

# **How we check the quality of dental education and training**

A guide for course providers and  
awarding bodies

## OVERVIEW

The GDC has a legal responsibility under the Dentists Act 1984 to check the quality of all dental and dental care professional (DCP) education and training courses which lead to registration.

The aim of the GDC quality assurance (QA) process is to check whether courses meet the GDC Learning Outcomes for the relevant registrant categories.

The QA process involves:

- reviewing proposals for new courses and qualifications from course providers and awarding bodies;
- inspecting the course providers and awarding bodies; and
- monitoring course providers and awarding bodies every year.

All applications for new courses and awards and all inspection reports are considered by the Registrar. The Registrar may seek advice from subject expert registrants, if required. The Registrar decides whether a course or award should be accepted for registration, though some decisions may be referred to the Council of the GDC.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

We have just published our new set of Learning Outcomes in the document 'Preparing for Practice', which is available on our website.

Education and training providers or awarding bodies wishing to commence a new course leading to GDC registration should base their proposals on the relevant set of Learning Outcomes from this document.

Currently accepted programmes are based on our previous Learning Outcomes and guidance contained within 'The First Five Years' and 'Developing the Dental Team'. Providers and awarding bodies should continue to deliver accepted programmes against the Learning Outcomes set out within these documents. In future they will need to align their courses to the new set of Learning Outcomes in 'Preparing for Practice'.

We are in the process of consulting with providers and awarding bodies to establish time-scales for this transition.

## FUTURE QA STANDARDS

We are currently developing a set of standards which we will use as a framework to quality assure training providers and we anticipate that this will be finalised and published by autumn 2012. Education and training providers and awarding bodies will be consulted in the development of these standards. It is anticipated that the new standards will lead to changes in how we approach each stage of our quality assurance process and these will be fully explained.

Our CURRENT QA PROCESS is outlined below.

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## NEW COURSES OR AWARDS

All education and training providers or awarding bodies planning to start a new course or examination that leads to registration with the GDC must provide a submission to the QA team. The submission should explain how the curriculum and assessments are mapped against each learning outcome contained within 'Preparing for Practice'. The provider or awarding body is also required to provide information on areas such as quality control, assessment and patient supply (where appropriate). All submissions for new courses and examinations must be made on the correct Submissions Form.

A new submission should be sent to the GDC at least six months before the course is due to start. The QA Team reviews the submission and identifies whether all of the information requested has been provided. If this is the case, the submission will be sent in full to at least two expert assessors. The assessors will make a recommendation as to whether all of the Learning Outcomes can be met by the proposed course or examination.

If additional material or clarification on the submission is needed, the course provider or awarding body will be asked to provide it. When the assessors and the QA team are satisfied by the submission, the submission and a summary of the assessors' comments are presented to the Registrar.

The Registrar reviews the submission and the assessors' comments and recommendation and decides on whether to provisionally accept the submission.

'Provisional acceptance' means the GDC is satisfied that, on paper, the submission meets our requirements and there are no, or only minor, issues identified with a programme. The Registrar can request additional information before deciding whether to provisionally accept a submission and may, on occasion, provisionally accept with conditions. The Registrar may also reject a proposal if the proposed programme does not meet the necessary standards.

The course provider or awarding body must clarify on their website and in their course documentation that the course has provisional acceptance, and that a decision on 'sufficiency' will be made following inspections.

The GDC should be kept informed of any significant changes to the programme between the granting of provisional acceptance and the start of the course or examination.

A decision on full acceptance for registration purposes ('sufficiency') for new courses and awards is made after the first cohort of students completes its studies and exams. We inspect the course and final exam for each programme.

'Sufficiency' is a term used in the Dentists Act 1984: "Visitors...shall report to the Council as to the sufficiency of the instruction given in places which they visit..." If sufficiency is granted, this entitles students passing the course or examination to apply for registration with the GDC.

A separate GDC document, 'Course submissions – guidance for course providers' sets out in full the submissions process for new courses and awards.

## INSPECTIONS

For courses that have been provisionally accepted, the course and the final exam/assessment is normally inspected for the first time when the first cohort of students reaches its final year. Regular inspection cycles of 'sufficient' UK dental and DCP courses and examinations are undertaken as part of the QA process.

At an inspection, the GDC inspection team meets with staff delivering the course and with students enrolled on it, and reviews documents presented before and at the inspection.

The purpose of the inspection is to get an overview of the content, delivery, assessment and quality control of the course. The inspection team also attend the final exam/assessment, to observe its rigour and scope. A report is prepared for each inspection.

Inspection reports, together with a response from the course provider are considered by the Registrar for a decision on sufficiency.

## THE INSPECTION TEAM

Inspection teams are made up of laypeople, dental professionals and a member of the QA team. A list of inspectors is available from our website.

## BEFORE THE INSPECTION

Course providers or awarding bodies are contacted approximately four months in advance of the planned inspection to agree the timing of the inspection.

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fixed well in advance by the course provider or awarding body. These dates should be provided as soon as they are known.

Inspections typically last one or two days. To help with planning and the inspection itself, the course provider should nominate an individual to be the point of contact for the GDC.

A questionnaire is sent to the course provider or awarding body approximately three months before each inspection. The questionnaire seeks information on the content, delivery, assessment and quality control of the course or award. This must be completed by the provider and returned to us no later than eight weeks after it is received.

