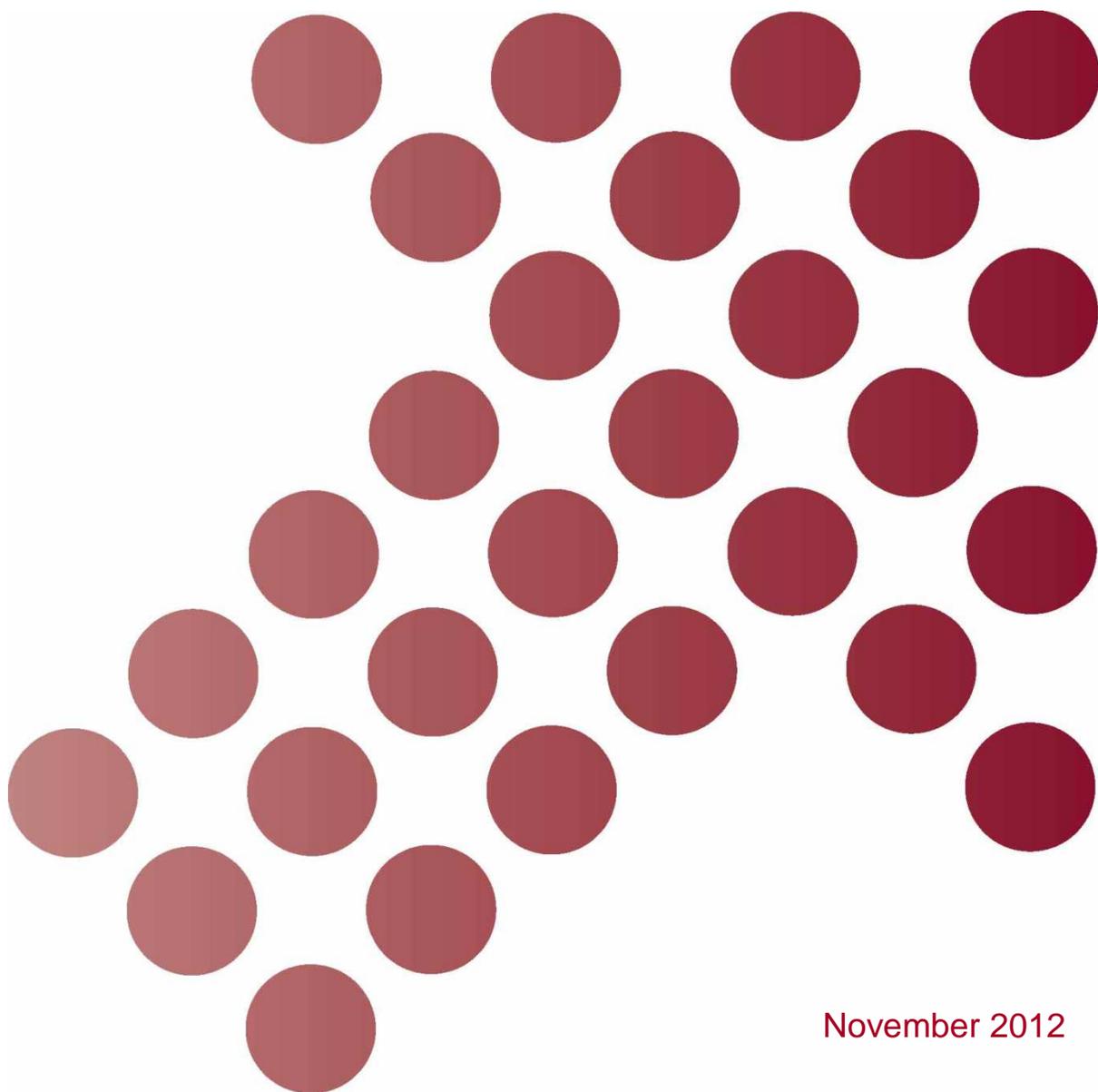


Quality Assurance Process



Contents	Page
1. Introduction	3
Standards for Education	3
Learning Outcomes	4
Inspectors and the Inspection panel	4
2. New programme submissions	5
3. Inspections	5
Short – Term Sufficiency	6
Reporting	6
Sufficiency for Registration	7
Monitoring	8
4. Additional information	8

1. Introduction

The General Dental Council (GDC) is the regulatory body for dentists and dental care professionals (DCPs) in the UK. Within its role, the GDC has a responsibility to set out the requirements for educational programmes leading to registration as a dental professional and a statutory obligation to quality assure these programmes. The purpose of this process is to fulfil the GDC's primary function of protecting patients.

The GDC quality assures programmes so that it may be confident that a qualification allowing the holder to apply for registration is 'sufficient' for registration with the GDC. 'Sufficiency' is the term used in the Dentists Act and it is granted to individual programmes, rather than to a programme provider. The GDC's interest in programmes leading to registration lies in determining whether a programme has reached the required level and that those who are awarded a qualification should be allowed to apply for registration. The GDC does not rank or grade programmes.

