

**Minutes of the Meeting of the General Dental Council
held at 10am on Friday 8 December 2023
in Open Session at 37 Wimpole Street, London**

Council Members present:

Lord Harris	Chair
Terry Babbs	
Ilona Blue	
Donald Burden	
Anne Heal	
Angie Heilmann MBE	
Serbjit Kaur MBE	
Sheila Kumar	
Mike Lewis	
Timea Milovecz	
Simon Morrow	
Laura Simons	

Executive Directors in attendance:

Gurvinder Soomal	Interim Chief Executive and Registrar
Samantha Bache	Interim Chief Operating Officer
Stefan Czerniawski	Executive Director, Strategy
Lisa Marie Williams	Executive Director, Legal & Governance

Staff and Others in attendance:

Sharon Balmer	Governance Manager
Manjula Das	Head of Education & Quality Assurance
Rebecca Ledwidge	Deputy Head of Governance (Secretary)
Kelly Marsh	Policy Manager
Katherine McGirr	Policy Manager
Jenny McLaughlin	Policy Manager
Clare Paget	Senior Counsel and Associate Director, Legal
Joanne Rewcastle	Associate Director, Communications & Engagement
David Teeman	Head of Regulatory Intelligence

Others in Attendance

Sir Ross Cranston Chair of the Statutory Panellists Assurance Committee

Members of the public attended as observers.

Apologies

Theresa Thorp Executive Director, Regulation

Katie Spears Head of Governance and Board Secretary

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including members of the public who had joined to observe. The Chair noted apologies from the Executive Director, Regulation and the Head of Governance.

2. Declaration of interests

2.1 The following declarations of interest were received:

- a. Items 9 – Board Development and Board Effectiveness – all Council Members and Executive Members present declared an interest.
- b. Item 10 – Standards for Education – Registrant Members with a continuing role in education provision declared an interest.
- c. Correspondence Item 1 – Council Members and Associates Expenses Policy – all Council Members declared an interest.

3. Questions Submitted by Members of the Public

3.1 No questions had been received within the required timeframe before the meeting.

4. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

4.1 The full minutes of the public meeting and the abbreviated minutes of the closed meeting held on 27 October 2023 had been **approved via correspondence**.

5. Matters Arising and Rolling Actions List

5.1 The Council **noted** that there were no live actions at present.

6. Decisions Log

6.1 The Council **noted** that the Council had approved the following items via correspondence:

- a. Council Members and Associates Expenses Policy – approved on 6 December 2023
- b. Education Quality Assurance Decisions – noted on 6 December 2023.
- c. Annual Reports of the non-statutory Committees (including forward workplans) – noted on 6 December 2023.

7. Assurance Reports from the Committee Chairs

7.1 The Council heard from the Committee Chairs in respect of the assurance taken from work conducted in Committee since the last Council meeting.

Audit and Risk Committee

- 7.2 The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) updated the Council that the Committee had met once since the last Council meeting and had scrutinised the timetable for the Annual Report and Accounts (ARA). The Committee had also received a full and helpful report on Fitness to Practise (FTP) in respect of the age profile of the case load.

Finance and Performance Committee

- 7.3 The Chair of the Finance and Performance Committee (FPC) updated the Council that the Committee had met once since the last Council meeting and had welcomed the progress made in the FTP function to improve timeliness, with two of the three performance indicators now reporting as 'green' whilst quality indicators were still good. In respect of the Costed Corporate Plan (CCP) the Committee had reviewed the approach in detail and had brought forward the planning process to enable the Committee to set clear parameters and assumptions up front for the Executive Leadership Team (ELT). The Committee had also received the Annual Actuarial Report for the Defined Benefit Pension Scheme which was reported as being in surplus.

Remuneration and Nomination Committee

- 7.4 The Chair of the Remuneration and Nomination Committee (RemNom) informed the Council that the Committee had met once since the last Council meeting at an extraordinary meeting to agree the approach for the appointment of the Chief Executive. The Committee had scrutinised and approved the approach to the job description and person specification, the remuneration approach, and the appointments process which had been designed using public sector principles to attract a diverse range of candidates. The Committee also received assurance that the remuneration approach for the Interim Chief Operating Officer was in line with GDC policy.

Statutory Panellists Assurance Committee

- 7.5 The Chair of the Statutory Panellists Assurance Committee (SPC) updated the Council that the Committee had met once since the last Council meeting and had discussed the recruitment of FTP Panellists and Legal Advisors, and training sessions for legal advisors and panellists. Positive feedback had been received on the induction training sessions held for the Legal Advisors. The Committee also received an update in respect of case management improvements and the new approach to split the caseload into complex, ordinary and simple cases, which would enable the tailoring of the case management approach and should achieve efficiencies. It was confirmed that the Committee would scrutinise the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) considerations in respect of the recruitment processes.
- 7.6 The Council **noted** the assurance reports.

