

**General
Dental
Council**

Consultation on the review of the Standards for Education

November 2024





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Consultation on the review of the Standards for Education

Overview

The General Dental Council (GDC) is reviewing the Standards for Education which set out the requirements expected of all pre-registration programmes that lead to registration with the GDC. These Standards are the framework of our quality assurance processes.

This review will include changing the structure, simplifying the requirements, and adding new areas that are relevant to dental education and training. This consultation asks for views on our proposals to this change.

The Standards were first published in 2012 and have not been revised since 2015. After conducting an initial information gathering exercise, we concluded that there were several changes we needed to make for the Standards for Education to remain relevant and up to date against all impactful developments that happened in dentistry and the wider healthcare ecosystem over the last decade.

Following the initial internal scoping, we engaged with several stakeholders to attain their views on our findings. We received feedback that we needed to simplify the standards, to tailor them to the different professions, and to step away from an outdated and dentist-centric approach, as well as to introduce new areas for quality assurance. There will be one set of standards and requirements, and we will make it clear to providers which ones are relevant to them and include examples of evidence that they can use in support. This consultation focuses on the full list of standards and requirements and the breakdown by professional group. The accompanying evidence is outside of this consultation and will be drawn together in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders.

The review of the Standards follows the recently completed development of the new Safe Practitioner Framework, setting expectations for pre-registration training and education in the UK. It was published in November 2023, and we are currently working with education providers on its implementation.

We invite everyone with an interest in dental education, training, quality assurance and regulation to share their views.

About this consultation

This consultation survey has 11 questions, which start on page 5. We would encourage all respondents to read the information in the consultation before answering the questions.

This consultation is structured in three different sections:

Section 1: Why are we reviewing the Standards for Education?

Section 2: The revision of the current Standards for Education and our proposals

Section 3: Consultation questions

A copy of the current Standards can be found on our [website](#).

Consultation period and deadline for responses

This 12-week consultation exercise opened on Thursday 14 November 2024. The closing date is 12:00 Thursday 6 February 2025.

Ways to respond

Please respond to this consultation document by using the [online survey link](#).

You can also submit your response by email. Please include the name of the consultation in the subject line of your email to stakeholder@gdc-uk.org.

For details of how your data will be processed and stored, please see our [Privacy Notice](#). Information held by the GDC is subject to Freedom of Information requests, so please do not provide any information you would not want disclosed.

Responding to your views

The GDC will respond to views raised during the consultation by producing a consultation outcome report. The report will be published on the GDC website.

Contact us

If you have any questions or queries about this consultation, please email: stakeholder@gdc-uk.org
Phone: 020 7167 6330.

About your response

Summary and direct quotes of individual response may be included in our consultation outcome report, and responses from organisations may be attributed to them. Copies of individual responses, without attribution, and of organisational responses with attributions may also be subject to publication following a Freedom of Information (FOI) request.

