

## Policy Statement

Complaints raised regarding education and training providers will be handled by the Quality Assurance (QA) team within the Policy and Communications Directorate.

If an approved dental training programme fails to meet the standards we expect, it may be necessary to take action to address this. Such action may, in exceptional circumstances, lead to the withdrawal of approval (known as 'sufficiency'<sup>1</sup>) so that graduating students are not able to join our registers until full and effective remedial action has been taken. This policy sets out how we will deal with complaints or concerns raised regarding dental education and training providers by students and staff alike.

It should be noted that when we receive a complaint which leads to an investigation of an education or training provider, the General Dental Council (GDC) cannot affect an outcome which would lead to changes in grades or award classifications or to financial compensation.

## Purpose and scope

As well as approving and quality assuring programmes for registration with the GDC, we will also investigate and, if necessary, act upon concerns which may be raised about such programmes. This policy sets out our procedures for dealing with concerns and complaints and aims to ensure they are dealt with in a fair and consistent manner.

It is not within the remit of the GDC QA team to consider complaints regarding:

- the academic judgement of staff at an education or training provider;
- the fitness of individuals to remain on our registers. Such complaints or concerns are handled separately by our Fitness to Practise (FtP) department. Details about FtP procedures can be found via the GDC website.

## Policy and procedure

We may not be able to consider complaints or concerns which are not well-evidenced. It is also expected that, prior to consideration by the GDC, the complainant will have exhausted local routes to resolve their complaint or concern; this includes education or training providers' own complaints procedures.

When an anonymous complaint is received, it may not be possible for any further action to be taken if insufficient information is provided. In such cases, it is likely that the education or training provider would be contacted as a matter of courtesy and given the opportunity to answer the complaint. Their response will be held on file pending any additional information coming to light.

### Initial investigation

Complaints should be made in writing and include as much detail as possible. The types of information we require are:

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<sup>1</sup> 'Sufficiency' is the term used in the Dentists Act 1984.

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- The name of the education or training provider involved;
  - a summary of any incidents; issues or key facts;
  - details of any other complaints procedures the complaint has gone through as well as any findings;
  - permission for the complaint to be forwarded to the education or training provider (this can be anonymised).

It should be noted that without the information listed above, it may not be possible for a complaint or concern to be considered. Staff in the QA team will conduct an initial investigation of a complaint to determine whether the 'sufficiency' of the programme or award may have been jeopardised or if there is a risk that students completing the course or award would not be eligible or fit to join our registers.

Normally, a complaint will be forwarded to the education or training provider. Their response should address the concerns raised as fully as possible. The member staff within the QA team handling the complaint should offer support and guidance where necessary or where requested. We would usually expect a response within two weeks, although this will be negotiable depending on the nature of the complaint or concern.

Once we have received a response we may need to request additional information from the complainant, the education provider or both. It may also be necessary to seek the expert opinion of members of our inspection panel. Such external advice would not be obtained from stakeholders already linked in some way with the complaint or the complainant.

Once an initial investigation of the information supplied by the complainant has taken place and a detailed response has been submitted by the education or training provider, one of three possible outcomes will be arrived at:

1. The response from the education or training provider is sufficient to resolve the matter and no further action is required;
2. As a result of the investigation, it is clear that the education or training provider is not failing to meet the standards we require. Further monitoring, however, is seen as being necessary in order to ensure the issues raised continue to be dealt with appropriately. This will take place either through the current Annual Monitoring process or via another agreed method;
3. Concerns are serious enough to warrant a targeted inspection and the matter is referred to the Education Committee for ratification and further input.

Additionally, it may be decided that there is a need to refer the complaint or concern either to another organisation or to another department within the GDC.

### Targeted inspections

A targeted inspection may be necessary when there is evidence of serious educational failure which has not been addressed sufficiently via an alternative method. It is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of examples for when a targeted inspection might occur, however, some examples are listed here:

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- A continual lack of appropriate supervision for students;
  - Students are undertaking tasks for which they are not competent;
  - A lack of opportunities for students to attain the desired level of competency.

When staff identify that a targeted inspection may be required, a paper will be prepared for Education Committee to consider. The paper will summarise the nature of the complaint and any related issues as well as make recommendations on how to proceed. It may be necessary for Education Committee to consider the issues outside of a normal scheduled meeting or teleconference.

Targeted inspections will often need to be arranged at short notice. As such, we are unable to be flexible regarding suitable dates, given that inspectors will require as much notice as possible to rearrange their diaries.

Inspection teams for targeted inspections will normally have the same make-up and remit as those for standard inspections and the principles for the inspection will generally be the same. As with standard inspections, the inspection team will meet with students and with staff involved in the management and delivery of the programme. It may be applicable, at targeted inspections, to meet with more senior staff who we would not normally meet during our regular QA inspections.

#### Targeted inspection reports

As with standard QA reports, requirements and recommendations will be included which the education or training provider must respond to. The requirements may include the need for a re-inspection to take place at an agreed stage during remedial action. A clear action plan will normally be required to show how the requirements and recommendations will be addressed.

Due to the sensitive and confidential nature of these reports, they will normally be considered as private items by the Education Committee. We will not normally publish a targeted inspection report until such time as the Education Committee has considered the report and any action plan has been agreed.

- Complaints or concerns should be addressed to:

Quality Assurance  
General Dental Council  
37 Wimpole Street  
London  
W1G 8DQ

Email: [qualityassurance@gdc-uk.org](mailto:qualityassurance@gdc-uk.org)  
Tel: (020) 7887 3746