

**INSPECTION OF THE BTEC LEVEL 3 EXTENDED
DIPLOMA IN DENTAL TECHNOLOGY AWARDED
BY EDEXCEL**

**BELFAST SCHOOL OF DENTAL TECHNOLOGY
& EDEXCEL**

11 FEBRUARY 2013 & 4 FEBRUARY 2014

REPORT OF THE INSPECTORS

MR M YATES (LAY CHAIR)

MRS C LOGAN

PROFESSOR P HEASMAN

MR L MELIA (GDC STAFF)

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OVERVIEW

The School of Dental Technology (Belfast) delivered the BTEC level 3 Extended Diploma in Dental Technology (the Diploma) to a high standard, with good engagement from students, staff, and external stakeholders. There was also an excellent collaboration with the BDS programme at Belfast Dental School.

The inspectors were pleased to note a high level of enthusiasm from students, who provided extremely positive feedback and indicated that they experienced a supportive learning environment. The programme benefits from having a small cohort of students, with an annual intake of five students.

The inspectors felt that the students benefit greatly from the setting of the programme within the Dental Hospital and a two stranded approach to work placement. Over the three-year programme, students have had the opportunity to work in both the Hospital Laboratory and a commercial laboratory, allowing them to gain a wide variety of skills and experience of different aspects of the profession. The commercial placements were promoted by the School's close working relationship with dental technology laboratories in the region.

The inspectors considered an area for improvement for the School was the formalising of policies and feedback systems. In 2013, the inspectors noted an informal 'open-door' policy with tutors for students to raise concerns or to bring issues to the teaching staff. The inspectors were of the opinion that a more formal student staff liaison committee structure would be appropriate, where items could be recorded and future actions reviewed. This forum has subsequently been introduced and minutes for the inaugural meeting were considered in 2014.

The inspectors were encouraged to see the formalised student staff liaison committee but felt that more work is still needed on formal mechanisms for students and staff to raise serious concerns or issues with the School. The inspectors also noted that there was potential to improve the overall quality assurance processes for the programme by allowing staff to develop their roles to include internal verification duties.

The area of laboratory placements would also benefit from more formal connections between the School and external stakeholders. The panel considered there to be an excellent opportunity for the School to build on the strong links within the profession and seek to engage local laboratory owners more formally with the programme and its delivery.

The School building was undergoing a refurbishment when the panel visited in 2013, which was evident during the inspection. This development has continued into 2014. The inspectors believe that the renovation work will enhance the learning environment for students and improve the facilities available for both staff and students.

Introduction & background

1. As part of its duty to protect patients and promote high standards, the General Dental Council (GDC) monitors the education of student dentists and dental care professionals (DCPs) at institutions whose qualifications are approved by the GDC. The aim is to ensure that these institutions provide high-quality learning opportunities and experiences and that students who obtain a dental qualification are safe to practise.

2. The purpose of the inspection was to assess whether the BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Dental Technology conforms to the GDC's requirements for the training of dental technicians and whether, on qualification, students would be acceptable for registration with the GDC.
3. This report sets out the findings of two, one-day inspections, of the Belfast School of Dental Technology using the assessment principles and guidelines set out in *Developing the Dental Team – Second Edition (Interim) 2009* (DDT) as a benchmark. The report highlights areas of good practice, but also draws attention to areas where issues relating to improvement and development need to be addressed. The report is based on the findings of the two inspection visits and on the consideration of supporting documents prepared by the School.
4. The inspections took place on 11th February 2013 and 4th February 2014. During the inspections, the inspectors met with academic staff of the School, representatives from the Department of Health and Dental Hospital Laboratories, as well as students on the BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Dental Technology.
5. The qualification is awarded by Edexcel and is currently taught in four institutions across the United Kingdom – Birmingham Metropolitan College, Sheffield City College, Lambeth College, and the Belfast School of Dental Technology. The GDC treats each course provider separately and inspections have been undertaken at all institutions before allowing students who pass the Diploma course to register as dental technicians. At Belfast School of Dental Technology, the programme is delivered over three years to full time students. The current intake of students is five per year and there are no plans to increase this, however there has been a fallow year with no new intake in 2013. Advertising had started for the 2014/15 academic year.
6. The report(s) will be considered by the GDC Registrar. In advance of the consideration, the School will be given the opportunity to correct any factual errors and then submit observations on the content of the report. The finalised report, together with the School's observations, will be published on the GDC website.

