DENTISPARK

The Passport

Your route into dentistry,
Year 7 to Year 13

Free. No account needed.
dentispark.com

How to use this

One page per school year, from Year 7 to Year 13. Find your year, do the things on it, tick them off. That is the whole idea.

You do not need to have decided anything. Most of what follows is about keeping the option open rather than committing to it — and about finding out, early, which routes apply to you.

Spark — Years 7 to 9

Working out what the job actually is, and keeping your science options open.

Build — Years 10 to 11

Choosing subjects, and finding out whether you qualify for a contextual offer.

Launch — Years 12 to 13

Work experience, the admissions test, and the application itself.

Every figure in this booklet is sourced on page 17. Grades, dates and salaries change every year, so check anything you are about to rely on.

Dentistry is a team

Four jobs, four different training routes, four different lengths and costs. Ruling out one does not rule out the others.

Dentist

FIVE-YEAR DEGREE

Diagnoses, plans and carries out treatment, and is legally responsible for a patient's care.

Dental therapist

TWO TO THREE-YEAR DEGREE

Does much of what a dentist does for children and for straightforward adult work.

Dental hygienist

TWO TO THREE-YEAR DEGREE

Works with patients on gum health and prevention. A lot of teaching and persuading.

Dental nurse

USUALLY AN APPRENTICESHIP

Runs the room, supports treatment, and keeps nervous patients calm.

Also registered with the GDC

Dental technicians, clinical dental technicians and orthodontic therapists. Different routes again, and rarely mentioned at school.

YEARS 7 TO 9

Spark

Nobody decides on a career at eleven. These three years are about finding out what the job actually is, and making sure you do not close the door by accident.

SPARK PATHWAY

Year 7

Nothing to decide. Everything to stay curious about.

- [ ] Notice what people who work in healthcare actually do all day — not what television says they do.
- [ ] Take science seriously enough to keep your options open. You do not need to be top of the set.
- [ ] Start something that uses your hands: an instrument, model-making, baking, sewing.
- [ ] Practise talking to adults you do not know well. It is the most underrated skill in this job.

Worth knowing

A very large part of dental work is persuading a nervous person to let you help them. If you are good with people, that is a dental skill — not a consolation prize for not being good at science.

SPARK PATHWAY

Year 8

Widen what you think is possible.

- [ ] Find out what the four dental jobs on page 3 involve, and which one sounds most like you.
- [ ] Join something that is not school work — a club, a team, volunteering. It counts later.
- [ ] Ask one adult you know about their job: what they like, and what they would warn you about.
- [ ] Keep going with science. Chemistry and Biology matter most later.

Worth knowing

Dental nursing is usually an apprenticeship, which means you earn while you train. People move from nursing into therapy, and into dentistry, later in their careers. It is a starting point, not a lesser option.

SPARK PATHWAY

Year 9

The first choice that actually matters.

- [ ] Choose your GCSEs. You want Biology and Chemistry — either as separate sciences or inside Combined Science.
- [ ] Take Maths and English seriously. Dental schools set minimum GCSE requirements and check English more often than students expect.
- [ ] Start a list of everything you do outside lessons. Jobs, clubs, caring, coaching. Keep adding to it.
- [ ] If your school offers a careers appointment, take one.

You may have been told otherwise

You do not need triple science. Combined Science is accepted by most dental schools. Check the requirements of two specific schools rather than believing whoever told you.

YEARS 10 TO 11

Build

This is where the decisions start to bite. Subject choices made here decide which doors are still open at eighteen — and this is the right moment to find out whether a contextual offer applies to you.

BUILD PATHWAY

Year 10

Find out what applies to you, before it matters.

- [ ] Ask your careers lead whether you qualify for a contextual offer. This is the single most valuable thing on this page.
- [ ] Look up two dental schools' actual entry requirements. Their own admissions pages, not a league table.
- [ ] Get a Saturday job or regular volunteering if you can. Working with people is the experience that counts.
- [ ] Keep adding to your list of what you do.

Why the first one matters

Contextual offers are decided by your circumstances — your school, household income, free school meals, time spent in care — not by your grades. At Leeds and Newcastle they drop the offer by two grades. Students almost never think to ask.

BUILD PATHWAY

Year 11

Choose your A-levels with the requirements in front of you.

- [ ] Chemistry and Biology at A-level. Almost every dental school requires both — dropping either closes most doors.
- [ ] Choose a third subject, and check specific schools' rules. Most are relaxed; a few are not.
- [ ] If your grades are not where you want them, look up gateway and foundation year routes now.
- [ ] Ask about BTEC, T-level and Access routes if that is the path you are on — several schools accept them.

The number nobody softens

The standard offer is AAA at most dental schools, and A*AA at two of them. That is demanding, and it is not the only route in — see page 14. But you should hear the real number from us rather than find it out at eighteen.