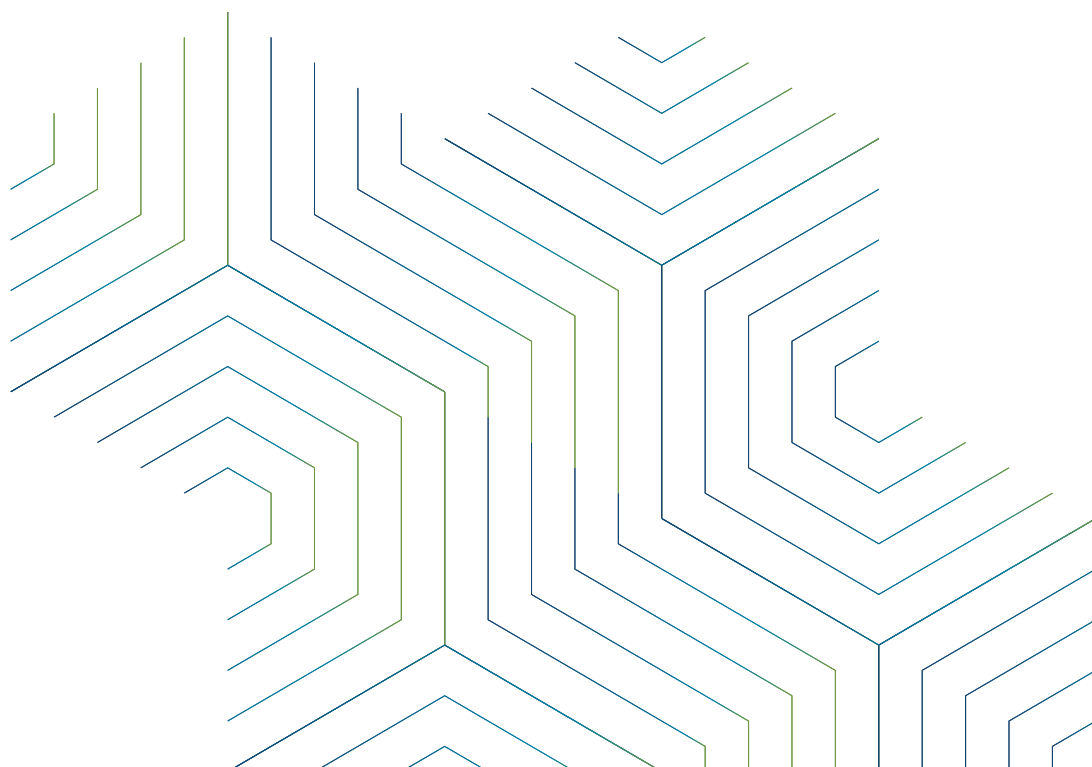
We ask for contact details from those responding to the consultation on behalf of an organisation only for the purposes of asking questions about your response. The need to do this is rare. The names and personal contact details of those responding will not be included in our outcome report and will not be published as part of a FOI release.

At the end of this survey, we will ask you to tell us a bit about you by completing an anonymised survey. This information will not be connected to your responses to this consultation. We will use the data you provide us for overall analysis and insight into the fairness and inclusivity of our processes. Providing this data is extremely helpful, and we would like to encourage you to complete this step.

You can find out more about how we collect, store, and process information in our [Privacy Notice](#).

Analysis

We will use descriptive statistics to analyse the closed questions, including sub-group analysis if appropriate. Responses to the open questions will be analysed thematically to identify key areas of interest. When analysing and reporting on the data we will consider whether responses are from an individual or an organisation.



Why are we reviewing the Standards for Education?

Background

1. The GDC's role in setting Standards for Education

- 1.1. We have a statutory duty to assure the standard of pre-registration education and training.
- 1.2. We do this by setting the Standards for Education, the learning outcomes and quality assuring (including inspections and monitoring) compliance.
- 1.3. We use the Standards for Education for the following purposes:
 - a. To set out the requirements expected of all pre-registration programmes that lead to registration with the GDC
 - b. As the framework of our quality assurance processes
 - c. To assess and approve all new pre-registration dentistry and dental care professional programmes which lead to a registrable qualification.
 - d. To carry out monitoring and inspections of education providers to ensure that they meet our requirements.
 - e. To assess programme modifications.
- 1.4. While proposing changes to the Standards for Education we will continue to prioritise patient safety and promote high standards of education for the dental team.
- 1.5. We have recently reviewed the learning outcomes and now must review the Standards for Education to reflect the changes.
- 1.6. The review of the Standards for Education is also an opportunity to bring this document up to date and reflect important changes in the GDC's strategic direction, in dentistry, demographics and the wider healthcare ecosystem and will affect dental training and education.

