



General
Dental
Council

protecting patients,
regulating the dental team

Student professionalism and fitness to practise

Standards for the dental team
Guidance for students

This document sets out the standards of conduct, performance and ethics that you should follow as a student training to become a dental professional registered with the General Dental Council.

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The purpose of this guidance

This guidance sets out the principles of professional behaviour expected of you during your training to become a registered dental professional. It applies to all students training to become a member of the dental team registered by the General Dental Council (GDC). The dental team is made up of the following roles:

- ▶ clinical dental technicians,
- ▶ dental hygienists,
- ▶ dental nurses,
- ▶ dental technicians,
- ▶ dental therapists,
- ▶ dentists, and
- ▶ orthodontic therapists.

The guidance contains information to help you understand what patients and training providers expect of you, what happens if concerns arise, and what sort of help and support may be available for you during training.

Your training provider and the GDC are here to provide you with the information and help you need to develop your professionalism as a student and later on when you start work. We understand that training, as well as being a rewarding experience, can be a stressful time for students and you should feel you can ask for advice when you need it.

Your training provider will take you through the guidance and explain how it applies to you during your course.



What is the General Dental Council?

Patients need good dental professionals, who take care of them, are competent, keep their knowledge and skills up to date, are honest and act with integrity.

The General Dental Council's role is to protect patients and maintain public confidence in the dental profession and its regulation. The law requires us to regulate the dental professions in the United Kingdom by:

- ▶ quality assuring education;
- ▶ registering you and your colleagues;
- ▶ setting standards that dental professionals must meet; and
- ▶ requiring dental professionals to keep their skills up to date through continuing professional development.

The law also requires us to investigate serious allegations where a dental professional's behavior or conduct is called into question. When we say "fit to practise" we mean that someone has the appropriate skills, knowledge, character and health to practise their profession safely and effectively. This might include imposing restrictions on practice such as requiring them to only see patients under supervision, requiring them to complete additional training, and, in rare cases, removing a professional from the register.



GDC - Training and education.

We set the learning outcomes and standards that must be covered by qualifications leading to registration and approve and monitor these training programmes. The learning outcomes can be found in the publication

Preparing for Practice.



Skills such as communication, professionalism and management and leadership are as important when caring for patients as the clinical skills you will be taught.

The standards expected of registrants are set out in the GDC publication Standards for the Dental Team. The standards expected of students are based on these principles.

It is important that you become familiar with the Standards for the Dental Team as soon as you begin training.



The GDC register of dental professionals

Once you have qualified as a dental professional you must apply to join the register if you want to work in the UK. Once registered, we regulate the profession by setting standards of conduct, performance

and ethics. We take action against those who work outside their scope of practice, practise illegally, breach our standards, and who put patients at risk, therefore eroding the confidence patients have in the profession. If a registrant isn't meeting our standards we aim, where possible, to recommend actions to support them to make improvements that will support the registrant to address the issues and remain in practice, depending on the risk to patients.



What is student professionalism?

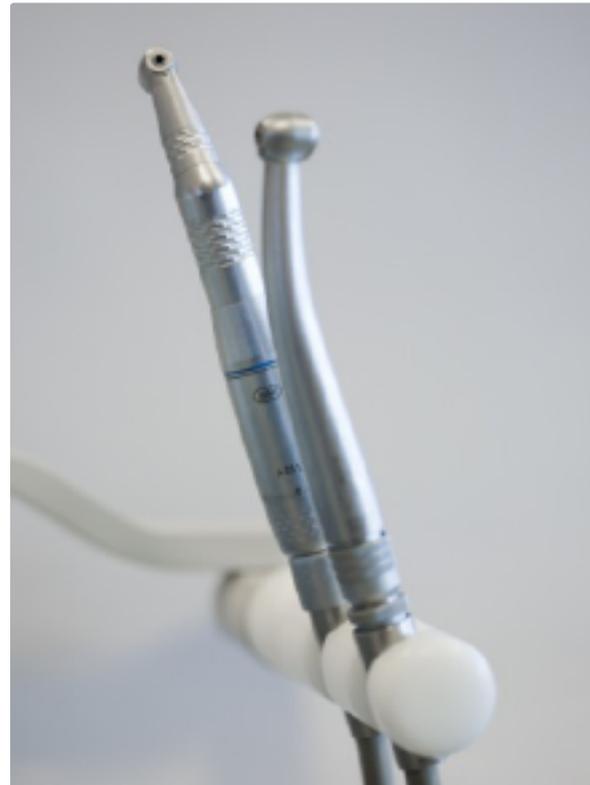
Training to be a dental professional offers many exciting opportunities but it also comes with a very high degree of responsibility. You may have access to confidential patient information. Patients may view you as being in a position of trust and responsibility. They are often willing to allow students to be involved in their treatments as they accept this is an important part of your development. This is based on trust that as students, you will behave professionally, supported by trained professionals.

