For Board members, this manifested itself in the way they felt about the decisions taken by the Assembly and the Executive. Board members felt their views and recommendations were not always taken on Board, and that the process meant it was difficult for them to understand whether the input they may have provided through Board discussions had been taken into account.

Some external stakeholders expressed surprise and disappointment that they were not always asked for views on important topics that the RPS was considering. They felt their experience and expertise would have been useful in helping the RPS to reach a good decision on such topics. Again, this related in particular to the decision about Royal College status but also the decision to leave FIP, which some interviewees said they were unaware that the RPS had even been considering.

Many members of the RPS felt it was hard to understand how the RPS makes its decisions. Members described how they would often express views to those who sit on country Boards but felt that this input often seemed not to permeate through to the Assembly or the Executive. Members told us that the use of social media to highlight decisions taken by the Assembly did not provide sufficient explanation of the rationale for those decisions and did not explain the impact on the membership or the profession as a whole.

Right touch

Every audience we heard from would like to hear more from the RPS, but they all emphasised that this has to be done in the right way, and on topics they want to know about. Board and Assembly members and the wider membership all expressed a desire for more face to face, in person events and the regional approach which the RPS is now taking was welcomed.

It was felt that these face-to-face meetings would generate a stronger sense of engagement and involvement and build closer relationships among members and Board and Assembly members. Board members felt that it was important for them to listen, and be seen to be listening, to the membership, so that they could reflect what they heard in Board discussions and in communication with the Assembly.

External stakeholders considered it particularly important to hear from the Chief Executive, and the President about strategic

and high impact decisions. While they told us they feel closely connected to their national Board, the lack of communication from the centre of RPS meant that they felt that their opinions were sometimes overlooked – in areas where they felt like they had valuable expertise to provide. Some felt that the RPS executive in London had distanced themselves too much from stakeholders based in devolved nations; they made it clear they wanted direct communication with both the RPS in London and the RPS in country.

# Chapter 5 - Member participation & engagement

To ensure we heard from all RPS members who wanted to voice their opinions as part of this review, we established an online survey which was open from 14th June to 11th July 2022. All members were invited by the RPS to respond to the survey via email, and regular reminders were issued on social media and via email throughout the time the survey was open. Over 1,300 members responded to the survey, representing 3.4% of the total RPS membership.

Members who completed the survey were asked if they wanted to attend a focus group to discuss in further detail their responses to the survey questions. Over 500 responded that they would like to take part. From those responses, we randomly selected a representative sample[2] of members to invite to three focus groups, which we held on different days and at different times of day. In total, 16 members took part in the three focus groups. Luther team members facilitated the conversation in each group. No RPS representatives were present.

Views on current participation in decision-making vary

Members' views on their ability to participate in the decisions taken by the RPS are divergent. In the online survey, members were asked how they rated their overall ability to participate in the decisions taken by the RPS on their behalf. Nearly half of respondents were neutral (42.6%) and there were similar proportions between those who felt their ability to participate is good/ very good (24.6%) and those who feel it is poor/ very poor (29.2%).

This mixed picture was further explored in the focus groups. Members who were part of particular groups such as retired pharmacists, felt that they had good links into the RPS and were therefore able to make their voices heard on big decisions.
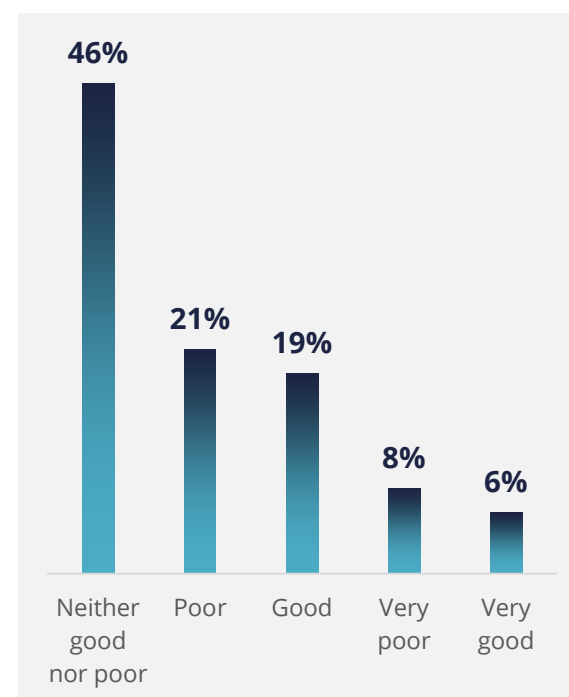
How do you rate your overall ability to participate in decisions made by the RPS on your behalf?

One member commented: *"We have written directly to the chief exec, who is very responsive, and Paul has already been in touch with us, and we know Claire the President very well too, so we have quite good personal links with the top people. Not all members have that sort of link."*

This was also true of members who were or had been involved in committees or other groups with direct contact with the Boards or Assembly. However, several participants in the focus groups raised the issue that many decisions were presented as 'fait accompli' without consultation with members. In this regard, they cited the decisions to leave the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) and to not pursue Royal College status in the next five years.

Another member said: *"They really annoyed me by leaving the Fellowship of International Pharmacy, without consulting their members in any way. It made me get in touch with an ex-President to ask what's going on."*

Recommendation E2:

The RPS should always consult members on high impact decisions which are likely to affect the membership or the profession as a whole. In circumstances where this is not practical, it should inform members of the decision(s) currently in discussion by making Board and Assembly meeting agendas, and relevant supporting papers readily available and drawing members' attention to them. This should be done well in advance so that members and their Board representatives have the opportunity to discus these in advance.

Lack of transparency and disengagement

Respondents' views on members' ability to learn about decisions taken on their behalf by the RPS Country Boards and Assembly were divided - 40.8% rated this as neither good nor poor, whilst 32.7% rated it as good/ very good and 26.5% as poor/ very poor.
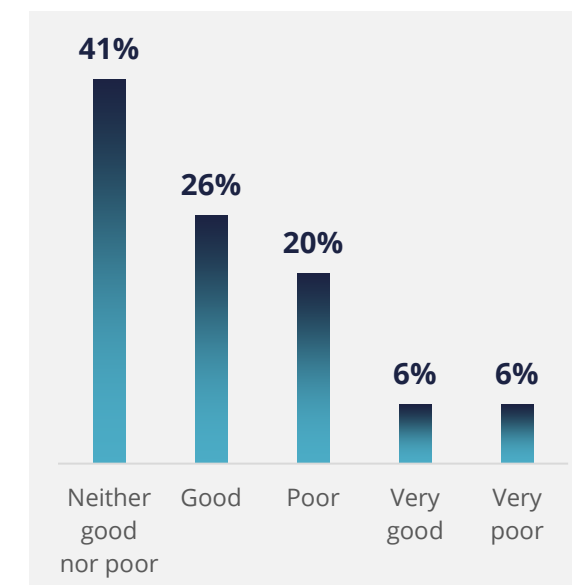
How do you rate your ability to learn about decisions taken by the RPS on your behalf by our Country Boards and Assembly?

However, some members feel strongly that there is not enough transparency of decision-making. The need for improved transparency was regularly raised in longer form answers in the survey and in focus group discussions.

One member commented: "I think part of the problem is that some of the issues discussed in Assembly were in closed business and which, quite frankly, shouldn't have been closed business. Closed business decisions should be as few as possible."

Another added: "I think some of the concerns have arisen because some people weren't aware that a decision was going to be made that might affect them and we need some greater transparency about decisions in the offing."

Concerns were raised about the fact that some members first hear about decisions made through social media. With regards to leaving the FIP, one focus group participant commented: "I knew nothing about it until I saw something on Facebook saying we'd left" and another participant was completely unaware of this decision, which they felt was because they don't use social media.

2. A balance of the different types of membership, which reflected the composition of the RPS membership as a whole.

In the survey, multiple respondents noted a feeling of disengagement from the RPS, with several mentioning that, apart from the annual survey, they don't feel that the RPS is interested in their views. Two fifths (41.5%) of respondents said they have not attempted at all to interact with the RPS.
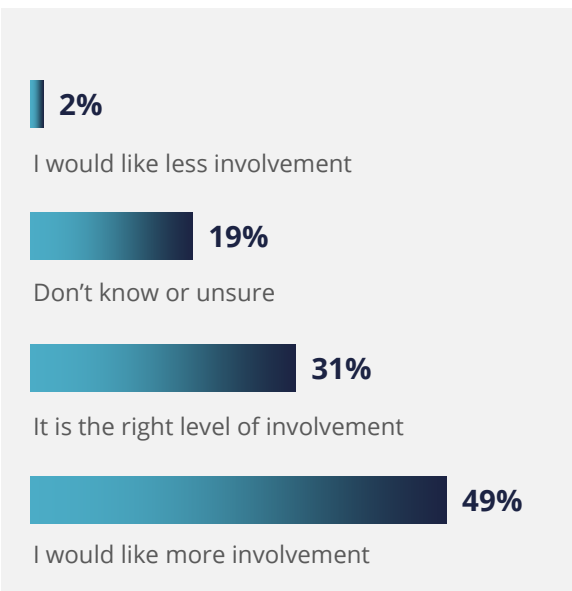
Recommendation: E1

Establish a new protocol for communications and engagement around Assembly and Board decision-making. This needs to address a number of matters, including: early flagging of where decisions or debates will take place, set out in advance the process by which the decision will be made; what the timeline is; highlight complications, for example commercial considerations. This process should also articulate that the impact of the decision on members, illustrating that they are the core consideration. Post this process, the RPS must articulate the rationale of the decisions, and any outcomes or next steps.

7%
I get no response from my interactions

7%
My views and opinions are considered and respected

12%
Don't know

16%
My views and opinions go largely unheard

17%
My views and opinions are heard and noted

42%
To date I have not attempted to interact with the RPS

When considering your own interaction with the RPS, if you have any, which of the following statements best reflects your experience when engaging?

Appetite for greater engagement and participation

On a positive note, there is appetite amongst members for greater engagement and participation. Almost half (48.6%) of respondents to the survey said they would like more involvement in decisions taken by the RPS about the pharmacy profession. In addition, the majority (68.3%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that they would like to participate in decisions taken by the RPS on their behalf. Some focus group members noted that they valued the experience of participating in a focus group and would like more, similar opportunities to discuss with other members what they want from the RPS.

2%
I would like less involvement

19%
Don't know or unsure

31%
It is the right level of involvement

49%
I would like more involvement

As a member, how do you feel about your level of involvement in decisions taken by the RPS about the pharmacy profession?

The area in which most respondents said they would like to have more involvement in the decisions taken by the RPS was around continued professional development and training, which was selected by 73.8%. Other areas in which respondents showed interest were collaboration with other organisations, policy development, education policy and membership, all of which were selected by around half of respondents.

One focus group member noted that participation was a two-way conversation between members and the RPS; that members would need to be proactive on their part but that the RPS could encourage members to participate by creating and signposting an easy way to engage.

