

BY E-MAIL

Mike Nesbitt MLA
Minister of Health

14 March 2025

Dear Minister,

Regulatory performance of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

On 24 March, we will publish our review of the performance of the PSNI in the year 2023/24, covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2024. The PSNI's performance during the review period has caused us considerable concern and I am writing to you on behalf of the Board to inform you of the action we are taking, in line with our escalation policy.¹ I attach a copy of our report, which is under embargo until publication on 24 March.

About the Professional Standards Authority

The Professional Standards Authority (PSA) reports to Parliament and the devolved administrations each year on the performance of the 10 statutory health and social care professional regulators.² We judge a regulator's performance against our 18 [Standards of Good Regulation](#) (the Standards), which cover five cross-cutting standards as well as the four key regulatory functions: guidance and standards; education and training; registration; and fitness to practise. Each Standard is assessed as being 'met' or 'not met'. Every three years, we conduct an intensive 'periodic review' and in the other two years, we monitor performance and produce shorter 'monitoring' reports. For the PSNI, 2023/24 was a periodic review year.³

¹ [Professional Standards Authority process for escalating performance review concerns](#)

² These are the General Chiropractic Council, the General Dental Council, the General Medical Council, the General Optical Council, the General Osteopathic Council, the General Pharmaceutical Council, the Health and Care Professions Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, and Social Work England.

³ More information about our approach is available here: [Our performance reviews of regulators | PSA](#)

Our 2023/24 performance review

We have identified weaknesses in multiple regulatory functions during 2023/24 which have led us to conclude that the PSNI has not met 7 of our 18 Standards this year. Our report sets out our findings in detail, which are summarised below:

- Standard 1: for the large majority of the review period, the PSNI's public Council papers were not published ahead of the Council meeting and contained minimal information about its operational, corporate, policy and statutory functions.
- Standard 2: we saw the PSNI make little progress on key projects such as publication of a new Corporate Strategy, the review of The Code (the professional standards of conduct, ethics and performance for pharmacists in Northern Ireland), guidance for registrants, education reform and improvements to its website.
- Standard 3: from 2023/24 we have introduced a new approach to assessing regulators' performance on EDI. We had concerns across all four of the outcomes within this Standard and identified many gaps in fundamental areas.
- Standard 4: we continued to encounter problems contacting and obtaining information from the PSNI for the majority of 2024, and this only improved following a letter on this issue from myself as PSA Chair to the PSNI President in September 2024. In addition, for the large majority of the review period, the PSNI's public Council papers contained few substantive items in general, and no items on its operational performance.
- Standard 5: we saw examples of inactivity across a number of different areas and workstreams and stakeholders had sought, but not received, updates from the PSNI on a number of key projects, including The Code review.
- Standard 7: the PSNI made little progress against its plans to update its 2016 guidance on internet pharmacy, despite this being a known and growing risk to patient safety.
- Standard 15: the PSNI took too long to deal with fitness to practise cases and the number of open cases, including older cases, has increased.

Our assessment of the PSNI's performance in 2023/24 is notable in two main respects:

- It is the first time a regulator has not met this many Standards in a single year.
- Standards 1, 2, 4 and 5 have been met by all the other regulators every year since 2019/20, when they were first introduced.

We recognise that the PSNI, as a small regulator, has been significantly impacted by turnover of senior staff. We also recognise the efforts that the PSNI has made since September 2024 to improve its performance, and we hope this will bear fruit in 2024/25.

Next steps

Our legislation does not provide us with any power to require action to be taken by the regulators in response to our reports. We will continue to monitor the PSNI's performance closely and will provide you with annual updates until the issues we have identified are

resolved. In the meantime, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with your officials to discuss the PSNI's performance and how it can be supported to improve.

I have copied this letter to Dr Geraldine O'Hare, President of the PSNI, and I am writing in similar terms to Philip McGuigan MLA as Chair of the Committee for Health, copied to counterparts in the UK Government and Parliament for information.

Yours sincerely,

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

Caroline Corby

Chair