

General Pharmaceutical Council

Fitness to Practise Committee

Principal Hearing

Remote videolink hearing

6 November – 7 November 2025

Registrant name:	Leanne Marie Richardson
Registration number:	5042697
Part of the register:	Pharmacy Technician
Type of Case:	Conviction
Committee Members:	Janet Fisher (Chair)
	Stephen Riley (Registrant member)
	Joanne Hird (Lay member)
Legal Adviser:	Raj Joshi
Committee Secretary:	Ivana Raimundova
Registrant:	Not present and not represented
General Pharmaceutical Council:	Represented by Yesim Hall, Case Presenter
Facts proved:	1
Fitness to practise:	Impaired
Outcome:	Removal
Interim measures:	Interim suspension

This decision including any finding of facts, impairment and sanction is an appealable decision under *The General Pharmaceutical Council (Fitness to Practise and Disqualification etc. Rules) Order of Council 2010*. Therefore, this decision will not take effect until **8 December 2025** or, if an appeal is lodged, once that appeal has been concluded.

However, the interim suspension set out in the decision takes effect immediately and will lapse when the decision takes effect or once any appeal is concluded.

Particulars of Allegation (as amended)

You, a registered pharmacy technician previously employed by Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust, White Rose Office Park, Building 3, Millshaw Park Lane, Leeds, LS11 0DL

1. On 7 March 2025 were convicted at Liverpool Crown Court of being concerned in the fraudulent evasion of a prohibition on the importation of a Class A drug, contrary to section 170(2), (3) and (4) of and Schedule 1 to the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

By reason of the matters set out above your fitness to practise is impaired by your conviction.

Documentation

Document 1- Council's hearing bundle

Document 2- Council's skeleton argument

Document 3- Registrant's email dated 5 November 2025

Document 4 – Proof of service bundle

Document 5 – Proceeding in absence application bundle

Witnesses

None

Determination

Introduction

1. This is the written determination of the Fitness to Practise Committee at the General Pharmaceutical Council ('the Council').
2. This hearing is governed by *The Pharmacy Order 2010* ('the Order') and *The General Pharmaceutical Council (Fitness to Practise and Disqualification etc. Rules) Order of Council 2010* ('the Rules').
3. The statutory overarching objectives for these regulatory proceedings are:
 - a. To protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and well-being of the public;
 - b. To promote and maintain public confidence in the professions regulated by the Council; and
 - c. To promote and maintain proper professional standards and conduct for members of those professions.
4. The Committee also has regard to the guidance contained in the Council's *Good decision making: Fitness to practise hearings and outcomes guidance* as revised March 2024.
5. A Principal Hearing has up to three stages:

Stage 1. Findings of Fact – the Committee determines any disputed facts.

Stage 2. Findings of ground(s) of impairment and impairment – the Committee determines whether, on the facts as proved, a statutory ground for impairment is established and, if so, whether the Registrant's fitness to practise is currently impaired.

Stage 3. Sanction – the Committee considers what, if any, sanction should be applied if the Registrant's fitness to practise is found to be impaired.

Service of Notice of Hearing

6. The Committee has seen a number of letters dated between 22 August 2025 and 24 October 2025 from the Council setting out the hearing dates and addressed to the Registrant. These letters were sent to their registered postal address as noted on the Register and other addresses where the Registrant was known to be residing. The Registrant has acknowledged the letters and emails and has stated that they are aware of the hearing.
7. The Committee was satisfied that there had been good service of the Notice of Hearing ('Notice') in accordance with Rules 3 and 16 of the Rules.

Application to proceed in the absence of the Registrant

8. The Registrant was not in attendance at this hearing, nor was someone attending on their behalf. The Committee heard submissions from Ms Hall, on behalf of the Council to proceed in the absence of the Registrant under Rule 25.
9. The Committee noted the correspondence from the Registrant dated 26 October 2025 and an email to the committee secretary dated 5 November 2025 which stated that she would not be attending and was content for the hearing to go ahead in her absence.
10. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser in relation to Rule 25 and the case of Jones [2002] UKHL5.
11. The Committee decided to proceed in the absence of the Registrant for the following reasons:
 - The Committee has found good service of the Notice, therefore the Registrant is, or should be, aware of today's proceedings. The Committee had correspondence from the Registrant on 26 October 2025:

"Hello,

I confirm receipt of the bundle documents and I'm happy for everything to be used.

*I won't be attending the hearing, **PRIVATE***

Thank you"

In the light of this communication, the Committee found that the Registrant had chosen to voluntarily absent themselves from this hearing.

- There was no information to suggest an adjournment would result in the Registrant's attendance in future.
- There is a public interest in fairness to both parties and the expeditious disposal of cases.

