

# Studying for a career in the dental team

This page provides an overview of the things to consider if you are thinking about a career in the dental team, what you can expect during training and your next steps after qualifying.

The dental team includes:

- [dentists](#) <sup>[1]</sup>
- [dental therapists](#) <sup>[2]</sup> and [dental hygienists](#) <sup>[3]</sup>
- [dental technicians](#) <sup>[4]</sup> (also known as dental technologists)
- [dental nurses](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

dentist looking at x-ray

## Applying to become part of the dental team

All members of the dental team have to take a course approved by the General Dental Council (GDC). You can search for GDC-approved courses using our [course finder](#) <sup>[6]</sup> or by looking at the programmes and qualifications listed on the [GDC website](#) <sup>[7]</sup>. The course you take depends on your role within the dental team.

### Dentist

You'll need to take a GDC-approved dentistry degree. Entry requirements vary because each university dental school sets its own criteria. You need at least three A-levels at high grades or equivalent qualifications at level 3. Chemistry and biology are usually required subjects. You also need supporting GCSEs. Contact universities directly to find out whether qualifications equivalent to A-levels or GCSEs are acceptable. If you don't have the necessary science qualifications at level 3, you may be able to take a pre-dental year.

Find out exactly what is required for your chosen courses and get organised as soon as possible.

Most courses expect you to sit the [University Clinical Aptitude Test](#) <sup>[8]</sup> (UCAT). There is stiff competition for places.

If you decide to train as a dentist, as well as meeting academic entry requirements, you'll need a willingness to learn about human anatomy and oral disease. All members of the dental team are now required to learn this to an extent. However, a dentist's knowledge is required to be especially thorough.

Throughout your career, scientific knowledge will need to be updated as methods and theories of disease change.

### **Financial support while studying at university**

[Find out about financial support while studying dentistry at university](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

### **Dental therapist/dental hygienist**

You'll need to take a GDC-approved diploma or degree programme. Most courses lead to a combined dental hygienist and dental therapist qualification. You generally need two A levels or equivalent for a diploma course and three A levels for a degree programme, including at least one science subject. Individual universities set their own entry criteria, so find out exactly what qualifications you need and whether GCSE- and A level- equivalent qualifications are acceptable.

### **Financial support while studying at university**

[Find out about financial support while studying dental hygiene or dental therapy at university](#) <sup>[10]</sup>

### **Dental technicians**

You'll take either a GDC-approved degree or foundation degree course. Entry requirements are as above for dental therapists and hygienists. You can also qualify as a dental technician without going to university by taking a BTEC level 3 qualification in dental technology.

### **Dental nurses**

Dental nurses don't need to have a higher education qualification (although some are available at this level). Most gain GDC-approved qualifications while in employment. Some dental nurses go on to train as dental therapists or hygienists.

- **Your application**

Applications for full-time higher education courses are made through UCAS. <sup>[11]</sup> For part-time courses, contact individual universities to find out their application procedures. Many universities will ask you to attend an interview.

Some university dental schools expect you to have had some experience <sup>[12]</sup> in a dental practice or another dental setting, especially for dentistry courses. Even if this is not the case, you will need to show that you have found out about your chosen dental team role and understand what it involves. Work experience placements can be difficult to find, so alternatives would be to shadow a member of the dental team or talk to a member of the dental team about their career. Experience in any healthcare setting may be acceptable for some courses, but if you can gain it in a dental setting, so much the better. Find out exactly what is required for your chosen courses and get organised as soon as possible.

You can find course providers on our course finder <sup>[6]</sup>. More detailed information about specific courses can be found in university prospectuses and on their websites.

## • **Recruiting for values**

If you're applying for a university programme leading to a role providing NHS healthcare, you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values would apply in your everyday work.

Find out more about NHS values <sup>[13]</sup>.

## • **Training for the dental team**

### **Dentistry**

Standard dentistry degree courses last for five years, although it's possible for certain science graduates to take a four-year accelerated course <sup>[14]</sup>.

If you don't have science A-levels or equivalent qualifications at level 3, you could consider a degree course with an additional 'pre-dental' year, making the course six years' long in total.

### **Dental care professionals**

Full-time degree courses leading to registration as a [dental therapist](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, [dental hygienist](#) <sup>[3]</sup> or [dental technician](#) <sup>[4]</sup> last for three or four years. Full-time foundation degree and diploma courses last for around two years. Part-time courses are available for those in relevant employment.

### **Information relevant to all dental-related courses**

All [GDC](#) <sup>[15]</sup>-approved dental courses combine academic study with practical experience in dental settings.

Although approved courses must meet the GDC's standards, programmes vary in their content, the way they are structured, and how they are taught and assessed. The facilities available and amount of support and supervision may also differ from course to course. Find out more by looking at university websites and prospectuses, attending university open days and contacting admissions staff.

### **Support**

See our [information about the support available](#) <sup>[16]</sup> while on your course.

## **• What happens after your training?**

After you have gained a GDC-approved qualification, in order to practise you must [register with the GDC](#) <sup>[17]</sup>. Dentists must follow their degree with two years' postgraduate dental education. You will spend at least one year in [primary care](#) <sup>[18]</sup>, providing general dental services. The other year can involve specialist training in hospital dental services.

Job vacancies for qualified dental team members are advertised on the [NHS Jobs website](#) <sup>[19]</sup>. If you become a member of a professional body such as the British Society of Dental Therapists, you may also find jobs advertised in their journals or on their websites.

General information on looking for work can be found in the [Career planning](#) <sup>[20]</sup> section and under [Looking for a job](#) <sup>[21]</sup>.

As a dental team member, there are opportunities to work in a range of settings, including in the community dental service, general practice and hospitals, and you can progress from one grade or band to another.

You'll need some experience in a more generalist role, but you may be able to specialise in an area that interests you. For example, dentists can specialise in paediatric (children's) dentistry or restorative dentistry. Qualified and experienced dental technicians can undertake additional training to become clinical dental technicians. Specialising may involve taking further qualifications.

To remain registered with the GDC <sup>[15]</sup> you have to maintain its set standards for your profession. This includes taking part in continuing professional development <sup>[22]</sup> (CPD).

The concept of lifelong learning is especially important in the dental team.

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