'As a dental nurse you are seen to be a 'good member of society' and at the work place, you are there to help care for your patients. You shouldn't be any different outside of the workplace.'
(Dental Nurse student)

'I feel there most definitely is a difference in the standards expected of dental students to those students studying other subjects. This is due to the nature of studying dentistry, it includes having real patients, which means real procedures and treatments to be carried out in a real environment'
(Dental student)

Student professionalism is the way you respond to the standards required of you and the issues you may face during your training. It is how you demonstrate the appropriate attitudes and behaviour with patients and your colleagues (staff on the training course, employers and other

students) and develop the ability to know when to seek advice and support in terms of your learning, your clinical work or technical work and health. It also encompasses the way you respond when you are made aware of issues and offered advice and support. These are behaviours or attributes a patient expects a dental professional to demonstrate.





Your training provider will help you develop your judgment to apply the principles laid out in our standards to the various situations you will face as a dental professional. This is regardless if you are registered or not, what dental professional you are or if you regularly see patients. If there is an occasion where you don't fulfil what is expected of you, for whatever reason, your recognition of the problem when it is raised and reacting in the right way also demonstrates professionalism. Support will be available but it is important that you take responsibility for your actions.

These standards are important because student dental professionals work and provide patient care and maintain good infection control. This responsibility sets student dental professionals, and other

health and social care students, apart from other students. Patients you provide care for during your training must be able to trust that you put their safety, health and choices first. This means thinking about how you communicate and behave outside of study, as well as on your course, in the evenings, at weekends and when using social media.

By the end of your training you must be able to demonstrate that you have the knowledge skills and attitudes expected of a registered dentist or dental care professional. This is at the level of a 'safe beginner'. This includes standards of conduct, performance and ethics.

Student professionalism is a significant part of meeting student fitness to practise requirements.

What standards are expected of students?

There are nine ethical principles of practice in the **Standards for the Dental Team**. You have an individual responsibility to behave professionally and follow these principles at all times. Your training provider will give you the detailed information you need about:

- ▶ what is expected during training
- ▶ what is expected when you register with the GDC.

Not all of the standards are relevant during training, although you must be familiar with them. For example, you don't need to ensure you have appropriate insurance or indemnity in place since you are not yet registered with the GDC (see the section on students who are already registered with the GDC). Indemnity cover is a requirement of registering. Your training provider may have responsibility for other areas such as reporting patient safety incidents to the appropriate national body.

The GDC website contains a support area called **Focus on Standards** where you can access supporting guidance, FAQs, scenarios and other learning materials to help you apply the standards in your daily work. You can test yourself as you go along. There is also a dedicated **student professionalism** resource area with helpful information.

The nine ethical principles of practice:

1. Put patients' interests first
2. Communicate effectively with patients
3. Obtain valid consent
4. Maintain and protect patients' information
5. Have a clear and effective complaints procedure
6. Work with colleagues in a way that is in patients' best interests
7. Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills
8. Raise concerns if patients are at risk
9. Make sure your personal behaviour maintains patients' confidence in you and the dental profession

What is student fitness to practise?

Student fitness to practise, put simply, is meeting certain requirements during your training relating to:

 **Clinical/technical and academic work**

 **Professional behaviour**

 **Health**

This is a key part of managing the risks to patient safety during training and helping you develop the professional attributes required for registration with the GDC.

Training providers are responsible for determining the fitness to practise of individual students. The GDC does not have any direct authority to deal with or advise on individual cases of the fitness to practise or disciplinary issues of students.

As highlighted earlier, the GDC has the legal authority to decide the standards and learning outcomes that students must demonstrate at the point of qualifying in order to register with the GDC.

As part of the GDC's duty to protect the public, if a dentist or dental care professional falls seriously short of the standards expected of them, we can remove them from the register, or restrict what they do professionally. These powers are given to us by parliament and cover all registered dentists and dental care professionals whether they are working in the NHS or in private practice.

This needs to be taken into account when deciding if student dental professionals are fit to practise. It is important that where a student displays signs of poor performance or behaviour, these are addressed before patients are put at risk.





As students you are expected to behave in a professional and responsible manner as set out in our standards and Preparing for Practice Document. If your behaviour falls below these expected levels, there is an issue with your clinical/technical and academic work or there are concerns about your health that may impact on your ability to achieve the learning outcomes or affect patient safety, the provider should consider if this amounts to a student fitness to practise concern, and therefore warrants consideration through its formal procedures.

The GDC ensures that all training providers must have a student fitness to practise policy and apply it as required. The content and significance of the student fitness to practise procedures must be explained to you by your provider.

The GDC collects information annually from all training providers on student fitness to practise issues. This data is anonymous. We use this information to check how they are implementing the guidance and also whether there are any patterns we may need to provide further guidance on.

You are required to declare student fitness to practise proceedings or investigations on your GDC application. You must be aware that **unprofessional behaviour, criminal convictions and cautions or serious health problems that have not been appropriately managed during your training can affect your ability to register with the GDC** and therefore get a job as a dental professional. For more information, see 'Applying for registration with the GDC' on page 23.

Patients

Patients that receive care or treatment from you while you are training expect you to put their interests first. Depending on how your course is designed you may be meeting patients soon after you start. Think about what you would expect from your dentist or doctor to help see it from their perspective.

Patients will expect:

- ▶ you to put their safety, health and choices first
- ▶ to be treated fairly with respect, kindness, dignity and compassion
- ▶ those involved in their care to behave professionally
- ▶ to be listened to and have their preferences and concerns considered

Good communication with patients is an important part of effective care and it is helpful to think about how your tone of voice and body language might come across.