28%
Science and research

41%
The future use of medicine

47%
Membership

50%
Education policy

50%
Policy development

51%
Collaboration with other organisations

71%
Continued professional development and training
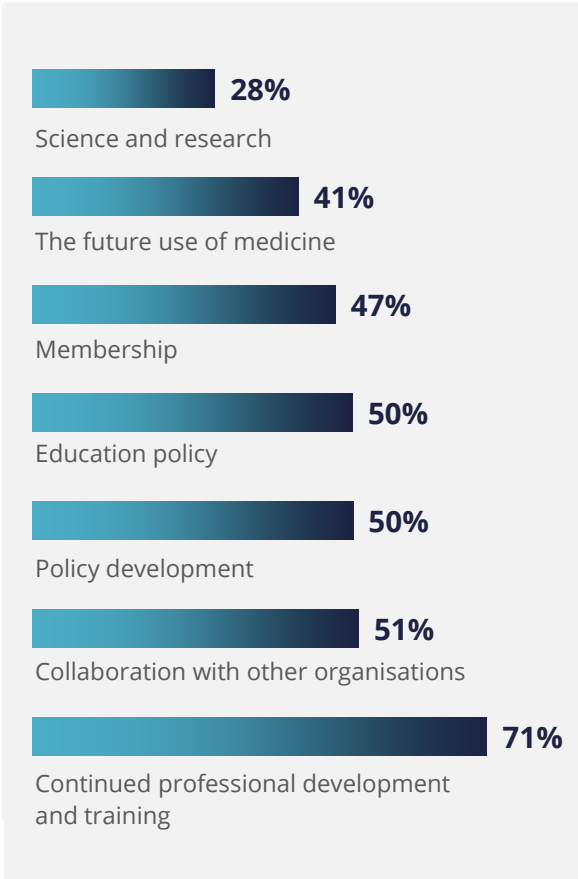
In what areas would you like to have more involvement in the decisions taken by the RPS about the pharmacy profession?

53% Agree
25% Neither agree nor disagree
15% Strongly agree
4% Strongly disagree
3% Disagree
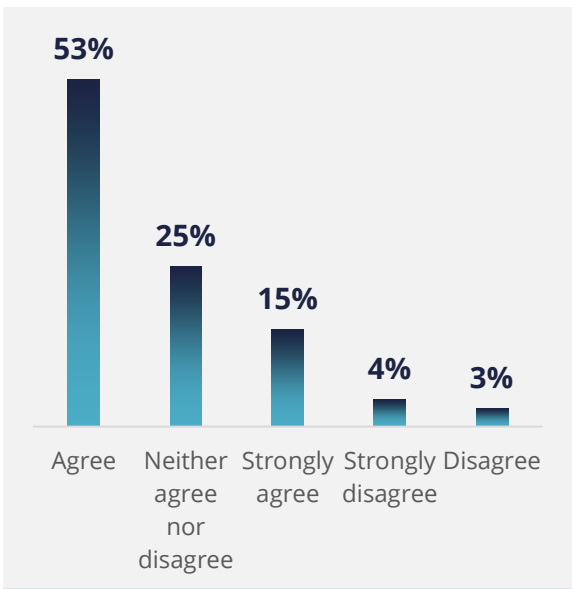
How far do you agree with the following statement: I would like to participate in decisions taken by the RPS on my behalf?

Recommendation E3:

Create a dedicated channel for members to get in touch about decisions by the Assembly, such as a dedicated inbox or social media channel and advertise this to members.

Channels and topics of communication

Whilst current channels and methods of communication used by the RPS are diverse, there were two methods which members had clearly valued in the past and wanted the RPS to reinstate or improve.

The Pharmaceutical Journal

Numerous respondents to the survey said that they would like a hard copy of the Pharmaceutical Journal, and in the focus groups members spoke highly of the PJ in terms of its value for CPD and feeling connected to the Society.

One member commented: "I used to enjoy getting my Pharmaceutical Journal regularly by post. Finding articles helps with my continued professional development, and I have kept that up ever since it started."

It was acknowledged in the focus groups that a paper version was unsustainable, however it was felt that the current format of the online journal was not easy to navigate or fully comprehensive, and that a full pdf version would be preferable.

Local meetings

Several members said that local meetings had been a good source of engagement with the RPS and expressed disappointment that they had stopped. In the survey, 35% of respondents favoured face to face local events as a method of communication.

A focus group member commented: "I would also like to echo the point about local meetings. When we used to have local branch meetings... we'd get 20, 30, 40 people for a meeting every two months and so we could get together, and we could talk formally and informally, and I think the loss of that is really sad."

It was also noted that the size of regions meant that meetings held on a regional basis could involve lengthy travel for many would-be attendees which would discourage attendance. All-member meetings tended to be London centric and that likewise was seen as discouraging engagement and participation.

One member commented: "I noticed that a lot of the meetings and events tend to be in London. Unfortunately, I can't take a day off work and pay hundreds of pounds to go to something in London, so I just don't bother with it."

Another said: "We have a region that goes all the way down from the North-East to Leeds. They had a meeting that I would have loved to attend but it was in Bradford and that's just too far from Newcastle if I'm honest."

In terms of topics where members wanted to hear more from the RPS, Education and CPD were often cited as topics where they would value more engagement on and communication about, including signposting to relevant training programmes.

A wider point was that members wanted to hear less about things that do not apply to them. Around 26 respondents mentioned they want to hear less about diversity and inclusion and more on scientific / industry related topics.
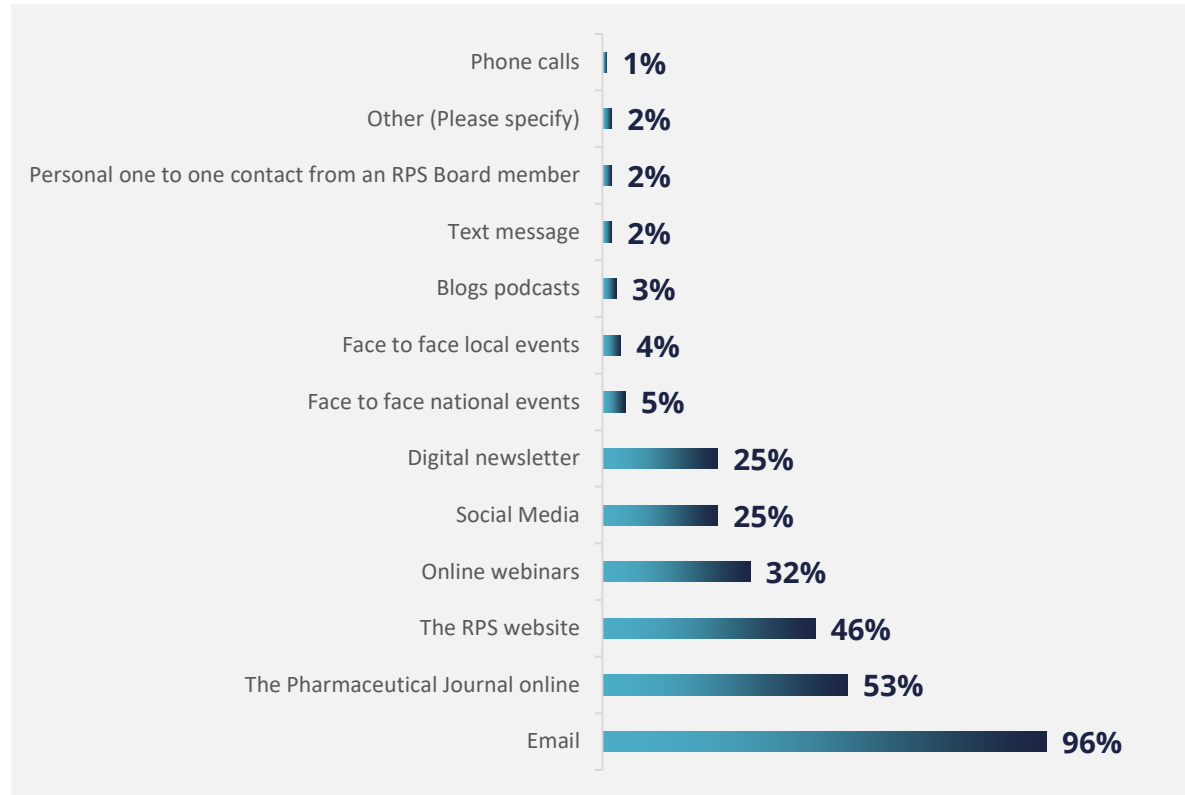
Recommendation E9:

Be visible and engage locally. Focus groups and interviewees expressed a desire to have more engagement at a local level, citing that this was a way that the RPS used to engage with members. It was thought that these were successful by many though some reiterated the issue that soundings were not listened to. Any future engagement on this level would require a need to demonstrate that member views were considered.
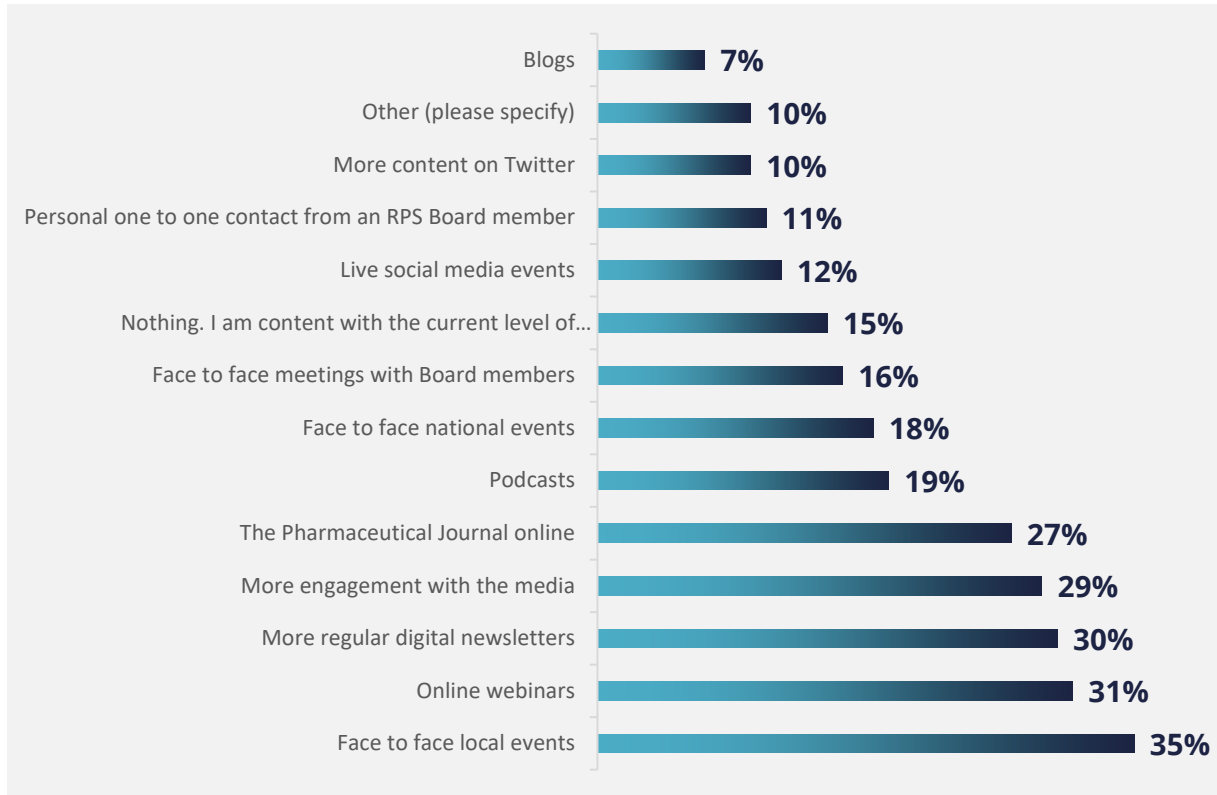
Recommendations (additional recommendation):

The RPS should examine, together with the Pharmaceutical Journal, whether it is practically and financially feasible to make the PJ available in other formats, and not just on the PJ website. For example, members would value a complete pdf version and would find it easier to navigate.