- 1.7. The impactful developments that happened since the last update and hold significant influence on the GDC and its approach to regulation include:
- a. The GDC's increased focus on education and upstream initiatives as expressed in our document [Shifting the Balance](#)¹;
 - b. The [broadening of diversity](#) of groups entering the profession and the changing demographics of the population they will care for;
 - c. Diversification of work patterns and the changing skills mix in dental teams;
 - d. Fast paced and continuous technological developments such as greater use of machine learning and artificial intelligence in training and in practice;
 - e. Increased attention to and understanding of the extent and of impact of training and practice on wellbeing and mental health of student and trainees, and dental professionals^{2,3};
 - f. Significant expansion in the number of dentist and dental hygiene and therapy training numbers in the medium to long term in England⁴, and the resulting increase in the number of new courses and course modifications to assure.
- 1.8. The review of the Standards for Education allows the GDC to address these changes while producing robust and adaptable standards.
- 1.9. We want the revised Standards for Education to be clear for providers to comply with, while being flexible to respond to any future developments within the regulatory and educational landscape.
- 1.10. We want the revised Standards for Education to be suitable for the needs of all professional groups that we regulate (they are currently quite dentist-centric).

2 Smyth Zahra, F., Pearson, J. and Piper, K. (2023) 'The Clinical Humanities & Wellbeing programme' - sustainable healthcare education for an era of uncertainty', *International Review of Psychiatry*, 35(7–8), pp. 636–644. doi: 10.1080/09540261.2023.2262026.

3 A Research commissioned by the GDC, "[Mental Health and Wellbeing in Dentistry: A Rapid Evidence Assessment](#)" has also evidenced existing mental health and wellbeing challenges amongst the dental professions, which further highlights the need to address this issue as early as possible within the profession.

4 The NHS Long-term Workforce plan published in 2023 set out plans to increase dentist and dental hygiene and therapy places by up to 40% by 2031/32
[NHS England » NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#)

The revision of the current Standards for Education and our proposals

2. The planning of the review of the Standards for Education is being conducted in an iterative manner, allowing the GDC to progressively narrow down the areas for improvement.

- 2.1. We analysed the last ten years of inspection reports of education providers and gathered feedback from the Education Quality Assurance team (EQA). EQA team is responsible for all education and training quality assurance activity including inspections of providers. We then discussed the findings with a team of education associates. The discussion highlighted the need for potential new areas to explore and include within the Standards for Education.
- 2.2. We conducted a further information gathering exercise aimed at assessing the strengths and challenges of the present Standards, as well as scoping and exploring new areas which the GDC might want to consider including as part of the revision. At this stage, the following areas were identified for further exploration:
 - a. Admission to dental education and training.
 - b. Training and assessment.
 - c. Support for students and trainees.
 - d. Professionalism, behaviours, and attitudes.
- 2.3. In parallel, we met with other regulators, namely the General Medical Council (GMC), General Optical Council (GOC), and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) to learn from sharing common experiences, challenges and successes. They are all at different stages of the project life cycle of similar work within their Education and Quality Assurance functions. We will continue these conversations which are mutually beneficial.
- 2.4. The GDC organised several stakeholder engagement sessions to test the potential inclusion of these areas further and to inform the development of the draft consultation. They took place in London and Birmingham on 5 and 12 March 2024⁵.

⁵ We invited all education providers in the United Kingdom and invited the British Dental Students' Association (BDSA) to send student representatives from the four nations. Attendees included Chief Dental Officers, education, and training providers, awarded postgraduate representatives including Foundation and Vocational leads, the British Dental Association (BDA), foundation trainees, clinical fellows and students, and representatives from diversity groups in dentistry. We counted with 86 attendees over the two days. A presentation was given of the aims of the revision. Most of the day consisted of round table discussion facilitated by GDC staff, with time for wider discussions and questions and answer sessions.

