DSC
Dental Schools Council

# Guidance on the core values and attributes needed to study dentistry



# Introduction

This statement sets out the core values and attributes a student should possess to study dentistry in the UK. In addition to the appropriate academic background, skills, and aptitude, dental schools are also looking for applicants who are able to demonstrate the values and attributes set out in this statement. The list below is not exhaustive and individual dental schools will also have additional skills or attributes that they are looking for in potential students.

The General Dental Council (GDC) sets the required outcomes for undergraduate dental education which are the skills, attitudes and behaviours that dental students should demonstrate before they graduate. These outcomes are set out in their standards for the dental team. Applicants are strongly advised to read these standards before you apply as it gives you a sense of what dental school will involve. Whilst you do not need to have reached these standards on application, it is important that you feel you have the potential to reach them. It is this potential that admissions teams are looking for.

It is important to note that dentistry is a healthcare profession first and foremost. Your position in society and responsibility to improve the oral health of the public is an important thing to consider, as you will be expected to act in the best interests of your patients at all times. This means your will be expected to uphold professional standards whilst at work, but also in your own time. In a wider context, you will play an important role in educating patients, advocating for oral health, and supporting patients in the community with their health needs within the scope of your practice.

# Advice to applicants on using this statement

We have written this guide to help you be able to explain how you have potential to be a dentist, in line with the values dentists should hold according to the GDC. This Guidance sets out the key skills and attributes needed to study dentistry, in relation to each of the GDC standards.

- Skills and attributes dental schools look for include:
- Ability to apologise and recognise duty of candour (being open and honest with patients)
- Ability to appreciate the complexities of healthcare consent decisions
- Ability to show respect, empathy and care
- Ability to take responsibility for own actions
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Conscientiousness
- Courage to advocate for patients
- Effective and appropriate communication, including written and spoken
- Honesty
- Individual responsibility and resilience
- Integrity
- Motivation to study dentistry
- Proactive personal insight, self-reflection, and self-development

# Advice to applicants on using this statement

This Guidance describes how these skills fit with the GDC standards for undergraduate dental education and reflects on dental school expectations of students and applicants.

Applicants are advised to read this Guidance carefully and to reflect on how they might demonstrate the values and attributes during the selection process. You should think of concrete examples of times you have demonstrated these values and attributes. These examples may be useful in aspects of the selection process including interviews and personal statements. It is not sufficient to merely memorise the learning outcomes. Applicants should also be able to describe how they have reacted or would react to scenarios in ways that demonstrate the key GDC outcomes.

Examples can be drawn from a wide range of experiences including:

- Educational experience
- Experience of paid employment
- Participation in social activities
- Volunteer work
- Work experience placements

# GDC Outcome 1

## Put patient's interests first

As a dental student, you will be exposed to patient care situations early in your course and be expected to undertake dental care for patients as part of your degree. It is essential that dentists are lifelong learners who are committed to providing their patients with excellent care based on the latest findings in dental and medical sciences throughout their careers. Dental schools look for applicants who display a genuine interest in the dental profession itself rather than only other indirect goals.

To keep up to date and to improve the standard of care they provide to patients, dentists need to be able to reflect honestly on their own practice in order to identify aspects that could be improved, or temporary or permanent issues that may inhibit their ability to practice. Dental schools are looking for applicants who have insight into their own capabilities and who will be able to reflect honestly on their own performance, including any weaknesses, during the course.

Dentists must have empathy for their patients and do their best for them. Dentists should put their patients first and they should actively listen to their concerns, and advocate for patients where appropriate.

Applicable skills and attributes:

- Ability to appreciate the complexities of healthcare consent decisions
- Ability to show respect, empathy and care
- Conscientiousness
- Courage to advocate for patients
- Honesty
- Motivation to study dentistry
- Proactive personal insight, self-reflection, and self-development

# GDC Outcome 2

## Communicate effectively with patients

The ability to communicate effectively with a wide range of different people (e.g. adult and child patients, members of the dental team, medical general practitioners), often in difficult situations, is essential to all aspects of dental practice. Having good communication skills is one of the attributes that patients value the most in their dentists. Patients are often anxious when seeking or receiving care from dental professionals, and communication skills are an essential part of managing these situations. Dentists should understand and anticipate barriers to healthcare and communication that patients may experience.

Dental schools look for evidence of good communication skills during the application process with the understanding that their students will learn at dental school how to apply these skills in a clinical setting and in different clinical situations. Communication skills cover speaking, listening, writing and reading, amongst others.

