

Protected Learning Time

Level 3 Dental Nurse Apprenticeship

Protected learning time, also commonly known as 'off-the-job training', or 'OTJ', is a statutory requirement for an apprenticeship.

It's learning that the apprentice completes during their normal working hours, for the purpose of achieving new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

- Apprentices must use this time to complete activities that are outside of their usual working role.
- The activities must focus on teaching new skills and knowledge, not assessing existing skills.

How much protected learning time is needed?



The minimum off-the-job hours have been reduced

Level 3 Dental Nurse Apprenticeship – Protected Learning Time Requirements

The new minimum requirement for Protected Learning Time is **326 hours** across the full duration of the Level 3 Dental Nurse apprenticeship.

For apprentices completing the programme over **18 months** (approximately 78 weeks), this averages out to 4.2 hours of Protected Learning Time per week.

If an apprentice completes **6 hours per week**, they could reach the 326-hour requirement sooner, potentially enabling them to complete earlier than planned. This approach also provides flexibility for learners who may need additional support, allowing them to continue with 6 hours per week for the full 18 months to meet their learning and development needs.

Importantly, Protected Learning Time hours are flexible and do not need to be completed evenly each week. For example, an apprentice might do 2 hours one week and 7 hours the next. As long as the total minimum of **326 hours** is met by the end of the programme, the distribution of hours is entirely within your control.

Please note, protected learning time can be completed outside of working hours if it is agreed, documented and confirmed that the learner was paid for these hours, or time given back in lieu. Completing these hours outside of working hours should be an exception, not the norm, for example, when there is a staff shortage.

What this means for you

- More flexibility for your practice and team scheduling
- Highest achievement rates in the UK – 30% above the national average.
- Complimentary recruitment support to help you find your next apprentice
- Choose your preferred study day
- We're proud to support practices with a training model that truly works for them.

Learning and development activities

- **Formal training completed:** Any mandatory or optional training sessions, such as Basic Life Support (BLS), infection control, medical emergencies, or radiography safety.
- **E-learning modules or webinars:** Completing online courses about dental materials, communication skills, patient management software, or specific dental specialities.
- **Independent research:** Looking up dental conditions like periodontitis or endodontic issues, or researching legislation such as the General Dental Council (GDC) standards or CQC regulations.
- **Professional reading:** Reading articles or newsletters from dental journals (e.g., Dental Nursing, British Dental Journal) about best practice in dentistry.
- **Shadowing or coaching:** Observing and learning from experienced colleagues or dental professionals—e.g., shadowing a dentist during a complex procedure or learning how to use new dental equipment.
- **Cross-department learning:** Spending time with reception staff, dental laboratory technicians, or hygienists to understand how each role contributes to overall patient care.
- **Mock assessments or exams:** Preparing for your End-Point Assessment with practice questions, role-play scenarios (e.g., patient communication), or reflective writing on clinical situations.
- **Role-specific development:** Learning to use electronic patient record systems, dental imaging software, impression materials, or sterilisation equipment.
- **Company information:** Reading through updates, new practice policies, or procedures—like safeguarding changes, new cross-infection protocols, or updated reporting requirements.
- **Meetings attended:** Practice meetings, clinical governance meetings, or patient care discussions where you learn about new approaches, updates in dental procedures, or service improvements.
- **Patient updates:** Understanding changes in patient medical histories, new treatment plans, or health and wellbeing updates that require you to adapt your care and communication.
- **Support or guidance received:** Learning through one-to-one conversations with senior dentists, hygienists, therapists, or external professionals such as dental engineers or laboratory technicians.



Application and reflection

- **Your own supervision:** Reflecting on feedback and goals discussed with your supervisor, including actions to improve your clinical or administrative practice.
- **Workplace projects:** Contributing to improving patient flow, updating stock management systems, implementing new digital dentistry workflows, or helping revise cross-infection control measures.
- **Peer reviews or case studies:** Reviewing anonymised patient notes or clinical situations and discussing what was done well or could be improved in a dental context.
- **Mentoring others:** Showing a new staff member how to carry out a dental task (e.g., setting up for an extraction, preparing a room) and reflecting on how teaching helped you improve.
- **Action planning:** Setting goals in your development plan based on your recent learning or feedback from clinical practice.

What makes Protected Learning Time evidence valid?

To meet government requirements, all Protected Learning Time training should be:

Planned

It should be part of your apprenticeship journey.

Relevant

Clearly linked to your apprenticeship standards and development.

Don't forget when logging hours in **bud**

Always include a summary of what you learned. This reflection helps turn your experiences into valuable learning evidence.

Where possible, also link your activity to specific **Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviours (KSBs)** in your apprenticeship standard.