How does the RPS currently communicate with you? Select all that apply

Channel	%
Phone calls	1%
Other (Please specify)	2%
Personal one to one contact from an RPS Board member	2%
Text message	2%
Blogs podcasts	3%
Face to face local events	4%
Face to face national events	5%
Digital newsletter	25%
Social Media	25%
Online webinars	32%
The RPS website	46%
The Pharmaceutical Journal online	53%
Email	96%

What should the RPS do more of to improve engagement with you? Select all that apply

Option	%
Blogs	7%
Other (please specify)	10%
More content on Twitter	10%
Personal one to one contact from an RPS Board member	11%
Live social media events	12%
Nothing. I am content with the current level of...	15%
Face to face meetings with Board members	16%
Face to face national events	18%
Podcasts	19%
The Pharmaceutical Journal online	27%
More engagement with the media	29%
More regular digital newsletters	30%
Online webinars	31%
Face to face local events	35%

Policy engagement

Members felt that the RPS is fairly influential in shaping policy, giving an average score of 2.85/5. They scored the RPS slightly higher in terms of its influence in the pharmacy sector compared to the pharmaceutical sciences sector, with average scores of 3/5 and 2.7/5 respectively.

In the focus groups, when asked about policy engagement, there was a general sense that members were not made aware of the policy work carried out by the RPS, and that they would appreciate more communication about this, both to be better informed and to provide input:

"I think it would be helpful to know what kind of things are being looked at. So, every month, we could get a summary of the government consultations and it basically says this is what we're doing, anybody interested send in your thoughts."

In terms of areas of policy engagement, the RPS should focus on, the most popular suggestion was around workforce planning and training. Although, it was specified that by 'education' members meant career
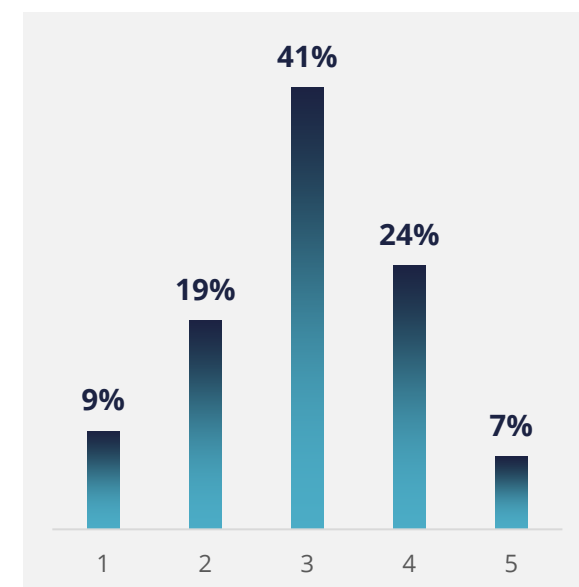
pathway development rather than the delivery of training, which they did not view as the RPS's role.

"I think they definitely have a role in workforce development. Rather than the delivery of training, it's more about defining the framework we should work against."
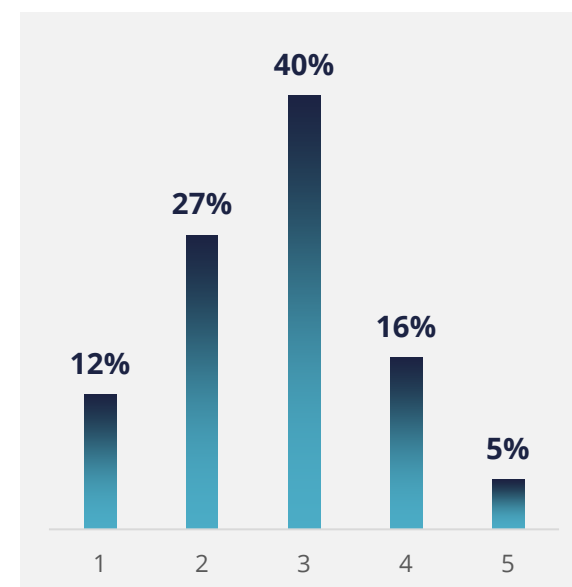
Those who had sight of elements of the RPS's policy work rated it highly and were appreciative, particularly in the devolved nations.

Recommendation C9:

The RPS should provide regular, clear, country specific updates to members and to elected members on its policy influencing and political engagement. This could be achieved through creating a specific section of the RPS website dedicated to showcasing the RPS's responses to consultations and engagement with policymakers, rather than using the news section of the website. The communications need to clearly reflect the devolution of pharmacy services.

41%

19%

24%

9%

7%

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

On a scale of 1-5 how influential do you think RPS is in shaping policy in the pharmacy sector? (With 5 being highly influential, and 1 not at all influential)

40%

27%

16%

12%

5%

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

On a scale of 1-5 how influential do you think RPS is in shaping policy in the pharmaceutical sciences sector? (With 5 being highly influential, and 1 not at all influential)

Chapter 6 - Board and Assembly engagement

Luther established an online survey of elected members of the RPS which was open from 1st July to 19th July 2022. 34 elected members of the RPS's country Boards and from the Assembly participated in this survey, and the results therefore represent a comprehensive reflection of their views.

We asked elected members if they would like to attend a focus group to discuss their views further. 19 elected members said they would like to do so. We invited all elected members to attend one of two focus groups, with the exception of Professor Claire Anderson since she had been the commissioner of our work. In total, 12 elected members attended the focus groups. Luther team members facilitated the conversation in each group. No other RPS representatives were present.

Additionally, we held one-to-one interviews with the two non-elected members of the Assembly to ensure their inclusion in the process.

Elected members
Informed but not engaged

In their survey responses, most elected members told us that they generally feel able to participate in RPS decision-making. However, a sizeable minority (just under a quarter) rated their ability to participate in decisions as poor.

When this was explored further in focus groups, it became clear that Board members sometimes feel decisions are taken without their knowledge or full understanding. One Board member said:

"I do tend to feel the vast majority of direction on what's happening is done by the executive and the rest the chairs and officers may be sometimes involved and informed of those things to help to steer it, but I just feel quite unempowered."

35.3%

23.5% 23.5%

17.6%

0.0%

| Good | Poor | Neither good nor poor | Very good | Very poor |
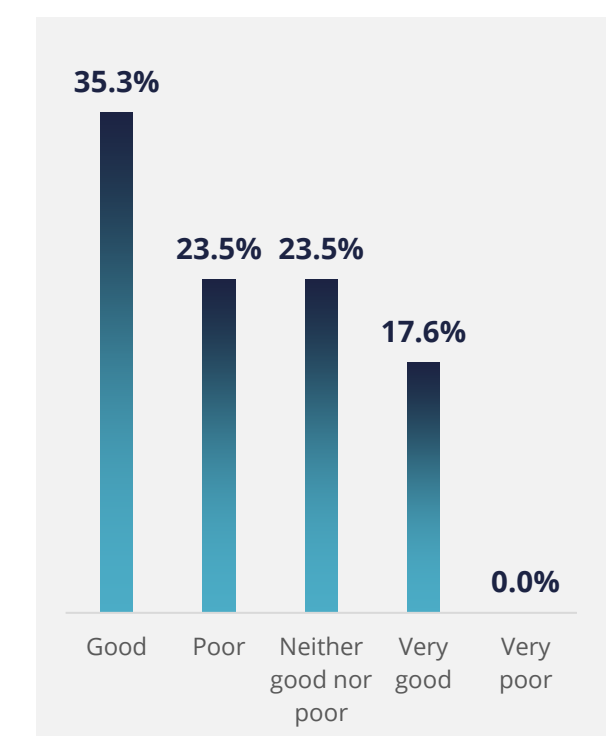
How good is the RPS at enabling you to participate in decisions that it makes?

Many said that being on one of the Boards does not mean a significant say in decision-making. They felt that ultimately it is the Assembly that makes the decisions. One member commented: "as a Board member I felt like I had no influence over decisions and thus I joined the Assembly to try and change this."

There was also a consensus that the opinions of Board members should be more carefully considered as they are the people 'on the ground'. However, being 'on the ground' also comes with its own issues, as elected members highlighted that they are time poor and don't have time to chase up on whether their views and opinions have been noted and considered. It also means they struggle to make time for reading longer form Board papers, which could be a hindrance to decision making.

One member commented: "I think the volume of information we sometimes get can also make it very difficult for us to see the wood for the trees at times, and that doesn't help us get quality information as well. For example, the vast Board papers that come from central meetings."
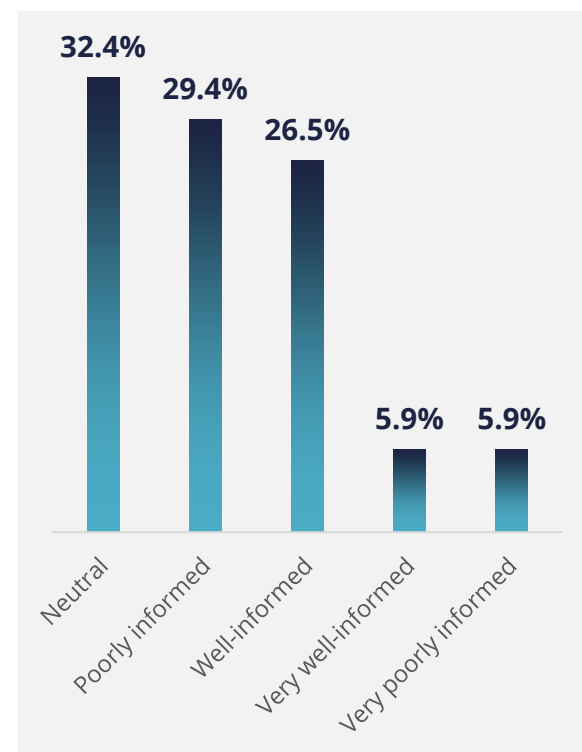
How well-informed do you feel about decisions taken by the Assembly?

One point that was frequently highlighted was that the context of decisions taken by the Assembly, or the Executive is often missing from communications to Boards. This contributes to the feeling among over two-thirds of Board members that they are not well-informed about the decisions taken by Assembly.

In focus group discussions it was clear that although members may be informed that a decision has taken place, they are often missing vital context which would allow them to feel 'engaged' in the process:

"I think there's an awful lot they [the RPS] need to do to improve communication so I think … I did feel informed at some points but not engaged as well, and I think it's a common theme that's coming through."

Another elected member commented: "I guess I get a lot of information but sometimes engagement can be quite low, even as a Board chair, I often don't get the engagement from it. It's often a, this is what we've done, sign off type of thing, which isn't the way it should be."

Recommendation E4:

Explain the decisions being made and consult on them. More elected members feel poorly informed (35%) than well informed (32%) about decisions taken by the Assembly. Elected members stated that the Assembly should provide a briefing document to them ahead of the Assembly meetings, so they have time to discuss and collate responses and feed these back via their Assembly representative. They should then receive a clear note on 'you said, we did' to explain the decisions taken as a response to the feedback. This should be shared with all three Boards.

Organisational governance and strategic direction

In the survey of elected members, when asked how they would rate the organisational governance and strategic direction provided by the Assembly to the RPS executive leadership team, only six out of 34 elected members rated it as 'good' or 'very good'.
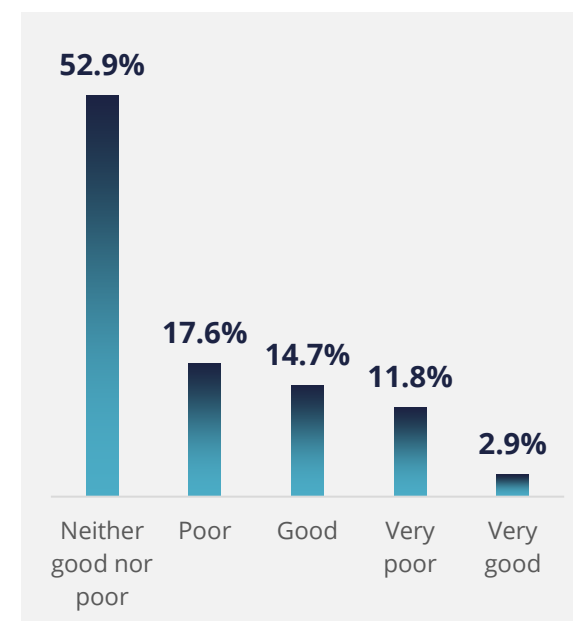
Overall, how do you rate the organisational governance and strategic direction provided by the Assembly to the RPS executive leadership team?

