

# Steve Churton promises tangible outputs while President of the Society

In his first interview with *The Journal* since being elected President of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, Steve Churton spoke to **Hannah Pike**

Steve Churton appears to be a people person. His immediate priority, he says, is "to understand the people issues". With fewer than 400 working days until the doors of the new professional body are due to open, this will be no mean feat for the newly elected President of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, who states his top three targets as strong leadership, inclusiveness and efficiency.

Mr Churton has a background in change management, and he believes that recognition of this by Council members contributed to his election. "The skills I learnt in a large corporate environment are needed to get the best out of people," he says.

"I won't shy away from decisions that need to be made, but would prefer that they are done by consensus. That way you are more likely to get buy-in and be valued and respected."

Mr Churton says he also intends to get close to the membership. "Before we start designing a new organisation it is really important for us to understand, listen to and involve our members in defining what it is they want from that organisation." This will need to be done in parallel with the work of the Transitional Committee, and he emphasises the need to act quickly enough to keep things on track, but to make a judgement of when to seek views from the members. "We need parallel working, not sequential decisions," he says.

And it is through feedback from members that Mr Churton intends to judge the success of his presidency.

"We can make changes that are invisible to the members but we need to make changes that members can see," he explains. "The best evidence I can provide of my ability to deliver will be tangible outputs."

Mr Churton said that his predecessor Hemant Patel made a great contribution, and served at a time when tough decisions needed to be made, but says that his own leadership style differs from Mr Patel's. "My style is more engaging. It is a style which hopefully brings out the best in people's willingness to contribute."

Mr Churton adds that he likes to understand people and their motivation. "A good leader is somebody who will inspire others to have confidence in them," he says. "A great leader will inspire others to have confidence in themselves." It is this confidence that he intends to instil into the Council. He says that the Council has a wide range of skills but he



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does not think the best use is made of them. "We need to unify Council and make sound decisions with sound pace," he says.

A culture change is needed and the Society needs to get closer to its membership to demonstrate its worth. "Nobody loves a regulator," he says, "And I'm not sure the membership sees the good work the Society does." He explains that this is not the fault of the members, but that it is up to the Society to market itself to the profession. It may be this outlook that leads Mr Churton to praise the work of Jeremy Holmes, the Society's Chief Executive and Registrar. He concedes that part of the efficiency of the decision-making process depends on the relationship between the President and the Chief

Executive. "The chemistry feels right and he is somebody I can and will work with," Mr Churton says.

He believes that the Society needs to focus on its intellectual assets rather than its material assets. "We need to preserve the expertise that we have to form the core of the organisation that we will need in the new professional body," he says. Staff members at Lambeth need to be confident that their work is appreciated.

"My vision is for this organisation to [become] a new professional leadership body which will truly serve the membership in a way the Society, on occasions, hasn't," he said.

Mr Churton is head of professional practice at Boots UK and, consequently, some members may be suspicious of an underlying agenda from Boots The Chemists. He describes this as "a short-term reaction" and says that he intends to acknowledge it, manage it and move on. Indeed, he points out that it is healthy for members to raise such concerns, and demonstrates that they genuinely care about the future of the profession.

But he says they will soon see that these concerns are unfounded. "People who don't know me presume what my intentions are," he reflects, "but I stood for election because I am passionate about making a difference, not because my employer told me to." He adds: "People should measure me on output. I intend to lead impartially. I have an obligation to listen to and respond to all pharmacists, irrespective of what sector they are in and what career stage they are at."

However, he believes that his background of 28 years working for Boots will be invaluable. "What is needed right now is strong, strategic leadership and change management skills. The best breeding ground for these is a commercial organisation."

Does Mr Churton's appointment provide assurance that Boots will be backing the new professional body? Of course, it is too early to say. "Boots will always back something that is right for pharmacy," says Mr Churton. "If the new professional body is right then Boots will support it."

However, despite the pressure of the new professional body having to be established in less than 18 months, Mr Churton has not forgotten that there is a profession to support in the meantime.

"We need to deliver on the day job as well as the future," he says.