A new assessment for today’s dental graduates

Within The Royal College of Surgeons of England the two dental faculties (Faculty of Dental Surgery (FDS) and Faculty of General Dental Practice (UK) (FGDP(UK)) exist side by side to promote high standards of patient care through education, training, assessment and research.

Currently each of the faculties has its own membership examination. The Diploma of Membership of the FDS (MFDS) was designed to support broad-based postgraduate education and general professional training and serves as the intercollegiate entry requirement to recognised specialist training programmes.

The Diploma of Membership of the FGDP(UK) (MFGDP(UK)) is the first-level diploma of the FGDP(UK) and the starting point for the Career Pathway within general dental practice. This examination was designed to test the knowledge, skills and understanding required for general dental care in practice. It also seeks to recognise the achievement of an appropriate standard of patient care and a commitment to lifelong professional development.

With the advent of Modernising Medical Careers (MMC) there has been a change in the way postgraduate medical training is delivered. This change has been driven by the need for more flexible training pathways tailored to meet service and personal development requirements.

Within dentistry, the General Dental Council and the Department of Health have shown interest in ‘modernising dental careers’ along the lines of the medical model. The Department of Health asked the UK Dental General Professional Training (GPT) Liaison Group to undertake the development of a curriculum for foundation programmes in dentistry in the UK. As a result, the publication Competencies for UK Dental Foundation Programmes in the UK has been produced. The competencies defined in the publication will inform the curriculum, educational content, training requirements and the expected outcomes of all dental graduates who complete a foundation programme (GPT).

It is the view of the two dental faculties of The Royal College of Surgeons of England that foundation programmes in dentistry will become mandatory in the future. While there will be some form of assessment of completion of the programme, there will also be a requirement for a formal assessment and
a qualification as a marker of the standard reached at this point in a dental graduate’s career. The two dental faculties have sought to provide a modern, educationally sound assessment in their new examination, the MJDF.

This MJDF qualification may become a desirable requirement for entry into postgraduate training programmes generally, including specialist training, and will be the starting point for the FGDP(UK)’s Career Pathway for general dental practitioners.

Aim of the new joint examination

The aims of the new joint examination are to assess knowledge after completion of a two-year foundation programme (GPT) for all dental graduates, whether they are pursuing a career in general or specialist practice. The examination will also assess an understanding of the structures and processes required to provide quality assured dental healthcare.

In replacing the existing MFGDP(UK) and MFDS, the faculties are providing a modern assessment that makes a significant step towards work-based assessment of knowledge, application of knowledge and competencies in line with the principles of the Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Board.

Structure of the examination

The assessment will consist of two parts (Part I and Part II) alongside a portfolio of work-based evidence of achievement that will present candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their acquisition of key skills developed in the work environment.

PART I

The Part I assessment will be one three-hour written paper consisting of multiple choice questions and multiple short answer questions. This will constitute a test of knowledge of all aspects of the curriculum and will also provide an assessment of critical appraisal of research literature.

PART II

The Part II assessment will be in the form of an objective structured clinical examination (OSCE), providing assessment of application of knowledge, competence and philosophy guiding practice. Included in the Part II assessment will be a number of structured clinical reasoning OSCEs. Information will be given to candidates relating to a clinical case and there will then be time to assimilate the information. There will follow short, structured discussions about the case with the examiners.

PORTFOLIO OF WORK-BASED EVIDENCE

This element of the assessment will consist of a portfolio presented by the candidate demonstrating knowledge and application of knowledge in respect of a work-based portfolio removes the reliance on traditional tests of knowledge and, together with the OSCE elements, allows for triangulation of methods to test the areas set out in the general professional training curriculum. Furthermore, the faculties hope that the lesser reliance on traditional examination methods and assessment of work-based experience will also have greater meaning for young dental graduates.

Transition arrangements

There will be a process of transition to ensure that those who have already commenced either the MFGDP(UK) or MFDS will be protected and will be able to use components that have been completed from those two examinations towards the new award. For all up-to-date information on the MJDF and for a detailed explanation of the transition arrangements, please refer to the faculty websites at http://www.fgdp.org.uk/ or http://www.rcseng.ac.uk/fds/.

Summary

The two dental faculties believe that the new examination will provide a modern, fit-for-purpose, innovative assessment for today’s young dentist. The introduction of