This guidance document provides general information about how the GDC fulfils its statutory duty to quality assure educational programmes that lead to registration. It will give an overview of the publications and procedures that underpin the process. Further guidance is available for providers of education programmes and for GDC Quality Assurance Inspectors, who are tasked with carrying out the evaluation of new programme proposals and programme inspections.

Standards for Education

The GDC has published a set of *Standards for Education*, which is used as a regulatory framework to ensure that a programme is fit for purpose. The Standards cover four areas that education programmes are expected to meet and these are central to the GDC's quality assurance process:

- 1. Patient protection**
- 2. Quality evaluation and review**
- 3. Student assessment**
- 4. Equality and diversity**

The Standards contain a total of 29 underlying requirements across the four areas. The GDC will assess the demonstration of these standards at all stages of the QA process.

Learning Outcomes

The *Standards for Education* require that providers only allow students to pass if they demonstrate a set of learning outcomes, which have been defined by the GDC in the document:

Preparing for Practice: Dental Team Learning Outcomes for Registration (2011)

The learning outcomes were designed with a focus on patient protection and future oral health need. *Preparing for Practice* contains learning outcomes for each of the seven professions that are registered with the GDC.

During a transition period, education and training programmes may produce professionals who demonstrate the learning outcomes in the previous curricula:

- The First Five Years: A Framework for Undergraduate Dental Education (3rd Edition 2008), for dentists; and
- Developing the Dental Team (2nd Edition 2009), for DCPs

From 2012, education providers are expected to review the programmes that they offer so that those who pass the programme meet the learning outcomes from *Preparing for Practice*. For some providers this may be a short process, but others may need to completely revise their curriculum.

All proposals or 'submissions' for new programmes are required to be mapped against the relevant learning outcomes in *Preparing for Practice*. The submission must also demonstrate how the new programme will meet the *Standards for Education*.

Inspectors and the Inspection Panel

GDC Quality Assurance Inspectors undertake inspections of programmes that lead to registration with the GDC, working in panels of between four and five. Inspection panels include a member of the GDC's Quality Assurance Team. Inspectors also undertake evaluations of new programme proposals, or 'submissions'.

Inspectors are GDC registrants or lay people. All inspectors are appointed through an open and competitive recruitment exercise. All inspectors are trained in the GDC Quality Assurance process and will receive on-going training throughout their appointment.

Inspection panels make recommendations regarding whether a programme is sufficient for registration. Inspectors also make recommendations on proposals for new programmes. These recommendations are made to the GDC Registrar, who has delegated powers from Council to make decisions on these matters.

2. New Programme Submissions

The quality assurance of all new programmes begins with a submission by the programme provider. New programme submissions are paper-based and outline how a provider plans for a programme to meet the *Standards for Education* and consequently how the students will demonstrate the learning outcomes in *Preparing for Practice*.

The submissions form contains a questionnaire about the programme, including questions about the delivery of the programme and the assessment strategy. The provider must state the evidence currently available and the evidence which will be available in future that will demonstrate it meets the *Standards for Education*.

A further part of the submission is the completion of a mapping of assessment against the learning outcomes. This mapping explains how the provider is assured that students will demonstrate the learning outcomes by the end of the programme.

3. Inspections

The GDC undertakes inspections of new programmes in the year when the first cohort of students complete the programme. The programme and the point where the students are signed off as fit to practise are inspected.

Inspections vary in length but are generally undertaken over one or two days. They can include two or more separate visits to the institution. First, there is a programme inspection when the inspection panel has the opportunity to meet with staff involved with the management and delivery of the programme and with students across each year of the programme. This is followed by an inspection of the point where students are signed-off as fit to practise. During this inspection, the panel will observe examinations and assessments and attend meetings where the results of these are agreed and the pass list is determined.

For new dentistry programmes, the GDC will undertake an inspection in each of the years the programme is delivered, up to and including the first year that students graduate. These additional inspections are advisory and are undertaken because the GDC has a different legal relationship with dentistry programmes than with DCP programmes.

Inspections of all existing programmes that are accepted for registration are undertaken on a periodic basis. In future, the GDC will normally inspect programmes on a five year cycle. Inspections of programmes may be brought forward where a programme undergoes major changes or where the GDC becomes aware of concerns about a programme through monitoring or whistleblowing and/or complaints. The policy on whistleblowing and complaints can be found on the GDC website.

As the QA process develops there will be a greater focus on risk in determining the frequency and type of quality assurance activity required.

