

Aide-Mémoire

Meeting with Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand

Date due to MO: 16 February 2026 **Date of Meeting:** 19 February 2026

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE **Reference:** H2026077539

To: Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health

Consulted: Health New Zealand: ☐

Proactive release: This **title** is proposed by the Ministry of Health for proactive release: ☒

Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
Billy Allan	Clinical Chief Advisor, Medicines, Strategy and Policy	s 9(2)(a)
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Meeting with Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand

Date due:	16 February 2026		
To:	Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health		
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Reference:	H2026078415

About the Meeting

Purpose of Meeting To discuss pharmacy workforce sustainability and assessment system risks. (letter attached as Appendix 2)

Details of Meeting

Date: 19 February 2026
Time: 11.30am – 12.00pm
Venue: EW 6.6

Attendees Michael Hammond, President
Helen Morgana-Banda, Chief Executive Officer

The biographies of Pharmaceutical Society attendees are included in Appendix 1.

Organisation Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand

Ministry representatives Billy Allan, Clinical Chief Advisor, Medicines, Strategy and Policy

Summary: The Society mainly wishes to discuss with you their concern that the current assessment method for intern pharmacists may be contributing to lower pass rates for pharmacists trained in certain countries.

We agree that a review of the assessment is warranted to ensure timely registration of pharmacists. The Society has expressed frustration with the Pharmacy Council being unwilling to engage on this issue. We recommend you encourage both the Society and the Council to work with the Pharmacy Sector Leaders Forum, to review the intern pharmacist training programme and assessment.

s 9(2)(g)(i)

s 9(2)(g)(i)

Background and context

1. The Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand (the Society) is a professional membership-based association representing the pharmacy profession. The Society provides members with professional support and resources to enable their practice, and advocates for the advancement of the pharmacy role in healthcare.
2. The Society is also responsible for the intern training programme, which is accredited by the Pharmacy Council. The Society runs the intern pharmacist assessment centre under contract from the Pharmacy Council. These processes are set by the Pharmacy Council to ensure intern pharmacists are fit and competent and can practice without supervision before registration as a pharmacist.

Letter of 22 December 2025

3. The Society has indicated they wish to discuss their letter to you dated 22 December 2025 with the heading "Pharmacy workforce sustainability and assessment system risks". The issues raised in the letter are discussed below (Appendix 2).
4. The letter expresses the society's view that the Pharmacy Council is not engaging on some of these matters. You will have met the Pharmacy Council on 19 February 2026 immediately before your meeting with the Society [H2025077198 refers].

Intern pharmacist training and assessment

5. Domestic and internationally trained pharmacists must complete an intern pharmacist training programme and an assessment before registering as a pharmacist in New Zealand. Internationally trained pharmacists (including those already practicing abroad) without qualifications recognised by the Pharmacy Council must complete an internship through the 'non-recognised equivalent qualifications' route (non-REQR).
6. The intern training programme is operated by the Pharmaceutical Society. The Society has raised concerns about the low pass rate for non-REQR intern pharmacists who sat the intern assessment in 2025.
7. The Society believes the low pass rate reflects systemic challenges, including exam design, rather than a deficiency in the candidates. This is consistent with feedback from experienced instructors who consider many of their non-REQR interns who passed the intern training programme, are ready to work as fully registered pharmacists despite having failed the assessment.
8. The low pass rate for non-REQRs impacts on employers, who pay \$12,000 in fees for a non-REQR compared with \$5,800 for a domestic graduate. The difference in fees is partly

because Health NZ contributes to the domestic candidate fees, but not to international candidate fees.

9. The Society has requested that the Pharmacy Council release the disaggregated data showing pass rate differentials, including between non-REQR interns and other internationally trained and domestic interns. The Pharmaceutical Society are aware of the results from the intern pharmacist assessment centre but are unable to release them publicly as the data belongs to the Pharmacy Council. The Society has requested this to support a review of the intern training programme and the assessment with the wider pharmacy sector.

Ministry comment

10. Ministry officials have discussed this issue separately with the Pharmacy Council and with the Society.

11. s 9(2)(g)(i)



12. However the Society believe the low pass rate is unlikely to be one of aberration. Enrolment numbers of non-REQRs continue to be at record numbers, with 112 non-REQRs already enrolled in the 2026 intern programme. Without intervention, the risk is that non-REQRs may simply fall out of the system and those that follow may find it harder to gain a training place as employers become aware of the high assessment failure rate of this group.
13. We believe a review of the intern pharmacist training programme and assessment is warranted and should be possible without releasing the disaggregated assessment data.
14. It is the Pharmacy Council's responsibility to make any changes to the assessment process. The Society is developing options for the Council to consider which could improve the assessment process. They will need to work with the Council and the wider pharmacy sector to effect any changes.

Immigration requirements for international intern pharmacists

15. The Society's letter attaches a copy of a briefing they wrote to Hon Casey Costello, copying in you and Hon Erica Stanford as Minister of Immigration (dated 4 December 2025).
16. The briefing recommends "reinstating" the Green List exemption (waiver of labour-market testing/advertising requirement) for internationally qualified pharmacists who are entering the intern training programme – especially for the 2026 intern cohort. The briefing notes that in 2026, at least eight international intern pharmacists with confirmed job offers are facing visa delays.

17. Intern pharmacists have never been on the Green List. The applicants should be assessed under standard Accredited Employer Work Visa settings, which include domestic labour market testing.
18. Previously, there were some inconsistencies in processing immigration applications for intern pharmacist roles. Some employers incorrectly declared these roles as 'retail pharmacists' and the applicants they were hiring as meeting the definition of a retail pharmacist. This enabled applicants to seek residency through the Green List and reduced the requirements for employers when advertising roles e.g. for domestic labour market testing. Changes have now been made by Immigration New Zealand to ensure employers are appropriately declaring retail pharmacist roles.
19. s 9(2)(g)(i)
20. The Society's argument is that applicants only have a narrow 2-year window to complete non-REQR requirements and secure an intern training position, which only has one intake each year (1 February). Even minor delays for applicants can prevent them from meeting registration requirements in time to secure an intern training position. This is considered to be placing additional strain on already under-resourced pharmacy teams.



Allison Bennett
Group Manager, Health System Settings

Strategy & Policy

16/02/26

Appendix 1: Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand meeting attendees

	Michael Hammond was elected President of the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand (PSNZ) in April 2024. He had previously served on the National Executive as a co-opted Early Career Pharmacist as Vice-President for two years. His pharmacy career includes work in community, hospital, general practice, and PHO settings. He is currently Network Manager, National Clinical Networks Radiology & Infection Services at Health NZ.
	Helen Morgan-Banda was appointed CEO of PSNZ in August 2024. Her background includes 6.5 years as CEO of the Royal NZ College of GPs and 2.5 years as CEO of the NZ Law Society, leading the Society through transformational change.