

# Year zero to clinical dental professional



For those who do not have the traditional A-level qualifications to apply for dentistry or dental therapy, there is an option, explains **Joanne Bowles**<sup>1</sup> (pictured), **Peter Rees**,<sup>2</sup> **Kathryn Mulhearn**,<sup>3</sup> **Jade Francis**<sup>4</sup> and **Laura Fletcher**.<sup>5</sup>

The route into becoming a dentist has traditionally been via A-levels. The majority of dental hygiene and dental therapy courses have now become BSc programmes; these are also applied for through UCAS and generally require A-level qualifications.

There are some people who may not have undertaken A-levels; they may have been out of education for a period of time. There may be others who did not undertake the specific A-levels required for dentistry or dental therapy. It is important to be aware that there

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## Author information

<sup>1</sup>University of Liverpool School of Dentistry BSc Dental Therapy Programme Director and member of the admissions team; <sup>2-5</sup>BDS students, University of Liverpool School of Dentistry

are options available.

This article has been written to give an insight into a programme run by the University of Liverpool in conjunction with a local further education college. It also includes reflections from BDS and BSc students at the School of Dentistry who have been part of this career pathway.

It is important to be aware that different dental schools will have options and entry requirements do vary between schools. It is important to contact each school to find out their specific entry requirements.

The University of Liverpool offers a year zero foundation programme that leads to access onto a variety of vocational health studies programmes. This allows mature students who have typically been out of formal education for some time or who have taken non-traditional qualifications, the opportunity for a different route into undertaking a Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) or BSc in Dental Therapy degree. This is also a potential pathway for dental nurses to further develop their knowledge and skills with a view to becoming a dental therapist or

dentist. The year zero foundation programme has been designed in collaboration with Carmel College, Merseyside.

Applications for the year zero programmes are through UCAS. As with any dentistry programme the competition for places is high but this should not put people off. At the very start of the UCAS application process applicants decide which pathway they wish to apply for – BDS or BSc Dental Therapy - and the appropriate UCAS codes are then used for the application (BDS UCAS code 0AAW, BSc UCAS code BAAW). The UCAS application will include qualifications, a personal statement and also a reference.

To apply for the year zero BDS pathway the entry requirements are five GCSE subjects at grade B (numerical grade 6) to include: Mathematics, English Language and either Biology or Chemistry, Core and additional Science or Dual Science Award.

To apply for the year zero BSc Dental Therapy pathway the entry requirements are five GCSE subjects at grade C (numerical grade 5) to include: Mathematics, English Language and either Biology or Chemistry, Core and additional Science or Dual Science Award.

Once applications have been processed and reviewed applicants judged to be suitably qualified and motivated are invited to interview within the School of Dentistry. The interview format would usually be multiple mini interviews (MMIs). If successful at interview offers for places are made for the year zero programmes, and the programmes will commence in the September.

To be able to progress onto the BDS or BSc Dental Therapy programme after the year zero foundation programme a certain level of attainment is required. If successful within the year zero programme you will commence directly onto the BDS or the BSc programme pathway without the need for another interview.

It is always important to be aware of what you are applying for: the year zero foundation year and undergraduate dental school programmes are very intense courses, and at times they can be challenging. Resilience and the development of self-efficacy are both essential to aid individuals' development academically, clinically and personally. When individuals have been out of education for a while it can be difficult to get back to studying; it may feel like a huge step. However,

dentistry is an extremely rewarding career and there is no reason why an individual cannot study a little later in life.

It is always helpful to hear from students who have had first-hand experience. Here some of the students share their thoughts and reflections:



**Peter, BDS student**

'The only thing I regret about the foundation year was that I didn't know about it

sooner. As someone who struggled with academic motivation during my late-teens, I felt as though all doors that led to a career in dentistry were closed to me. The foundation year at University of Liverpool was exactly what I needed to allow me a pathway into the field. Not being from Liverpool, I left my job and relocated from South Wales.

If I could give any advice to someone thinking about applying, I would have to copy the advertisement campaigns of Nike and say, "Just do it!" Be prepared to study hard, leave your past achievements and ego at the door, go with an open mind and enjoy it.'