This has a clear link to how well members feel the Assembly communicates with them. When asked how could communication and engagement between country Boards and the Assembly could be improved, there were three common themes, all of which relate to governance.

Representation

The majority of respondents who highlighted representation as a reason why communication and engagement could be improved said that Scottish and Welsh voices are underrepresented in the Assembly. They felt that the English Board's views carry more weight. This was considered a significant issue to address, so that elected members in Scotland and Wales could bring forward ideas and proposals that are 'relevant and important to their devolved healthcare system'.

However, one elected member expressed the opposite view, that there needs to be more English representation on the Assembly, and that the current weighting isn't representative of the number of RPS members in each nation of Great Britain.

Preparation

Elected members felt strongly that Boards should receive a summary of the Assembly agenda items in advance of Assembly meetings, so that they have time to discuss and form a view, which can then be taken into account by the Assembly as it debates and decides.

Some elected members felt that the Assembly does not make good use of the experience and specialist expertise that Board members possess. They want to see this expertise better utilised to aid good decision-making.

A summary of outcomes, decisions and actions arising from Assembly deliberations should always be shared promptly with Boards. One member stated, "it would be good as a national Board member to receive a brief overview of the meetings (pre & post) in a format that would be shared with the three Boards".

Another member suggested a "you said, we did" communication from the Assembly to the Boards, or a flash report. Either was considered preferable to reading minutes.

Recommendation E8:

Assembly should assess how it can best utilise the specific experience and knowledge of Board members. In interviews, some said that the voices being heard were limited. By understanding the skill sets of Board members collaboration can be more valuable and meaningful to both RPS and stakeholders. This information might already exist within RPS.

Governance structure

There was considerable dissatisfaction with the existing governance structure. For example, one elected member called for a complete overhaul of the current
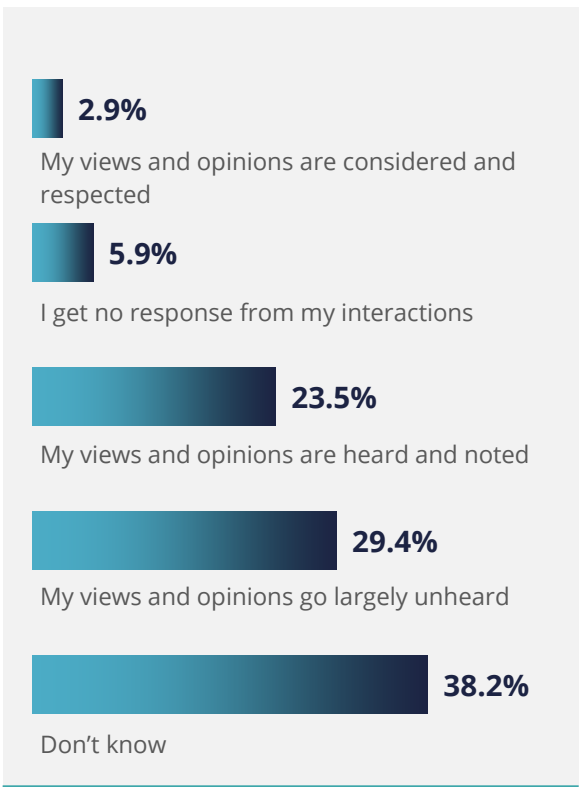
arrangements, stating that "the current structure isn't fit for purpose" and that the Assembly is therefore "not able to deliver on GB wide policy". Another stated that "the governance should be looked at afresh".

Many members felt that increasing transparency was crucial and providing clear communication and assurance that governance processes are followed was an essential part of this. One member stated that "making the system as clear and open as possible would, I think, improve engagement as it would allow members to see that the system is fair."
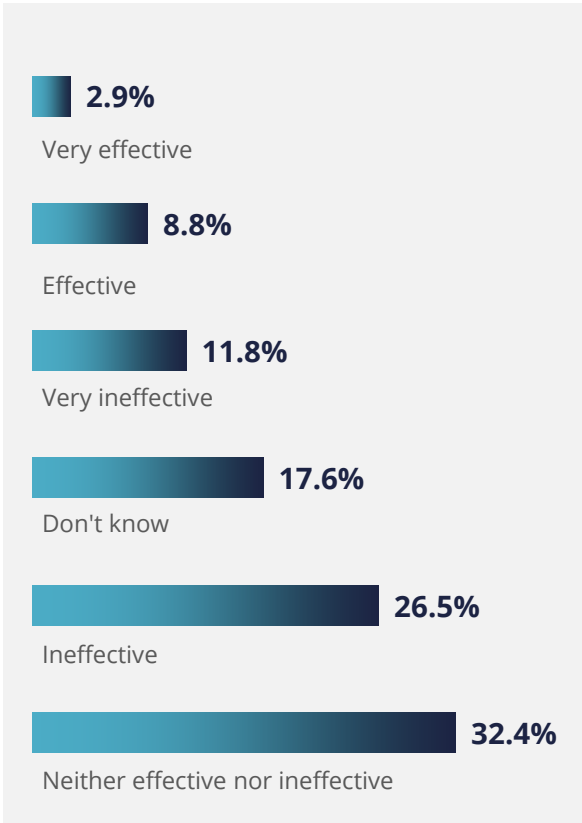
In the elected member focus groups, governance issues permeated throughout the different areas of questioning. One elected member said: "Having seen all the tweaks and attempts to play around and fix problems over the last 11 years since we've had this new model, it just doesn't work. We can't fix this with the present governance model that we have, and we need one with an Assembly that is accountable for everything, and properly accountable."

Another elected member who stopped short of calling for an overhaul of the current system, nonetheless, told us: "The Board members and Assembly members really do not have clear understandings of the governance processes of the Society and how we are supposed to operate. That information should be brought to us as part of our induction, and maybe in the Board meetings we should be able to understand more about the governance processes."

This perception around the current governance structures links to the response of elected members to questions about whether they felt their views and opinions are listened to by the Assembly. The most popular answer was 'don't know', with 13 elected members selecting this option. The the second most popular was 'my views and opinions go largely unheard'. Only four out of 34 elected members rated the communication between country Boards and the Assembly as 'effective' or 'very effective'.

2.9%
My views and opinions are considered and respected

5.9%
I get no response from my interactions

23.5%
My views and opinions are heard and noted

29.4%
My views and opinions go largely unheard

38.2%
Don't know

When considering your own interaction with the Assembly, which of the following statements best reflects your experience?

2.9%
Very effective

8.8%
Effective

11.8%
Very ineffective

17.6%
Don't know

26.5%
Ineffective

32.4%
Neither effective nor ineffective

In your experience, how effective is communication between the country Boards and the Assembly?

Recommendation C6:

Create communication material, possibly an animation, to restate and be clear on how the RPS makes its decisions. Members felt that increased transparency was crucial and providing clear communication and assurance that governance processes are followed was an essential part of this. Many felt unclear on how the RPS makes the decisions it does and the procedures that govern this. Being transparent and doing this concisely will help remedy this issue.

A short animated video could live on the RPS website and also be used on social media channels ahead of key decisions going through the Assembly.

Recommendation C10:

Be clear on how member voices are heard and represented in the RPS. Members reported being uncertain on how representatives are elected. It is thought that a better understanding would promote engagement and turnout.

An influential organisation

Positively for the RPS, the organisation is seen as influential and even highly influential by elected members in shaping policy in the pharmacy sector. In the survey, elected members gave it an overall score of 3.5/5. However, the RPS is seen as less influential in shaping policy in the pharmaceutical sciences sector. The average score given was 2.6/5, and just 9% of elected members see the RPS as influential or highly influential in this area.
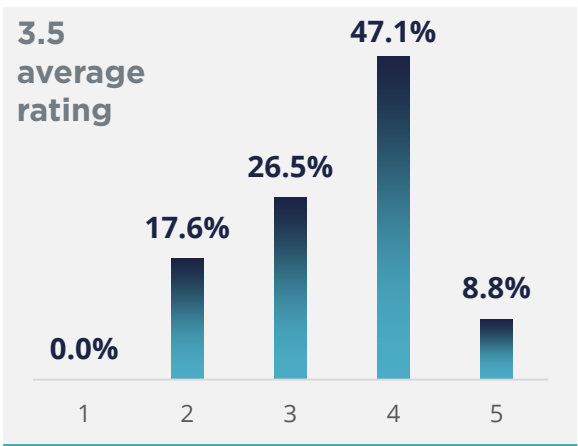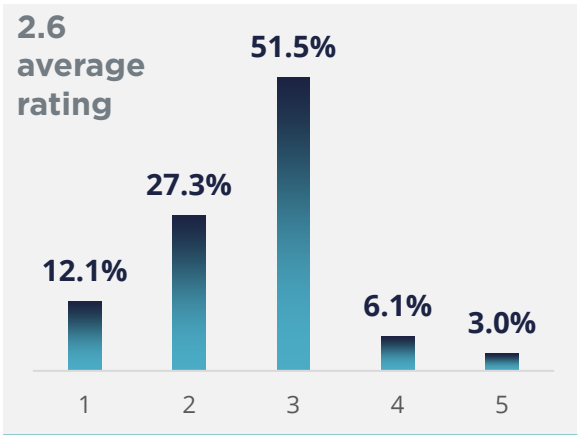
When this was explored further in the focus group discussions, it was clear that Scottish and Welsh Board members felt they had very good links with the devolved administrations and were able to influence policy. However, this was sometimes confused by communications from the RPS in England, where it was felt that English policy issues or positions were sometimes presented as GB-wide:

"Some very good work has been done in Scotland and we do celebrate it in the emails that go out to members on a weekly basis, we say what's gone well and what engagement we've had politically and otherwise. I think there are challenges around how we communicate big topics and the workforce crisis, and make sure that we can influence to make sure pharmacy is included with workforce planning on the wider scale."

3.5 average rating

0.0% — 1
17.6% — 2
26.5% — 3
47.1% — 4
8.8% — 5

On a scale of 1-5 how influential do you think RPS is in shaping policy in the pharmacy sector? (With 5 being highly influential, and 1 not at all influential)

2.6 average rating

12.1% — 1
27.3% — 2
51.5% — 3
6.1% — 4
3.0% — 5

On a scale of 1-5 how influential do you think RPS is in shaping policy in the pharmaceutical sciences sector? (With 5 being highly influential, and 1 not at all influential)

A Welsh Board member commented: "In Wales I feel we have really good engagement with the Welsh government, we are a devolved nation, and I think sometimes decisions made in England confuse our members in Wales and sometimes are not always communicated effectively."

