DTA | DENTAL TECHNOLOGISTS ASSOCIATION

The leading professional body for dental technologists in the UK

WHAT IS A DENTAL TECHNOLOGIST?

A dental technologist (or dental technician) is a member of the dental oral healthcare team who, upon prescription from a dental clinician, construct custom-made restorative and dental appliances such as dentures, crowns, bridges and dental braces for individual patients.

Their work requires a high level of manual dexterity, attention to detail and an application of applied aesthetic values.

FOUR MAJOR DISCIPLINES

There are four major disciplines within dental technology:

- Fixed prosthesis including crowns, bridges and implants;
- Removable prosthesis, including dentures and removable partial dentures;
- Orthodontics, including orthodontic appliances and mouthguards;
- Maxillofacial prosthesis, including ocular prosthesis and craniofacial prosthesis (generally carried out in the Hospital provision)

THE WORK

No two pieces are the same, therefore much of the work is carefully done by hand to fine-tune each piece to the exact specification to make sure the device is comfortable and effective for the patient prior to the final fitting with the dentist.

Dental technicians use different tools, equipment and materials to make, modify or repair:

- Various types of dentures
- Crowns and implants to replace individual teeth
- Bridges to anchor a false tooth between natural ones
- Various other types of appliance, such as braces to straighten teeth
- Maxillofacial appliances and prostheses, for patients who have lost part of their face or jaw through
- Disease or accident, or for children born with defects, such as a cleft palate. This is specialised
- Hospital work with limited entry opportunities.

SKILLS

Dental technicians need:

- to be able to do fine, manual work - most jobs are on a very small scale and must be accurately finished
- to be good at concentrating
- good eyesight - normal colour vision is important for some aspects of the work - for example, making crowns and bridges, as subtle colour matching (called shading) is part of the job
- some design flair, and an ability to sculpt and copy shapes
- the ability to apply technology and health sciences to complex and varied tasks.

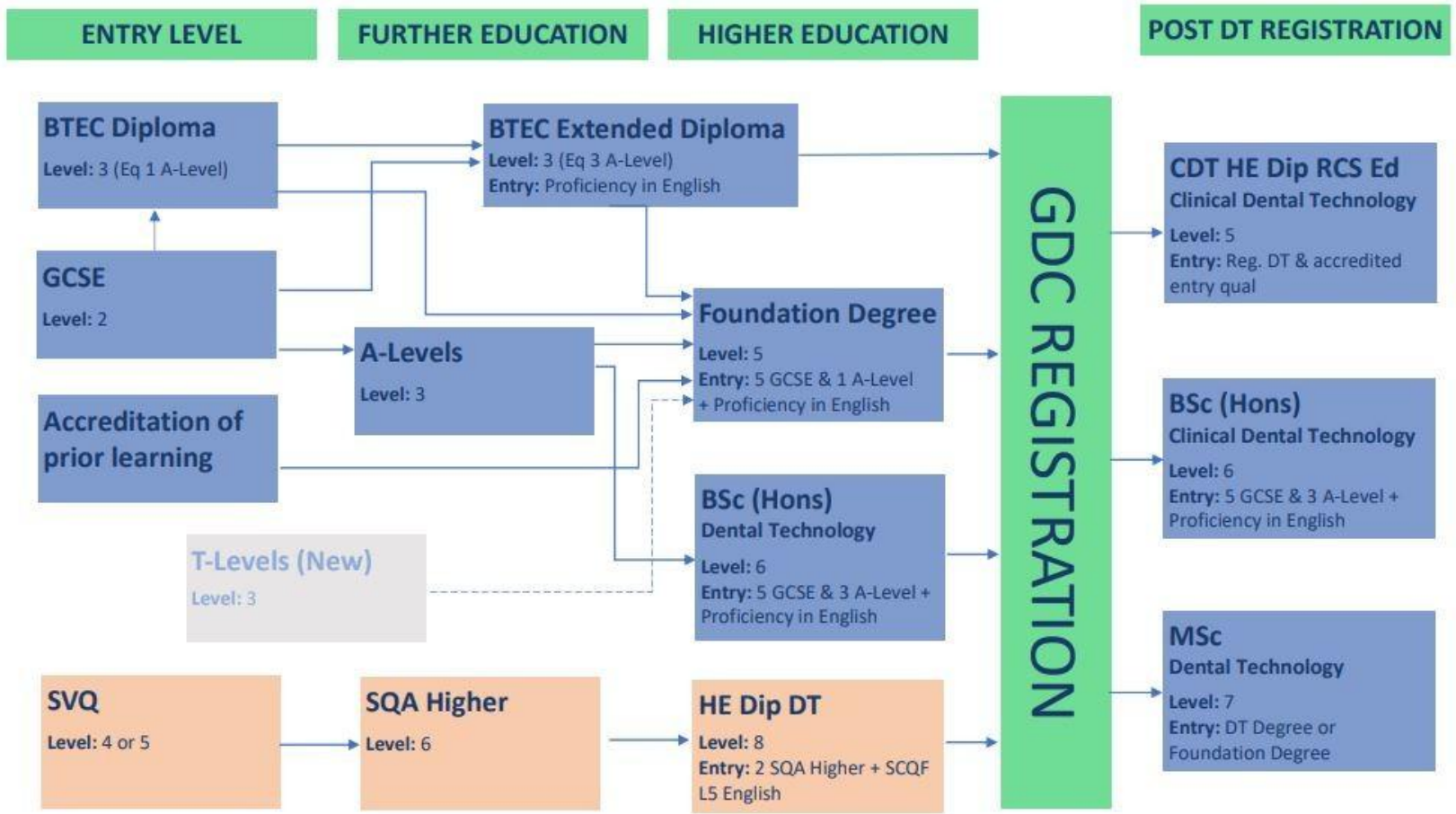
TOOLS, EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS

