

GPhC contribution to the Inclusive Pharmacy Practice bulletin

Theme: Improving diversity in senior pharmacy professional leadership

National pharmacy organisations work together within the Inclusive Pharmacy Practice (IPP) principles and framework to share and promote inclusive practice and learning for improvement with frontline pharmacy professionals. In this case study, Laura McClintock, Associate Director of Corporate Affairs, discusses the importance of diversity in Council member appointments at the GPhC, the steps taken to improve diversity over the past two years and how pharmacists and pharmacy technicians can get involved in these roles in the future.

The GPhC Council is the organisation's governing body – setting vision and strategy and having oversight of everything we do. It's required, by law, to be made up of 14 members – seven lay and seven registrants (pharmacists or pharmacy technicians).

The power to make appointments to the Council rests with an external body – the Privy Council. Our role is to assist the Privy Council by managing the processes to identify suitable candidates and recommending these candidates for appointment. The entire process is also carefully scrutinised by the Professional Standards Authority, to make sure we follow the principles of merit, fairness, transparency and openness and inspiring confidence, as well as their good practice guidance on making Council appointments.

Our starting point is that we value diversity and want to promote it on our Council. It's vital that our Council members are drawn from the widest possible talent pools, bringing with them a diversity of life experiences, ideas, and perspectives, to enhance our decision-making. Diverse leaders are strong role models and have an important role to play in supporting inclusive environments and helping to breakdown unconscious biases.

Greater board diversity is about diversity of thought and experience, as well as the legally protected characteristics. The current IPP theme is focussing closely on gender and ethnicity in senior pharmacy leadership, so we want to share how we have significantly improved the diversity of the Council in relation to these characteristics over the past two years and highlight some of the practical actions that have made a demonstrable difference.

In 2019, through its Diversity Action Plan, the UK Government set clear ambitions for more inclusive and diverse public appointments, specifically for **50% of all public appointees to be female** and **14% of all public appointments to be from ethnic minority backgrounds by 2022**.

Although these Government ambitions don't strictly apply to Council member roles, they are still helpful benchmarks for judging progress. This is because Council member roles are very similar to the types of public appointments that are overseen and scrutinised by the independent Commissioner for Public Appointments and subject to the Governance Code for Public Appointments.

In 2018/19, just under **43% of GPhC Council members were female** and just under **15% were from ethnic minority backgrounds**. Following a dedicated programme of work to improve the diversity of this group, by 2022, just under **65% of Council members were female** and **36% from ethnic minority backgrounds**. In 2022, we appointed our first female Chair of Council (who is also our first black Council Chair and Council member).

We're already ahead of the Government ambitions, but we're continuing to maintain a focus on diversity as we move to our next recruitment round (read more on this below). We're not complacent and we want to make sure that our Council reflects the public we serve and the professions we regulate.

So, what worked for us

Below are some of the practical actions we have taken to make a difference and improve diversity:

- Developed bespoke Diversity Actions Plans for each appointment round, covering all aspects of the process from design, procurement, attraction, application, selection and interview
- Mapped the learnings from external insights and research on diversity in appointments and applied these to our own processes
- Strengthened the EDI requirements in our tender documentation for recruitment support and assessed how this would be implemented in the campaign
- Reviewed the core competencies and selection criteria, to make sure they didn't create unnecessary barriers, with emphasis on skills, output and lived experience
- Designed a dedicated communications campaign, to reach the widest possible talent pools (specifically identifying and approaching new networks and groups)
- Improved our candidate packs to make them more accessible and inclusive, and tested them with focus groups before the campaign
- Created video content with existing Council members to help demystify the process, including adding selection panel photographs to the candidate packs
- Promoted opportunities more widely, to encourage applications from all individuals with the skills and experiences needed
- Increased the diversity of the selection panel and briefed them fully on their responsibilities in relation to EDI from the outset
- Ensured the selection and decision-making processes are objective, fair and unbiased with robust independent quality assurance established
- Supported candidates to get a 'look and feel' of the organisation before going through the process by inviting them to attend Council meetings
- Added positive and purposeful messages about adjustments, remuneration and support, to help encourage applications from candidates with caring or childcare responsibilities, disabilities or other needs (proactively asking candidates what they needed in advance and ensuring those needs were met)
- Monitored any feedback from candidates, to ensure that this is fed into future recruitment campaigns

How pharmacy technicians and pharmacists can get involved

Our longer-term goal is to encourage pharmacy professionals from different backgrounds who might not normally apply, to consider putting themselves forward for the role in the future.

Current Council members **Penny Mee-Bishop** (pharmacy technician) and **Yousaf Ahmad** (pharmacist) share their experiences of being on the Council and why it's important that other pharmacy professionals see themselves in these roles:

“It’s so important the experience and skills of pharmacy technicians are reflected in Council discussions. All Council members and the executive team value the contribution that pharmacy technicians make as a profession to the safety of patients and the public. I have felt that by bringing my perspective and views as a pharmacy technician to discussions they have been valued and have been used to positively shape the decisions made. I encourage pharmacy technicians from all sectors and at every stage of their careers to consider similar roles when they arise. I do understand there are challenges in juggling the additional commitments alongside work and family responsibilities. My advice would be to speak to your employer if considering applying for a role. I have found that my employers have been keen to support me even when working full time in operational settings” - see Penny’s full biography [here](#).

“Colleagues across the profession should put themselves forward for roles on Council as hearing views from a diverse array allows the Council to function more effectively. Being part of the Council is a privilege and a highlight of my career. Having the opportunity to share the voice of the profession at Council has allowed me to help shape strategic decisions that improved public safety and focuses on the value that the profession adds to the health of the UK. I am extremely humbled to serve my profession by being on Council” - see Yousaf’s full biography [here](#).

Opportunities to join the Council arise when existing members complete their terms of office. When this happens, we will advertise the roles on this website, on our social media channels and through any recruitment agency supporting the process.

You can see some illustrations of the types of skills, knowledge and experience that Council members need to have as well as more information about [how to become a Council member](#) on our website.

If you would like to find out more about appointments to Council, please don't hesitate to get in touch with laura.mcclintock@pharmacyregulation.org.