In England however, there is less clarity. One English Board member commented: "Even as a Board and Assembly member, I don't always know how influential the RPS is because we don't get told how successful our lobbying has been, and how successfully our influence has translated into actions."
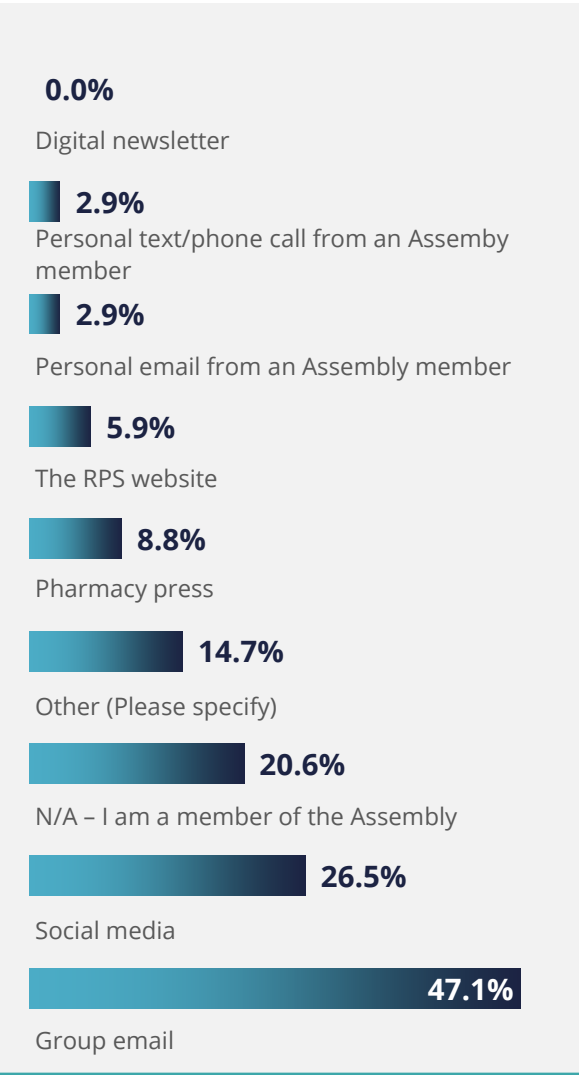
Communications – with Elected Members

Elected members were asked about communications channels and topics. Survey responses showed that elected members usually first hear about decisions taken by the Assembly via email (selected by 47% of respondents) and then social media (selected by 27% of respondents). The majority of elected members said they would prefer to hear about decisions taken by the Assembly via a direct email – social media was only selected by one person.

The reasons behind this preference were highlighted in responses to the longer form questions in the survey. Social media was seen as problematic, particularly in relation to communicating official decisions. Elected members felt that this was not an appropriate channel and live-tweeting sessions could be problematic, if Board members decided to return to earlier discussions at a later point in the session.

In one of the focus groups, an elected member said: "Sometimes we'd give our opinions and then we'd find out on Twitter that a decision was made that wasn't in line with our opinions." This suggests that although the live tweeting of decisions may have been designed to provide greater transparency to the wider membership, it has led to elected members feeling that decisions are less transparent, because they are

Recommendation C9:

The RPS should provide regular, clear, country specific updates to members and to elected members on its policy influencing and political engagement. This could be achieved through creating a specific section of the RPS website dedicated to showcasing the RPS's responses to consultations and engagement with policymakers, rather than using the news section of the website. The communications need to clearly reflect the devolution of pharmacy services.
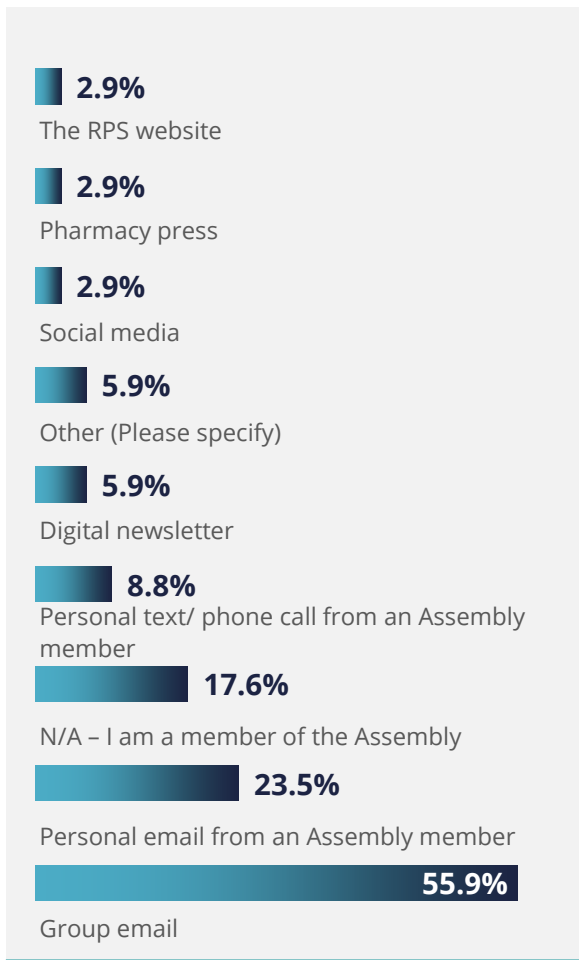

0.0%
Digital newsletter

2.9%
Personal text/phone call from an Assemby member

2.9%
Personal email from an Assembly member

5.9%
The RPS website

8.8%
Pharmacy press

14.7%
Other (Please specify)

20.6%
N/A – I am a member of the Assembly

26.5%
Social media

47.1%
Group email

How do you usually first hear about decisions taken by the Assembly?

unsure whether their views have been heard and properly considered. Elected members also felt that the RPS's use of Twitter meant that they were sometimes only informed of decisions at the same time as the public, leaving them unable to answer questions from the membership and unsure of the context behind those decisions.

Recommendation C1:

Posting live from meetings on a point-by-point basis must be reconsidered. Although the approach is undoubtedly proactive and done in the spirit of transparency, elected members find this process unhelpful and feel that it can provide a fait accompli to issues they believe still require debate. It can also lead to information being presented bluntly, without explanation, which members view as informal and unprofessional.

Group email is considered a preferred method of communication for decisions by the Assembly. A summary email should be sent to Board members and the wider RPS membership, providing more detail about the decision that has been taken, its context and next steps.

2.9%
The RPS website

2.9%
Pharmacy press

2.9%
Social media

5.9%
Other (Please specify)

5.9%
Digital newsletter

8.8%
Personal text/ phone call from an Assembly member

17.6%
N/A – I am a member of the Assembly

23.5%
Personal email from an Assembly member

55.9%
Group email

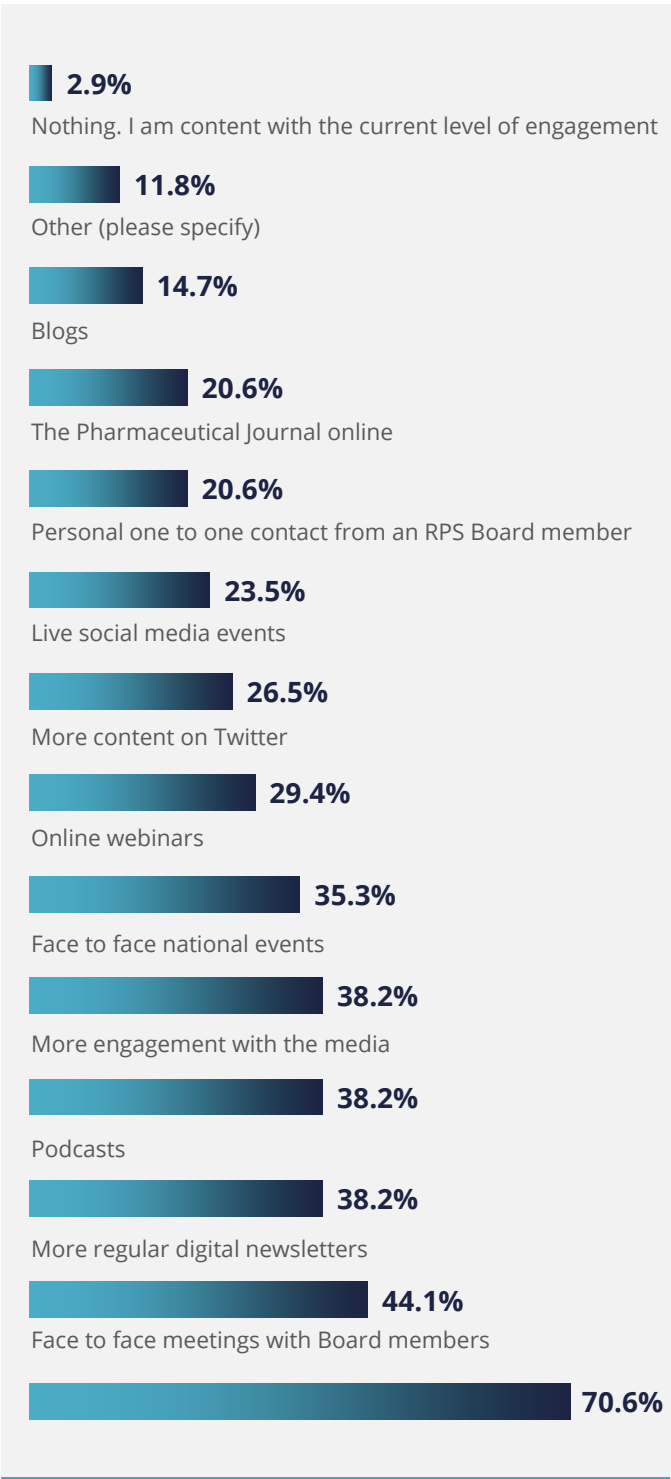**How would you like to first hear about decisions taken by the Assembly?**

Communications – with members

Elected members were also asked about the RPS's communication with members. In the survey, face to face local events were extremely popular as well as face to face meetings with Board members. The focus groups gave a clear signal as to why these were considered important.

One member told us: "There is huge potential in re-energising local engagement and addressing the visibility and engagement 'on the floor' that this brings." However, it was widely agreed upon that the current regional approach might not deliver this type of communication and engagement. One commented that: "the 14 RPS regions are absolutely huge …. the entire London region is put together as is the whole of the Midlands." Focus group participants felt that it would be important to have events in different areas of the regions and to ensure that events were not London or England centric.

In addition, elected members would like more support to communicate with members. Focus group participants felt strongly that elected members should be included in the communications sent out by the RPS and were happy to be so. One commented: "I want to hear more from the elected Board members. We've got different people from different backgrounds of pharmacy, and people want to hear more from them, and that needs to be facilitated by the RPS in the form of newsletters and videos. I don't want to be able to move without seeing someone from the RPS everywhere. It's the role of the RPS to support the elected members to get out there as well because the profession wants to see that as well."

Survey responses revealed there was strong support for more communication from the RPS to members on four topics. While the first two themes were also raised in the focus groups, pharmacy experience and education were not highlighted, suggesting that they are perhaps perceived as less crucial topics by elected members.

2.9%
Nothing. I am content with the current level of engagement

11.8%
Other (please specify)

14.7%
Blogs

20.6%
The Pharmaceutical Journal online

20.6%
Personal one to one contact from an RPS Board member

23.5%
Live social media events

26.5%
More content on Twitter

29.4%
Online webinars

35.3%
Face to face national events

38.2%
More engagement with the media

38.2%
Podcasts

38.2%
More regular digital newsletters

44.1%
Face to face meetings with Board members

70.6%

What should the RPS do more of to improve communications?

1.The decisions taken by the RPS, including

- Being clearer on governance processes
- Key organisational decisions taken and a brief explanation of the rationale behind the decision
- RPS strategy
- Collaboration with other bodies
- How to get involved with decision making
- Voting behaviours

2.The external work RPS is doing

- Any Government lobbying, including responding to consultations and meeting with MPs
- Public support of pharmacists and their teams
- Success stories
- Media coverage

3.Pharmacy experience

- Stress reduction
- Healthy living
- Key issues that have an impact on individuals in terms of their day to day working life
- NHS developments like the creation of ICBs and how this affects pharmacy
- Primary care pharmacy

4.Education

- Education content
- Opportunities to use pharmacy training as an introduction to careers in clinical informatics.

Recommendation C2:

Be more proactive about communication on the topics audiences want to hear about (as to the left). Understanding what RPS's audiences want to gain more insight on is key to producing content that resonates. Survey members regularly to understand this and then feeding the results into the overall content programme.

Recommendation C15:

The RPS should begin work immediately on delivering a rolling programme of face-to-face events for members. Elected members should be heavily involved in these face-to-face events, in order to raise their profile among members. To do this, elected members will require the full support of the RPS.

