

You have posted the vacancy, shared it locally and waited. Applications are thin, suitable candidates are thinner, and the rota still needs covering. If your pharmacy is facing recruitment difficulties, repeating the same advert on another job board may not solve the underlying problem.

Community pharmacies are working in a demanding environment. Pharmacy First has added opportunities to provide care for eligible patients in England, while day-to-day dispensing and other services continue. At the same time, many employers report pressure on staffing and difficulty filling roles. The exact picture varies by role, location and reporting period, so check current local vacancy and workforce data rather than relying on a single national headline.

When the usual recruitment route stops producing candidates, it is time to look at the job, the local labour market and your route into the workforce. This guide sets out practical steps, including how apprenticeships can become one of several alternative talent routes.

Why more advertising may not fix recruitment difficulties

Advertising helps people find a vacancy. It cannot make an unattractive role workable, create candidates who are not available locally or resolve a mismatch between your requirements and the skills on offer. In a tight labour market, employers may be competing for the same small group of experienced people.

Before paying to post the advert again, check where the process is breaking down. A small number of applications might point to a limited local candidate pool or unclear advert. Plenty of applications but few suitable people could mean the requirements are too restrictive. Candidates dropping out after an interview may be responding to pay, hours, workload or a slow hiring process.

What you notice What to check A practical response

Few applications	Pay, location, hours, job title and reach of the advert	Compare similar local vacancies and make the role and offer clearer
Applicants lack one required skill	Whether that skill is essential from day one	Separate must-haves from skills you can train
Candidates withdraw	Time to respond, interview process and expectations discussed	Shorten the process and give a realistic view of the work
New starters leave quickly	Induction, supervision, workload and rota fit	Review the first 90 days, not just the advert

Start with the work, not the job title

When a vacancy stays open, it is tempting to ask for a more experienced candidate. First, map the work that needs doing. Which tasks require a registered pharmacist or another specific qualification? Which tasks could a trained team member take on within their competence and under the right supervision? Which duties are administrative, repetitive or possible to reorganise?

This is not about shifting regulated work to someone who is not qualified. It is about protecting professional capacity and making sure every team member has clear responsibilities, appropriate training and suitable supervision. Pharmacy First can increase the range of patient-facing work in England, but it does not remove the need to meet service requirements or maintain safe staffing. Check the current service specification and local arrangements when planning roles.

Do a rota reality check

Write down the cover you need by hour and day, including breaks, planned leave and the busiest periods. Then compare it with the work actually arriving. A rota can look adequately staffed on paper but fail in practice if key people are routinely pulled away from their assigned work, breaks are missed or there is no cover for predictable peaks.

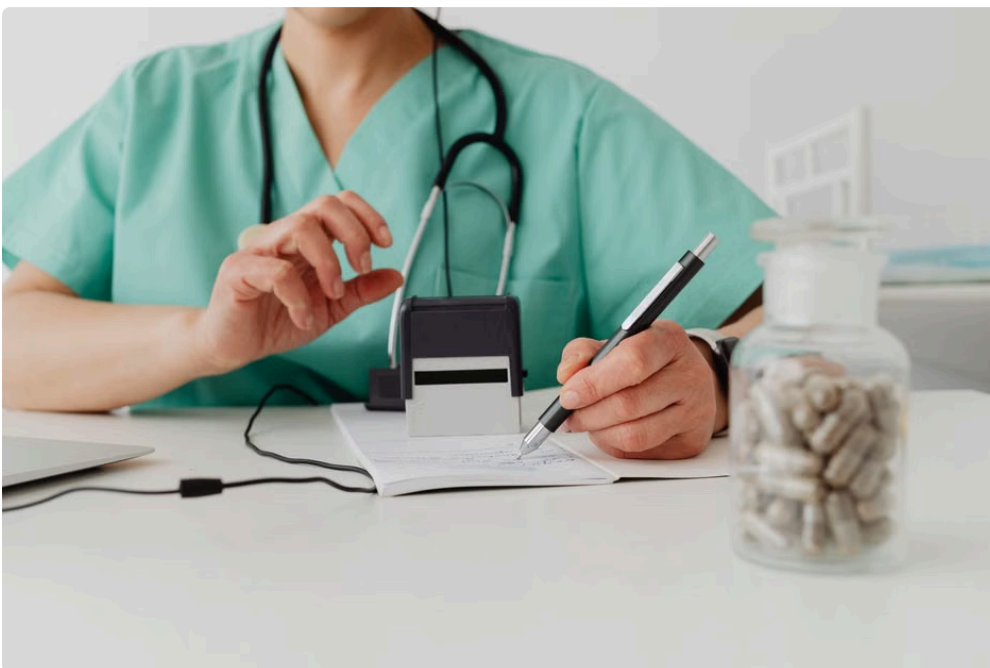
- Identify the hours and duties that regularly create pressure.
- Separate essential cover from work that could be rescheduled or streamlined.
- Check whether the advertised shift pattern matches the rota people will actually work.
- Record where one absence or vacancy causes the greatest disruption.

This gives you a better brief for recruitment—and may show that you need a different mix of roles, not simply another person with the same job title.

Rewrite the advert around the real opportunity

Many pharmacy adverts list a long set of requirements but say little about the day-to-day job. Candidates need to know what the role involves, what support they will receive and how the hours fit their lives. Replace vague promises such as “career progression” with a specific description of training, review points and possible next steps.

