The PDA has offered candidates of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) National Board Elections 2024 in England and Wales the opportunity to tell PDA members their views on key issues. Below is Aiysha Raoof’s response:

1. What would you hope to achieve over the course of your office, if elected?

If elected, it is essential to recognise this is not about individual achievements or personal objectives. It is bringing experiences and influences to strengthen the collective voice of the RPS in advocating for our profession.

Realism is needed, change takes time and must be collaborative with stakeholders and members. There will also be existing aspirations; boards, assembly, and the Commission; everything must be considered in tandem.

As an early-career pharmacist with a diverse background spanning clinical and leadership, I bring on-the-ground experience in addressing challenges impacting our profession.

Rather than specific outcomes, I hope to strengthen foundations:

- Ensuring a voice at the table!
- Where pharmacy and medicines are mentioned, the RPS must; represent, advocate and influence.
- Collaboration, strategic direction and ensuring we are at the forefront of healthcare.

Upon term completion, I hope for a longstanding impact for influence and work to continue positive change and robust direction.

2. The RPS ceased to be the regulator over a decade ago and therefore membership became optional. It has refused to publicly declare its membership numbers for several years, even when asked to do so at its own annual meetings. The membership figure of “26,137 paying members” was given in the RPS Annual report 2022 and this is a rare insight for members. What is your view on transparency and in particular the declaration of membership numbers in future?

Transparency is imperative in fostering trust and accountability within any professional organisation. While I acknowledge the importance of disclosing membership numbers, it is essential to understand the rationale behind decisions to withhold such information but also why the question is being raised. I firmly believe in tangible actions; if the data is released, what are we hoping to do with it? What positive steps are being expected? How would we quantify if the results are favourable or not? As we can tell, it is much more complex than just sharing the details.

As a candidate, I re-echo promoting transparency and accountability within the RPS, ensuring that decisions will be made in the profession's and its members' best interests.
3. Should the RPS membership base remain exclusively for pharmacists, pharmaceutical scientists, and pharmacy students/trainee pharmacists? Why?

This question continues to arise, yet we never look from the other side. What are RPS members’ views? Does the wider workforce want to be involved? Acknowledging the important work and voice of the Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK (APTUK) is essential. Before considering membership expansion, we must engage in dialogue with APTUK and RPS members to understand preferences and aspirations regarding membership.

Additionally, membership governance is complex. The option to continue fostering closer partnership working and Associate membership being a preferred route. Continued collaboration would allow us to enhance the representation of the pharmacy workforce while still amplifying the collective voice of pharmacy professionals and ensuring both professions’ independent voices are represented most appropriately by their respective professional voices.

I would add that fragmentation within pharmacy may hinder progress. Inclusivity via collaborative routes, rather than overhauling membership policies, may promote greater unity and collaboration.

4. Pharmacy technicians undoubtedly have an important role to play in supporting pharmacists through skill mix. However, the government seems keen instead to introduce pharmacist role substitution for example by giving pharmacy technicians’ the rights to operate Patient Group Directions (PGDs). What views do you hold on this subject and in particular, do you believe the pharmacy technicians have the appropriate levels of training to independently deliver PGDs?

Pharmacy technicians are registered professionals who play a key role in the delivery of patient care. While using Patient Group Directions presents opportunities, we must ensure adequate training and competency assessments are in place to safeguard patients, as is for all delivering PGDs.

In Ambulance Trusts, it is common practice for paramedics and nurses to operate under PGDs, undergoing thorough education and competency assessments. This approach has been successfully implemented across healthcare settings and reduced health inequities.

This is an opportunity for development rather than role substitution. We are heading into a future where pharmacists will join the register as Independent Prescribers. This is an opportunity to identify upskilling to ensure pharmacists can evolve and develop as the future of healthcare does.

Mindset and growth are crucial; external changes are new doors opening. We must adapt, aspire and develop our skills to meet the advancing needs of health organisations and patients.

5. Do you support the PDA’s Safer Pharmacies Charter?

Absolutely. The Safer Pharmacies Charter resonates deeply with my commitment to patient safety and wellbeing. It echoes the core principles articulated in my vision for pharmacy practice. I am proud to be a PDA member and have the Charter in place for us to take to our employing organisations.
As a candidate, I wholeheartedly endorse the Safer Pharmacies Charter and advocate for its widespread adoption and implementation. The foundations of the Charter are mirrored not only in my manifesto but also in the work I have led, such as the NHS Midlands Pharmacy Charter. I hope that the RPS and PDA will collaborate further to ensure that all pharmacy sectors implement the Charter and ensure the safety of patients and pharmacy professionals.

6. What are your views on the UK Pharmacy Professional Leadership Advisory board installed by the 4 country Chief Pharmaceutical Officers?

Establishing the UK Pharmacy Professional Leadership Advisory Board represents a positive step towards fostering collaboration and unity within the profession. By enabling improved and novel collaborative working among pharmacy leadership, this advisory board has the potential to strengthen the collective voice of the profession. The Commission will provide both stability and a robust foundation to drive the change we need.

As someone who is passionate about the RPS working towards achieving Royal College accreditation, I hope this will be a constructive step in accomplishing that. I am optimistic about the board's ability to promote shared goals and advance the profession's interests on a larger scale. Furthermore, I advocate for a periodic review of membership criteria to ensure the inclusivity of on-the-ground professionals and future leaders within the profession.