What really matters to elected members

At the end of the survey, elected member were asked if there was anything else they feel the RPS needs to understand about their perceptions of communication and engagement with elected members. Elected members responding to this question (23/34) highlighted the importance of issues they had raised in response to earlier questions. These include:

- Questions around the use of social media
- The need for greater openness and transparency
- Representation
- More engagement between members and Boards
- Improved communication between the RPS Executive team and Board members

Use of social media

Many elected members do not agree with the way social media is used to convey Board decisions. This includes the live tweeting of proceedings at Board meetings:

- "I don't agree with live social media posts during ongoing meetings by Board members - we may have to revisit topics later in the meetings"
- "Some stricter control on posting Board decisions on social media before they've been discussed more widely"
- "Consideration of how Board members and Assembly members release information via social media in advance of official confirmation and to consider context of this including reputational impact and member perception"
- "Twitter is an echo chamber and not necessarily representative of the wider pharmacy world"
- "There is a fear instilled in new Board members that they cannot speak publicly, without media training. This isn't true but the perception leads to a reluctance to stand out on social media etc. By addressing this I think more Board members would be happy to be more publicly visible".

Openness and transparency

Many elected members believe there is a lack of openness and transparency in the way the Boards and the Assembly communicate:

- "There is a lack of insight into how decisions taken by the Executive and Assembly are likely to be perceived by members which makes them seem to be out of touch with members and elected members receive the fall-out."
- "There needs to be better clarity on the purpose of some items that come to the Board, and we need to be sufficiently well informed on topics that are for decision. Acknowledging the dynamic nature of some Board meetings, Board members need to be better communicated with during the meeting on key aspects of governance so that the appropriate process is followed"
- "I think members feel that sometimes decision announcements come out of left field, members would like to be kept up to date on what we are working on, why, and our discussions around them. FIP comes to mind initially"
- "Feels like a lot of decisions taken behind closed doors; even recent agenda items on national Board meetings were unclear how they had been added and for what purpose."
- "Transparency is essential. We are perceived to be hiding things. Ensure how we vote is open to scrutiny by members. As a membership organisation we need to think of them first. Without members, we are nothing. Communication is fundamental to engagement. Membership numbers and challenges with falling numbers needs to be addressed through openness with the members about it."

Recommendation E6:

More frequent and more focused meetings between the Assembly and the Boards. It was thought that the Assembly and elected Boards met too infrequently and that the time in between was too long for meaningful engagement. Others commented that the agenda for these meetings attempted to cover too many issues and so was not an effective forum. By increasing the cadence and focus, all parties will gain greater value and member views given more time to air.

Representation

Concerns were raised about the weighting given to the English Board:

- "Assembly is heavily skewed by English national Board so other countries views which differ are overruled. This is extremely frustrating and demoralising. A consensus should be agreement from all country Boards, not one which overrules the others"
- "Each individual person's voice needs to be heard. Everybody should be respectful and professional. Agreed procedures/ processes for ways of working must be upheld at all times"
- "There is a lot of bureaucracy, opaqueness and default to inaction due to 'the charter'. We need more items for discussion in open business"
- "The Assembly seems to be unequal/ biased/weighted against members out of England. How do members in Scotland and Wales ensure their voice is heard?"

Recommendation E7:

Engagement and discussion is needed on the issue of representation. The majority of respondents who highlighted representation as an issue felt that Scottish and Welsh voices are underrepresented in the Assembly, and that the English Board's views carry more weight. However, one member expressed the opposite view. Representation needs to feel equitable, if members are to feel a sense of agency over issues and decision that are important to their devolved healthcare system.

Member engagement with Boards

Elected members felt that more needed to be done to convey what the Boards do for members, and how Board discussions and decisions underpin and inform what happens in the Assembly.

- "Members feel that the Boards are useless, I have to say since being on the Board I feel that we are fairly ineffective and do not have a real voice. We can decide something as a Board and then the Assembly will do something else"
- "I am not sure that members know they can contact Board members about issues they want raised"
- "More needed to let our members know the huge amount of work going on behind the scenes to deliver on the work of the RPS; what we see in press releases are the tip of the iceberg"

Communication between the executive leadership team and the Boards

It is felt by elected members that there are tensions between the executive team and the Boards. These stem from certain key decisions that have been taken, apparently by the Executive without the Boards' involvement, and the way in which these decisions have been communicated:

- "More information about in house staffing decisions before they happen."
- "It is hard work for engagement to turn into action. If a suggestion is made, the onus should be on staff to provide regular updates not elected members to chase."
- "The exec needs to keep elected members included in ideas and decisions and not act autonomously."

Non-elected members

In addition to the survey and focus groups with elected members, we conducted one-to-one interviews with the RPS's two non-elected Assembly members. Similar themes came up in these discussions as were raised by the elected member research elements.

Governance structure

One of the non-elected members felt strongly that the current governance structure is not working. They said: "I'm never sure why we have the national Board and then the Assembly, it seems a very unusual governance structure, not one I've seen in any other organisation before. I'm sure it

came about for all the right reasons, when the GPhC and the RPS separated, but I'm not entirely sure if it works any more in terms of providing appropriate representation."

And they felt that this was impacting negatively on engagement with the membership: "I don't think the members understand how the representatives get elected, so they elect the English Pharmacy Board, for instance, if they're in England, and yet they hear that the Assembly makes the strategic decisions."

The other non-elected member, however, felt that compared to other organisations they had worked in, the governance of the RPS was working "reasonably well" and that the RPS needs to "careful that we don't revisit strategy and governance too frequently".

Communications with members

In common with the elected members, the non-elected members felt that increasing regional engagement, and having more face-to-face meetings, would enable the RPS to communicate with members more effectively: "So how do we get more of a reach? I think going back to regional bodies ... they [the RPS] are trying to go back to different regions and having more face-to-face regional meetings and I think that's definitely a step in the right direction, but we've got to make it valuable for the members to see that those regional meetings are useful, and that the RPS is a body worth engaging with."

The issue of transparency in communications with members was also raised, particularly in relation to the recent decision around FIP: "I think the RPS overall, takes a very conservative view of how it communicates. A good example would be the decision to leave FIP. Whether you consider that a right or a wrong decision, to not communicate that it was under debate, or that that the debate had happened, I think was a good example of where the executive was very cautious and very conservative, which then led to a complete failure to communicate."

The other non-elected member felt that

while the RPS's "formal communications are perfectly good", the organisation had a tendency to let things "drip out" and that "the reputation of the RPS is that it is doing things secretly or as secretly as you can make an announcement."

Influencing policy

The non-elected members felt the RPS was starting from a difficult position in its attempts to influence policy. One commented that in the past the views expressed by senior pharmacists outside the RPS had been detrimental to the RPS: "I think the RPS does quite a good job in terms of influencing. I think it's a really tricky situation at the moment, we've had a Chief Pharmaceutical Officer whose stated aim was to reduce the number of community pharmacies, and therefore the number of pharmacists who have a job. That is not a great place to be in terms of influencing policy."

Education

One non-elected member felt that the RPS was particularly good at raising the profile "of what pharmacy can do, and today's pharmacy graduates are far better than in my day. Their knowledge is far greater, their capabilities are far greater, and they've generally got higher A level results and better degrees."

Recommendation C13:

Non-elected Assembly members should receive the same level of communications as elected Board members – and may require additional context and background dependent on their area of expertise.

Chapter 7 - External stakeholders' participation and engagement

To engage external stakeholders, we invited each of the Chief Pharmaceutical Officers (CPhOs) from England, Scotland, and Wales to a half-hour interview. We issued several invitations to the three GB CPhOs and secured a one-to-one with Andrew Evans, the CPhO for Wales.

We also held interviews with Professor Margaret Allen, Pharmacy Dean, Health Education and Improvement Wales, and Professor Anne Watson, Postgraduate Pharmacy Dean, NHS Education for Scotland. We were unable to secure an interview with the Pharmacy Deans for Health Education England.

Communications from the Assembly, Boards and the RPS Executive

All three of the external stakeholders we spoke to were content with the communication they had with their respective country Boards.

One said: "I talk very warmly about my ability to get on the phone to the Director for Wales and talk to her about things both formally and informally. The same is true with Board members and the Chair". That feeling extended to the Chief Executive and to the RPS executive team: "The personal relationship works incredibly well and is pretty strong. I think that works two ways, the RPS are very happy to approach us."

On the matter of Royal College status, external stakeholders felt that the RPS's communications had not been effective. One commented: "I personally feel I never had any communication from the CEO, or anybody at a strategic level. I had input from the education lead at that time, but not from anyone more senior in the hierarchy."

Another told us: "We want the RPS to go for post-registration, and to be a credentialling

body. I'm sure several years ago the RPS stated that becoming a Royal College was the direction of travel. Then they said that they weren't going to be a Royal College, and as a result there's now a load of very negative press around the Royal Pharmaceutical Society which I think has been damaging to them."

Recommendation E10:

The level and frequency of communications from the centre of the RPS (the Executive and the Assembly) to external stakeholders needs to increase, particularly around key organisational decisions. The Chief Executive Officer should commit to quarterly meetings with the pharmacy deans in each country – and look for opportunities to include the RPS President in these meetings. If the RPS are planning to make decisions which are fundamental to the future of the profession, external stakeholders should be used as a trusted sounding Board and should be involved in the early stages of the decision-making.

A clearer purpose and priorities

External stakeholders told us that the RPS needed to define its purpose and priorities more clearly. They felt that it sometimes tried to fulfil too many different roles at once. One referred to the GPhC which they stated has recently set out its strategic direction and established a registrant listening group and told us they would like to see something similar from the RPS.

"I've always felt that ever since the RPS was established in 2010 that they haven't really got their raison d'être … I think they do a bit of all-sorts, and as a result people do not really understand what they're there for."

External stakeholders said it was unclear whether the RPS's primary purpose was advocating on behalf of its members or on behalf of the service users of the those it represents. Interviewees believed this led to a lack of understanding about the RPS's role and sometimes left the organisation hamstrung when making decisions.

"That tension between representing your members versus representing the role your members can play for others is probably the thing which is least clear to me, and I think RPS, in fairness, tries to do both of those things, but I'm not sure it's absolutely clear its purpose is to be one of the other, or whether it's governance allows it to do both of those things independently."

External stakeholders felt that in the current economic climate the RPS had, more than ever, to demonstrate its value to members and potential members:

"People are up against it, they've got bills going up and up, and if they're going to cut something, they're going to cut something where they can't see the value because they've got to pay for other things, so it's got to be a really strong message as to what the RPS's value-add is to those individuals."

Recommendation C7:

Set out the vision: Some members said that

that they didn't fully understand what the RPS stood for and that it had spread its focus too thinly. This must be more clearly defined and articulated to all stakeholders. The RPS should ensure that a clear set of objectives, suitably prioritised and updated as necessary, guides its strategy and that progress against these objectives and priorities is communicated to members, so that they can see value in their membership. The RPS should publish a clear plan to accompany its five-year strategy within the next three months.

Royal College status

The sense that the RPS had lost its sense of purpose and needed to reassert its priorities was driven in large part by the decision to not pursue Royal College status, and by how this was communicated. It was felt that the direction of travel for the RPS a few years ago was to become a Royal College, but that this position was changed with no consultation and little notice.

"We just assumed that RPS were working their ways towards Royal College status, it felt like everyone was signed up to that, and then it just disappeared without any consultation."

It was suggested that stakeholders in the health and care professions would understand and appreciate the status and expectations of a Royal College and that this would help define the RPS's purpose.

"I think they've got some really good products, but they try to be too many things to too many people… I think taking themselves forward to College status would give them clarity."