2.5. The key points from the stakeholder discussions on the structure of the Standards for Education included:

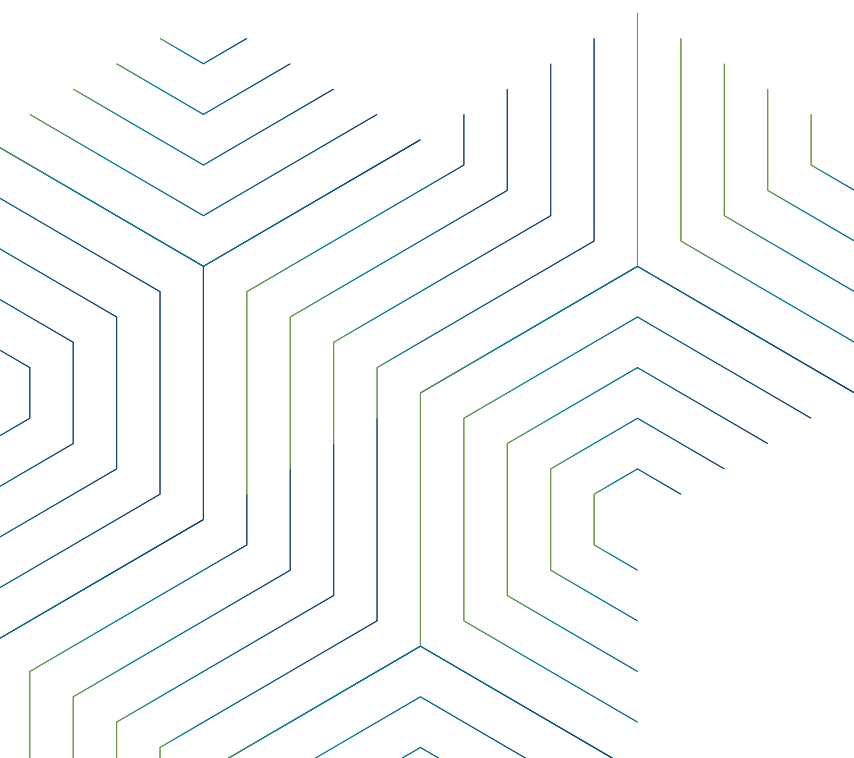
- a. The way the current standards are written is complex and needs refinement. For example, some requirements are too long and comprise different elements. These need to be broken down and simplified. Specific requirements are needed for providers that are solely assessment focussed.
- b. Most of the current standards were still relevant; but some areas required further clarification and new areas needed adding.
- c. The revised standards should be applicable for all professional groups as many participants considered the 2015 iteration was disproportionately focussed on dentistry education providers.

2.6. The main discussion points on areas for inclusion were:

- a. Setting specific requirements relating to admissions and recruitment to improve fairness and equity, to ensure education providers reflect upon their admission processes and review them, if necessary, to make them more accessible to a wide range of students.
- b. Requesting evidence on how behaviours can be monitored to start building our base of understanding and be able to share good practice more widely.
- c. Ensuring pastoral care and wellbeing support is available for clinical and academic staff and education providers, as well as students and trainees.
- d. Ensuring trainers and education providers keep up to date with technological developments so they can teach students about it effectively, to ensure that they are suitably equipped for practice.
- e. Addressing differential attainment by setting a standard for education providers to, at a minimum, show they are collecting this evidence, analysing it, and addressing it, as necessary.