Detailed responses to each question are required, and it should be clearly stated if any part of any question is inapplicable to that course or award. Responses should give information that is directly relevant to the course, rather than containing generic institutional guidance. All responses must be typed into the boxes on the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contains a curriculum mapping table with the required learning outcomes. The course provider must complete this table, detailing:

- How every learning outcome is met by the course or award (e.g. through lectures, practical classes or clinical sessions etc., and the units/modules in which they are covered); and
- The formative and summative assessment of each learning outcome (e.g. written papers, case presentations, OSCEs, in-course continuous assessment etc., and their scheduling in the course). Supplementary documents may be attached. Documents which shall be made available during the inspection are listed in the pre-inspection questionnaire.

Submissions of completed questionnaires over two megabytes should be sent to us on a datastick or disc. This is to prevent e-mails with bulky attachments being bounced back from recipients' inboxes, or trapped by junk mail filters.

The course provider or awarding body must draft an inspection timetable enabling the inspection team to:

- Meet with all staff directly involved in delivering the course and students enrolled on it;
- See clinical/laboratory facilities, including a selection of outreach/workplace locations; and
- Hold private discussions and examine documents.

It is essential that the inspection team can meet all students in each year of the course (or a smaller selection chosen by the inspectors, depending on cohort sizes) at an early stage of the inspection. The timetable for the final exam/assessment should be submitted by email. The completed questionnaire and draft timetable will be reviewed by the QA team and sent to the inspectors. On occasion, the course provider or awarding body may be asked to change the timetable or to provide further information.

## COURSE INSPECTIONS

At the inspection, all meetings are held in private. Any comments included in the report will not normally be attributed to any individual.

## EXAM AND ASSESSMENT INSPECTIONS

At final exam/assessment inspections the inspection team observes case presentations, oral examinations and the board meeting at which students' results are discussed. Written exams are not observed, though the provider or awarding body may be asked to make the question and answer papers available to the inspection team.

Meetings with staff or with students do not normally take place, but the inspectors do meet with external examiners. In the base room the inspection team will review student logbooks and grades, written papers and model answers, and work contributing to final marks (including exam scripts and projects).

The inspection team do not give feedback to the course provider or awarding body at the end of an inspection.

## INSPECTION REPORTS

A report is drafted, based on the documents presented prior to and during the inspection and comments from meetings. The report describes the inspectors' views on areas of strength, and highlights any deficiencies, including failure to meet learning outcomes.

A report may contain requirements on issues which must be addressed as a matter of urgency. Additionally, reports may contain recommendations on how the course could be developed

A draft report is usually produced within four weeks of the inspection. However, if further information from the course provider or awarding body is needed, this process may take longer.

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Following receipt of the draft report the course provider or awarding body is invited to submit any corrections on matters of factual accuracy. They must also provide a written response clearly explaining the actions being taken to address each requirement and recommendation. This response may also include any other comments on the content of the report.

Providers or awarding bodies are given two weeks to provide factual corrections on the content of the report and a further two weeks for the written response on requirements and recommendations. If a suggested factual correction does not relate to a matter of factual accuracy, this will be indicated in our response.

## SUFFICIENCY FOR REGISTRATION

To prevent any delay in registration of the cohort completing the course in an academic session the inspectors make a recommendation to the GDC on 'short term sufficiency' after the final exam/assessment inspection, applicable only to that cohort of students.

The inspectors' recommendation is relayed immediately to the Registrar for a decision.

The decision is normally conveyed to the course provider or awarding body in writing within two working days of the final exam inspection. Should serious shortcomings be identified at the course and/or final examination inspection which could compromise the safety of dental patients, the inspectors may decide that short term sufficiency should not be granted.

A decision on sufficiency, entitling subsequent cohorts of students passing the course to apply for registration with the GDC is made by the Registrar with consideration of the report(s) of the inspectors and the course provider's written response(s).

If the Registrar has any concerns, further information may be sought before the sufficiency decision is made. Where serious concerns are raised, the Registrar may sanction further inspections of a course and/or final exam/assessment, or withhold sufficiency.

Inspection reports and responses are available on our website.

## ANNUAL MONITORING

Every year a form is sent to each course provider and awarding body so that the GDC may monitor developments within programmes and ask how requirements and recommendations from inspection reports are being addressed.

Some questions on the monitoring form will change each year if specific information relating to a course or exam is required.

The QA team reviews the responses and provides feedback to the course provider or awarding body. Should a response raise concerns which could put the sufficiency of the course at risk, then appropriate actions are taken. This could include re-inspections and, potentially, the withdrawal of sufficiency if the concerns are serious.

If the title, structure, content, quality assurance mechanisms or awarding body changes significantly, a re-submission may be required.

If in doubt, providers are asked to contact the QA team.

The GDC reserves the right to inspect courses and/or exams which have provisional acceptance or have been granted sufficiency, at any time, in order to fulfil their responsibility to protect the public.

## YOUR VIEWS

We are continually developing our QA process to improve patient protection. A new QA process and accompanying guidance is expected to be in place in 2012.

If you have any questions or comments on our QA process, please email [qualityassurance@gdc-uk.org](mailto:qualityassurance@gdc-uk.org) or phone 020 7344 7346.

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