

The 'Safe' Degrees, Compared

Medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, law, engineering and more,
how hard to get in, where they lead, what they really pay

A parent's guide to the professional degrees

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The vocational degrees, ranked by pay

Ordered by median earnings 5 years out. Notice dentistry beats medicine early and law sits at the bottom.

DEGREE	GETTING IN	PAY 5yr / 10yr	THE HONEST CATCH
Dentistry Dentist, NHS or private	Very high. Few places, UCAT, dexterity test	£58.5k £53.9k	Highest early pay here but a tiny intake and intense.
Medicine Doctor, a licensed career	Brutal. ~9 applicants per place, UCAT + experience	£52.9k £61.3k	Long training. Foundation posts are competitive and burnout is real.
Engineering Engineer, chartered route	Moderate, varies a lot by discipline	£48.2k £54.8k	Discipline choice matters. Chartership takes years.
Veterinary Vet, broad animal routes	Very high. Only a handful of schools	£44.9k £45.6k	Emotionally hard, pay plateaus, fierce competition.
Pharmacy Pharmacist, NHS + retail	Moderate. MPharm plus a foundation year	£40.2k £40.5k	Steady but the pay plateaus early.
Nursing Nurse, secure NHS career	Accessible, high demand, funded routes	£33.2k £33.6k	Vital and stable but pay rises slowly.
Law Solicitor, barrister, beyond	Competitive at the top, broad overall	£32.1k £40.5k	Pay is split, City high vs high street modest. Many grads never practise.

Four honest truths

1. Vocational means a clear job, not an easy one

The appeal is a protected, recognisable career at the end. But clear does not mean easy to get into. Medicine, dentistry and veterinary are brutally competitive and need admissions tests.

2. The pay order surprises people

Dentistry out-earns medicine in the early years. Engineering quietly sits near the top. Law, the one families assume is lucrative, has the lowest median here and a deeply split market.

3. Some plateau, some climb

Look at the 5 to 10 year jump. Medicine and engineering keep climbing. Pharmacy and nursing largely flatten. The first salary is not the whole story, the trajectory matters more.

4. The right one is fit plus odds plus interest

A miserable medic is not safer than a thriving engineer with a plan. Choose for genuine interest, a realistic shot at getting in and a career your child actually wants.

Which one fits your child?

A title on a list is not a strategy. An EduStrategy session works out which of these your child can realistically get into and which actually suits them, before you build the shortlist around it.

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