- 2.7. The key changes between the current and proposed new Standards are (please see the current standards and the draft of revised Standards for Education to compare them and understand the differences):
- a. The new Standards will keep their current structure and content consisting of several requirements, grouped under Standards.
 - b. The number of requirements remains at 21. Out of the 21 requirements set within the draft revised Standards for Education, 12 of these cover the same areas as the current requirements of the Standards, 5 of these requirements are new, and 4 relate solely to assessment providers.
 - c. The contents of the 12 existing requirements are not new. They have been reduced from 21 to 12 as some requirements have been broken down or distilled into one, and their wording has been updated to reduce ambiguity, provide clarity and make it easier for education providers to demonstrate how to meet them.
 - d. We have introduced a small number of descriptors under the requirements, which will help providers to better understand what the GDC will be looking for when assessing against each requirement. For example, requirement 2: 'Providers must have a patient consent process' has two descriptors: 'Providers must inform patients that their treatment may be carried out by a student' and 'Providers must ensure that patients who are being cared for by a student give informed and valid consent and are aware that they may withdraw their consent at any time'. To ensure that there is consistency in decision making (i.e. if the requirement is met, partially met or not met), the EQA team will draw together internal guidance to ensure consistency in decision making, which will be reviewed periodically, as well as the usual calibration meetings.
 - e. We have some providers who solely deliver assessments, and the current requirements are not suitable for their needs, therefore we have included an additional standard (4) to address this.



Consultation questions

In this section, we will ask you several questions about the proposed changes to the Standards for Education. Please read the proposed draft Standards for Education in Appendix 2. Further to internal and external stakeholder feedback, proposed structural changes include:

- 3.1. Retaining the current structure which includes several overarching Standards, each supported by several requirements that must be followed by education providers. Adding a new element of 'criteria' which sits under each requirement and give greater clarity about what the GDC is expecting.

Question 1: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to keep the structure based on a small number of Standards, each supported by several requirements, each explained by a small set of criteria? [1-5, 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]

Please explain your answer.

- 3.2. Making it easier for providers to understand and meet requirements, by breaking requirements down, and including criteria requirements.

Question 2: Do you agree or disagree with breaking down the current requirements into several shorter ones? [1-5, 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]

Please explain your answer.

- 3.3. Retaining requirements that are appropriate, breaking them down for clarity, and adding new requirements.

Question 3: Do you agree or disagree with the proposed requirements for Standard 1 – Patient Protection [1-5, 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]

Please explain your answer.

Question 4: Do you agree or disagree with the requirements for Standard 2 – Students Journey [1-5, 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]

Please explain your answer.

Question 5: Do you agree or disagree with the requirements for Standard 3 – Provider Governance [1-5, 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]

Please explain your answer.

- 3.4. We have added an additional standard (standard 4) which will only apply to assessment and examination providers.

Question 6: Do you agree or disagree with the requirements for Standard 4 which is applicable solely to examination providers? [1-5, 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]

Please explain your answer.

3.5. There will be a single set of Standards.

3.6. Once the revised Standards have been finalised, following this consultation, we will work with education providers, awarding organisations and examination providers to agree examples of evidence that can be used to demonstrate compliance. We are not consulting on supporting evidence in this consultation.

**Question 7: Do you agree or disagree that presenting requirements in this way makes clear which of them apply to which dental professional group and examination providers?
[1-5, 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]
Please explain your answer.**

3.7. We want the revised Standards for Education to be appropriate for modern dentistry. For this reason, we have added new requirements and criteria.

**Question 8: Do you agree that it is relevant to add the following areas to the requirements?
Please explain your answer**

**Behaviours – see Standard 1, requirement 6; Standard 2, requirement 7; Standard 2, requirement 8, 9, 10 [Yes/No].
Please explain your answer**

**Wellbeing – see Standard 2, requirement 9 [Yes/No].
Please explain your answer**

**Differential attainment - see Standard 3, requirements 12 and 17 and Standard 4, requirement 19 [Yes/No].
Please explain your answer.**

**Admissions - see Standard 3, requirement 12 [Yes/No]
Please explain your answer.**

**Technology - see Standard 3, requirement 16 and Standard 4, requirement 20 [Yes/No]
Please explain your answer.**

3.8. We have set out the aims and the process of the revision and the changes we propose to make.

Question 9: Please indicate here any aspects that we have not covered that you believe need to be considered?

Considering impacts on different groups

We aim to foster inclusion, promote diversity and further our commitment to eliminating discrimination, in line with our [Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#).