‘There’s nothing impersonal about dentistry, it’s a very personal thing. You’ve got to be able to handle people in a sympathetic way. The way you engage with the patient, is important.’
(Patient – GDC Patient Public survey 2012)

As a dental professional you must justify the trust that people place in you by being honest and acting with integrity. You must not discriminate against others or take advantage of their vulnerability.

Patients should be provided with information about your role, what standards they can expect from a dental professional student and what they should do if they wish to provide feedback and/or are unhappy with the care they have been given. Your training provider will assist with this. Look at the patient information provided by the GDC.



Communication

Good communication skills will help you interact with patients, their representatives, the wider public, team members from the dental profession and the wider health and social care sector. Communication skills are central to successful patient care - enabling patient assessment, the obtaining of valid patient consent and effective team working.

Most fitness to practise issues involve an element of poor communication.

You should communicate appropriately, effectively and sensitively with those you provide care for and work with.

Your training provider will provide you with a thorough grounding in these skills but it is worth thinking about what good communication looks like throughout your course.

Communication isn't limited to direct interaction with others but also **about** others. Ensure your record keeping is accurate, comprehensive, up to date, and meets legal and statutory requirements. There are laws around patient confidentiality and data protection which your training

provider will teach you about and that you must comply with. Use of social media should be considered very carefully. More guidance can be found in the section on 'Social media'.

Think about who you are communicating with and make sure you adjust your style and language as appropriate. Ensure that you explain the treatment you are providing and check their understanding of what you are communicating. What seems obvious to you, may be language or concepts which the patients and/or their carers are unfamiliar with and may need further explanation. This is very important when obtaining patient consent. The Standards for the Dental Team provides more information on what dental professionals are required to do.

Consider what, if any, are the barriers to effective communication and what are the options to overcome them. What would be the best method of communication in different circumstances?

Clinical/technical and academic performance

In order to qualify and be able to practise independently as a safe beginner you will need to meet the level expected in your academic, clinical and/or technical work. If there are issues meeting this level and they are not addressed by the appropriate stage on your course, through the support provided, your fitness to practise may be called into question.

Health

As a student you should:

- ▶ register with a GP;
- ▶ be aware that your own health conditions may put patients and colleagues at risk;
- ▶ seek advice if there is a concern about your health;
- ▶ accept that you may not be able to assess your own health and be willing to be referred for treatment and engage in any recommended treatment programmes;
- ▶ protect patients, colleagues and yourself by being immunised against common serious infectious diseases;
- ▶ be aware of the risks and regulation surrounding Exposure Prone Procedures (EPPs), Blood Borne Viruses (BBVs) and other infections;
- ▶ not rely on your own or another student's assessment of the risk posed to patients by your health, and seek advice from a professional; and
- ▶ be aware that dental professionals must take action if their health poses a risk to patients or the public. Advice should be sought from appropriate colleagues, professional or defence organisations.



Many students are affected by disabilities, including physical or mental health conditions. If you have a disability or health condition, it is important to let your provider know as early as possible so they can give you the appropriate support and, where appropriate, make reasonable adjustments to enable you to complete the course.

Reasonable adjustments are expected to be made for students with disabilities and other health requirements to allow them to achieve the learning outcomes on the course. Although adjustments will not be made to the learning outcomes themselves to ensure patient and public safety, reasonable adjustments can be made to methods of teaching and learning and assessments. Training providers and employers are used to adapting the environment and taking into account learning styles, for example, to meet these needs in order to help.



Some examples of reasonable adjustments are:

- ▶ allowing extra time for written assessments to take into account reading time that may be needed for a student with dyslexia;
- ▶ providing sufficient space in a patient bay for a student requiring a wheelchair; and
- ▶ providing a seat in clinic suitable for a student with back pain.

A disability or health condition may occasionally make it impossible for you to meet the outcomes required by the GDC at the point of qualifying, despite reasonable adjustments having been made. Under such circumstances, it will be appropriate to consider your fitness to practise.

Fitness to practise concerns will not, in the majority of cases, be raised by health conditions or disability, provided you receive the appropriate care and reasonable adjustments necessary to study and work safely in a clinical environment. Your training provider should offer support and regular reviews of your progress.

Raising concerns

Raising concerns about your own or another's work, behaviour or health is important for two reasons:

- ▶ it may help protect patients and other people
- ▶ it helps ensure students get the support and help they need

This is also an important part of your responsibility as a registrant once you begin work. Healthcare professionals must be open and honest with their colleagues, employers and relevant organisations, and take part in reviews and investigations when requested. Health and care professionals must also be open and honest with their regulators, raising concerns where appropriate. They must support and encourage each other to be open and honest and not stop someone from raising concerns.

Advice on raising concerns can be found here on our website.



What should you do if you have a concern about your own or another's work, behaviour or health?

We do understand that it may be difficult to tell someone about a concern you have about yourself, another student, or a member of staff, even your supervisor or teacher. Your training provider will give you information about the different ways you can do this and provide a supportive environment to help you do this. They will aim to support and help those who have a concern raised against them.

The professional duty of candour

You should make sure you are familiar with what the Professional Duty of Candour means. This covers your responsibility to be open and honest:

- ▶ Every healthcare professional must be open and honest with patients when something goes wrong with their treatment or care which causes, or has the potential to cause, harm or distress.