YEARS 12 TO 13

Launch

Two years, and most of it happens earlier than people expect. Work experience is arranged at the start of Year 12, the admissions test is sat the summer before you apply, and dentistry's application deadline is months ahead of most subjects.

LAUNCH PATHWAY

Year 12

Almost everything here has to be started early.

- [ ] Ask about work experience in September, not July. Waiting lists run for months.
- [ ] Register for the UCAT in May, book in June, and sit it over the summer.
- [ ] If the UCAT fee is a problem, apply for the bursary. Adjustments are available too.
- [ ] Draft your personal statement over the summer, not in October.
- [ ] Keep going with the list of what you do. This is when it starts earning its keep.

If you cannot get a dental placement

Many dental schools say outright that they do not expect one and will not disadvantage you. A Saturday job, a care home, coaching, tutoring — anything that shows you can work with people patiently — is what they are actually looking for.

LAUNCH PATHWAY

Year 13

Applications close earlier than your friends'.

- [ ] Submit through UCAS by the October deadline for dentistry. Hygiene and therapy courses use the later January one.
- [ ] Prepare for interviews. Most dental schools use several short stations rather than one panel.
- [ ] Decide your fifth UCAS choice deliberately — a course you would genuinely accept.
- [ ] Have a plan for the year after, in case this one does not work out.

Said plainly

There are more strong applicants than places, and every year people who would make excellent dentists are unsuccessful. It is not a verdict on you. Many reapply, or come in through therapy or a related degree, and arrive anyway.

More than one way in

The standard offer is not the only offer. Each of these has its own eligibility rules, so the job is to find out which one fits you.

1. **A gateway or foundation year**

   Bristol's Gateway to Dentistry has a typical offer of BBC and runs six years in total. If you already hold AAB, or an A in Chemistry, you are not eligible — it exists for students who do not have top grades.

2. **A contextual offer**

   Most dental schools reduce their offer for students meeting widening participation criteria. Leeds and Newcastle go to ABB, two grades below standard.

3. **A different qualification**

   BTEC, T-levels and Access to HE Diplomas are accepted by some schools. Dental nursing and dental technician qualifications can count too.

4. **A different starting role**

   Train as a dental nurse through an apprenticeship, then move into therapy or dentistry later. Longer, but you earn throughout.

What it costs

£0

is what you pay upfront. Tuition and living costs come as a loan you do not touch until you are earning.

You repay 9% of what you earn above £25,000
and nothing below it. On £26,000 that is roughly £7.50 a month.

Anything still owed is written off after 40 years
whatever the balance. The headline total is not a bill anyone sends you.

The NHS pays your tuition from year five
on a standard five-year course in England. Graduate-entry courses work differently.

A newly qualified dentist earns £43,893
in their NHS foundation training year, from April 2026.

Do not let the total put you off
A UK student loan behaves far more like a graduate tax than a debt. What you repay depends on what you earn, not on what you borrowed.

Words you will hear

UCAT
The admissions test most dental schools use. Sat in the summer between Year 12 and Year 13, before you apply. There is a bursary if the fee is a problem.

Contextual offer
A lower offer for applicants whose circumstances are taken into account — school, household income, free school meals, time in care.

Widening participation
The umbrella term for schemes designed to get students from under-represented backgrounds into competitive courses.

Gateway or foundation year
An extra year before the degree, for students who have the potential but not the grades. Entry requirements are lower, on purpose.

MMI
Multiple Mini Interview. Several short stations with different interviewers, rather than one long panel.

GDC
The General Dental Council. Every dental professional must be registered with it to practise.

Foundation training
The paid year in an NHS practice that newly qualified dentists complete after graduating.

BMAT
An admissions test that no longer exists — it was discontinued after 2023. If a guide tells you to sit it, that guide is out of date.

Where these facts came from

Everything stated as fact in this booklet, and where to check it.

Entry requirements, standard and contextual
Dental Schools Council, “Entry requirements for UK and Ireland dental schools: 2027 entry”.

Gateway to Dentistry: BBC, AAB ineligible
University of Bristol, BDS Gateway to Dentistry, 2026 entry.

UCAT dates, bursary, adjustments
UCAT Consortium.

BMAT discontinued after 2023
Cambridge Assessment, withdrawal of the BioMedical Admissions Test.

Foundation dentist salary, £43,893
NHS Employers, Pay and Conditions Circular (M&D) 1/2026 R2, from 1 April 2026.

Student loan repayment
Plan 5 terms, 2026/27: £25,000 threshold, 9% above it, written off after 40 years.

NHS Bursary from year five
NHS Business Services Authority. England; arrangements differ elsewhere in the UK.

Roles registered with the GDC
General Dental Council.

Requirements, dates and salaries change every year. Always confirm against a dental school's own admissions pages before you rely on anything here.

Keep this somewhere you will find it again.

Free pathway content for every year in this booklet is at dentispark.com. No cost to you or your school.