

Community pharmacies have more to do than dispense prescriptions. In England, Pharmacy First has added a route for people to seek advice and treatment for certain common conditions directly from a pharmacy. That can mean more conversations at the counter, more coordination behind the scenes and more pressure on a team whose time is already in demand.

For pharmacy owners and managers, recruiting another experienced team member is thebusinessdesk.com not always straightforward. The local pool of applicants may be small, and other employers may be competing for the same people. An apprenticeship offers a different option: employ someone into an entry level pharmacy role, support them to learn the work, and build their capability over time.

This guide explains what the Level 2 pharmacy services assistant apprenticeship involves, what an apprentice may do, and what an employer needs to consider before offering a place. It also points to Tend Training's pharmacy apprenticeship training category as a place to explore pharmacy training options.

What is a Level 2 Pharmacy Services Assistant apprenticeship?

The Level 2 pharmacy services assistant apprenticeship is a work-based training route for people learning to support the safe and effective running of a pharmacy. It combines paid employment with structured learning and assessment against the relevant apprenticeship standard.

In plain terms, the apprentice learns while doing the job. They may help receive and process prescriptions, support stock management, communicate with customers and contribute to the day-to-day organisation of the pharmacy. I remember a project where wished they had known this beforehand.. They work under supervision and must follow the employer's procedures, professional requirements and boundaries for the role.

"Level 2" describes the level of the apprenticeship standard; it does not mean the apprentice can take on every pharmacy task independently. The employer remains responsible for safe staffing, supervision and deciding which duties the apprentice is competent to perform.

Apprenticeship standards, assessment arrangements and funding rules can change. Employers should check the current standard and apprenticeship guidance before agreeing a start date, duration or funding plan. The training provider can explain how those requirements apply to a particular learner and workplace.

What does a pharmacy services assistant do?

A pharmacy services assistant supports the pharmacy team with practical, customer-facing and administrative work. The precise task list depends on the pharmacy, the apprentice's progress and the level of supervision available.

Typical responsibilities may include:

- Welcoming customers and directing questions to the appropriate member of the team.
- Helping receive, assemble or hand out prescriptions in line with local procedures and supervision.
- Maintaining stock, including checking deliveries, dates and storage arrangements.
- Keeping work areas clean, organised and ready for use.
- Handling information carefully and following confidentiality and data-protection procedures.
- Supporting accurate record-keeping and routine administrative tasks.
- Recognising when a question or concern needs to be referred to a pharmacist or another qualified colleague.

The last point matters. An entry level pharmacy role involves learning where the boundaries sit, not just learning a list of tasks. A safe assistant knows when to pause, check a procedure or ask a colleague for help.

Why Pharmacy First makes capacity more important

Pharmacy First in England gives community pharmacies a role in providing advice and, where appropriate, treatment for a defined set of common conditions. It can help people access care closer to home, but it also adds work to the pharmacy day. A consultation takes staff time, and the team still needs to manage prescriptions, customer enquiries, deliveries and other services.

The effect is not identical in every pharmacy. It depends on factors such as local demand, opening hours, the number of trained staff, the pharmacy's service mix and how work is organised. A busy site may need to rethink who handles incoming queries, how the counter is covered during consultations and how routine tasks are shared.

An apprentice does not replace a pharmacist or provide an instant fix for a service-capacity problem. They do, however, offer a way to develop support capacity for appropriate tasks over time. Exactly.. With a clear training plan and consistent supervision, an apprentice can gradually contribute to the reliable running of the pharmacy while experienced staff focus on work that requires their expertise.

Are workforce numbers falling in community pharmacy?

Community pharmacy employers report workforce pressure, including difficulty recruiting and retaining staff in some areas. It is tempting to sum that up as "numbers are falling", but workforce figures need careful handling: totals can vary by date, geography, job role and the way a dataset defines the workforce. A fall in one category or area does not automatically mean every pharmacy has fewer staff.

For a local decision, the most useful denominator may be your own rota: how many shifts you need to cover, how often you use overtime or agency support, and how many vacancies remain open. National workforce data can help show the broader context, but it will not tell an owner exactly how many people are available to hire within commuting distance.

The practical issue is clear even without overclaiming a national trend: if vacancies stay open and experienced applicants are hard to find, a recruitment-only strategy can leave the same people carrying the workload week after week.