8. International Registration: Overseas Registration Examination Consultation Outcome and Making Rules

- 8.1 The paper presented the consultation outcome report on two sets of draft Rules governing the GDC's international registration process. The Council was invited to approve and agree to publish the consultation report, make the relevant Rules, and note the proposed timetable in respect of the GDC's Fees Regulations. The Council heard that the consultation response indicated broad support for the new rules. One minor change had been made to amend 'assessment' fee to 'examination' fee for clarity. In respect of the exercise to determine fees, analysis was being undertaken including a costing exercise and benchmarking with other comparative regulators. Council approval for the

new fees would be sought via correspondence in early 2024 and the fees would come into effect on 9 March 2024.

- 8.2 The Council heard that the existing rules in respect of International Registration would automatically lapse in March 2024 and the proposed rules would provide an interim position whilst a comprehensive framework was developed.
- 8.3 The Council discussed the following:
- a. There was concern about the impact on individuals in terms of affordability from the intended move to a cost recovery position. The Council heard that the fee modelling work related to the GDC administrative application fee, which was minimal in comparison to the examination fee. The examination fees would not be directly affected by this work, but would increase as a consequence of the decision to remove the cross-subsidy resulting from the 2015 fees not having been updated since they were set.
 - b. The medical emergencies part of the proposed part 2 rules for Dentists was not included in the proposed rules for Dental Care Professionals (DCPs). This was in line with the existing rules that had been replicated for the interim position. Changes were being considered as part of the comprehensive review at a later stage.
 - c. There was a key risk around the financial modelling for the Overseas Registration Exam (ORE) as the volume of applications could be unpredictable and there was uncertainty as to whether a more efficient process would create more demand. The finance team were undertaking a sensitivity assessment to assist with the modelling. The time and motion study to determine the costs incurred by the GDC in administering the ORE would follow the same approach taken previously as part of the early work to develop the Costed Corporate Plan (CCP). The FPC would have oversight of this work.
 - d. The analysis of the responses to the call for evidence that had been undertaken at the same time as the consultation was now underway following completion of the analysis of the formal consultation on the rules. The outcome report would be shared with the Council in due course.
 - e. In respect of affordability, the Council welcomed the work being undertaken to look at particular categories of applicants such as refugees.
- 8.4 The Council **approved** the consultation outcome report for publication and **noted** the proposed timetable in respect of GDC Fees Regulations.
- 8.5 The Council **approved and made** the following Regulations:
- a. The General Dental Council (Dentists) (International Registration) Rules 2023 – these would come into force on 9 March 2024.
 - b. The General Dental Council (Dental Care Professionals) (International Registration) Rules 2023 – these would come into force on 9 March 2024.
- 8.6 The Regulations would be signed and sealed at a separate meeting arranged by the Governance team.

The Associate Director, Legal and two Policy Managers left the meeting.

9. Board Development and Board Effectiveness Review

- 9.1 The Executive Director, Legal and Governance outlined the paper which proposed a continuing programme of Board development and an external review into Board

effectiveness to take place in 2024. The Council was reminded that it had approved a three-year rolling programme of Board development in February 2023. A number of actions had been taken to deliver the desired outcomes, including two Council development sessions, the facilitation of social events and the establishment of peer mentoring. External consultants had been commissioned to facilitate three sessions in 2024 to build on the work already undertaken.

- 9.2 The Council heard that the Board effectiveness review that was due in 2022 had been postponed, following a discussion with the Council, for a number of reasons, including that the Chair had been new in post at that time. It was proposed that the 2024 review should focus on the assurance framework and Committees, and the impact the Council can have on culture, tone, and behaviours in the organisation.
- 9.3 The Council **discussed** the following:]
- a. The strategic risk in respect of Council effectiveness had been made dormant and had been moved to the Legal and Governance Operational Risk Register (ORR). It remained the aim to recruit people with the required skills to the Council.
 - b. There was a view that the review of Committee effectiveness had already been undertaken during the last external review and the recommended changes had been implemented. It was felt that it would be more productive to focus on the Council itself in terms of its stewardship role in shaping and guiding strategic direction, how it responded to strategic risk and gaps in assurance, whether there was enough focus on reflection to determine whether desired outcomes had been achieved, and a look at the dynamics of the relationship with the ELT and the different roles across the Council. It was noted that the Committee focus had been proposed partly due to the upcoming change in Chairs of Committees (as their terms ended in the next couple of years).
 - c. Notwithstanding the above, it was noted that there was still a need to review the Terms of Reference of the Committees, to see if further amendments should be made, or clarity could be improved.
 - d. Consideration should be given to who would be commissioned to deliver the review as there was agreement that a bespoke specialist consultancy would be preferable to a standardised review.
 - e. In relation to the Council's role in setting the tone and expectations around culture, it was agreed that clarity was required around the cultural aspects of the effectiveness review to ensure that there was alignment with the work undertaken by the culture consultants.
- 9.4 The Council **approved** the proposed approach to Board development and **approved** the approach to commissioning an external review into Board effectiveness in 2024, subject to further consideration in relation to the focus and content of the review.

