



Boots' hours reduction FAQ

Last updated 15 February 2022

The FAQ may be updated as the overall situation evolves, so if reviewing a downloaded or printed copy of the FAQ, please first check this page on the PDA website to ensure it is the most up to date version.

Section A – Background

1. What is happening?

Boots have decided to further reduce their high street presence. Having recently closed hundreds of pharmacies, the company is now introducing reductions in the opening hours in some pharmacies.

- Some Boots stores are having the pharmacy removed to turn that store in a retail shop.
- Many pharmacies are having their opening hours reduced.
- Some stores have had their registration amended so that the retail sales space can remain open when the pharmacy is closed

2. Who is making these decisions?

Boots' management are making these decisions.

3. Why are they making these decisions?

It is for Boots to explain the rationale to those affected.

4. What does this mean for pharmacists?

Boots' management want to change pharmacists working hours to match the new pharmacy opening hours. To do that could mean pharmacists asked to change their working patterns and/or location of work. (See “*Section F - Consultation process and risk of redundancy*” below). If that can't be agreed, it could result in redundancies.

5. How are the PDA involved?

PDA Union are the recognised independent trade union representing store and relief pharmacists at Boots, which means the company is required to consult or negotiate with the PDA on some types of proposed changes.

6. Have the PDA agreed to these changes?

No. The union have not made any agreements about either the decision or the consequences of the reduction in opening hours.

7. What about non-pharmacist staff?

While the PDA is concerned about what happens to other staff, we are the trade union exclusively for pharmacists. We recommend that other staff are encouraged to join an appropriate trade union for them, which is most likely the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (Usdaw). [Click here for information about how to join Usdaw](#)

Section B – Initial PDA response

8. What have the PDA done about this?

The PDA have:

- Listened to members.
- Represented members at consultation meetings.
- Taken issues to management.
- Issued guidance and communications to members.
- [Publicly asked the company to waive any restriction on employees working for other companies, so that pharmacists can work for another employer if cuts to hours are implemented, or they leave Boots](#)
- Formally reminded the company of their need to ensure the process is not discriminatory.
- Told the company they need to improve communications directly with employees (i.e. not to rely exclusively on a management cascade).
- [Told the company they needed to take a step back and review what is happening.](#)
- Hosted an online meeting for members to share their experiences and concerns.

Section C - Current position (since 10th February 2022)

9. What is the position as of 10th February?

The PDA gave clear feedback to senior management about various concerns about how the implementation of their decision was going. Following the PDA raising concerns, there has been a pause to this process for pharmacists.

10. Does this mean nothing is changing?

The changes to store opening hours from 27th February are going ahead but management have paused consultation processes about changes to individual's working patterns.

11. What if I already agreed to change my working hours before the process was paused?

We appreciate some pharmacists may have “agreed” to changes without being fully informed or have felt under pressure from their manager to do so.

As the entire consultation process has been paused, the PDA believe all permanent changes agreed to date as part of this process should be rescinded pending agreement on how the entire process will be taken forward.

Therefore, if you have already reached an agreement under this process, and in order to protect your position, we recommend that you should write to your line manager and state the following:

“Following the recent company announcement to pause consultations on working patterns, I reserve my right to review my current position (having obtained advice if appropriate) following any announcements or agreements made once the pause has been lifted so that I am not prejudiced for having taken a decision before the full process had been completed.”

12. How do I still work my hours if the store is not open for the same hours?

Your manager is responsible for ensuring appropriate work for your role is available during your contracted hours.

Any work undertaken must comply with lone-working policy and other relevant safe practices, including compliance with company SOPs.

We know a common concern of pharmacists is not having enough time to keep on top of company communications, reading SOPs and training, which is work for which you should receive payment. PDA advice is that where pharmacists can gain safe access to their place of work, they attend the store and undertake those aspects of work appropriate for when the pharmacy is closed, to fulfil their contracted hours.

For example, if your working hours are 8:00am – 5:30pm, but the pharmacy will now only be open from 9:00am – 5:30pm but other staff will be working in store, then pharmacists can spend 8:30am – 9:00am undertaking training, catching up on Boots live, reading SOPs or undertaking other appropriate tasks for their role.

13. I work on a Sunday and in future the store will not open at all that day?

Ask your line manager to confirm how you will continue to work your Sunday contracted hours during this pause to the process. That may include working at another store on a Sunday, but only if it is reasonable to do so.