Be precise about:



- Pay range, contracted hours, shift pattern and weekend expectations.
- The main duties, including any patient-facing responsibilities.
- Which qualifications are essential and which you will support the employee to gain.
- Who will supervise and support the person during induction.
- How you will review progress and agree development goals.

Use requirements carefully. If you need someone to start with a particular qualification or registration, state that clearly. If you can train for a skill, consider whether insisting on previous experience unnecessarily narrows the candidate pool. Do not imply that a role is flexible if the rota cannot support flexibility.

Broaden your search with alternative talent routes

Recruitment advertising is one route, not the whole workforce plan. Depending on the role and local conditions, alternative talent routes might include returning workers, people moving from retail or customer service, local careers services, colleges, community organisations or internal progression. Each route needs a realistic onboarding plan. A change of background does not mean a person can immediately perform pharmacy duties without training.

Look at the skills the work requires. Reliability, communication, accuracy and calm customer service may transfer from other sectors. You can assess those qualities at interview, then provide role-specific training and supervision. Make sure applicants understand the working environment, including busy periods and the importance of following procedures.



Make internal development visible

Existing team members may want to take on new responsibilities or work towards a recognised qualification. Ask about those interests during one-to-ones, then check what training, time and supervision the pharmacy can support. Internal development will not fill every vacancy, and it must not leave another part of the rota short. But it can help retain staff and build skills that match the needs of your branch.

How apprenticeships can create a staffing pipeline

Apprenticeships offer a structured way to develop people while they work. They can help a pharmacy recruit someone with potential, build role-relevant skills over time and support progression for an existing employee. They are not a quick fix for an urgent rota gap, and they are not a substitute for qualified staff. An apprentice needs appropriate supervision, protected learning time and a safe, planned scope of work.

Start by identifying the role and the capability you need, then check which apprenticeship standard and training options fit. Course availability, eligibility, funding rules and employer contributions can change, so confirm current details with a training provider and check the latest government guidance before making a commitment.

For an overview of pharmacy apprenticeship training, visit Tend Training's pharmacy apprenticeship training category page. Use it as a starting point for a conversation about suitable programmes, entry requirements, delivery and the support your team will need. Confirm the details directly with the provider before planning a start date.

Plan the apprenticeship week by week

A useful apprenticeship plan connects learning to work without expecting the apprentice to replace an experienced team member. Before recruitment, agree who will supervise, when learning time will happen and how progress will be reviewed. Ask the provider what it expects from the employer, and make sure the rota reflects those commitments.

1. **Define the role.** List the duties the apprentice can learn and the tasks they must not perform unless trained, authorised and competent.
2. **Choose a suitable programme.** Check the standard, entry criteria, duration, learning delivery and any relevant funding conditions.
3. **Appoint a named supervisor.** Confirm who will provide day-to-day guidance and who will step in when that person is away.
4. **Protect learning time.** Put it in the weekly plan rather than relying on quiet moments that may never arrive.
5. **Review progress regularly.** Agree check-ins with the apprentice and provider, record skills gained and address problems early.
6. **Plan what happens next.** Discuss the role and development options after the apprenticeship, without promising a job or progression route you cannot guarantee.

This is how an apprenticeship becomes a staffing route rather than a slogan: you recruit against a defined need, support learning in a planned way and review capability over time. Results will take time, and the approach needs to fit the size and capacity of your pharmacy.

Make recruitment faster and clearer

Good candidates often consider several opportunities. A lengthy process can lose people even when the role is suitable. Decide who can approve the hire, what evidence you need and how quickly you can respond. A short, consistent process is usually more helpful than several rounds of interviews that test the same things.

- Acknowledge applications promptly and give candidates a clear timeline.
- Use a structured interview with the same core questions for each applicant.
- Explain the role honestly, including busy periods and the support available.
- Tell candidates when they can expect an outcome and follow through.
- Track basic measures, such as applications, interviews, offers accepted and reasons for withdrawal.

These figures help you diagnose the problem. If few people apply, review reach and the offer. If candidates reach interview but decline, ask what influenced their decision. If hires leave early, examine induction, workload and supervision. Use a defined period—for example, the last three months—when comparing results, and state how many thebusinessdesk.com vacancies or candidates the figures cover.

Take a 30-day approach

You do not need to overhaul every role at once. A focused review over the next month can show whether the issue is the advert, the offer, the hiring process or the shape of the work.

1. **Week 1:** Review the rota, duties and vacancy history. Identify the tasks that genuinely require the experience or qualification you have specified.

2. **Week 2:** Compare your pay, hours and expectations with relevant local vacancies. Rewrite the advert and remove requirements you can train for safely.
3. **Week 3:** Contact local training or careers partners and assess whether an apprenticeship or another entry route suits a specific role.
4. **Week 4:** Set up a simple recruitment and retention tracker. Decide what you will review each month and who owns the follow-up.

Build a workforce plan, not just another advert

When a pharmacy cannot find candidates, the answer may still include advertising—but advertising should sit alongside a clear view of the role, the rota and the local labour market. Pharmacy First has increased the service workload for many primary care teams in England, while workforce pressures make it harder for community pharmacies to rely on experienced candidates alone. Check current evidence for your area and avoid treating one national figure as a complete picture of your branch.

Review what must be done by qualified professionals, improve the clarity of your offer, widen your search responsibly and consider apprenticeships where you can provide proper supervision and learning time. These approaches take planning, but they give you more options than repeatedly reposting the same vacancy—and a better chance of building a team that can meet the work ahead.