

Assessment Strategy for Dental Specialty Training

This document sets out the assessment strategy for the following nine General Dental Council (GDC)-listed specialties:

Endodontics, Oral Medicine, Oral Surgery, Orthodontics, Paediatric Dentistry, Periodontics, Prosthodontics, Restorative Dentistry and Special Care Dentistry¹.

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 RCP² 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 GDC Specialist List for that specialty.

This strategy has been written by the Royal Colleges in conjunction with the relevant Specialty Advisory Committees (SACs). Oversight of the strategy's implementation in informing NTN specialty trainee progression is provided by COPDEND. Individuals aiming to be admitted to a GDC specialist list via Specialty Listing Assessed Application will need to demonstrate curriculum outcomes via equivalence.

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 GDC registered dentist prior to specialty listing 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

¹ The assessment strategy for Dental Public Health is outlined separately.

² 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 LOs identified in the curriculum for their training programme.

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 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.

WBAs are conducted throughout the training period using a range of different assessors and are managed by the body (for NTN-trainees) or person 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 Discussion (CbD), mini Clinical Evaluation Exercise (miniCEX), Multi-source Feedback (MsF), Direct Observation of Procedural Skills (DOPS), Procedure-based Assessments (PbA), Assessment of Audit (AoA), Observation of Teaching (OoT).

Specialty specific WBAs are the responsibility of the relevant SAC and guidance on RCP process is in the Dental Gold Guide.

Dental Specialty Fellowship Examinations

The Dental Specialty Fellowship Examinations (the examinations) are the formal assessments that need to be passed 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.

Each examination is mapped to the speciality specific learning outcomes of the relevant specialty curriculum. The examinations will focus on assessing basic and clinical sciences, clinical judgement and clinical decision-making skills, but will not seek to assess in a stand alone way any technical or non-technical skills listed in the specialty learning outcomes (such as communication and patient management). However, aspects of these skills can be expected to be incorporated within the assessment tools described below in a way that reflects specialist clinical practice.

An examination syllabus is being developed for each specialty that will illustrate how the two assessment tools used in the examination are mapped to the learning outcomes/exemplars in the curriculum. The examinations will use the following two assessment tools.

Single Best Answer (SBA) Questions

Single Best Answer questions will be used to assess basic and clinical sciences pertinent to clinical decision making in the relevant specialty, particularly those that are not directly observable in the workplace. They may also assess peripheral knowledge, that whilst not strictly clinical, is relevant to clinical decision making and treatment planning.

SBAs are a selected response format with one single best answer, usually with 4 plausible distractors. They are particularly well suited to assessing higher-order thinking and usually contain a clinical vignette requiring the application of knowledge.

Examples of content covered: physiology, anatomy, pharmacology, treatment mechanics, application of guidance.

Clinical Structured Oral (cSO)

A structured oral will be used to assess candidates' clinical judgement and decision-making skills including the assessment and interpretation clinical information to reach appropriate diagnoses, including differential diagnoses in line with relevant clinical guidelines, prognoses, patient management, treatment planning and dealing with complications within the overall context of healthcare delivery relevant to the specialty. Clinical decision making may also include the recognition of medical emergencies and situations requiring urgent referral.

The format is well suited to assessing high level cognitive skills and is based around a circuit of simulated clinical scenarios where one or more examiners explore with each candidate their proposed management of a standardised clinical case.

Examples of content covered: outcomes of physical examination, medical and social history, tests, radiographs, special investigations, the formulation of treatment and management plans, follow up arrangements including timely management of any complications, longitudinal treatment planning, pre- peri- and post-operative management within a context of patient/public safety and experience plus quality improvement.

Example Programmatic Assessment Overview

The following table shows broadly how the five curriculum domains will be assessed in the examinations, 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 WBA 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 (WBA)					
CbD	✓		✓	✓	✓
MiniCEX	✓				✓

Consent miniCEX	✓		✓		✓
DOPS /PBA					✓
OoT				✓	✓
AoA			✓		
MSF	✓	✓	✓		
Formal Examination					
SBA					✓
cSO					✓

Reference: Case-based Discussion (CbD), mini-Clinical Evaluation Exercise (miniCEX), Multi-source Feedback (MsF), Direct Observation of Procedural Skills (DOPS), Procedure-based Assessments (PbA), Assessment of Audit (AoA), Observation of Teaching (OoT), Single Best Answer (SBA) Questions, Clinical Structured Oral (cSO),

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

Version control

Version	Date	Changes made
1.0	11 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.'

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	Branding update and update of wording relating to examination format under ‘Dental Specialty Fellowship Examination.’