14. What if I am a Relief Pharmacist?

It may be that your working weeks already vary in length with some longer days and some shorter days depending on the stores worked in, with the hours balancing out over a few weeks.

However, if many, most or even all of the stores you cover are now on reduced opening hours you may not be able to work enough hours to meet your contracted hours over the coming weeks without having to work additional days over and above your normal pattern of work.

We advise that like your store-based colleagues you undertake training and other necessary activities at stores during the hours they used to be open, in order to make up your normal pattern of working hours.

15. What if patients come to the pharmacy when it is closed?

This is another issue your manager needs to discuss with you. The company has decided to reduce the pharmacy opening hours for the public and therefore complaints about lack of patient access should be directed to the store manager.

If working in the store when the pharmacy is closed, pharmacists will need to make a professional decision on whether to dispense prescriptions, if SOPs can be complied with.

There is the potential for public confusion if the pharmacist routinely provides a pharmacy service outside of the revised opening hours.

16. What happens next?

The PDA is waiting for the company to confirm how it plans to proceed.

17. What should I do in the meantime?

Ensure you have:

- An up-to-date copy of your contract.
- A record of your regular working pattern and locations.
- Notes of any consultations that have happened to date.
- A copy of any recent scoring of your performance.
- Raised any concerns you have with your line manager.
- A written record of any proposals made.

and

- Ask pharmacist colleagues who are not yet members to join the PDA. The more members the PDA has, the more united the workforce, the stronger our position.
- Look out for more communications from the PDA, read them, respond if required and share them with pharmacist colleagues.

18. What if I have a specific concern?

In the first instance [speak to your local PDA Union network representative](#)

Section D - Further PDA action

19. What will the PDA do to support members?

We will continue to listen and talk to members and raise your issues with management.

We will support individuals with the specific issues they face and hold member meetings as appropriate.

20. Will you reach any agreements with the company?

If necessary, we may seek to negotiate compensation or protections for contractual changes.

21. Will you issue any press releases?

We prefer to resolve matters early, locally and without dispute where possible. We want companies that employ our members to have a good reputation and retain the

trust of patients. However, we're an independent trade union and free of control of any employer, so if necessary, we will raise issues through the appropriate channels.

22. What if no agreed way forward can be found?

We will help members to understand and exercise their rights at work. That could include supporting member grievances and bringing claims in the Employment Tribunal Service where the company has acted unlawfully.

We will consider the options for PDA members to take collective action if necessary and challenge any proposals to force change onto individuals, such as [fire and rehire tactics](#).

Section E – Equality

23. What is happening to ensure this large-scale process is not discriminatory?

The PDA has formally asked the company to monitor the diversity impact of any changes, so that no group is treated any worse due to a protected characteristic.

As well as ensuring everyone is treated fairly, we have asked the company to monitor the profile of the pharmacist population at each major stage of the process, checking if any group have been disproportionately impacted.

The company have not yet started capturing ethnicity and other protected characteristics of employees, however they do record age, hours of work and gender on every employee record, so can monitor certain protected characteristics.

Section F - Consultation process and risk of redundancy

24. What my manager has said/done doesn't seem to be the same as what other pharmacists have been told. How do I know what is correct?

Even the clearest of company communications can be at risk of interpretation by local managers if communications rely exclusively upon a management cascade.

The PDA will communicate directly with members, and we have encouraged the company to share their communications directly with pharmacists, in addition to briefing line managers.

25. If I don't agree to reduce or change my hours and/or location, am I redundant?

Each situation depends on its own facts, and you should always seek specific advice about your circumstances. If your employer no longer has a need for your "job" in the location(s) you work, then that could mean your existing job no longer exists.

26. What is “my job”?

Your specific job is defined not just by what is in your employment contract but can also include the custom and practice of the role you perform.

For example, on paper it may say you are a Relief Pharmacist working in different stores and at different hours, but in practice you may have been working the same pattern in the same location(s) for a significant amount of time.

27. If my job is redundant, do I get to leave with a redundancy payment?

Employers are required to avoid redundancies if they can, which means offering “suitable alternative” roles if they exist to those at risk of redundancy. That could mean the same job in another location or a variation of the previous job, such as amended working patterns.

The role does need to be a “suitable alternative” though and advice should be sought from the PDA if this is not the case.

28. How do I know if an alternative job is suitable?

Always seek specific advice based on your circumstances.

The suitability of a job can be different for each individual. For example, you may work in a certain location(s) due to how far away your home is or can only work certain hours due to caring responsibilities.