Dental technicians work with plastic, porcelain, metals (including gold and stainless steel), wax and plaster. They use hand and power tools and have skills that include modelling, sculpting in fine detail, polishing, plastic-forming, casting, wire-bending and ceramic work. Computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing are also increasingly used in commercial dental laboratories. As each of us is different, each appliance is custom-made, to ensure a good fit.

THE DIGITAL EVOLUTION

Dental technicians today continue the tradition of skilled manual artistry but sometimes with digital tools. Digital dentistry encompasses computer-aided design and manufacturing (CAD/CAM), intraoral scanners, 3D printing, digital imaging, augmented and virtual reality, and guided implant workflows. All of which are transforming how restorations, prostheses, and appliances are designed and fabricated.

ROUTES TO BECOMING A DENTAL TECHNOLOGIST



ROUTES TO BECOMING A DENTAL TECHNOLOGIST

Approved degrees: full-time degree courses in dental technology are offered at a few universities. You usually need three A levels including a science subject. Equivalent qualifications, such as a relevant BTEC Level 3 National qualification, may be acceptable. You also need supporting GCSEs.

Apprenticeship: It's possible to train in dental technology through an Apprenticeship. These offer structured training in the workplace.

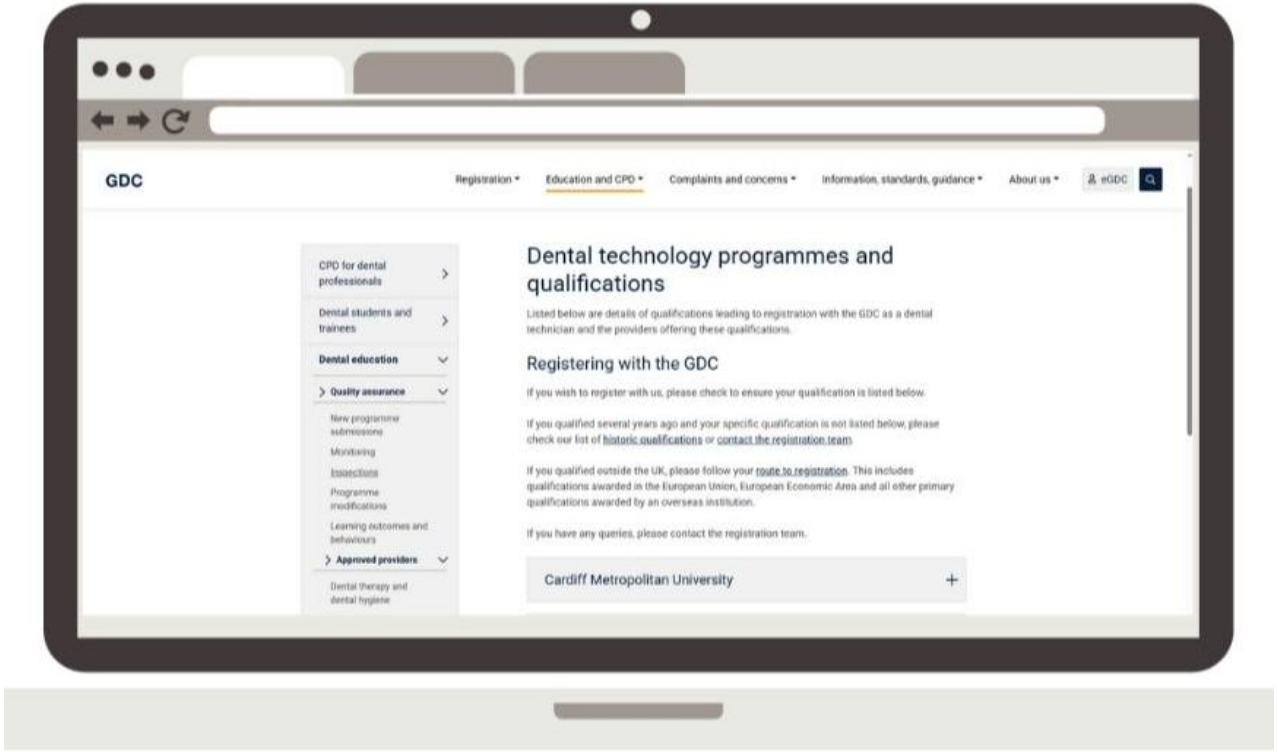
In England, it's possible to train as a dental technician through a Higher Apprenticeship (at level 5). In Wales, training can be through a Higher Apprenticeship in health (dental technology). These Apprenticeships lead to GDC-approved foundation degrees.