In this section we would like you to consider whether the draft Standards, or the way in which they are being reviewed and updated, as described above, are inclusive and diverse and have the potential to enhance and promote the outcomes for students, trainees, educators, and patients with certain protected characteristics.

We have completed an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for the proposed changes of the Standards for Education and potential impacts of their review. You can find this EqIA alongside the consultation information on our [website](#).

Question 10: Please tell us about any impacts you think the proposed changes to the Standards for Education may have on students, trainees, staff and members of the public with protected characteristics, or any other aspect of equality, diversity and inclusion?

Question 11: Are you responding to the consultation as an individual or on behalf of an organisation? [Response options: Individual / On behalf of an organisation]

11.1 [Reply only if you have selected 'On behalf of an organisation' in 11]. Please provide the name of the organisation you're representing, and a contact email address or phone number (on the rare occasion, we will need some further information about your response)

11.2 [Reply only if you have selected 'Individual' in 11]. How would you describe yourself? [Select the option that best describes yourself]

- UK registered dental professional
- Education or training provider
- Professional body
- NHS
- Dental patient or member of the public
- Regulator
- Training or studying to join the GDC register
- Other

11.3 [Reply only if you have selected 'UK registered dental professional' in 11.2] If you are a UK registered dental professional, what is your title? (Tell us all that apply from the list below).

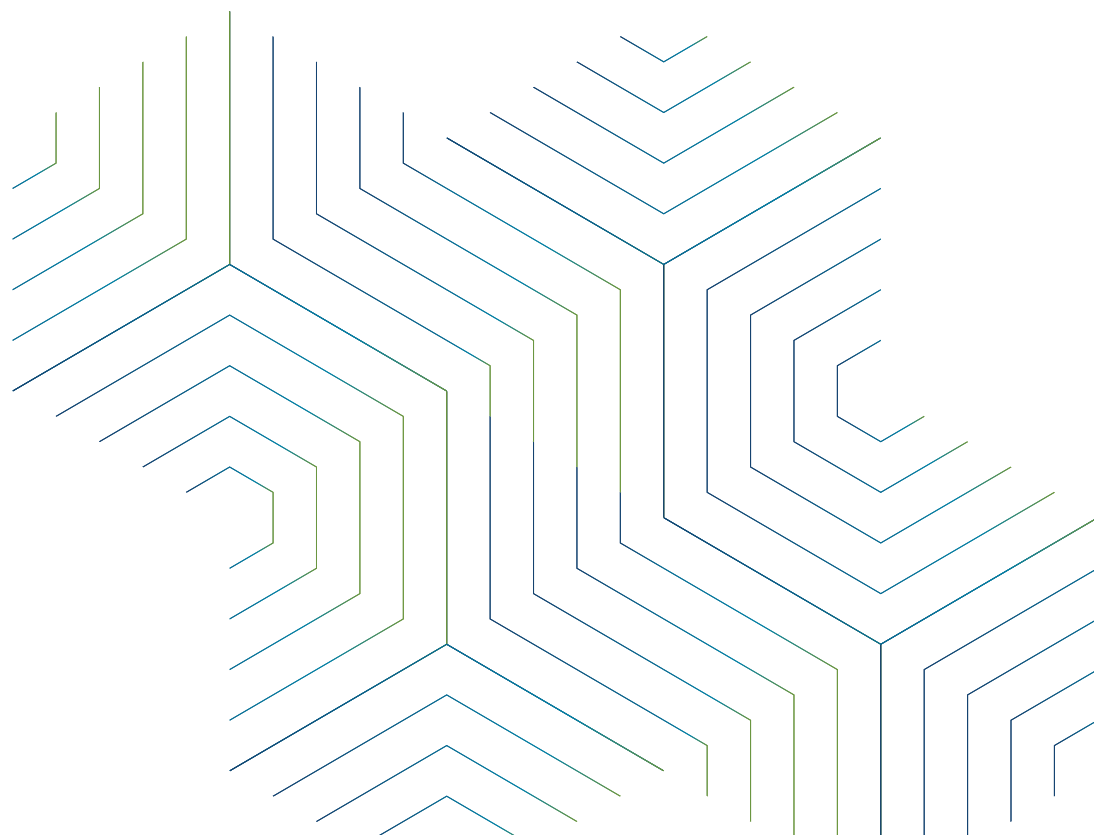
- Dentist
- Dental Therapist
- Dental Nurse
- Dental Hygienist
- Dental Technician
- Orthodontic Therapist
- Clinical Dental Technician