10. Standards for Education

- 10.1 The Head of Education and Quality Assurance presented the paper which outlined planned work to revise the GDC's Standards for Education and sought the Council's support for the direction of travel.
- 10.2 The Council heard that the standards had last been revised in 2015 and were split into three areas which were patient protection, quality evaluation and review, and student assessment. These were underpinned by 21 requirements that education providers must meet. An information gathering exercise had been conducted on the current standards to

understand the challenges and assess the work required. Four strategic themes had been identified - admission to dental training and education; training and assessment; support for students and trainees; and professionalism, behaviours and attitudes. A stakeholder engagement process would be undertaken, and the results would be presented to the Council in due course.

10.3 The Council **discussed** the following:

- a. There was broad support for the proposed approach to develop standards that were consistent across the professions, with supporting guidance on the application of the standards in different settings (e.g., large universities vs small providers) and what was expected from them in terms of reporting and evidence.
- b. In respect of admission to dental training and education, the approach to seeking assurance from providers that admissions processes are fair and inclusive was welcomed.
- c. It was confirmed that EDI would be a key consideration in the standards and a recommendation was made to set expectations early for providing EDI reporting to ensure it aligned with existing GDC reporting.
- d. In respect of training and assessment, there was concern that smaller education providers did not necessarily have the full depth of institutional support expected of larger academic organisations, and that the new standards should take proper account of the range of institutional contexts in which they are applied.
- e. In respect of support to students, the Council noted the need for greater consistency and improved communication requirements across the smaller providers, in particular for Dental Nurses. It was noted that a thematic review into dental nurse training was to be undertaken separately to understand what could be done to bridge the gap.
- f. In respect of technological innovations in training, it was noted that there was a gap in the current standards. Increasingly sophisticated simulation tools were of great benefit, but it was important their use was not at the expense of direct patient contact. Setting an appropriate balance between the two would be one of the issues addressed in the stakeholder engagement process.

10.4 The Council **noted** the update.

The Head of Education & Quality Assurance and Policy Manager left the meeting.

11. Research Programme Update and Forward Plans

- 11.1 The Head of Regulatory Intelligence presented the paper which outlined the work that had been undertaken by the Research team in 2023 and proposed its approach to research in 2024 and beyond. It was highlighted that the GDC was now capturing data on the working patterns of registrants as part of the Annual Retention Fee process. The learning from this would be shared via workshops with key stakeholders. Strong networks had been established with other regulators and the GDC had led sessions on research related to EDI, mental health (in particular in respect of FTP) and sexual misconduct.
- 11.2 The Council discussed the opportunities for using datasets held by other stakeholders such as the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs).
- 11.3 It was noted that the patient perspective was not clear from the report in respect of the communication of research results to inform understanding around the expectations of a dentist and how it impacts on patient safety.

- 11.4 The process for accessing research capacity in the GDC was outlined. This began with the development of a forward plan that informed the proactive research for the year. It was noted that the determination of the longlist of work to take forward was dialogue based and used a thematic approach. The Executive Director, Strategy and the Associate Director, Policy and Research had delegated authority to prioritise and approve the research proposals. It was noted that it was a challenge for the ELT to frame the research questions so they could be translated into a piece of research work.
- 11.5 The Council heard that the team also operated responsively to enquiries during the year, an example of this was the analysis of data in respect of remote hearings.
- 11.6 The Council noted an area of concern for the FPC in respect of the accuracy of forecasting. A review had been requested in relation to the risks presented over the last few years to understand the degree to which risks had crystallised and to help inform future forecasting.
- 11.7 A request was made for future reports to include a list of the research institutions the GDC was working with.
- 11.8 The Council **noted** the 2023 work programme and **approved** the proposed approach to research in 2024 and beyond.

The Head of Regulatory Intelligence left the meeting.

12. Communications and Engagement: Quarterly Review and Insights (Q3)

- 12.1 The Associate Director, Communications and Engagement presented the paper which provided an overview of the external communications work undertaken in Quarter 3 of 2023.
- 12.2 The Council **discussed** the report:
- a. It was requested that more detail be provided in future iterations of the report about what had worked well and not so well in Communications and Engagement, and what was being done to understand and access 'hard to reach' groups.
 - b. Assurance was sought and received that there was a comprehensive internal communications strategy, and it was requested that internal communications activity should also be reported to Council.
 - c. In respect of the engagements undertaken, it was noted that there had only been two engagements in Northern Ireland. This was partly because the report covered the summer period, however, it was also noted that there was no specific resource in place in the team for Northern Ireland, which was not the case for Scotland or Wales.
 - d. The focus on outcome reporting was welcomed, however it would be useful to understand more about the expected outcomes versus the actual outcomes.
 - e. More detail was requested on reporting in relation to digital communications such as social media activity. It was noted that there had been resourcing challenges in the Digital team, but the new Digital Communications Manager had started in post and more information would be provided in future reporting.
- 12.3 The Council **agreed** that it would be useful to see a Communications and Engagement Report at every Council meeting for discussion and **noted** the update.

13. Any Other Business

- 13.1 There was no other business, and the meeting was closed at 12:30.