Further information can be found in the GDC publication on **Duty of Candour**

Social media

The GDC has published clear guidance to help registrants use social media. This can be found on our website.



The standards expected of you as a student do not change when you are communicating through social media rather than face to face or by traditional media. As a student dental professional, you have a responsibility to behave professionally and responsibly both online and offline. Your online image can impact on your professional life and you should not post or share any information, including photographs and videos, which damage public trust in dental professionals. Even if you do not present yourself online as a student dental professional a patient may still be able to identify you as such.



It is important to remember that anything you or others post on social media is in the public domain and can be easily copied and redistributed without your knowledge. You should presume that, even with the highest security settings, everything that you share online will be there permanently and could be seen by anyone. You should also consider any potential concerns around patient confidentiality, for example there are risks around the taking of clinical photographs on your mobile phone and devices which can be lost or stolen and data or images transferred to other locations.

What are your responsibilities?

From the beginning of your training you have a responsibility to:

- ▶ ensure you are familiar with this document and the standards expected of students;
- ▶ meet the Standards for the Dental Team;
- ▶ discuss concerns with your training provider if you are concerned about you or another student not meeting these standards ;
- ▶ discuss any patient safety concerns with your training provider; and
- ▶ know what you need to declare on your registration application.

What are your training provider's responsibilities?

Your training provider should deliver guidance and support from the beginning of your training by explaining what:

- ▶ may be considered as a student fitness to practise issue;
- ▶ support is available for students;
- ▶ the GDC may consider an issue that calls your fitness to practise in question;
- ▶ their student fitness to practise policy and processes are; and
- ▶ you may need to declare on your registration application.

They should promote and emphasise the GDC standards throughout the course and provide appropriate support.



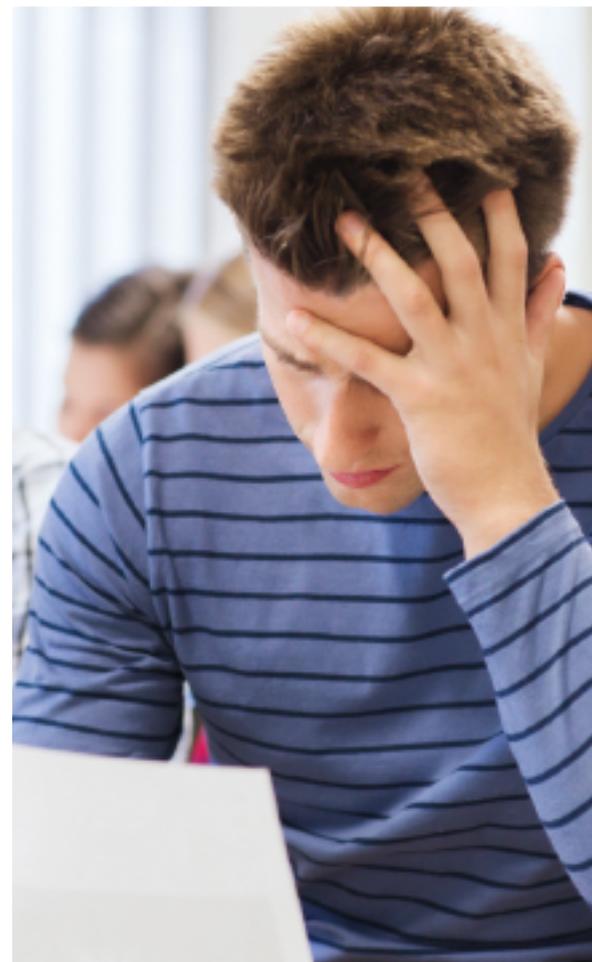
What might affect my performance or study as a student dental professional and who should I speak to about it?

Being a student is a rewarding and challenging experience. At the end of the course you will be working in a healthcare role which will make a difference to patients' health. You are learning new information, practising new skills, meeting new people, developing responsibility for patient care and also being assessed.

There are a lot of factors that might affect your behaviour and how well you do on your course. These are some examples of common issues that it is good to be aware of, and you should consider letting your supervisor know about:

- ▶ ill health (both physical and mental) – yours, that of a friend, or a member of your family;
- ▶ family commitments;
- ▶ bereavement;
- ▶ academic or other stress;
- ▶ bullying or harassment;
- ▶ financial pressures, part-time job;
- ▶ relationship issues – whether family or personal relationships;
- ▶ drug, alcohol, or addiction issues;
- ▶ balance between social life and study; and
- ▶ patient feedback.

Everyone can be susceptible to one or more of these issues any of which can impact your work. If this happens to you we encourage you to tell someone such as your supervisor or trainer if there are any issues either on your course or in your home life. Some of these may be out of your control and it is important this is recognised. If you have any problems dealing with them, support and advice is available and performance issues can be avoided.



What support is available for students?

It is important for you to have the opportunity, where possible, to seek support for any matter before it becomes a fitness to practise concern. This is so that appropriate help can be provided for you. You are learning, and it is expected that you may make mistakes and will need help and support at some point during the course. This is a normal part of the training process. Human error will happen from time to time whether a dental professional is in training or working once qualified. What is as important is your response.

