

Assessment Strategy for Dental Specialty Training for Dental Public Health

The strategy outlines the different methods of assessment both in the workplace and through examination within the relevant training programme. These will be used, along with other evidence (refer to the latest edition of the [Dental Gold Guide](#)) to determine a candidate's progression within training as part of the RCP¹ process. Those successfully completing training will be eligible for the Certificate for the Completion of Specialist Training (CCST) and able to apply to join the General Dental Council (GDC) Specialist List for that specialty.

This strategy has been written by the Royal Colleges in conjunction with the Dental Public Health Specialty Advisory Committees (SAC). Oversight of the strategy's implementation in informing trainee progression is provided by the UK Committee of Postgraduate Dental Deans and Directors (COPDEND).

A Programme of Assessment

The programme of assessment developed for the new dental specialty curricula is designed to assess the all-round competence of a listed specialist and has been mapped to the learning outcomes of each specialty.

It has long been established that to assess a complex construct such as clinical competence a single assessment tool will not suffice. Each type of assessment tool has its own strengths and weaknesses and using a combination of methods can provide a more robust and balanced approach. As such those responsible for designing curricula for the health professions are increasingly adopting a programmatic approach or system of assessment which requires a carefully selected suite of complementary assessment methods to address the different purposes of assessment.

Broadly speaking, the purpose of assessment can be categorised as formative or summative, the former being primarily focused on helping trainees to learn, the latter

¹ The RCP Process

The Review of Competency Progression (RCP) is the means by which dentists in specialty training are reviewed each year to assess their progression against learning outcomes identified in the curriculum for their training programme.

on assuring all stakeholders including the trainee, the profession, employer and the public that trainees have achieved the required standard of performance before progressing to the next career stage. The Programme of Assessment has been designed to incorporate both formative and summative uses of assessment.

In order to achieve this the programme has adopted two different methodologies: a system of workplace-based assessment (WBAs) and progression reviews delivered by the deaneries and COPDEND, and a formal examination taken towards the end of training delivered by the Dental Faculties of the UK Royal Surgical Colleges. A combination of these approaches will be used to address learning outcomes outlined in the curriculum. The general professional outcomes will be assessed by the WBAs whereas the specialty specific learning outcomes will be assessed using both approaches.

Workplace-based assessments

A range of different workplace-based assessments (WBAs) will be used to identify trainee strengths and weaknesses across the curriculum. These provide the basis for structured feedback conversations between the trainee and assessor and allow trainees to demonstrate progression over the course of their training. They will inform progression decisions and recommendations at RCP (Review of Competence Progression) meetings.

These assessments are conducted in the workplace setting throughout the training period using a range of different assessors and are managed by the body responsible for delivering training. The WBAs provide authenticity to the programme of assessment, opportunity for detailed personalised feedback and allow a wider range of skills to be assessed than would be possible with a purely formal assessment. The WBA tools used by the SACs might include: Case-based Discussions (CbD), Direct Observation of Procedural Skills (DOPS), Multi-source Feedback (MsF), Published Report/Paper, Objective Structured Dental Public Health Assessment (OSDPHA).

Specialty specific WBAs are the responsibility of the Dental Public Health SAC and guidance on RCP process can be found in the Dental Gold Guide.

Dental Specialty Fellowship Examination

The Dental Specialty Fellowship Examinations (the examinations) are the formal assessments that trainees need to pass as part of the evidence to support GDC specialist listing. They provide a more standardised approach to the programme of assessment.

The examinations are delivered on an intercollegiate basis by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Surgeons of England, and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. Eligibility criteria to enter an examination will be published separately. On successfully completing the examination, trainees will be eligible for Fellowship of the College with which they choose to affiliate. The examination is mapped to the speciality specific learning outcomes of the specialty curriculum.

An examination syllabus is being developed that will illustrate in detail how the assessment tools used in the examination are mapped to the learning outcomes/exemplars in the curriculum. The Dental Public Health examination will use the following assessment tools.

Short Answer Questions (SAQ)

Short Answer questions will be used to assess skills in critical appraisal.

SAQs are each based on stimulus materials, with a series of related questions attached. The questions require candidates to construct a concise and focussed response. The stimulus material accompanying the questions will be a set of published articles or reports, which may be redacted.

Structured Orals

Three types of structured orals will be used, each led by one or more examiners. Each type of oral will assess a different knowledge base and use different stimulus materials

- **Project based Structured Orals (pSO)** will require candidates to submit a range of project reports that will form the basis of the structured oral discussions. This approach will be used to assess candidates' ability to design and deliver a project, identify suitable sources of information, synthesise information and communicate findings in addition to decision making, critical appraisal and problem solving.
- **Unseen case Structured Orals (uSO)** will be based on simulated scenarios and will focus on the assessment of data interpretation skills, information synthesis, decision making and problem-solving skills

- **Management Structured Orals (mSO)** will be based on simulated scenarios and will focus on assessment of clinical judgement and decision-making skills relating to the management of healthcare service delivery and will include application of knowledge of legislative and ethical frameworks, national and local healthcare systems and service planning.

Example Programmatic Assessment Overview

The following table shows how the five curriculum domains will be assessed in the examination, along with an example of how the different assessment tools might be used to assess the five curriculum domains in the Workplace based assessment.

The workplace-based assessment section of the table is provided for illustrative purposes only, and the exact use of each tool may differ for each specialty and other WBA tools may be developed in the future to test the domains in the table. More detailed information on the WBAs can be obtained from the relevant SAC.

Assessment Tool	Curriculum Domains				
	Professional Knowledge and Management	Leadership and Teamworking	Patient Safety, Quality Improvement and Management	Personal Education, Training, Research and Scholarship	Specialty Specific Content
Workplace-based assessment					
CbD	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
DOPS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
MsF	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Published Report	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
OSDPHA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Formal Examination					
SAQ					✓
pSO					✓
uSO					✓
mSO					✓

Reference: Case-based Discussions (CbD), Direct Observation of Procedural Skills (DOPS), Multi-source Feedback (MsF), Objective Structured Dental Public Health Assessment (OSDPHA). Short Answer Questions (SAQ), Project-based Structured Oral (pSO), Unseen Case Structured Oral (uSO), Management Structured Oral (mSO).

Please refer any questions to info@dsfe.org.uk

Version control

Version	Date	Changes made
1.0	20 November 2024	Document released
1.1	24 November 2025	Update to College logos
2.0	27 January 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 1: Link to Dental Gold Guide corrected to point to most recent edition. Page 2: ‘The examinations are delivered on an intercollegiate basis by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Surgeons of England, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland’ amended to ‘The examinations are delivered on an intercollegiate basis by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Surgeons of England, and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow.’ Page 2: ‘...and a formal examination taken towards the end of training delivered by the Dental Faculties of the UK Royal Surgical Colleges...’ amended to ‘...and a formal examination taken towards the end of training delivered by the Dental Faculties of the UK Royal Surgical Colleges...’
2.1	8 April 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Branding update and update of wording relating to examination format under ‘Dental Specialty Fellowship Examination.’