EDI monitoring

Please tell us a bit about you by completing an anonymised survey. This information will not be connected to your responses to this consultation. We will use the data you provide us for overall analysis and insight into the fairness and inclusivity of our processes.

Providing this data is extremely helpful, and we would like to encourage you to complete this step. You can access the EDI monitoring questions within the [EDI screening survey](#).

If you require this EDI monitoring survey in an alternative form, please email stakeholder@gdc-uk.org.



Appendix 1:

Consultation questions

Question 1:

Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to keep the structure based on a small number of Standards, each supported by several requirements, each explained by a small set of criteria? [1-5 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]. Please explain your answer

Question 2:

Do you agree or disagree with breaking down the current requirements into several shorter ones? [1-5 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]. Please explain your answer

Question 3:

Do you agree or disagree with the proposed requirements for Standard 1 – Patient Protection [1-5 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]. Please explain your answer

Question 4:

Do you agree or disagree with the requirements for Standard 2 – Students Journey [1-5 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]. Please explain your answer

Question 5:

Do you agree or disagree with the requirements for Standard 3 – Provider Governance [1-5 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]. Please explain your answer

Question 6:

Do you agree or disagree with the requirements for Standard 4, specifically for assessment and examination providers? [1-5 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]. Please explain your answer

Question 7:

Do you agree or disagree that adding this new column helps you understand the requirements that apply to your organisation? [1-5 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree]. Please explain your answer

Question 8:

Do you agree that it is relevant to add the following areas to the requirements? Please explain your answer

- **Behaviours** – see Standard 1, requirement 6; Standard 2, requirement 7; Standard 2, requirement 8, 9, 10 [Yes/No]. Please explain your answer
- **Wellbeing** – see Standard 2, requirement 9 [Yes/No]. Please explain your answer
- **Differential attainment** - see Standard 3, requirements 12 and 17 and Standard 4, requirement 19 [Yes/No]. Please explain your answer
- **Admissions** - see Standard 3, requirement 12 [Yes/No]
- **Technology** - see Standard 3, requirement 16 and Standard 4, requirement 20 [Yes/No]

Question 9:

Please indicate here any aspects that we have not covered that you believe need to be considered?

Question 10:

Please tell us about any impacts you think the proposed changes to the Standards for Education may have regarding the protected characteristics, or any other aspect of equality, diversity and inclusion?

Question 11:

Are you responding to the consultation as an individual or on behalf of an organisation? [Response options: Individual / On behalf of an organisation]

11.1 [Reply only if you have selected 'On behalf of an organisation' in 11]. Please provide the name of the organisation you're representing, and a contact email address or phone number (on the rare occasion, we will need some further information about your response)

11.2 [Reply only if you have selected 'Individual' in 11]. How would you describe yourself?

[Select the option that best describes yourself]

- UK registered dental professional
- Education or training provider
- Professional body
- NHS
- Dental patient or member of the public
- Regulator
- Training or studying to join the GDC register
- Other

11.3 [Reply only if you have selected 'UK registered dental professional' in 11.2] If you are a UK registered dental professional, what is your title? (Tell us all that apply from the list below).

- Dentist
- Dental Therapist
- Dental Nurse
- Dental Hygienist
- Dental Technician
- Orthodontic Therapist
- Clinical Dental Technician



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