

A Council in crisis

This week's Council meeting — which will be reported in detail next week — was full of drama. The incumbent President, Gill Hawksworth, failed to be given a second year in office, as has become the norm in recent years, and Nicholas Wood, who was president of the Society in 1992–93, was elected to take over the reins. According to Mr Wood, a member of the Save Our Society group, the re-election of a past president is not without precedent, although historians will have to look back to 1879 to find another example.

The switch in President, however, paled into insignificance with the unexpected resignation of Michael Schofield, one of the three Privy Council nominees on the Council, who was so dismayed by the decision to oust Dr Hawksworth that he left the

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Council chamber before the other Officers were elected. His departure was followed by statements from the other two Privy Council nominees, Bob Michell and Phillida Entwistle, saying that although they would not be resigning, the activities of the new Council in the next few months would be under scrutiny and that it was “on notice” until August.

To suggest that the Council is in anything other than crisis would be an understatement. It is without

precedent for a Privy Council nominee to resign and the circumstances were sensational.

Privy Council nominees have been part of the Council structure since the implementation of the Pharmacy and Poisons Act 1933. The three nominees were originally put there to ensure that the Privy Council remained the “central authority for pharmacy” and it has been understood that their presence for the past 70 years has ensured that the Council behaves with probity and plays fair and that the public interest is taken into consideration.

Professor Schofield's departure is a loss to the Society on a number of grounds. He brought wisdom to Council meetings, making comments that were pertinent even if they were not always welcome; he is highly regarded in Government circles and has great influence in the corridors of power. That he intends to write to the Privy Council, the Department of Health and the Council for the Regulation of the Healthcare Professionals expressing his views about the Council's direction of travel should be of concern to all pharmacists.

The SOS group has stated that it wants to honour members' right to determine the future of the Society. However, the Society is not an island and the Government, through the Department of Health and the Privy Council, remains the “central authority for pharmacy”.

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