

A photograph of dental students in a clinical setting. They are wearing white lab coats, blue surgical masks, and blue gloves. They are working on dental models or patients. The background shows dental equipment and a clean, professional environment.

**General  
Dental  
Council**

protecting patients,  
regulating the dental team

# Student professionalism and fitness to practise - what you need to know?

Introduction for student dental professionals



- ▶ **Clinical dental technicians**
- ▶ **Dental hygienists**
- ▶ **Dental nurses**
- ▶ **Dental technicians**
- ▶ **Dental therapists**
- ▶ **Dentists**
- ▶ **Orthodontic therapists**

### **Congratulations on achieving a place on your training programme.**

This leaflet outlines some of the important information you need to know about student professionalism and student fitness to practise when you begin your course and where to find further help and support.

sets you, and other health and social care students, apart from students who study subjects that don't lead to professional regulation. It is important that the public can have confidence in the dental profession. Conduct in both your personal and professional life must be consistent with maintaining that public confidence. This means thinking about how you communicate and represent yourself outside of study, in the evenings, at weekends and when using social media, as well as on your course.



**Student professionalism** is the way you respond to the standards required of you, and how you take responsibility for meeting them. It is how you demonstrate appropriate attitudes and behaviour with patients and those around you, in a range of situations. Even if you don't meet a standard on a particular occasion, your recognition of the issue and responding in the right way to put correct it also demonstrates professionalism.

It is your responsibility to meet these standards of professionalism.

As a student you are expected to meet certain **student fitness to practise requirements** during your training relating to:

▶ **Clinical/technical and academic work**

▶ **Professional behaviour**

▶ **Health**

## **What is student professionalism and fitness to practise?**

Patients expect to be treated by competent dental professionals, with up-to-date skills who are properly trained and qualified and have the necessary technical and personal skills. The safety, health and choices of patients should be put first. They expect dental professionals to act with integrity and honesty and to treat them with respect.

The GDC regulates dental professionals by:

- ▶ Quality assuring education
- ▶ Registering you and your colleagues
- ▶ Setting standards that dental professionals must meet.

The standards are published in the booklet **Standards for the Dental Team**. These standards are used to judge whether a professional is 'fit to practise'.

These standards are important because you will provide care for patients, as well as maintaining good infection control and/or appliances for patients. This responsibility

These areas reflect those that the General Dental Council (GDC) ask you to meet as a registrant once you qualify, join the register and start practising. These are the requirements we expect once you join the dental register, which are there to help protect patients.

Where there are concerns about clinical/technical or academic work, professional behaviour or health, training providers will consider if this amounts to a **student fitness to practise** concern. If so, they will need to think about what support you may need and whether the issue warrants consideration through its formal procedures.

Student professionalism is an important part of meeting student fitness to practise requirements. While you are training it is your training provider, not the GDC, who is responsible for ensuring your student professionalism and fitness to practise and that you meet the right level by the end of your course.



## Standards for the Dental Team

The standards you need to meet once you register with the GDC as a dental professional are covered in the booklet:

### Standards for the Dental Team



These are set out as nine ethical principles of practice:

1. Put patients' interests first
2. Communicate effectively with patients
3. Obtain valid consent
4. Maintain and protect patients' information
5. Have a clear and effective complaints procedure
6. Work with colleagues in a way that is in patients' best interests
7. Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills
8. Raise concerns if patients are at risk
9. Make sure your personal behaviour maintains patients' confidence in you and the dental profession

During your training, you will learn how to meet these standards in practice. You should gain lots of experience too so they become second nature by the end of your course. Everyone will make mistakes and it is important to realise the lessons that can be learned and shared.



Your training provider will take you through the guidance and explain each section. Whether you are training in a college, university or largely with an employer is taken into account. You are encouraged to refer to the booklet throughout your training.

Following the guidance is very important as it is designed to promote effective patient protection. Although it is very rare, if you do not meet the requirements, or display inappropriate behaviour for a dental professional, this may trigger student fitness to practise proceedings. This could affect the completion of your course or being able to register with the GDC once you have qualified. Some common concerns have included:

- ▶ Aggressive, violent or threatening behaviour
- ▶ Poor academic, clinical and/or technical performance
- ▶ Dishonesty or fraud which might include dishonesty in relation to your training such as cheating and plagiarising
- ▶ Drug or alcohol misuse
- ▶ Criminal convictions or cautions

This could also include health issues such as mental health concerns which may require additional help and support.

You can find further information to help understand the types of behaviour that might trigger a concern in the guidance. However, it remains the case that most students recognise when concerns arise and are supported by their training provider to deal with them.



## The guidance

Your training provider should provide you with the **Student Professionalism and Fitness to Practise** booklet when you begin your course.



This covers:

- ▶ The standards you need to meet
- ▶ Support available for students
- ▶ What happens if there are issues and the best ways to resolve them
- ▶ The information your training provider should give you
- ▶ Things that might affect your application to register with the General Dental Council when you qualify

## Support

Your training provider understands you are learning and how important it is for you to have the support you need to fulfil your potential. They are familiar with the sources of stress that can affect you. These can include issues both inside and outside of study or related to your health or a disability.

Support is available from a wide range of individuals and groups including:

- ▶ Personal tutors
- ▶ Student health services
- ▶ Disability advisors
- ▶ Occupational health services
- ▶ Confidential counselling eg through your university/college support services
- ▶ Student groups
- ▶ Your employer

Your training provider will tell you what help and support is available on your course. The most important thing is to tell a suitable person eg your trainer, supervisor, mentor or employer, depending on your circumstances, if you are worried about anything that could affect your work so they can help. They can give you the appropriate support and where possible, make reasonable adjustments to assist you on the course.

If you are worried about a fellow student, it is also important to tell a suitable person such as a member of staff.

## Resources for you

A resource area for students is available on the **GDC website**. Here you can find:

- ▶ Answers to common questions
- ▶ Interactive case studies and quizzes

You can also follow us on Twitter (@GDC\_UK) as well as receiving regular updates through our newsletter. The GDC also has lots of guidance for registrants and if you have any questions you can also email us directly:

**QualityAssurance@gdc-uk.org**



## Social media

As a dental student in a regulated profession, you are different to other groups of students who are not professionally regulated. This means that you come under more scrutiny, inside and outside of training, to maintain the integrity of the profession.

Take care with the **information and images** you and others share online:

- ▶ You must always respect patient confidentiality
- ▶ You should not post or share any content which could cause offence to anyone – including patients, colleagues and members of the general public – or which may cause people to lose their trust in student dental professionals.

Look at the guidelines on your course and familiarise yourself with the **GDC's social media guidance** too. Think about what you would worry about if you were a patient? Test yourself using the case studies on the GDC website to see if you know the right thing to do in different situations?



## Starting work and applying for GDC registration

The Student Professionalism and Fitness to Practise guidance contains all you need to know about applying for registration with the GDC. It is a good idea to look at this section to check whether you need to tell your training provider about issues relating to your health or any criminal convictions or warnings at the beginning of your training. Your training provider can provide you with extra support, let you know if it could affect your application and what to do.

This leaflet is produced by the General Dental Council (GDC).

### Key things to remember:

- ▶ Put patients' interests first
- ▶ Ask for help
- ▶ Don't worry if you make mistakes
- ▶ Be honest
- ▶ Good communication helps avoid and solve most problems
- ▶ Think about how your behaviour may be viewed by patients – both on the course and when you are off duty
- ▶ Follow the Standards for the Dental Team

If you have accessibility needs and require the document in a different format, please let us know what adjustments you require. The GDC is committed to ensuring our publications are as accessible as possible. We can be contacted at:

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