Application to amend the particulars of allegation

12. The Committee heard an application from the Ms Hall, the case presenter under Rule 41 to amend the particulars from the word "exercise" in "customs and exercise" to "excise" as in "customs and excise"
13. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser that the Committee of its own volition may amend the particulars provided that no prejudice was caused and there was, in this case, no substantive difference to the allegation that the Registrant faced.
14. The Committee allowed the amendment in view of the nature of the amendment and lack of prejudice.

Application for the hearing to be held in Private

15. The Committee heard an application from Ms Hall, the case presenter on behalf of the Council and, in view of the absence of the Registrant, under Rule 39(3) to hold parts of the hearing in private.
16. The Registrant was not present.
17. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser that as a matter of course, hearings should be in public in accordance with the principle of open justice, however, where matters of a health and/or personal nature or where details referred to a third party and their personal matters, the Committee should consider the application on its merited basis.
18. The Committee decided to hold certain parts of the hearing in private as there will be reference to health matters for the registrant and a third party.

Registrant's response to Particulars of Allegation

19. The Registrant accepted that she was the person referred to in the conviction, although she denied committing the crime in her response to the GPhC questionnaire, but accepted that it was she who had been found guilty after a trial at Liverpool Crown Court on 7 March 2025. The Registrant also accepted that she had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment on 20 June 2025 at Manchester Crown Court. The Registrant accepted that she had been sentenced to 3 years and 9 months.

Background

The Registrant went on holiday with her then partner to Jamaica. The partner had arranged for the return to the UK, but in so doing had told the Registrant that they would leave their suitcases lightly filled and marked with a ribbon. Upon arrival in the UK, their suitcases were found to contain almost 22kg of cocaine of high purity

with a street value of approximately £594,000. Whilst her partner accepted the bulk of the responsibility, the jury considered that the Registrant had been a willing participant and found her guilty.

Decision on Facts

20. The Committee had sight of the memorandum of conviction and therefore found the facts proved in accordance with Rule 24(4).

Decision on Impairment

21. The Committee took account of the guidance given to the meaning of ‘fitness to practise’ in the Council’s publication *“Good decision-making”* (Revised March 2024).

Paragraph 2.12 reads:

“A pharmacy professional is ‘fit to practise’ when they have the skills, knowledge, character, behaviour and health needed to work as a pharmacist...safely and effectively. In practical terms, this means maintaining appropriate standards of competence, demonstrating good character, and also adhering to the principles of good practice set out in our various standards, guidance and advice.”

22. The Committee took into account the submissions made by Ms Hall, the Case Presenter and the representations made by the Registrant in correspondence.
23. Ms Hall submitted that the actions of the Registrant were so serious that the Registrant’s behaviour presented an actual or potential risk; had brought the profession of pharmacy into disrepute; had breached one of the fundamental principles of the profession under Rule 5 (2) (a-c). Additionally, Ms Hall submitted that the importation of nearly £600,000 of a Class A drug, cocaine, was of itself capable of harm to the public. Ms Hall stated that a member of the public would find the Registrant’s actions “deplorable”. Ms Hall stated that a current finding of impairment was necessary to uphold public faith in the profession. Ms Hall

confirmed that the Registrant was of previous good character, having had no adverse findings against her prior to the conviction.

24. The Registrant stated in her GPhC Listing questionnaire:

“whilst I was found guilty by a jury, I still maintain I was not aware of the situation I had been involved in, until I was stopped at Manchester Airport. However, I am fully aware of the severity of such a conviction and the impact that has on my profession, so I am willing to be removed from the register.”

25. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Advisor. In particular, the remarks of Mr Justice Cox in *CHRE v NMC* and *Grant EWHC 927 (Admin)* where he noted (at para 74): *“In determining whether a practitioner’s fitness to practice is impaired by reason of misconduct, the relevant panel should generally consider not only whether the practitioner continues to present a risk to members of the public in his or her current role, but also whether the need to uphold professional standards and public confidence in the profession would be undermined if a finding of impairment were not made in the particular circumstances.”*

The Legal Advisor also referred to *Cohen v General Medical Council [2008] EWHC 581 (Admin)* at [paragraph 65]: *“It must be highly relevant in determining if a doctor’s fitness to practice is impaired that first his or her conduct that led to the charge is easily remediable, second that it has been remedied and third that it is highly unlikely to be repeated”*

26. The Committee considered that the circumstances leading to the conviction related to the Registrant’s character and behaviour, and as such are very difficult to remediate. The Registrant had engaged in a course of conduct which she must have known was a serious criminal offence. As a pharmacy technician, the Registrant must have understood the wider public impact that her actions could have had leading to the distribution of a significant amount of a Class A drug amongst the public.

27. The Registrant's insight was extremely limited. Despite having been found guilty after a jury trial, she continued to deny the offence, however there was nothing to indicate there had been an appeal against her conviction or sentence. Whilst the Registrant accepted that her actions were so egregious that she should leave the profession, her correspondence does not address any understanding of the impact of her actions and her conviction on the public.