Why recruitment-only strategies can fail in a tight labour market

Advertising a vacancy remains important, but it cannot create experienced applicants where there are few available. Employers may also compete with other pharmacies, healthcare employers and local businesses for people with transferable customer-service skills.

Recruitment-only approaches can also overlook a useful group of potential employees: people who are new to pharmacy but interested in healthcare, customer service or practical work. They may not arrive with pharmacy experience, but they can learn if the role includes proper supervision, time to train and a realistic progression plan.

Ask yourself this: that is where the pharmacy apprenticeship route can help. Instead of waiting for a fully trained candidate to appear, an employer can recruit for aptitude and commitment, then support the person to develop the knowledge and skills the workplace needs.

How a pharmacy apprenticeship route creates a staffing pipeline

“Pipeline” should mean something practical, not a slogan. In a pharmacy, it means a repeatable way to bring people into the team, teach them the work and check that they are becoming more capable.

A workable approach might look like this:



1. **Identify a genuine role.** Set out the duties the pharmacy needs covered and the boundaries of the position. Do not design the job around tasks the apprentice cannot yet perform safely.
2. **Recruit for potential.** Look for reliability, communication skills, care with detail and willingness to learn. Previous pharmacy experience can help, but it is not the only indicator of suitability.
3. **Assign support.** Name a workplace contact who can answer questions, observe practice and make time for regular check-ins.
4. **Teach in stages.** Start with induction, safety, confidentiality and basic processes. Add responsibilities as the apprentice demonstrates competence and understands when to seek help.
5. **Review progress regularly.** Use the training plan and workplace feedback to spot gaps early. Adjust support when the pharmacy gets busy rather than assuming the apprentice will simply catch up later.
6. **Plan what comes next.** Discuss the apprentice’s role after the programme, the skills the business will still need and any further development that may be appropriate.

This takes effort from the employer. Apprentices are not cheap labour, and treating them that way is a poor plan for safe practice and retention. They are employees who need supervision and training. The return comes from building capability that fits the pharmacy’s work, not from expecting a beginner to perform like an experienced assistant on day one.

What should employers check before starting?

Before offering a Level 2 pharmacy services assistant apprenticeship, review the workload, support arrangements and training requirements. Ask the training provider to clarify the current programme structure, expected time commitment, assessment method and any funding or eligibility conditions that apply.

Question What to check Is there a real job? Confirm the apprentice will have meaningful duties, suitable hours and a role that fits the standard. Who will supervise? Name a colleague with the knowledge and time to guide the apprentice and check their work. Can the rota support learning? Allow time for training, feedback and any required

off-the-job learning, as well as routine pharmacy duties. Are responsibilities clear? Set out what the apprentice may do, what needs checking and when to refer to a pharmacist or another colleague. What does the provider require? Confirm current programme, assessment, funding and eligibility details directly with the provider. What happens after training? Consider the role, development opportunities and retention plan once the apprenticeship ends.

Who might suit this entry level pharmacy role?

The role may suit someone who wants to start a career in pharmacy and is comfortable balancing customer contact with careful, process-led work. Good candidates may be new to the sector, returning to work or looking to move from retail, hospitality or another service role.

It helps to be dependable, organised and willing to ask questions. The pharmacy can teach its systems and routines, but the apprentice needs to take feedback seriously and understand that accuracy and confidentiality matter.



How to explore training options

Employers and prospective apprentices can use Tend Training's pharmacy apprenticeship training category page to explore its pharmacy apprenticeship offering. Before committing, speak with the provider about the current Level 2 programme, workplace expectations and how training will fit around the pharmacy's operating hours.

For an employer, the key question is not simply, "Can we recruit an apprentice?" It is, "Can we provide a real role, regular supervision and enough time for this person to become competent?" If the answer is yes, an apprenticeship can turn recruitment from a one-off search into a deliberate way to grow capability within the team.

Key takeaways

- The Level 2 pharmacy services assistant apprenticeship prepares a learner to support the day-to-day work of a pharmacy under appropriate supervision.
- Pharmacy First adds activity for many teams, although its impact varies by pharmacy and local demand.
- Recruitment alone may not solve persistent vacancies in a tight local labour market.

- A pharmacy apprenticeship route can develop new staff, but it requires planned supervision, protected learning time and clear responsibilities.
- Check current programme, assessment and funding details with the training provider before setting expectations.