Short-Term Sufficiency

For new programmes, 'short-term sufficiency' may be granted by the Registrar following a recommendation by the inspection panel. This allows the graduating students to apply for registration and is granted pending a decision on the on-going sufficiency of the programme. The purpose of short-term sufficiency is to avoid a long delay between a student completing a programme and becoming eligible to register. It can take between two and five months after an inspection for the full sufficiency decision to be made, which could result in the holder of an award de-skilling or missing out on work opportunities. The inspection panel makes a recommendation to the GDC on 'short-term sufficiency' after the student sign-off inspection.

'Short-term sufficiency' is only granted if the inspection panel agree that the cohort completing the programme have reached the required standard and are fit to practise at the level of a safe beginner. This recommendation is applicable to the graduating cohort group of students only.

Should serious shortcomings, which could compromise the safety of dental patients, be identified at any stage of the inspection, the inspectors may recommend that 'short-term sufficiency' should not be granted. Alternatively, 'short-term sufficiency' may be dependent on the provider undertaking certain actions within a defined timescale.

Reporting

The draft inspection report is produced by the GDC QA Officer who attended the inspection and includes findings of both the programme and student sign-off inspections.

As explained above, GDC inspection reports are centred on the achievement of the *Standards for Education*. Reports highlight where there is insufficient, contradictory or inadequate evidence to demonstrate a Standard. In addition, reports will comment on areas of good practice.

Reports also contain actions required of the programme provider. These actions focus on areas that impact upon the achievement of the *Standards for Education*, particularly where it has been determined that requirements have not been met. Actions required must be addressed by the provider within a specific time period. It may be that further GDC inspections are required and in this case this will be listed as an action for the GDC.

The draft report is sent to the provider and they will be asked to provide factual corrections and observations on the content of the report. The observations must address the actions required.

Sufficiency for Registration

Reports contain a recommendation to the GDC from the inspection panel regarding the 'sufficiency' of a programme for registration.

A decision on 'sufficiency' is different to a decision on 'short-term sufficiency' because it entitles future students who obtain the qualification to apply for registration with the Council. This decision is made by the Registrar when considering the inspection report and the provider's written observations on the report.

Demonstration of the *Standards for Education* and underlying requirements is central to the inspection panel's recommendation regarding the sufficiency of a programme for registration. However, the recommendation will not be solely based on a provider meeting of a specific number of requirements, but it will be made with consideration of the programme as a whole. The recommendation will be made with particular regard to the safety of patients; either those treated by students on the programme or implications for future patients of those who pass the programme.

The inspection panel will recommend that a programme is either:

- A** 'Sufficient' for registration, with or without some actions required;
- B** 'Sufficient' for registration, for one cohort only, pending further actions and further quality assurance activity; or
- C** Not 'sufficient' for registration

By recommending A, that a programme is 'sufficient' for registration, the inspection panel have agreed that those who successfully complete the programme are fit to practise and that the *Standards for Education* have been met, or will be met subject to a number of actions being addressed. By making this recommendation, the inspection panel is assured that patient safety will not be compromised by the programme.

The inspection panel may recommend that a programme is 'sufficient' for one cohort only (option B). This is recommended if the inspection panel is assured that the graduating cohort is fit to practise. However, the inspection panel cannot be assured that future cohorts will reach this standard and the provider is required to address a number of actions to provide this assurance. Additional quality assurance activity may include further inspections.

The recommendation that a programme is not 'sufficient' for registration (option C), will be made if the inspection panel has serious concerns related to patient safety

and the provider has not demonstrated a number of the *Standards for Education* and has been unable to respond effectively to concerns raised during the inspection process.

The decision to award sufficiency is made by the Registrar on behalf of the Council of the GDC. The Registrar considers the inspection report and the provider's written observations on the report and has recourse to an advisory panel.

Where serious concerns have arisen, the Registrar may sanction further inspections of a programme. If the inspection panel recommends that a programme is not sufficient for registration the Registrar will refer the decision to the Council of the GDC which may refuse to award 'sufficiency' or may withhold 'sufficiency' pending further action. For dentistry programmes (BDS/BChD) this requires the GDC to petition the Privy Council to remove the provider from the list of dental authorities. For DCP programmes, the GDC holds the power to refuse sufficiency without referral to any other body.

The inspection report is published on the GDC website once a final 'sufficiency' decision has been made.

Monitoring

The GDC undertakes an annual paper-based monitoring exercise of all dental and DCP programmes that have been determined sufficient for registration.

All programme providers are asked a series of generic questions about the programmes they offer. There may be additional questions on the monitoring forms that seek specific information about a particular programme, including questions that seek information about actions required from inspection reports.

As the GDC QA Process develops, the way that programmes are monitored will be changing to assist the GDC in determining the risk profile of programmes, which will help inform future QA activity.

4. Additional information

Please contact the QA Team to seek clarification or further information on any aspect of the QA Process. You can email the team at qualityassurance@gdc-uk.org or telephone on 020 7344 3746.