



# Pharmacy in a New Age

**Dr Sue Ambler, Head of the Practice Research Division at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain used Catalyst Associates Limited to study the pharmacists' perception of the rapidly changing world of health care.**

*Paul: How does the Society work and what are the challenges it faces?*

**Sue:** The Royal Pharmaceutical Society has an unusual dual-role within the profession. On the one hand it is responsible for enforcement of professional and legal standards and on the other it has a development role in relation to professional practice and service delivery.

These different roles can create conflicting expectations between the membership, their representatives on Council, as well as the staff of the Society. There is also plenty of potential for ambiguity and for misunderstandings to arise.

*An exciting environment then!?*

Yes; and on top of this the broad health and NHS policy frameworks are changing rapidly, offering both opportunities and threats for the Society and its members.

*So how has the Society responded?*

Following a membership consultation exercise in 1998 we developed a strategy called 'Building the Future'. This set an important agenda for change within the profession.



Clearly it was vital that pharmacists responded positively to implementing the strategy in order to fulfil the vision. The Society quickly recognised that it needed to work with its members to identify and overcome any barriers that prevented them from making changes.

*So where did Catalyst come in?*

As part of the implementation programme Catalyst was commissioned to help Council members and the



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executive recognise and understand the world of pharmacy as pharmacists see it in their everyday practice. The project was designed to inform the Society and to enable it to overcome or to mitigate problems.

*What did you think of the Catalyst Process?*

It is novel. What was important to us was that it reached members whose views are not readily accessible. With **an 88% response rate** the Society heard from the normally 'silent majority' of the profession.

*What did the results tell you?*

The overall picture that emerged from the study has confirmed that the Society's strategy is most relevant to members. Furthermore their strong commitment to professionalism is quite clear.

However there are clearly things that we have to help members overcome.

*What sort of problems were highlighted?*

Well, for example, there were a number of areas where there was a significant disparity between the concerns

expressed by some (typically the vocal minority in the profession) and the majority of Society members.

*How will you deal with these?*

Knowing this will help us to develop a balanced portfolio of policies and approaches to development work in the future.

*What else did you learn from the research?*

The data has also highlighted areas where a variety of implementation tactics are required. We have to develop alternative routes to achieve our vision and be prepared to switch between them.

*What did you particularly like about the Catalyst Work?*

**We were not just left with the results, Catalyst worked with the Society** to use this data and lay down foundations for developing creative solutions to the problems identified.

They helped make best use of the data and to ensure that the investment will result in actions to make a real difference to members of the Society and to the future of pharmacy services.