In England, the level 3 Apprenticeship for dental laboratory assistants leads to a Level 3 Diploma in dental technology techniques. Dental laboratory assistants work under the supervision of GDC registered dental technicians. Progression is possible to a Higher Apprenticeship.

INSTITUTIONS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

- The GDC list approved dental technology programmes and qualifications on their website and you can find out more about Apprenticeships through the National Apprenticeship Service or Careers Wales.

- Be aware that course entry requirements vary, so check carefully with individual institutions and individual employers set their own entry requirements for Apprenticeships, but for Higher Apprenticeships you normally need A level or equivalent qualifications.



PROSPECTS AND PAY

With additional qualifications and experience, dental technicians have the opportunity to advance to roles such as clinical dental technician, orthodontic therapist, or healthcare scientist specialising in reconstructive science. They can also pursue management positions, and with sufficient experience, establishing your own dental laboratory could be a viable option.

Dental technicians working within the NHS earn from around £28,400 when first qualified, but it's possible for pay to rise to almost £50,100 with experience and advanced skills (2023/24 rates in England).

Salaries for staff working in the private sector vary depending on the employer; those who are highly skilled can earn up to £60,000+. The income of self-employed dental technicians will depend on the success of their business.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Commercial dental laboratories

These laboratories are where most dental technicians work, either as employees or, with experience, running their own businesses. The laboratories, which range from single-handed organisations through to large companies, receive prescriptions from dentists and carry out the work required. They also repair or modify appliances. A large laboratory deals with a wide variety of work and may offer the opportunity to specialise.

Hospitals

Hospital dental departments may employ specialist technicians to make maxillofacial appliances and other dental appliances. In the NHS there is a clear career structure relating to qualifications, responsibility and competence.

General practice

A few large private dental practices employ their own dental technician to carry out work on the premises, though most practices use commercial laboratories. In a practice, the dental technician would deal with quite a wide range of work, often specialising to meet the needs of the particular practice.

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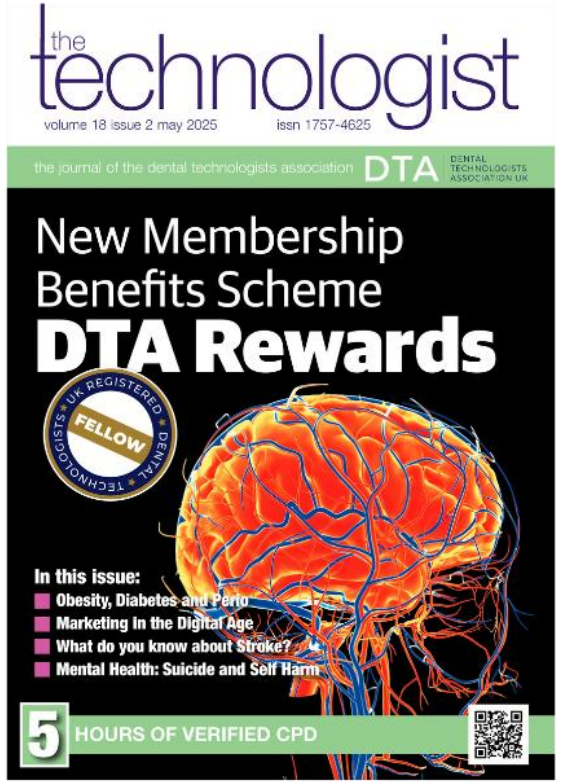
HOW CAN THE DTA SUPPORT ME AS A DENTAL TECHNOLOGY STUDENT?

- Our printed publication *The Technologist* includes technical articles to support your learning.
- Webinars of manufacturing techniques and information related to digital dental technology
- We explain what is expected of you by the GDC when you qualify as a Dental Technician and provide you with the tools to meet these requirements.
- Student membership of the DTA is only £10 per year. Then, once you qualify, your membership remains discounted for your first three years before you pay the full membership fee currently £125. Year 1 £25, Year 2 £50, Year 3 £75.



HOW CAN THE DTA HELP YOU?

Why join?

- Elevate your career in dental technology.
- As the leading professional body for dental technologists in the UK, the DTA offers unparalleled support, lifelong learning opportunities, and access to a wealth of resources.
- Whether you're qualified or in training, our membership provides instant access to over 20 hours of verifiable CPD, discounted professional indemnity insurance, and helplines.
- Stay educated, compliant, and connected with the latest advancements in dental technology.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Join us in shaping the future of dental technology.

If you're passionate about your profession, become a student representative on DTA Council

Contact
info@dta-uk.org

STUDENT OFFER

Join now.
Only £10 per year.

Questions?
Email: info@dta-uk.org

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www.dta-uk.org

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

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JOURNALS

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BE REPRESENTED

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SUPPORT

RECOGNITION

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