Programme content and delivery

7. The Belfast School of Dental Technology is situated in close proximity to the Belfast School of Dentistry, on the site of the Royal Victoria Hospital; this allows students on the Diploma course to participate in lectures with BDS students and undertake work placements in the Dental Hospital Laboratory.
8. The Diploma is taught at various accredited institutions in the United Kingdom. It is a 180-credit programme, consisting of 18 separately weighted units. The inspectors found that the School ensured all the GDC dental technology learning outcomes were adequately covered and assessed through delivery of the programme. The 18-module course content was delivered comfortably during this three-year programme, with 6 units taught per year, combined with ample opportunity to gain practical experience alongside the academic teaching.
9. The course material is designed by the tutors in accordance with Edexcel guidance for unit content and learning outcomes. Units are taught through a

combination of lectures, seminars and practical assessment. The inspectors were told by both staff and students that the opportunity to undertake different work placements during the second and third years was an extremely positive element of the Diploma. The placements enable students to take the skills they have acquired in the academic environment and develop them through practical application in the Hospital setting and within the commercial environment.

10. The panel felt that team working was embedded very well into the delivery of the programme. Candidates on the Diploma have had the opportunity to attend lectures with BDS students, which they reported was extremely beneficial. In year one, Diploma students also bring BDS students back to the laboratory to share aspects of their work and explain the laboratory environment. The inspectors were impressed with this collaborative approach and could see how early integration of the two student groups helped boost the confidence of the dental technology students in advance of them working more closely with the BDS peers in the second year. Staff and students were enthusiastic about such a good opportunity to develop a feeling of the dental team working together.
11. During the second year, Diploma students have been assigned to work with a BDS student to provide a set of complete dentures for a patient. In each pair, the dental student manages the clinical stages of care and the Diploma student undertakes the laboratory stages of denture construction. The dental technology students are introduced to the patient alongside their BDS colleagues, which gives them valuable experience of patient interaction, assists in fostering a team working ethos, and helps create a greater appreciation for professionalism. The Diploma students also have the opportunity to observe their BDS colleagues in providing a partial denture to a patient. These assignments were commended as an excellent facet of the programme by the inspectors.
12. The School has worked with the awarding body, Edexcel, and the other institutions that deliver the Level 3 Extended Diploma to map the course content from its current learning outcomes in *Developing the Dental Team* to the most recent learning outcomes in *Preparing for Practice*. The School believes that this has been done without significant changes to the overall structure of the award. The remapped programme is currently being considered by Edexcel and will also be reviewed by the GDC before its likely implementation in 2014/15 academic year.
13. Members of staff at the School regularly met with dental technology providers in the region and were able to work closely with them to provide work placements and support the programme. This was carried out through the annual Northern Ireland dental conference and also through the informal professional network of dental technology laboratories. The benefit of these close ties has been evidenced by all the year three students being able to find a work placement in a commercial laboratory, where they are timetabled to spend one day a week.
14. The inspectors were pleased to hear that Edexcel have introduced technical feedback on the practical content of the programme and its teaching. The external review and monitoring system is now undertaken by a registered dental technician, which will allow for verification on both teaching and the quality and suitability of the programme's technical content.

Work placements

15. The final 10-credit unit of the programme was Work-based Learning in Dental Technology. The unit was designed to enable students to contribute to the development of transferable skills and should be carried out in a dental laboratory setting. The unit required students to maintain a logbook for the duration of a work-based dental technology practical project, which was then assessed by tutors at the end of the course.
16. The work-based placements carried out during this course took place during years two and three. During year two, students spent one day a week in the hospital laboratory with a mentor, which is organised by the School. This placement enabled students to gain first-hand experience of dental technology with close supervision from the School. During the placement students were also able to further develop their team-working skills by working closely with other members of the dental team. Students responded very positively to having the opportunity to undertake their initial work-based placement in the hospital laboratory environment.
17. For the work-based placement in year three, students spend one day a week in a private commercial laboratory. Each student was expected to source their own placement and had been successful in doing so. In the event that a student were unable to find a laboratory willing to take them on, the opportunity to return to the Hospital laboratory to fulfil this component would be provided by the School.
18. The School demonstrated that it had good relations with local dental technology laboratories, with the Head of School making regular visits to placements. This practice, however, was undertaken on an informal basis. It is recommended that formal links be set up with laboratories where work-based practice placements are due to take place. Owners and principal technicians could be offered CPD certificates for attendance at formal training events to maximise their input and assist in calibration of the overall experience for each student.
19. The School needs to ensure that work placement mentors are fully engaged with student activity. Again, a formal review system could be undertaken on a monthly basis to monitor whether student logbooks have been signed-off with an appropriate level of feedback. The inspectors also felt that mentors in the Dental Hospital Laboratory could be further utilised in developing assessments and afforded the opportunity to bring their expertise to the design of new assignments.