Applicable skills and attributes:

- Ability to show respect, empathy and care
- Effective and appropriate communication, including written and spoken

# GDC Outcome 3

## Obtain valid consent

Appreciation of the consent process is essential for dental practitioners. This will be taught at University, however, the potential to become an ethical practitioner is something which Dental Education providers will look for from applicants. Gaining consent can be complex, and an appreciation of the challenges of certain ethical situations must be accurately judged by dentists. Dentists must understand the implications for patients and healthcare professionals if communication is not effective or appropriate as this may mean that consent is not valid.

Applicable skills and attributes:

- Ability to appreciate the complexities of healthcare consent decisions
- Effective and appropriate communication, including written and spoken
- Honesty
- Integrity

# GDC Outcome 4

## Maintain and protect patients' information

Confidentiality is essential as part of healthcare, and an appreciation that you will be expected to maintain confidence except in exceptional circumstances is important. This will include record-keeping and not identifying patients. Within institutions, dentists must take an active role in protecting patients' information. Showing this or narrowing this down to an individual skill is not simple, but there are several contributary skills and attributes.

- Ability to show respect, empathy and care
- Ability to take responsibility for own actions

Applicable skills and attributes:

- Conscientiousness
- Honesty

# GDC Outcome 5

## Have a clear and effective complaints procedure

Knowledge that complaints will happen and the standards for complaints procedures is important, along with some reflection on how your abilities and skills may be applicable to this eventuality. Communication skills, amongst others, are vital in reducing the incidence of complaints and successful resolution if things do not go to plan.

Applicable skills and attributes:

- Ability to apologise and recognise duty of candour
- Ability to show respect, empathy and care
- Conscientiousness
- Effective and appropriate communication, including written and spoken
- Honesty
- Individual responsibility and resilience
- Proactive personal insight, self-reflection, and self-development

# GDC Outcome 6

## Work with colleagues in a way that is in patients' best interests

Respectful and professional interactions between the dental team are essential. Dental Schools will be looking for candidates who are polite, respectful, and can interact appropriately with interviewers or colleagues, while having the courage to advocate for patients. This reflects the skills and attributes required to put patients' interests first, plus those relating to communication. There may be times when there is a conflict between, for example, financial interests of a practitioner, patient need, and time constraints. It is essential that all healthcare practitioners, including dentists, behave in a way which prioritises patient care.

Applicable skills and attributes:

- Ability to apologise and recognise duty of candour
- Ability to show respect, empathy and care
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Conscientiousness
- Courage to advocate for patients
- Effective and appropriate communication, including written and spoken
- Individual responsibility and resilience
- Proactive personal insight, self-reflection, and self-development

# GDC Outcome 7

## Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills

You must be driven and motivated to improve your knowledge and skills. All dentists are required to undertake a certain number of hours of Continued Professional Development over a 5-year cycle when registered with the General Dental Council. This must be dentist led, and so the ability to be a self-reflective, lifelong learner is an essential attribute for a future dentist. Moreover, lifelong learning is also essential to keep up with advances in knowledge and technology. Patient safety is paramount, and practicing outside your area of knowledge or skills would have a detrimental impact on patient health.

Applicable skills and attributes:

- Integrity
- Motivation to study dentistry
- Proactive personal insight, self-reflection, and self-development

# GDC Outcome 8

## Raise concerns if patients are at risk

Dentists must be open and honest when things are going, or have gone, wrong. Dental schools are looking for applicants who take individual responsibility for their own actions. Dentists have a responsibility to raise concerns about patient safety both at an individual and organisational level. Therefore, dental schools are looking for applicants who are conscientious and have the potential to advocate for patient safety, even in difficult circumstances. Dental schools are looking for applicants who take responsibility for their own actions.

Applicable skills and attributes:

- Conscientiousness
- Courage to advocate for patients
- Honesty
- Individual responsibility and resilience
- Integrity

# GDC Outcome 9

## Make sure your personal behaviour maintains patients' confidence in you and the dental profession

Dentistry is a trusted profession. Dentists must behave in a way that upholds the trust society places in them. This means that dentists should bear in mind their professional responsibilities both at work and in their private lives. In particular, it is important that they do not break the law. Where dentists do not behave in line with their professional responsibilities, they must be open and honest about this.

Dentists must declare if they have received a caution or conviction for a criminal offence to their regulator and employer. Accordingly, dental schools ask applicants to declare if they have received a caution from the police, if they have received a criminal conviction or if they have been subject to disciplinary proceedings. Applicants must understand the importance of maintaining the very highest standards of behaviour throughout their future careers. They must take responsibility for their actions and be honest with the dental school about their personal history and be aware that as a member of a registered profession, this will be expected of them during their working life.

Applicable skills and attributes:

- Ability to take responsibility for own actions
- Honesty
- Integrity
- Proactive personal insight, self-reflection, and self-development