If you are worried there are issues with your work, health or behaviour you should ask your training provider who is the best person to speak to. They will be able to



direct you to a range of people or services depending on what you are concerned about. These may include:

- ▶ personal tutor;
- ▶ student health services;
- ▶ disability advisors;
- ▶ occupational health services;
- ▶ confidential counselling eg through your university/college support services;
- ▶ student groups; and
- ▶ your employer.

You can also look at the section at the end of this document for a list of useful organisations and guidance. Professional bodies may also have helpful advice and resources.

If necessary, you and your training provider should agree plans that you develop together to help with health, behaviour, or work issues before fitness to practise becomes a concern. Your employer may be involved too. However, the decision on the plans made must be based on an assessment by your training provider of the risk to patients and the public.

If fitness to practise concerns are identified, it may be appropriate for your training provider to offer support to you alongside fitness to practise procedures and sanctions.

Confidentiality

It is important to feel you can discuss problems, whether about yourself or others, in a supportive and confidential environment. Your training provider should facilitate this.

Anyone who provides you with support or pastoral care should not be involved in investigating or making decisions that could affect your career, even though personal tutors may often raise the initial concern.

Your training provider has a responsibility to be aware of and comply with relevant legislation in order to protect your confidentiality. This includes supervisors and tutors in work placements.

What if my trainer is my employer?

On some programmes your employer may also be your trainer which may cause concern when raising issues. All training providers, whether their students learn in a university, college, or an employment location such as a dental practice or dental laboratory, should provide you with a clear process and supportive environment for raising concerns. If for any reason you don't feel you can report your concern to your trainer/supervisor you should be able to find out from your provider an alternative person to speak to. This may be someone from the university, college, NHS Trust or awarding body that oversees your course.



What actions and behaviours are expected of those preparing to become dental professionals?

The Standards for the Dental Team sets out principles of professional conduct across a range of areas. As a student preparing to become a dental professional you should be starting to embed those principles into how you work, particularly in relation to patients. Here are some examples of how you can demonstrate the standards as a student, and also some indicators of the types of behaviour that might cause your professionalism to be called into question:

Principle	Examples of how you can demonstrate the principles ✓	Examples of where there would be concerns ✗
1. Put patients' interests first	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Treating patients with respect and dignity ▶ Taking prompt action if you notice that patients might be at risk due to the health, behaviour or professional performance of you, teaching staff, other students, your employer or the clinical/technical environment ▶ Ensuring you find out about the laws and regulations which apply to your clinical/technical practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Failing to adhere to cross contamination/infection procedures ▶ Misleading patients about their care or treatment
2. Communicate effectively with patients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Listening to patients ▶ Encouraging patients to ask questions, and being ready to explain their care and treatment ▶ Thinking about the best way to communicate with patients and giving them the information they need in a way they can understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Persistent rudeness to patients ▶ Repeatedly failing to alter your communication style to meet the needs of the patient ▶ Not checking patients have fully understood the information you have given them
3. Obtain valid consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Documenting the discussions you have with patients and the supervising registrant about consent ▶ Making sure patients understand the decisions they are being asked to make ▶ Making sure the patient's consent remains valid at each stage, and if necessary, obtaining it again 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Failing to obtain valid consent from a patient ▶ Not explaining all treatment options and advantages and disadvantages of each to the patient so they make an informed decision

Principle	Examples of how you can demonstrate the principles ✓	Examples of where there would be concerns ✗
4. Maintain and protect patients' information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Making and keeping up to date, complete and accurate patient records ▶ Keeping patients' information secure at all times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Breach of confidentiality ▶ Sharing images or other information about patients online ▶ Speaking about patients where you can be overheard by people who shouldn't have access to patient information ▶ Failure to keep appropriate patient records
5. Have a clear and effective complaints procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Being aware of your training provider's complaints procedure and following it ▶ Listening to a patient's complaint politely and providing a prompt and constructive response ▶ Learning from a complaint to improve your work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Being unnecessarily defensive if a patient complains ▶ Not responding to the advice or support offered by your training provider as a result of a complaint ▶ Failing to apologise if appropriate
6. Work with colleagues in a way that is in patients' best interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Treating other students and members of the team with respect ▶ Understanding the roles of everyone in the team ▶ Letting your training provider know if you have any worries relating to your supervision ▶ Introducing yourself and explaining what your role is to the patient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Bullying other students or members of the team ▶ Being dismissive of the value of other members of the dental team
7. Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Showing commitment to the work necessary to become a competent and professional practitioner, including appropriate attendance ▶ Achievement of learning outcomes ▶ Recognising when to ask for advice and support and doing so promptly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Behaviour indicating lack of commitment to work eg repeated non-attendance ▶ Failing to recognise your limits and abilities