Staff

20. Teaching at the School is provided by four members of staff on the academic team. There is one full time tutor, one part-time tutor and two guest lecturers that each specialise in various areas of the course. The teaching team is supported by a School secretary, who provides student administration and support. On the whole, the staff felt satisfied with the support they received, however they are currently sourcing new team members as the teaching timetable can be extremely busy.
21. The Diploma continues to be funded by the Department of Health, who were extremely satisfied with the running of the School and programme and had a very high level of confidence in the staff.

22. While there were no current issues or concerns reported by staff (or in regards to staffing), in future it would be beneficial to have a formal mechanism for staff to raise issues. This would provide a framework that could incorporate formal reviews and appraisals, and provide a forum to demonstrate that feedback would be managed appropriately and efficiently, and any issues identified addressed with due diligence.
23. The inspectors felt that the wider teaching staff could be trained to become more involved in the internal verification of assessments. This would be a good development opportunity for suitable individuals in the team, and increase the School's pool of verifiers.

Students

24. The inspectors met with all nine students on the course, with four in year three and five in year two. The students from both year groups provided very genuine and positive praise for all aspects of the course. One of the key areas where the students were happy was the ability to work as part of the dental team. The opportunity to attend lectures with the BDS students in the first year, and work with them in the second year was considered a highlight. The practice enabled students to feel a valued member of the dental team from the outset of their training.
25. The students informed the inspectors that they felt the initial induction on the Diploma was very good with a clear explanation of what was expected of them as professionals. They were also given guidelines on their learning outcomes throughout the course. The students felt that while they were given significant new skills to learn quite quickly, they were provided with the appropriate amount of information and support to keep up with the learning curve.
26. There was an 'open door' policy for students to speak to the Head or Assistant Head of School or other tutors if they ever had any problems. The students were content with this approach and were confident that staff would treat their issues with due care and attention. The inspectors felt a more formal system for students to raise issues or concerns would enhance the learning environment. Subsequently, a Student Staff Liaison committee has been introduced since the first inspection in 2013. This was considered an excellent development by the inspectors and will offer students the chance to feedback on the programme in a formal environment.
27. Similarly, if students have had any issues with assessments or marking, the current procedure had been for them to be raised directly with the Head or Assistant Head of School. Again, the inspectors recommended that a more formal system for raising assessment issues may improve the overall running of the Diploma. A clear policy could incorporate assessment feedback and student reflection on their technical practice. The inspectors felt this aspect of the programme still requires further development.
28. Professionalism, fitness to practise and the roles and responsibilities of the dental team was covered in a 10-credit unit. Students were aware of the standards that will be expected of them as a member of a registered profession.

Assessment

29. The assessment process is comparable with other BTEC courses, incorporating assignments and practical work including:

- Written evidence and research studies in the form of assignments
- Oral presentations
- Discussions
- Direct observations
- Work-based assessment

The programme does not assess students using examinations: course leaders have adhered to Edexcel's method of assessment, which is continuous and allows feedback and the opportunity to improve. Each unit has a set number of assessments, most of which are written, although there are also practical assessments where appropriate.

30. As in all BTEC National programmes, all units were internally assessed and based on the achievement of specified learning outcomes. Achievement can be at three levels - pass, merit or distinction. Practical assessment was marked according to how much help was needed from the tutor. The marking criteria supplied by Edexcel were extremely clear and very specific. The marking criteria for every unit are provided in the student handbook.
31. At the School, assessments are written by the Head of School and then checked by the quality nominee. When an assessment had been completed by a student it was marked and then internally verified by the Lead Internal Verifier, if necessary. Edexcel can request a sample of two units per year to verify.
32. Edexcel carry out a Quality Review and Development (QRD) inspection on an annual basis. The most recent QRD report, based on an inspection at the end of 2013, did not raise any major areas of concern.
33. Arrangements for appeals follow Edexcel's procedures. Where a student wishes to appeal against the assessment decision of his or her assessors, he or she should make a request to the internal verifier. A second decision will be made by another member of the programme team and will involve the candidate. If the decision remains unsatisfactory to the candidate, the external verifier will be approached to make a final decision concerning the appeal.
34. There was no final exam board for this programme. Following successful verification, candidate names are forwarded to Edexcel for the certification of the BTEC Extended Diploma in Dental Technology.