**Kathryn, BDS student**

'I realised in my late twenties that I wanted to pursue a career in dentistry, however, leaving

school with A-Levels in humanities and holding a BA Marketing degree meant the traditional entry routes weren't an option for me. Undeterred, I researched access routes into dentistry and came across the Year zero course.

I embarked on obtaining lots of work experience and after a successful interview, I began Year zero at Carmel College, in

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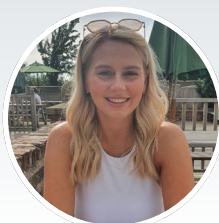
Although I have a degree in cardiac physiology, my A-levels were so poor that I received no offers from any dental schools to study dentistry. Due to the non-conformist method of selection for the foundation year, I was given an opportunity. As I have a background in science, I felt that I would not gain anything from the year, but I was very swiftly proven wrong. I, and all others included, found it noticeably challenging but inconceivably beneficial to our future careers in dentistry, medicine or veterinary medicine, depending on which pathway we were on.

Alongside everyone else who completed the foundation year, I am older than my peers in my chosen field. This was initially a worrying prospect, however, the friends I made while studying the foundation year are some of the best I have ever made. The ethos of helping and supporting one another through all aspects is something I will carry with me throughout my career.

September 2016. Having been out of education for nine years, giving up my career and having a young child, I was naturally apprehensive, however I needn't have worried as Year 0 is perfectly geared up for people who've been out of education. Staff are so supportive and approachable, there are resources to help with everything from revision skills to time management, and the modules you undertake build your confidence and knowledge to set you up perfectly for a smooth transition into year 1 at university.

I am now heading into 5th year BDS and my experience so far has been fantastic! I have made friends for life, joined and represented dental societies, won dental competitions and prizes and forged a career that I love. My advice to anyone thinking of applying would be to go for it and follow your dreams; there will be challenges and sacrifices to make along the way but with determination it is definitely achievable!

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**Jade, BSc student**

'Having been a dental nurse since 2013 and having been out of education since 2011, this programme gave

me the opportunity to get back into education and follow the career pathway I had always wanted – to become a dental therapist.

The opportunity allowed me to meet the most amazing group of friends who I know will be my friends for life. My experience could be described as fun, exciting and nerve-racking all in one.

I thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of the programme but particularly the health studies aspect of the course as it was more related to dentistry, and I got to make my own health promotion presentation on periodontal disease which was extremely useful and relevant to my future studies. The staff were amazing and the most helpful teachers you could have wished for. They completely understood that we were all older students who found it difficult to get back into studying but they always put the effort in to teaching us and in a way that was more effective for us.

My advice to anyone who is starting the Year zero course is to enjoy your time there, always ask lots of questions, and study hard to get you where you really want to be.'



**Laura, BDS student**

'When I was working as a dental nurse, I loved my job, especially helping patients. I enjoyed studying for my

dental nurse qualification and I knew that I wanted to learn and develop new skills and to stay in a clinical role. Looking at career options within the dental team, I found that most dental therapy and dentistry courses had very specific entry requirements that were tough to meet as a mature student who has been out of education for years so when I found Year zero at Liverpool, I knew I had to apply.

The team at Carmel College who teach the Year zero programme do an amazing job to help you get back into the swing of studying and I left there very well prepared for the first year of dental school – not only did I have all the knowledge of biology and chemistry I would need, but we had learned study skills, medical ethics, and health promotion. Dental school is hard work, but Year zero had prepared me well.

My advice to anyone thinking about applying would be to just do it. Year zero was an incredible opportunity that I will always be grateful for, and I would highly recommend it.'

For further information visit <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/foundation-to-health-studies-year-0/overview/> or contact the University of Liverpool, School of Dentistry admissions team via [dentenq@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:dentenq@liverpool.ac.uk).

#### Further reading

1. Quinlan K. Liverpool's twenty-first century curriculum. *BDJ Team* November 2020; 7: 32-35. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41407-020-0472-0> (accessed July 2021).

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41407-021-0683-z>

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