Recommendation E5:

Many members felt that increasing transparency was crucial and providing clear communication and assurance that governance processes are followed was an essential part of this. One member stated that 'making the system as clear and open as possible would I think improve engagement as it would allow members to see that the system is fair.'

An example and test of this approach will be if the RPS remains of the view that it will not pursue Royal College status within the next five years, or if it changes this decision. It needs to communicate clearly to both members and external stakeholders the reasons why.

Pharmacy technicians

When questioned about the decision regarding whether to bring pharmacy technicians into the RPS membership, interviewees expressed disappointment and felt that so far this has been a missed opportunity.

"It's really important that the Society, or the Royal College or whatever the future professional leadership body is, represents the breadth of practice within pharmacy. It needs to cover pharmaceutical scientists, it needs to cover industrial pharmacists, pharmacists within all sectors, and yes for me it needs to cover pharmacy technicians as well."

Interviewees were clear in their view that given the direction of travel in pharmacy with greater expectation and responsibility being placed on both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, including technicians in the RPS made sense.

Recommendation E11:

Find ways of bringing together pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to speak with one voice wherever possible, while still recognising the different skills and roles of both. The RPS should meet with the APTUK within three months, with the aim of securing an agreement to produce more joint statements going forward and engage policymakers together.

Policy engagement

Feedback on the policy engagement work of the RPS was very positive. One interviewee said:

"I think it does a really good job advocating for its members, particularly in raising the profile of what pharmacists can do."

But external stakeholders felt that the RPS was less effective when advocating for the role of its members in protecting the public and enhancing the well-being of the population. This underscored the challenge of seeking to advocate both for what is good for members and what is good for service users.

One stakeholder told us about the political engagement by the RPS needed to have a clear purpose, and its value to members needed to be demonstrable. By way of example, it was suggested that the RPS should do more to promote awareness among the profession of the good work it has done in policy, including on education:

"Some of the stuff about the advanced curricula, and the work they've done in that education space has been really great, but it doesn't have a platform."

Recommendation C9:

The RPS should provide regular, clear, country specific updates to members, elected members and external stakeholders on its policy influencing and political engagement. This could be achieved through creating a specific section of the RPS website dedicated to showcasing the RPS's responses to consultations and engagement with policymakers, rather than using the news section of the website. The communications need to clearly reflect the devolution of pharmacy services.

Appendix 1:
Peer review – Findings and recommendations

We analysed the social media accounts, websites, and media coverage of peer organisations working in the same sphere as the RPS. We sought to assess their strengths and areas for improvement, in order to gain an insight into best practice for communication and stakeholder engagement among professional bodies in science and healthcare.

The peer organisations we included in this analysis are the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych), Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP), Royal College of Physicians (RCP), and the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC). The findings were captured over the months of June and July 2022.

Findings

Use of website and social media

- The number and frequency of the tweets from the accounts we analysed tends to correspond to the number of followers. Organisations which tweet more regularly have a greater following.
- Several of these organisations, such as the CSP and the RCGP, have clear signposting of information and resources such as policy documents, learning resources and discussion forums. These are for professionals at all stages as well as information for public use which contributes to the user-friendly experience when visiting their website and utilising resources.
- Several, including the RCPsych and the RCP, successfully use platforms such as a YouTube channel and podcasts to provide lectures and webinars in topical issues of interest to members. They ensure that their publications are accessible, including in print form.
- Several use their website homepage to communicate key messages to the public and other external stakeholders. Navigation is easy.
- They use leading figures in their organisations to deliver communications about important subject matter in video and audio as well as in writing. Messages are therefore personalised, more direct and more appealing. Most routine communications come from the social media page of the organisation itself, rather than attributing the message to a person.

Engagement

- In contrast to the RPS, several of these organisations communicate about topical issues of concern not only to their members but wider society. Examples during the research period included the cost of living, pressures on the NHS and the impact of rail strikes on the services their professions provide. The RCP and the RCGP obtain widespread media coverage through this approach. Others, however, remain focused on content concerning professional practice which tends to be of interest to specialist media
- Several, including the RCP, encourage members to become involved in policy development and decision making. For example, the RCP had recently surveyed members on their views on the Health and Care Bill, the results of which were reflected in their RCP's briefings for parliamentarians and its media engagement. It has a regional network through which

members can access professional development resources, obtain tailored advice on training and career development and take part in regional networking. The RCPsych runs regular campaigns and projects, on issues such as the provision of mental health services in Scotland and has an international strategy to engage members overseas.

- They make good use of national awareness days and other milestone events. For example, during Pride Month, the RCPsych highlighted their work on diversity and inclusion, and emphasised the work of members from minority group backgrounds. Activity of this nature trends to lead to greater stakeholder engagement and more public interest.

Recommendations:

Use of social media

1. Recommendation C8: Use the website to power your messages and content. The current set up of the RPS website is dominated by commercial content. This includes memebrship pricing and posts about signing up. However, the homepage could be used more dynamically to highlight issues and decisions affecting members, calling for input, voting or setting out the new vision, as above. This will also make the website more 'vital' for members.

   The website and social media channels should more clearly signpost information and resources, and opportunities to get involved, collaborate, express opinions, contribute to policy development and learn.

2. Recommendation C11: Amplify the social media from the devolved nation Boards. More engagement and a sense of cohesion can be achieved by retweeting and sharing social media posts from RPS Scotland and Wales. This greater focus on the nations would increase the RPS's visibility among members and build a sense of mutual support. For example, at the time of writing, RPS Scotland recently announced the formation of a new Scottish Pharmacy Board – the RPS had not yet retweeted or appeared to amplify this

3. Recommendation C5: The RPS should ensure consistency between website and social media assets. For example, communications should always be digestible, tailored to the channel and complementary as between channels. At present, the relaying of information from Assembly meetings is difficult to follow on social media and not available at the same time elsewhere.

4. Recommendation C14: Don't overly rely on social media. Many members reported that they don't always have the time or technical skills to keep tuned in to social media posts and so often things are missed. This might foster the impression that decisions are being made in secret or that the RPS is not communicating with members effectively or regularly. As in the engagement section, email is often a preferred method of communicating and people do value face-to-face communications and engagement on policy issues and decision making.

Engagement

1. Recommendation C16: Use the website as a tool for collaboration. A number of peer organisations including the RCP use their websites and digital media to drive member involvement in decision making and gaining valuable input. The RCP used their website to collate member feedback on their attitude to the Health & Care Bill. The RPS can emulate this approach and, as before, make their web presence a more potent tool for member communications and engagement.

2. Recommendation C3: Align communications and content with the lives and concerns of pharmacists. A number of peer organisations, such as the RCP and RCGP, harness the zeitgeist to communicate with members and the media. These organisations capitalise on topics of universal interest such as the impact of the cost of living, pressures on the health service and even the impact of the rail strikes, seizing on the news agenda to highlight the profession's issues and the role it plays.

3. Recommendation C17: Collaborate to build thought leadership with impact. The RPS should prioritise pushing their own media agenda in order to have more control over their public narrative as well as to be seen as a leading voice in their area. The RPS can work with members, using surveys and opinion polls, and other professional bodies when it comes to developing thought leadership in pharmacy. Inclusion and collaboration will increase the richness of thought leadership content and will also foster greater levels of advocacy among those involved with the project.

4. Recommendation C12: Elected members prefer communication on decision making via group email or email from a contact within the Assembly. Social media posts mean that discussions are more difficult or can appear messy to external observers.

The media

1. Recommendation C3: Align communications and content with the lives and concerns of pharmacists. A number of peer organisations, such as the RCP and RCGP, harness the zeitgeist to communicate with members and the media. These organisations capitalise on topics of universal interest such as the impact of the cost of living, pressures on the health service and even the impact of the rail strikes, capitalising on the news agenda to highlight the profession's issues and the role it plays.

2. Recommendation C4: Make greater use of the media as a way to proactively get messages, vision and insights to audiences. The RPS runs an effective and busy press office, fielding enquiries regularly and commenting on pharmacy in the news agenda. The RPS can utilise these relationships for the things it now wants to communicate; be it a vision for pharmacy, insights on the work of pharmacists or the big decisions that will shape pharmacy and the RPS in the future.

Appendix 2: Parliamentary Mentions

Findings following review of relevant debates: Parliamentary mentions of RPS between January 2020 – May 2022

A review of references to the RPS in the legislative assemblies of the UK and the devolved nations. This research was designed to:

- Understand the context in which the RPS is currently included in political debate.
- Assess levels of understanding of both the pharmacy profession and the RPS itself among these political audiences; and
- Gauge levels of political support for both the profession and the RPS.

The review found that the RPS is frequently included in debates about medicine shortages and community pharmacy. There are some clear opportunities to work closely with MPs, MSs and MSPs on policy changes which the RPS would like to see.

Stakeholders to engage

- Dame Diana Johnson MP– Key speaker on issues related to RPS and often encourages RPS involvement in meetings with government.
- Alex Norris MP – Has interest in a topic of mutual concern to RPS (salbutamol inhalers) would be good to engage more on this and similar issues.
- Jackie Doyle-Price MP – Former Chair of All Party Parliamentary Pharmacy Group and outspoken on issues of community pharmacy. Would be good to build a contact to bring this issue to parliamentary debates.
- Jason McCartney MP – Has voted in favour of community pharmacy- could be a good contact to engage on a deeper level with.
- Taiwo Owatemi MP – Has spoken around medicine shortage, could be good to engage on a deeper level.
- Lord Clement-Jones – Outspoken on issues in community pharmacy and training/education of pharmacists, could be helpful to engage on a closer level.
- Lord Grade of Yarmouth – Outspoken on issues affecting pharmacy in the media, RPS could engage closer to bring this discussion to the Lords where appropriate.
- Lord Choudrey - Cited RPS research and is outspoken on issues of mutual interest to RPS, so increased engagement could be useful.
- Baroness Finlay of Llandaff – Interested in issues of mutual interest to RPS. Key contact for health discussion post-Brexit, including trade and supply of medicines.
- Baroness Thornton – Also a key contact on supply chains and trade in a post-Brexit UK.
- Angela Burns MS – Outspoken in recognising the effort RPS and CPW has endured during the pandemic, could be helpful to engage on a closer level.
- Jayne Bryant MS – Outspoken on issues affecting local pharmacies and community pharmacy's involvement in the vaccination programme, could be helpful to engage on a closer level.

- Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP – Has interest in a topic of mutual concern to RPS (prescriptions and medicine reviews) would be good to engage more on these issues.
- Brian Whittle MSP – Has spoken on issues around pharmacy technicians and patient data collection, could be useful to engage on a closer level.
- Miles Briggs MSP - Has spoken around the environmental impact of inappropriate disposal of medicines, could be good to engage with on a deeper level.
- David Stewart MSP – Has shown interest in the work of the RPS as evidence for their inquiry, so increased engagement could be useful.
- David Torrance MSP – Outspoken in the role pharmacists have under the Scottish Government's vision for primary care, RPS could engage closer to bring this discussion to the Scottish Parliament where appropriate.

Stakeholders to inform

- Rosie Duffield MP – Comments on RPS data and statistics.
- Paul Bristow MP – Member of Pharmacy APPG
- Feryal Clark MP – Member of Pharmacy APPG
- Julian Sturdy MP – Member of Pharmacy APPG
- Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle – Has a mutual interest to RPS on certain sections of the Health and Care Bill.
- Lord McNally – Spoke in Parliament about RPS offering to give the use of their facilities to administer vaccines.
- Lord Alderdice – Outspoken on workforce issues during the pandemic.
- Lord Bethell – Interest in Health as former Under Secretary of State of health.
- Baroness Cumberlege – Member of Pharmacy APPG

Relevant speakers mentioning the RPS and relevant issues RPS related in the debate

Findings:

- Dame Diana Johnson MP is a frequent speaker attaching support of the RPS to issues they mutually support such as telemedicine services for abortion in England.
- RPS data and statistics are often used to back up arguments in the Commons on matters such as the misuse of Nitrous Oxide.
- RPS support and interest in a specific issue is sometimes cited e.g. On telemedicine services for abortion in England as well as their collaboration with the government on specific health issues, such as the supply of Salbutamol Inhalers.
- In the Lords, issues such as Covid-19 and Brexit have led to involvement from the RPS in the form of warnings, conversations with government and evidence, sometimes including statistics.
- The issues RPS had concern over during Covid-19 and Brexit were the stock of medical supplies as well as the calling up of pharmacists early/introducing retired pharmacists and the interest in transferring more NHS services to community pharmacies.