Some alternatives may be suitable for one individual, but unsuitable for another.

[Employment legislation gives a 4 week trial period to employees to determine if an alternative role is suitable](#) and you should seek advice before commencing a trial period.

29. What do I do if I think I might be redundant?

Seek individual advice from the PDA Service Centre.

30. Should Relief Pharmacists have been consulted originally?

While each situation depends on its own facts, we think in general [the company were wrong to approach this exercise in a way that would first resolve the hours of store-based pharmacists and only then consider relief pharmacists](#).

When any consultation restarts, we want to see all roles treated fairly.

31. What about the scoring of pharmacists?

Just before the company paused their processes, we raised serious concerns with the company that some managers were downgrading pharmacists using examples where their professional judgement has been exercised in the interests of patient safety, in accordance with GPhC/PSNI professional standards, or those issued by the Pharmacy Office.

If this is your experience, we encourage you to get copies of minutes and scoring from any such meetings, to submit your challenges and to ask that any future alternative scoring process is undertaken by a different manager.

32. What should I agree about breaks in future?

The PDA issued [guidance on taking proper rest breaks](#) in 2021 and you should read this before considering any new working patterns.

33. Should I stay signed in when I'm not being paid?

No, and the relevant SOPs should be followed for operating the pharmacy when there is no Responsible Pharmacist signed in.

Being signed as the RP is working time and so pharmacists should be getting paid. If the company aren't paying you, sign out.

You should also not participate in the company's Advance Declaration process, for the same reason.

Section G - Impact on patients, patient safety and the store workload

34. What about the impact on workload of the store?

The PDA are already working to ensure pharmacists have achievable workloads, and while less opening hours may mean fewer customers or patients come to the pharmacy, the overall weekly workload of tasks and activity cannot be compressed into less hours.

Raise in writing, with your manager any concerns if the number of staff at any time and staff hours overall are not enough to safely operate the pharmacy/store.

35. I'm concerned for patient safety after these cuts, what should I do?

It is for the Responsible Pharmacist to judge if a pharmacy is safe to open and what activities can safely be undertaken given the resources available.

Patient safety must always come first, and we know that if a patient safety incident occurs the employer will closely examine compliance with company SOPs and it takes a view that responsibility sits with the individual pharmacist. Pharmacists should not feel pressured to compromise regulatory or company standards and must do what is safe in their professional judgment.

If you are concerned speak to your PDA Union network representative in the first instance.

Section H - Your wellbeing

36. I am concerned about the financial implications of a cut to my hours?

There are several organisations that can support pharmacists with financial difficulties.

Pharmacist Support is an independent, trusted charity in Great Britain, providing a wide variety of support services to pharmacists, trainee pharmacists and their families. <https://pharmacistsupport.org/i-need-help-managing-my/finances/>

The Pharmacist Advice and Support Service, known as PASS, helps pharmacists, and pre-registration trainees in Northern Ireland during times of need. <https://www.pfni.org.uk/pass/who-we-are/>

The Boots Benevolent Fund is a registered charity that can offer support to eligible current and former colleagues in the UK, at times of financial hardship. <https://www.boots-uk.com/corporate-social-responsibility/what-we-do/healthy-inclusive-workplace/boots-benevolent-fund/>

37. This change is causing me stress at work, can this be addressed?

Employers have a legal duty to protect employees from stress at work by doing a risk assessment and acting on it.

If you are feeling stressed by this situation, send an email to your manager requesting a stress assessment. They must undertake an assessment and agree any action required to reduce your stress.

Speak to your local PDA rep who is also your PDA Health & Safety rep as they can advise you on the risk assessment process.

38. I am concerned about my mental health and wellbeing due to these changes, what can I do?

Boots provide a service called **Boots LifeWorks** to employees – Accessible via Boots intranet or www.lifeworks.com , Tel: 0800 077 8316

[Pharmacist Support](#) is an independent, trusted charity in Great Britain, providing a wide variety of support services to pharmacists, trainee pharmacists and their families.

The [Pharmacist Advice and Support Service](#), known as PASS, helps pharmacists, and pre-registration trainees in Northern Ireland during times of need.

There are also other sources of support available, for example through your GP.

39. I'm not yet a member of the PDA, how do I join?

Pharmacists and Trainee Pharmacists can join the PDA via our website. [Click here to join the PDA](#)

40. I have another question not covered above, who should I speak to?

In the first instance [speak to your local PDA Union network representative](#)