Working in the NHS after you qualify

A quick briefing for Years 12–13 applicants and career changers — DentiSpark

If you start a dental degree in England in autumn 2027 or later, a new requirement will apply to you. Check your intended start year, not your qualification year — that is what the rule is based on.

The rule

Newly qualified dentists will have to work in the NHS for a minimum period — the government intends at least three years. It applies to anyone entering a dental course of study from the 2027/28 academic year. Ministers have confirmed it covers part of the working week, not all of it. The reason given: training a dentist costs the taxpayer around £200,000 that the student never repays.

Why it might not change much

Almost all UK dental graduates already start in the NHS. Dental Foundation Training — the year every new dentist completes before working independently — is NHS-based. The General Dental Council's own figures show around 84% of dentists already work fully or mainly in the NHS one to two years after qualifying.

Still to be decided

Whether the Foundation Training year counts towards the three years. What proportion of the week must be NHS. What happens if you can't complete it — illness, parental leave, or specialty training. The government has said it will consult on the details; that consultation had not opened as of summer 2026.

Not everyone agrees

The British Dental Association opposes the policy — its argument is that new dentists already work in the NHS, and the real problem is experienced dentists leaving, which a tie-in doesn't address. The General Dental Council has raised similar concerns. The Dental Schools Council has been more open to it.

More places too

The same announcement expands dental school places in England from 809 to 859 from 2027/28 — the first sustained expansion since 2007 — including new schools at Portsmouth and the University of East Anglia.

This is an England policy. If you plan to study or work elsewhere in the UK, check the position for that nation separately.

Sources: NHS 10 Year Health Plan, July 2025. DHSC written ministerial statement, 10 March 2026. General Dental Council response to the DHSC consultation, July 2024. Checked 2 August 2026.