Principle	Examples of how you can demonstrate the principles ✓	Examples of where there would be concerns ✗
8. Raise concerns if patients are at risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Letting your supervisor or employer know if you think there may be a risk to patient safety due to the health, behaviour or professional performance of you, teaching staff, other students, employer or the clinical/technical environment ▶ Acting promptly in these situations ▶ Support other students to raise concerns if they need it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Failure to seek medical attention or other support if health concerns, including mental health issues, are raised ▶ Alcohol or drug consumption that affects clinical/technical work or environment ▶ Refusal to follow medical advice or care plan including monitoring and reviews
9. Make sure your personal behaviour maintains patients' confidence in you and the dental profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Treating other students, staff on your course and the public with respect and dignity ▶ Telling your tutor or an appropriate professional if you are worried that your health, behaviour or work may be an issue ▶ Responding positively to advice provided on any issues with your health behaviour and work ▶ Appropriate conduct outside of your studies in the evenings or at the weekend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Behaviours associated with dishonesty eg cheating, plagiarising, claiming registrant status before you are qualified ▶ Misuse of social media ▶ Serious driving offence ▶ Failing to co-operate with support advised if an issue is raised with your work, behaviour or student fitness to practise proceedings ▶ Behaviours involving or associated with potential criminality eg dealing, possessing or misusing drugs/illegal substances even if there are no legal proceedings ▶ Discrimination or other unlawful behaviour relating to different groups in the population ▶ Becoming involved in criminal activity ▶ Violent behaviour ▶ Abusive behaviour ▶ Sexual harassment ▶ Theft including shoplifting ▶ Gaining a criminal conviction or caution ▶ Financial fraud

What happens if you don't meet the standards?

There are a variety of things that can happen depending on what the issue is and how serious things are. These range from:

- ▶ simple support in terms of extra training or treatment of a health problem which can get you back on track quickly. This is what happens in the majority of cases.
- ▶ to the training provider requiring the issue to be considered under its student fitness to practise process with a possibility of formal sanctions including removal from the training programme. This would happen in the most serious cases where, for example, a student's behaviour had put patients at serious risk and there was no insight shown by the student. This is quite rare and, if any, there are usually a maximum of only one or two cases each year on a course.



What happens if you have been through student fitness to practise proceedings and everything has been resolved?

If you have been through formal student fitness to practise proceedings, your training provider has followed the GDC guidance appropriately, and a decision has been made to allow you to qualify, there should be no reason for us to refuse registration unless issues had come to light of which the training provider had been unaware.

Students already registered with the GDC

Some students may already be registrants with the GDC, for example, dental nurses training to become orthodontic therapists, dental hygienists training to become dental therapists or dental technicians training to become clinical dental technicians. If you are registered as a member of the dental team and training to become registered in another category then you and your training provider must report a concern about your fitness to practise directly to the GDC.

How does the student fitness to practise process work?

Your training provider should provide you, and all others involved, with clear information about all stages of the process.

- 1.** If a concern is raised there will be an initial investigation. A neutral member of staff should carry out the investigation. They will have full access to your student record and will meet with you and other relevant people to get as wide a range of evidence as appropriate. If no evidence is found then you will carry on in your training as before. If there are some issues that need addressing they may be relatively minor and resolved by you agreeing to additional support and supervision for a period of time.
- 2.** If the issues continue, or are more serious, they may be referred to a fitness to practise panel or committee through formal student fitness to practise procedures. You should be informed of this in writing and be offered an opportunity to present written evidence. There may be a formal hearing where you have to appear at a meeting with the panel/committee and answer questions about the issues and present evidence on how you are addressing them. The panel will make a decision on the appropriate course of action to help you become fit to practise, or whether it is best for you to leave the course. These are called sanctions. Alternatively they may provide you with a warning or find there is no issue and allow you to continue training. A student fitness to practise hearing is not a legal hearing.

Recognising there is a problem – or insight

It is worth remembering that one of the biggest factors contributing to a student facing formal fitness to practise proceedings is a lack of recognition of the problem or insight. If you can see what the problem is, recognise what you need to do and take the advice or support recommended, then usually things can be resolved.

Warnings

A warning would occur where there is evidence of misconduct but your student fitness to practise is not impaired and does not require any of the sanctions listed below. This will remain on your student record and **you must declare it** when applying to the GDC for registration.



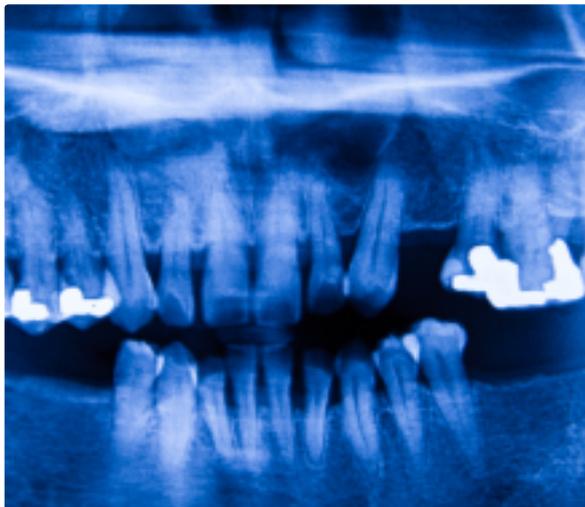
Sanctions

There are four types of sanctions:

- ▶ Undertakings
- ▶ Conditions
- ▶ Suspension from the course
- ▶ Expulsion from the course

Undertakings

This is an agreement between you and the training provider where it is found that your fitness to practise is impaired and you acknowledge this. This agreement is usually taken forward before and instead of a formal hearing. Undertakings may include restrictions on your clinical practice or behaviour, or a commitment to undergo medical supervision or remedial teaching. These do not need to be declared when applying to the GDC for registration.



Conditions

Conditions such as remedial tuition and increased supervision may be applied where there is a significant concern about your fitness to practise, you have shown insight in to your problems and there is a good chance this will help you get back on track. You must declare conditions when applying to the GDC for registration.

