

Oral and maxillofacial surgery

Consultants in oral and maxillofacial surgery (OMFS) diagnose and treat patients with diseases affecting the mouth, jaws, face and neck.

You'll work with patients of all ages in a rewarding field where treatment to someone's face can make a huge difference to their quality of life.

Surgery patient with staff

Life as an oral and maxillofacial surgeon

You will treat children who are born with or develop deformities of their skull or face including cleft lip/palate and young adults who need surgery after an injury or accident. Your older patients could have oral cancer or skin tumours of the face and head.

You'll also deal with the non-surgical management of conditions such as facial pain, disease and infections. Your work will be a mixture of surgery and outpatient clinics and you'll work alongside other medical and dental specialists.

Your surgery could vary from simple cases like removing a wisdom tooth through to treating skin cancer in a clinic or complex facial reconstruction which can take many hours. Major surgery in OMFS is exciting, and often collaborative, working alongside colleagues such as neurosurgeons and ENT surgeons.

You'll use the latest techniques including scans to produce 3D models to help you plan surgery and navigate the complex structures of the face and skull. You'll also use micro-surgical techniques to transfer tissue from one part of the body to another. For example, face transplantation combines facial surgery and anatomy with micro-surgical skills.

Omar Sheikh

Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery trainee

One minute I could be treating a patient a few days old and the next an elderly patient.

[Read Omar's story](#) ^[1]

How much can I earn?

You'll first earn a salary when you start your [foundation training](#) ^[2] after medical school. Find out details of current salary ranges for foundation and specialty training, [SAS doctors](#) ^[3] and consultants on the ['Pay for doctors'](#) ^[4] page.

How about the benefits?

- make a difference
- flexible and part-time working
- high income early in your career
- work anywhere in the world
- excellent pension scheme
- good holiday entitlement
- NHS discounts in shops and restaurants

Must-have skills

- excellent communication skills to manage a wide range of relationships with colleagues, and patients and their families
- emotional resilience, a calm temperament and the ability to work well under pressure
- teamwork and the capacity to lead multidisciplinary teams
- problem-solving and diagnostic skills
- outstanding organisational ability and effective decision-making skills
- first-class time and resource management for the benefit of patients
- a high degree of manual dexterity
- superb hand-eye co-ordination, excellent vision, and visuospatial awareness
- physical stamina to cope with the demands of surgery

Entry requirements

Your first step is medical or dental school. Typically, you'll need excellent GCSEs and three A or A* passes at A level including chemistry for a five-year undergraduate degree in medicine. Many medical schools also ask for biology and others may require maths or physics.

If you already have a degree, you could study for a four-year postgraduate degree in medicine.

You'll need to pass an interview and admissions test. You'll be asked to show how you demonstrate the NHS values such as compassion and respect.

Some medical schools look to recruit a mix of students from different backgrounds and geographical areas, so your educational and economic background and family circumstances could be considered as part of your application.

What are my chances of starting a career in OMFS?

There are 383 oral and maxillofacial surgeons working in the NHS in England. In 2020 there were 32 applications for 10 specialty training places.

How to become an OMF surgeon

You must be qualified in medicine and dentistry – the training is long.

Most people - around 75% - train as a dentist ^[5] first and then train as doctor. But you can do the degrees in either order and there are pros and cons to each approach. If coming from a dentistry background, your specialty training will take 13 years after your dental degree. If coming from a medical background, your specialty training will take 11 years after your medical degree. See the [British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons \(BAOMS\)](#) ^[6] for more information on possible pathways.

You will need to fund your second degree. There are a small number of BAOMS and NHS bursaries available. Find out more about [financial support for medical and dental students](#) ^[7].

You will be paid during your [specialty training](#) ^[8].

You may be able to train part time, for example for health reasons or if you have family or caring responsibilities.

Where a career as an OMF surgeon can take you

You could:

- specialise or conduct research in areas such as head and neck cancer, cleft lip and palate surgery, trauma and aesthetic facial surgery
- teach medical students or postgraduate students in training
- get involved in research at universities, the NHS or private sector

• Live vacancies

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• Further information

These organisations have further information about being an oral and maxillofacial surgeon, particularly as your career progresses. Take a look.

[British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons](#) [9]

[Joint Committee on Intercollegiate Examinations](#) [10]

[Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow](#) [11]

[Royal College of Surgeons](#) [12]

[Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh](#) [13]

And hear from people already working as an OMF surgeon.

[Maxillofacial surgery \(BMJ\)](#) [14]

[How to become an oral and maxillofacial surgeon \(BMJ\)](#) [15]

Other roles that may interest you

- [Plastic surgery](#) [16]
- [Neurologist](#) [17]
- [Emergency medicine](#) [18]
- [Otorhinolaryngology \(ear, nose and throat \(ENT\) surgery\)](#) [19]

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