

## **To be or not to be...Specialist or not**

The General Dental Council (GDC) is an organisation which regulate dental professionals in the United Kingdom. It keeps an up-to-date register of all qualified dentists and other dental care professionals. It was established in 1956 to set and maintain standards in UK dentistry, with the aims of protecting the general public from unqualified dental professionals, including dentists who are entitled to use one of the 13 specialist titles recognised by the GDC. These titles are designed to protect the public against inaccurate claims of specialist skills and to help employers and others recognise dentists with specialist skills and experience. One of these specialist titles of course relates to Oral Surgery. Dentists do not have to join a specialist list to practise any particular specialty, but they can only use the title 'specialist' if they are on that list.

### **Joining the Specialist List**

Dental professionals registered with the GDC and who have completed an approved specialist training programme in the UK may apply for the award of a Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST) and entry onto the relevant specialist list.

GDC-registered dentists who do not hold a CCST can apply to join a specialist list by submitting evidence that they have an equivalent level of knowledge and experience gained in other ways. This is also known as an assessed application. For oral surgery the level of knowledge and experience must be gained through the route of academia or research work.

Historically, these applications are made to the GDC and assessed by Specialist Advisory Committees (SACs), which are intercollegiate bodies within the Royal Colleges that advise on higher specialist training in the dental specialties.

### **CCST**

In 2015, the Council adopted the Standards for Specialty Education, for use in quality assuring specialty education in the UK. The Standards set quality requirements for all UK education and training programmes leading to inclusion on one of the GDC's specialist lists. This was updated in 2019.

If you are registered with the GDC and have completed an approved specialist training programme, you may apply for the award of a CCST and entry onto the relevant specialist list.

Applications for approved training programmes must be submitted to your regional postgraduate dental dean who will monitor you throughout your period of training. At the end of your training you must hold the agreed qualification awarded by one of the three Royal Surgical Colleges: the Royal College of Surgeons England, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow and the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

You must fulfil all entry, training, and assessment criteria to be eligible for the award of a CCST.

## **Assessed Route (Non-CCST)**

For UK and overseas qualified dentists without a CCST, alternative evidence can be considered for entry onto a specialist list. This route is for those who either hold a specialist dental qualification awarded outside the UK or who have gained equivalent knowledge or experience from academic or research work.

In this system, an application was made to the GDC and the applicant's evidence was passed to the SAC for consideration and determination of equivalence of training. The issue was there is no direct contact between the GDC and those undertaking the assessments within the SACs, which can result in a disjointed user experience and makes the overall process more complicated than it needs to be. Where applications are turned down, there is a right of appeal against the decision, and there were also concerns about how that process worked.

In 2021, the SAC expressed concern through the Intercollegiate Royal Colleges about the quality assurance, effectiveness and speed that applications to the specialist list were being adopted. This being so in March 2022 the assessment to the specialist list were paused until a more robust process could be determined.

After careful consideration informed by discussion of the issues with Deans of the Royal Colleges and others, it was decided that the GDC will in future administer the scheme directly and also make changes to the process for considering appeals.

In June 2023 following advice from myself and two other member of the SAC (whom all are Council Members of BAOS) the new process of assessment of applicants started again. Along with these individuals, a cohort of new assessors with specialist skills and experience were recruited to give rigorous and objective advice on whether applicants have met the high standards needed for admission to the specialist list. The new process is clearer, with defined requirements and it is hoped the process will give feedback to applicants if they do not achieve the required standard.

It is imperative to state, that this process is not easy to achieve, as evidence equivalent to three years full time as a trainee, with the addition of academia and research work is required. The fast-track process of being a trainee with a national training number is still the only guaranteed way of being awarded a CCST and entry on to the oral surgery specialist list, although with this new process, with the progress made by BAOS to help our members, those who have the clear skills now have the chance to be awarded the title of 'specialist in oral surgery'.

Adrian Thorp  
BAOS Honorary Secretary