Suspension from the course

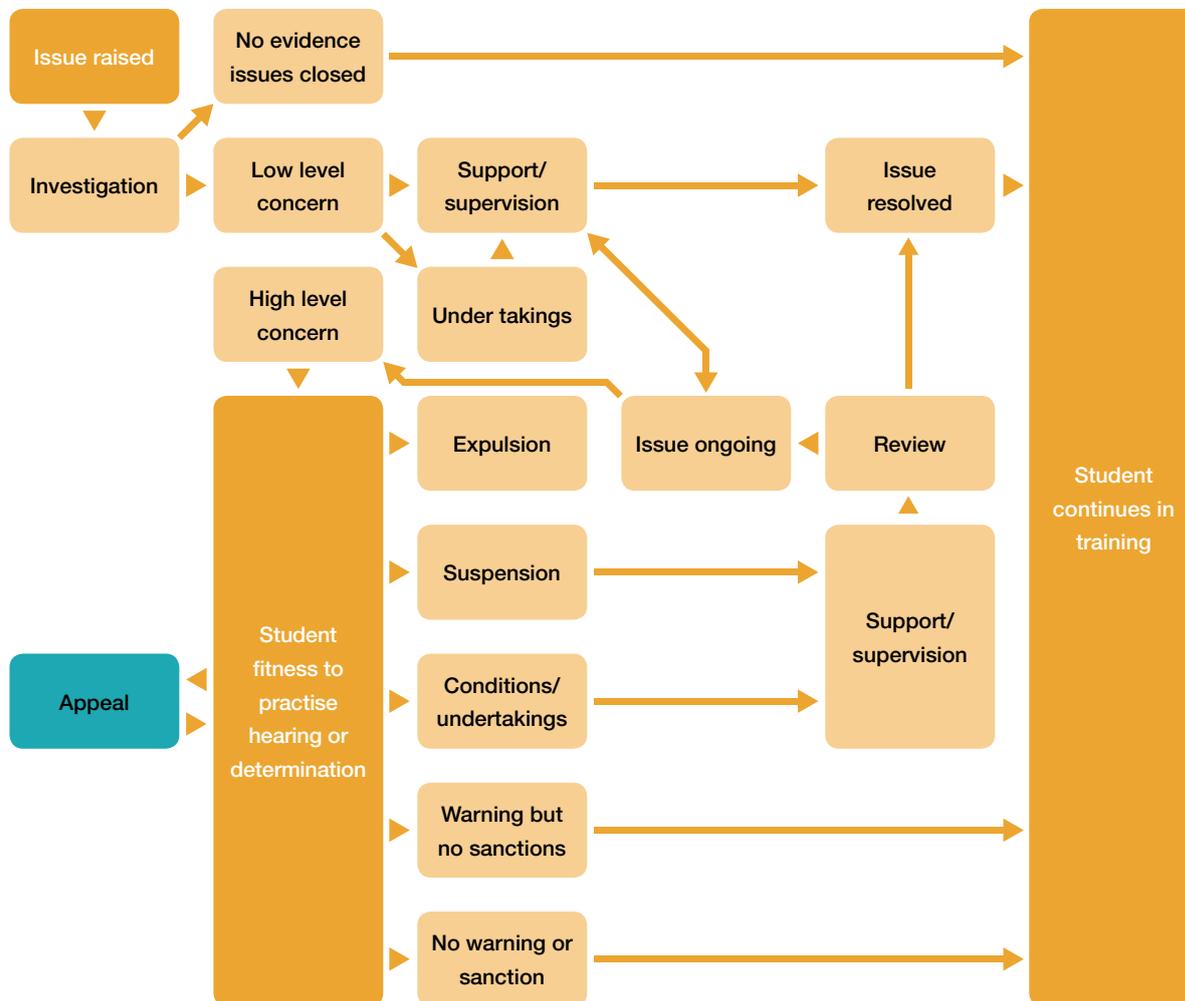
This would occur to prevent you continuing with the course for a period of time. Suspensions occur when the concerns about your fitness to practise are serious but not so serious as to justify immediate expulsion from the course. You would be expected to comply with any further conditions when returning to the course. **You must declare suspension and further conditions** when applying to the GDC for registration.

Expulsion from the course

The most severe sanction is the panel's decision that expelling you is the only way to protect patients and the public. Your behaviour would be judged to be completely incompatible with that of continuing on the course or eventually practising as a dentist or dental care professional. It may mean that you should not be accepted on any course in the future that leads to registration with the GDC. **The severity of this situation makes such cases very rare.**

Overview

Here is an overview of what happens from the point of a concern being raised about a student's work, health or behaviour.



Formal student fitness to practise proceedings

Should you have to attend a student fitness to practise hearing your training provider will allow you to be represented or have a supporter present. Although it is not a formal legal process it does follow a formally agreed fitness to practise procedure. You may wish to seek legal advice to help you through the process and have legal representation should you have to attend a hearing. If you are a student member of a defence/protection society or professional body you may be eligible to receive free advice.

Appeals

Your training provider will have a clear appeals procedure for student fitness to practise decisions setting out what the process is and what can be considered.

Equality and diversity

Your training provider, wherever they are based, is required to know what their equality and diversity responsibilities are and to comply with them.



