

## Real-life story - Andrea Johnson

Andrea began her career in the dental team as a trainee dental technician and is now an orthodontic & maxillofacial laboratory manager. Read her story.?



Andrea Johnson Orthodontic & maxillofacial laboratory manager

**Employer or university** Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

**Salary range** Unknown

### How I got into the role

I needed a career change, but it had to be one where I could train whilst working. I looked in the local papers and saw an advertisement for a trainee dental technician in a small laboratory just minutes from my home. I was fascinated by what I saw in that lab and knew this was the new challenge I had been looking for.

I studied a BTEC national diploma in dental technology and passed with merit. Then I went on to get a corresponding foundation degree and finally topped up with a BSc (Hons), which I passed with first class honours.

Being a mature student, I thought it would be so much more difficult for me, but it wasn't. It's surprising how easily you slip into it when you have a real interest and drive for what you are studying.

### What I do

There's no typical day in a dental laboratory. Every patient is unique so there is no 'one size fits all'. Every appliance is made bespoke for that patient.

You can try and plan your day but you have to be flexible. You never know what work will come through

the door: a new appliance, a replacement one as the patient's dog has eaten the previous one (!) or a necessary emergency appliance because a patient has had an accident and requires something to help hold everything in place while they heal.

## **The best bits and challenges**

Working with dental technology has led me to do things I never dreamed I would be doing. I work full-time in the hospital as a highly specialised technician and laboratory manager and I also teach dental technology at Nottingham College one afternoon per week. I am the chair of our professional association the Orthodontic Technicians Association (OTA) and also the chair of the dental charity Den-Tech. I have also been a STEM ambassador and a council member of the Dental Technologists Association.

These roles take me all over the world, speaking at conferences and events, providing dentures to the poorest communities, and attending meetings with regulators and governing bodies. My days are never boring.

## **Life outside work**

The nature of my job means that I must sit for prolonged periods of time carrying out fine detailed work, so it is important to keep active when I can. I walk my dogs every day. I also kickbox which is a great way to relieve stress and have recently tried out yoga which is good for relaxation techniques. I enjoy listening to music and reading too.

Part of my work with my charity Den-Tech is making dentures for homeless patients. They cry with relief when they have their dentures fitted. I got those skills from dental technology careers, and I couldn't be prouder of that. My life is full on and hectic, but it is very rewarding.

## **Career plans and top tips for others**

There are various areas within dental technology so you need to find an area to concentrate on that fits your skill set best. When training you will start out learning all the disciplines. This is very important as you need to understand about all the materials and techniques, the strengths and weaknesses of all the appliance types so that when you choose your preferred area, you know how your work will impact others.

I love my job and going forward, I would like to perhaps extend my skills by training in clinical dental technology but who knows? I am a natural manager and organiser too, so there are many options open to me. I will have to see where life takes me, but, no matter what, I know it will be interesting.

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