

Dental Hygienist Degree Apprenticeship Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why has a dental hygienist degree apprenticeship been put in place?

An apprenticeship could make the profession more accessible, more diverse and more representative of local communities. At present there are barriers that hold back talented people, within the dental team. An apprenticeship could help to change that, while maintaining the exact same high standards of training. We want to spread opportunity out to local communities and help to address the challenge of recruiting and retaining dental hygienists in areas where recruitment is proving difficult. It will also help promote skills escalation for current members of the dental team.

2. What are the entry requirements for dental hygienist apprentices?

The entry requirements will be set by the dental school or the university. Dental schools will have minimum entry requirements for their courses which must be met. The employer must be assured that the candidate is capable of the academic learning required and that they possess the values and behaviours to become a dental hygienist.

3. Does this apprenticeship include a degree?

Yes, completion of a dental hygienist degree is a central part of this apprenticeship. In fact, a dental hygienist degree apprentice will complete all the same training as a degree dental hygienist student following the traditional route. There is no element, academic or practical, of a traditional dental hygienist education programme that will not be completed by the apprentice. This includes meeting all the same requirements set out by the General Dental Council.

Apprenticeships enable people who are both new to the NHS and existing members of staff to gain a qualification and safely apply their learning while continuing to earn a salary.

4. Where will the apprenticeship vacancies be advertised and how can individuals apply?

There is usually a delay between apprenticeship standards being developed and providers being ready to deliver the programme. This is because providers need time to apply to the [Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register \(APAR\)](#) and prepare the course content and resources. Employers also need time to prepare for the apprenticeship and recruit apprentices.

Once available, vacancies are usually advertised locally, on [NHS jobs](#) or the government [Find an Apprenticeship](#) website.

5. Will dental hygienist degree apprentices be paid?

Apprentices are salaried employees during their apprenticeship. The decision on pay will be for their employer. There is a national minimum wage for apprentices, pay may be higher but cannot be lower than this.

Once an apprentice has completed the first year of their apprenticeship, they are entitled to the minimum wage for their age.

6. How will the degree apprenticeship be funded?

Discussions are being held with the Workforce Education and Training Directorate of NHS England regarding the additional funding required above that agreed by the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education to ensure the success of this apprenticeship.

To ensure the close supervision of the direct clinical activity undertaken by the apprentice dental hygienists it is envisaged primary dental care training hubs will be supported by “integrated care systems”, especially to support local recruitment and retention.

7. Where is the apprenticeship being piloted?

The Workforce, Training and Education Directorate of NHS England is engaging with a small number of dental schools that have already registered an interest in supporting the delivery of this apprenticeship. There are a number of regulatory and procurement processes which must be met before both training providers and delivery sites are confirmed.

8. What evidence is there that there is a market for a dental hygienist degree apprenticeship scheme?

We know that the majority of dental hygienist students come from various backgrounds, with only small numbers coming from within the current dental team. This has prevented many dental nurses applying to undertake dental hygienist training. It often means “leaving home” and taking large student loans. Traditionally A levels are required for entry, and more modern qualifications such as T levels and other apprenticeships have not been accepted as methods of entry. We also know that for some who have the ability to train as a dental hygienist the costs associated with undertaking a dental hygienist degree means they do not consider it an option.

The dental hygienist degree apprenticeship would offer those people a route to a career as a dental hygienist. If they wish to progress to a career as a dental therapist, they may be able to do this by undertaking the “enhanced clinical practitioner apprenticeship (dental therapist), at a time when they are ready to undertake additional study.

As outlined in the NHS England Long Term Workforce Plan (June 23) there will be an expansion across healthcare of workforce numbers and apprenticeships will form a

strong part in future developments. The dental hygienist apprenticeship is only one example of how we can widen participation across the healthcare team.

9. How will the dental hygienist apprenticeship help to support recruitment and retention within the dental team, and help attract those from underrepresented groups?

The dental hygienist degree apprenticeship will offer a route of progression for dental nurses and the wider healthcare team. The routes of entry will vary, taking into account other apprenticeships and emerging qualifications. For dental nurses it provides a clear route of progression, which will help support their retention within the dental team and help attract those that wish to develop skills and knowledge at level 3 before further progression, thereby supporting dental nurse recruitment.

The dental hygienist degree apprenticeship will reduce the financial burden associated with the traditional training route. This would help attract talented candidates from across the country, who currently face barriers due to geographical or socio-economic reasons.

10. How will the dental hygienist degree apprentice help to attract those from currently underrepresented groups to the dental profession?

We know that a workforce that is representative of the community it serves can cater for its needs more effectively.

The number of people from deprived socio-economic backgrounds undertaking dental hygienist remains low compared to all entrants to higher education. One of the reasons they do not traditionally choose these courses is the associated cost of study. The dental hygienist degree apprenticeship provides an earn and learn opportunity, which helps to take away some of that burden. We know similar degree apprentice courses have attracted people from the social economic backgrounds we are trying to attract.