Applying for registration with the GDC

When you apply for registration with the GDC you need to declare whether there are any issues which may affect your fitness to practise. Failure to declare issues is viewed seriously and may affect your registration. Click the image to see a copy of the application guidance.

UK Dentist Pre-Application Guidance



UK Dental Care Professional Pre-Application Guidance



Declaring student fitness to practise proceedings

If you have been subject to fitness to practise proceedings during training you must provide details on your application for registration with the GDC. You will need to include a description of the proceedings undertaken or contemplated, including the approximate date of the proceedings.

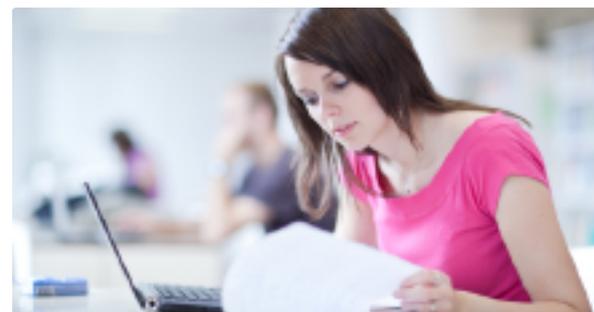
Declaring criminal convictions and cautions

As well as student fitness to practise proceedings you also need to declare criminal convictions and cautions. This applies to both current and past convictions and cautions, before or during your training. They include:

- ▶ being charged with a criminal offence
- ▶ being found guilty of a criminal offence
- ▶ receiving a conditional discharge for an offence
- ▶ accepting a criminal caution (including a conditional caution), or otherwise formally admit to committing a criminal offence
- ▶ accepting the option of paying a penalty notice for a disorder offence (in England and Wales), a penalty notice under the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 or a fixed penalty notice under the Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004
- ▶ receiving a formal adult warning in Scotland.

You do **not** need to inform the GDC of the following:

- ▶ a fixed penalty notice for a road traffic offence
- ▶ a fixed penalty notice issued by local authorities (for example for offences such as dog fouling, or graffiti)
- ▶ an anti-social behaviour, preventative justice, or other social order.



These may have been incurred as part of student fitness to practise proceedings. Failure to declare criminal convictions and cautions is viewed as dishonest and incompatible with professional behaviour and being on the register. It is likely to lead to referral to the Investigating Committee and then Professional Conduct Committee and can affect your registration. Convictions/cautions considered spent should still be declared as they may lead to a referral to the Investigating Committee and can affect your registration. More detailed guidance can be found in the GDC document *Criminal convictions and cautions*.



Health self-certification



You need to declare any health condition: meaning any illness, injury or disability/impairment either physical or mental. The GDC has a duty to be satisfied that a person is in good health, both physically and mentally, before they are registered. Putting patients' interests first is the first principle in our standards. To do this, you need to take into account your own health and wellbeing. If you can show that you are properly managing your health condition, there should be no impact on your application to join the register.

We need to know about any risk your health condition may pose to patient safety or to your ability to do your job safely, not so much about the condition itself. This may vary from person to person, and may also be affected by the impact of your condition, the help you may be receiving, and how much insight you have into its effect on your practice. We recognise that your ability to work safely can be enhanced by the support network you have, whether that is your dental school/training provider, at work or at home from the clinician(s) treating you.

Further information is available in the GDC document

Health self-certification guidance.



Your referee

You are required to provide a character and identity reference on your GDC registration application form. Referees can include a member of staff from your training provider, for instance:

- ▶ the head of the applicant's dental training school or their nominee; or
- ▶ the person responsible for supervision of the applicant's training (e.g. practice manager, deputy manager).

They are required to report formal student fitness to practise proceedings or other issues which would raise questions about an applicant's fitness to practise. A full list of people that can provide a reference can be found in the guidance section of the DCP and Dentist registration forms.

How does the GDC make a decision on a registration application where issues are reported?

In every case the GDC will look at the information and apply the principle of proportionality. We look at:

- ▶ the seriousness of the issue raised
- ▶ the potential implications for public and patient safety
- ▶ the potential implications for confidence and trust in the profession
- ▶ the impact it would have on the applicant

and ask whether refusal of registration would be a proportionate response.

As mentioned earlier if you have been through formal student fitness to practise proceedings, your training provider has followed the GDC guidance appropriately, and a decision has been made to allow you to qualify, there should be no reason for us to refuse registration unless issues had come to light of which the training provider had been unaware.

The GDC has a duty to assess the implications of any issue that an applicant

or other person discloses when their application is submitted to us. The GDC has the right to refuse registration in appropriate cases and in line with legal requirements.

If there are issues that are serious enough to require a refusal of registration – for example, if a training provider's decision to pass a student may not address the concerns raised later at the point of registration – the GDC may work with the training provider to arrive at a reasonable decision about the applicant.



List of useful organisations and guidance



The GDC website has a webpage for students where you can find all the GDC documents you need, and links to helpful information from other organisations.

<http://www.gdc-uk.org/Dentalprofessionals/studentprofessionalism/Pages/default.aspx>

If you have accessibility needs and require the document in a different format, please let us know what adjustments you require. The GDC is committed to ensuring our publications are as accessible as possible. We can be contacted at:

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October 2016