The Committee felt that the Registrant had not remediated by demonstrating regret or taking steps to prevent a repetition, for example through reflective practice. The Registrant had pointed out aspects of her personal circumstances, but these were to excuse her conduct.

28. It was appreciated that the Registrant had been of good character, but that good character of some 11 years had been forfeited by such a serious offence. The transcript of the sentencing hearing stated that the Registrant had tied ribbons to the suitcases and taken pictures and sent them in order that they could be identified, so that the cocaine could be placed in the suitcases. The Committee considered this decision to be a serious departure from the Registrant's expected professional judgement.

29. Bearing in mind the grave nature of the offence, the panel took into account the sentence of the court and the fact that the Registrant had been recently released on licence. The Committee considered that the importation of a Class A drug could have caused significant harm to the public. Any repetition would present a risk of causing harm and, therefore a finding of current impairment was appropriate.

The Committee decided that the wider public interest required a finding of impairment, which was necessary to protect the public, maintain public confidence and promote professional standards. The evidence presented was of a professional who had engaged in the importation of drugs to a street value of approximately £594,000 for a financial incentive and such conduct would be considered "deplorable" by any member of the public.

30. The Committee therefore determines that the Registrant's fitness to practise to be currently impaired on public protection and public interest grounds.

Decision on Sanction

31. Having found impairment, the Committee went on to consider the matter of sanction. The Committee's powers are set out in Article 54(2) of the Order.
32. The Committee had regard to the Council's '*Good decision making: Fitness to practise hearings and outcomes guidance*' to inform its decision.
33. The Committee took into account the submissions made by Ms Hall, the Case Presenter that the severity and significance of the conviction warranted removal.
34. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser to consider the available outcomes in ascending order from least restrictive, take no action, to most restrictive, removal from the Register, in order to identify the appropriate and proportionate outcome that meets the circumstances of the case. The purpose of the outcome is not to be punitive, though an outcome may in fact have a punitive effect. The purpose of the outcome is to meet the overarching objectives of regulation, namely the protection of the public, the maintenance of public confidence and to promote professional standards. The Committee is therefore entitled to give greater weight to the public interest over the Registrant's interests.
35. The Committee identified the aggravating factors, including:
- a. The nature of the misconduct which was importation of a significant amount of a Class A drug of high purity and high street value
 - b. The fact that this was a deliberate action by the Registrant and involved some degree of planning
 - c. That the level of harm and impact on others would have been substantial had the suitcases not been intercepted
 - d. The Registrant's lack of insight into the potential public harm

36. The Committee identified some mitigating features including:
- a. The fact that this was one incident in an otherwise unblemished career
 - b. The offence was one where she had a limited role, not initiating or organising the offence but participating at a later stage
 - c. **PRIVATE**
37. The Committee then considered each of the outcomes in turn. Bearing in mind the very serious criminal nature of the conviction, the lesser outcomes of no action, warning and conditions were not appropriate and would not serve the criteria of public protection and public interest. It would be impossible to devise any conditions which would prevent a repetition, particularly as the behaviour did not relate to her proficiency as a pharmacy technician.
38. The Committee next considered whether suspension would be a proportionate outcome. The Committee noted the Council's guidance which indicates that suspension may be appropriate where:
- "The Committee considers that a warning or conditions are insufficient to deal with any risk to patient safety or to protect the public, or would undermine public confidence. It may be required when necessary to highlight to the profession and to the public that the conduct of the registrant is unacceptable and unbecoming a member of the pharmacy profession. Also, when public confidence in the profession demands no lesser sanction."*
39. The Committee considered that, given the seriousness and nature of the criminal offence committed, character and behaviour issues arise. These issues and the Registrant's lack of insight into the potential public harm led the Committee to conclude that this could not be remedied by suspension.
40. Given the above conclusions, the Committee concluded that the only appropriate and proportionate outcome was of removal from the Register. The Committee determined that the conviction of the Registrant, together with the sentence and the

need for public protection and the public interest, meant that the conduct was fundamentally incompatible with being a registered professional.

41. The Committee therefore directs that the Registrar remove Leanne Richardson from the Register.

Interim Order

42. The decision for removal means that the existing Interim Order is formally revoked.

Decision on Interim Measure

43. The Committee's substantive decision will not take effect until 28 days after notice of this decision has been sent, or until any appeal has been finally disposed of and Ms Hall, the Case Presenter made an application for an interim measure. The Committee took account of the Council's guidance of March 2024.
44. The Committee determined that an interim order was necessary to protect the public and in the public interest. The Committee had ordered the Registrant be removed from the Register and it would therefore be perverse if she was able to practise during any appeal period. The Committee considered that an interim measure of conditions would not be appropriate for the reasons given previously, therefore the interim measure will be one of suspension. This takes effect immediately and covers the period during which the Registrant may appeal against the Committee's decisions and the period of any appeal proceedings that may then follow.
45. This concludes the determination.