Conclusion

35. The inspectors were satisfied that the curriculum is being delivered as proposed in the original submission to the GDC and that it conforms to the GDC's principles and guidance as published in *Developing the Dental Team*.
36. We recommend that this programme be granted 'approval' and successful students be deemed eligible to apply for registration with the GDC as Dental Technicians.

Requirements

To the school

- To continue to formalise the visiting of laboratory placements and explore further formal interaction between the laboratory owners and the School of Dental Technology. (18)
- To ensure that work placement mentors are fully engaged with student activity and explore the possibility of introducing a review system for the sign-off of student logbooks. (19)
- To further develop the policy for staff to formally raise concerns or issues with the School. (22)
- Explore the benefits of some of the wider teaching team being trained as internal verifiers for assessments (23)
- To continue with the Student Staff Liaison committee as a forum to offer students the chance to feedback on the programme in a formal, audited environment. (26)
- To further develop the policy for students to formally raise concerns or issues with assessment decisions. (27)

To the GDC

- To monitor and follow-up on actions taken by the College in response to the requirements

[NUMBERS IN BRACKETS REFER TO INDIVIDUAL PARAGRAPHS WITHIN THE MAIN BODY OF THE REPORT]



INSPECTION OF THE EDEXCEL BTEC LEVEL 3 EXTENDED DIPLOMA IN DENTAL TECHNOLOGY (QCF)

11th February 2013 & 4th February 2014

**BELFAST SCHOOL OF DENTAL
TECHNOLOGY**

RESPONSE



This document outlines a response to the inspectors' report on the General Dental Councils inspection of the Edexcel BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Dental Technology on the 11th February 2013 & 4th February 2014

We would like to acknowledge our appreciation of the way in which the inspection was carried out. We felt that it was conducted in an open and thorough manner.

Requirements

To the school

- **To continue to formalise the visiting of laboratory placements and explore further formal interaction between the laboratory owners and the School of Dental Technology. (18)**

Dental laboratories who are involved in vocational training are fully aware that they will be supported by the School regarding information, and updates. The School Quality Nominee visits the laboratories to continually improve relationships, communication and to ensure there is complete understanding of the importance of this vital part of the student's course of study.

The laboratory mentors are aware that the Quality Nominee is accessible at anytime for support and advice.

Vocational training laboratory mentors are offered the opportunity to become involved with the teaching of practical elements of the course at the School of Dental Technology, this offer is continually encouraged, particularly during mentor training activities.

The opportunity to offer mentor training as a CPD event is being considered.

- **To ensure that work placement mentors are fully engaged with student activity and explore the possibility of introducing a review system for the sign-off of student logbooks. (19)**

The need to ensure that student and mentor contact during work placement is consistent will be emphasised at future one-to-one meetings. Student log books will be monitored more regularly (monthly) to ensure mentor sign off and appropriate feedback is provided regarding student activity.

- **To further develop the policy for staff to formally raise concerns or issues with the School. (22)**

School Policy no. 2 - Raising Concerns (Staff) will be amended and a new copy placed in the Schools policies folder and staff handbook. Staff will be made aware of this.

- **Explore the benefits of some of the wider teaching team being trained as internal verifiers for assessments (23)**

We have discussed this issue before and intend to raise it again with teaching team members. Training is provided by Edexcel and the School Lead Internal Verifier will support any team member who wishes to develop their skills in this important area.

- **To continue with the Student Staff Liaison committee as a forum to offer students the chance to feedback on the programme in a formal, audited environment. (26)**

The staff/student liaison committee consists of one student from each year group and the Head and Assistant Head of the School. Meetings take place at the end of each semester; a new formal document has been created to record, action and monitor concerns.

- **To further develop the policy for students to formally raise concerns or issues with assessment decisions (27)**

School Policy no. 6 – Appeals Policy (student) allows a student to raise a formal grievance concern regarding an assessment decision and to appeal to the awarding body, this will be amended and a new copy inserted in the Schools policies folder and student handbook. Students will be made aware of this.

We have addressed the requirements in the report of the GDC inspectors in relation to the Edexcel BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Dental Technology offered by the Belfast School of Dental Technology.

Patrick McElwee
Head of School