England
Commons chamber

Topical Questions

Volume 709: debated on Tuesday 1 March 2022

Who

Dame Diana Johnson MP

(Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)

What they said

- Asked for a meeting with the Secretary of State for Health, Sajid Javid to meet her as chair of the APPG on sexual and reproductive health in the UK to explain why the decision to remove telemedicine is wrong for women in this country.
- Requested to bring along RPS and other Royal Colleges.

Business of the House

Volume 709: debated on Thursday 24 February 2022

Who

Dame Diana Johnson

(Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)

What they said

- On telemedicine for abortion services- Johnson detailed the alliance of organisations that are opposed to the removal of telemedicine for abortion services- including the Royal Pharmaceutical Society among others.
- Requested a debate on how that review will take place.

Health and Care Bill

Volume 711: debated on Wednesday 30 March 2022

Who

Dame Diana Johnson

(Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)

What they said

- On the decision for Wales not to scrap telemedicine services for abortion, she says not only will there be unequal abortion access between the devolved nations, but this decision will lead to health inequalities within England for the most vulnerable and marginalised.
- She reiterates the support of RPS on this issue.

Access to Salbutamol Inhalers

Volume 704: debated on Monday 29 November 2021

Who

Alex Norris

(Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)

What they said

- Argues to permit the availability of salbutamol inhalers in commercial kitchens.
- The Government have said that that is something that the regulator would need to approve, and if it sees a benefit a public consultation will be launched.
- She comments that the government has engaged with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society about the production of draft guidance.

Misuse of Nitrous Oxide

Volume 678: debated on Tuesday 21 July 2020

Who

Rosie Duffield MP

(Canterbury) (Lab)

What they said

- RPS and experts are cited as showing how the use of nitrous oxide carries significant health risks.

Lords chamber

Health and Care Bill

Volume 817: debated on Thursday 20 January 2022

Who

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

(Green party)

What they said

- Spoke in regard to amendments 112 and 118.
- She mentions a briefing from the Royal College of General Practitioners, writing also on behalf of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the Association of Optometrists. Quotes the college says: "We think this is a classic example of where secondary care is at the centre of decision-making, while GPs and primary care are 'consulted'."

Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Self-Isolation and Linked Households) (England) Regulations 2020

Volume 809: debated on Thursday 7 January 2021

Who

Lord McNally

(Liberal Democrat)

What they said

- RPS is mentioned as offering to give the use of their facilities to administer vaccines.

Queen's Speech

Volume 812: debated on Wednesday 12 May 2021

Who

Lord Choudrey

(Conservative)

What they said

- Comments that community pharmacies offer good value for money and play a vital and integral role in delivering NHS services to the local community.
- He recommends to the Government that they transfer more NHS services to community pharmacies.
- RPS research is cited.

Contraceptives and Hormone Replacement Therapy Drugs

Volume 802: debated on Wednesday 18 March 2020

Who

Lord Alderdice

(Liberal Democrat)

What they said

- References conversations between government and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society to free up some of the normal professional regulations and requirements for exemption and insurance, so that relatively recently retired chemists may come back to fill in the gaps.

Who

Lord Bethell

(Conservative)

What they said

- Comments that the government have engaged very closely with the pharmacy industry and considered using recently retired pharmacists and soon-to-qualify pharmacists might face early call up. Many have already been written to and there might be provisions in the forthcoming coronavirus emergency Bill to expedite the regulatory changes the noble Lord suggests.

Trade Bill

Volume 806: debated on Thursday 1 October 2020

Who

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff

(Crossbench)

What they said

- Spoke of the NHS databases being a resource for future research and development as well as economic development and the risk of losing this thorough a trade agreement.
- Comments that the RPS highlighted the huge extra cost to the NHS after Essential Pharma disclosed plans to cease production of Priadel, its cheapest lithium carbonate product.

European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill Volume 801: debated on Monday 13 January 2020

Who

Baroness Thornton

(Labour)

What they said

- Discusses the effect this Bill will have on health and medicine in the transition period and after 2021.
- Asks about the arrangements for medical supplies as a result of the legislation.
- She comments that the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and many other bodies have warned that pharmacists are already struggling to obtain common medicines.

APPGs

All-Party Parliamentary Pharmacy Group

To raise awareness of the profession of pharmacy, and to promote pharmacists' current and potential contribution to the health of the nation.

Members:

(Former) Chair & Registered Contact Jackie Doyle-Price (Conservative)

- Jackie is outspoken on issues regarding community pharmacy and encouraging the healthcare service to utilise them in the way they should. She wants pharmacies to have a more active role in the planning and delivery of primary care.

Officer - Paul Bristow (Conservative)

Officer - Feryal Clark (Labour)

Officer- Jason McCartney (Conservative)

- In 2016 – McCartney was the only Conservative MP to vote against pharmacy cuts in England.

Officer - Taiwo Owatemi (Labour)

- Qualified pharmacist, worked for the NHS, in the role of senior oncology pharmacist at Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust.
- Discusses her frustration with medicine shortage.

Officer - Julian Sturdy (Conservative)

Officer - Baroness Cumberlege (Conservative)

Officer - Lord Clement-Jones (Liberal Democrat)

- Former Chair of Council of the School of Pharmacy University of London.
- Taken a strong interest in the development and resourcing of community pharmacy services and the necessary education and training of young pharmacists.

Officer - Lord Grade of Yarmouth (Conservative)

- Lord Grade criticised the government over the £370 million in advance funding it has given pharmacies in England during the coronavirus pandemic and insisted the money is "nowhere enough" to ensure independents stay in business.

Wales
Findings:

- The RPS gets mentioned during the Health and Social Care Committee, which has been set up by the Senedd to look at policy and legislation, and to hold the Welsh Government to account on specific issues around the Welsh social care system.
- The RPS is mentioned around issues related to the Pandemic: most MS are concerned about the pharmacies' preparedness in tackling COVID related issues such as GPs backlog, virus mutations, vaccination rollout and medicines supply.
- Angela Burns MS is a frequent speaker who recognises the effort pharmacies have experienced during the pandemic and asks what pharmacies could do to help relieve the pressure from GPs around waiting time particularly on chronic care management.

Findings following review of relevant debates: Senedd mentions of RPS between January 2020 – May 2022

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee - Fifth Senedd

Debated on Wednesday 3 February 2021

Who

David Rees MS

(Welsh Labour Party)

What they said

- Raises concerns regarding the symptoms people experience from COVID and asks if pharmacists are prepared in facing these kind of health issues.
- Asks GPs and pharmacists how much is of a challenge when different patients present themselves with different symptoms given the rise in variants.

Who

Angela Burns MS

(Welsh Conservative Party)

What they said

- Asks if, given the rise in GPs backlog, pharmacies could provide more support to relieve waiting time particularly on chronic care management.

Who

Lynne Neagle MS

(Welsh Labour Party)

What they said

- Asks how sustainability of medicine supplies has progressed and if it has improved or not.

Who

Jayne Bryant MS

(Welsh Labour Party)

What they said

- Would like to know how pharmacists are feeling in respect to vaccination roll-out.
- Asks if, given the existence of an active list for community pharmacy involvement in the vaccination programme, pharmacies are being utilised as much as possible, and if not, what is preventing them from being utilised.

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee - Fifth Senedd

Debated on Thursday 14 May 2020

Who

Angela Burns MS

(Welsh Conservative Party)

What they said

- Asks about the overall response to the outbreak from the community pharmacies, RPS and CPW.
- Would like to understand how members of the RPS initially responded to the Covid-19 outbreak and how easy or difficult communication streams have been between themselves and GPs, themselves and the Welsh Government.
- Recognises the effort of GPs and pharmacies and asks the speakers (Ellen Jones and Judy Thomas) if they could expand on the pressure pharmacies have experienced.

Who

Jayne Bryant MS

(Welsh Labour Party)

What they said

- Refers to some of the practical difficulties around social distancing that pharmacies faced and asks RPS if they were able to support those smaller pharmacies that weren't able to have that type of reconfiguration.
- Asks if pharmacies received enough support available to those who experienced an increase in workload and had issues around burnout.

Scotland
Findings:

- The RPS is mentioned during the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee which focuses on health services in Scotland.
- The RPS is mentioned around issues involving automation of prescribing procedures such as HEPMA, medical reviews and the idea of polypharmacy.
- Other discussions mentioning RPS fall into the inappropriate disposal of medicines to limit the carbon footprint, the reuse of medicines that are not collected from a pharmacy and the need to incentivise pharmacies to claim remunerations to save costs.
- Alex Cole-Hamilton is a frequent speaker who suggests that medicine reviews should be broaden out to be more like therapy reviews to better assess the correct administration of medications with older patients.

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Alternative Pathways to Primary Care: Debated on Tuesday 15 March 2022

Who

Paul O'Kane MSP

(Scottish Labour)

What they said

- Asks how awareness on self-referral and people's ability to self-refer can be raised with initiatives such as pharmacy first and the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Right care.

Health and Sport Committee

Medicines (Supply and Demand: Debated on Tuesday 18 February 2020

Who

Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP

(Scottish Liberal Democrats)

What they said

- Talks about the idea of polypharmacy and the need for a consistent approach in prescriptions.
- Underlines the need for discussions with older patients about the impact of medications.
- Asks how often medicine reviews are broadened out to be more like therapy reviews rather than just pharmaceutical reviews.

Who

Brian Whittle MSP

(Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party)

What they said

- Asks how patient data that is gathered through HEPMA can be utilised, through IT, in primary care and community pharmacy.

Who

Miles Briggs MSP

(Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party)

What they said

- Moves the attention into the environmental impact of inappropriate disposal of medicines and asks for examples of action that is being taken to limit the carbon footprint of the NHS and its impact on the environment.

Who

David Stewart MSP

(Scottish Labour)

What they said

- Asks the panel to provide examples of best practice, from Scotland or other countries, that could be use in their inquiry.

Health and Sport Committee

Medicines (Supply and Demand: Debated on Tuesday 4 February 2020

Who

David Torrance MSP

(Scottish National Party)

What they said

- Asks if medicines that are not collected from a pharmacy or not used in a care home can be reused.
- Asks if the NHS reimburses pharmacies for medicine that is not collected.

Who

Brian Whittle MSP

(Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party)

What they said

- Asks to the guest speakers if they are aware that NHS disincentives pharmacists from developing their pharmacy technicians.

Who

Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP

(Scottish Liberal Democrats)

What they said

- Asks if there is a calculation that they can use to incentivise pharmacists to claim

remuneration by having them in share in a saving attached to de-prescribing.
- Notes that they would be incentivised to de-prescribe by identifying the costs that they save.

Health and Sport Committee

Medicines (Supply and Demand): Debated on Tuesday 28 January 2020

Who

David Torrance MSP

(Scottish National Party)

What they said

- Asks if, given the greater role pharmacists have under the Scottish Government's vision for primary care, pharmacists are bringing the anticipated benefits to general practice and if the current skill mix and workforce is adequate to enable them to perform that extended role.

Who

George Adam MSP

(Scottish National Party)

What they said

- Asks what the best way is to tell a patient with a long-term condition that there is a different medication that saves money but equally effective.

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