

Michael O'Neill

Head of General Dental & Ophthalmic Services
Department of Health
Room C3.27
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SQ

Cc: Caroline Lappin, CDO; Brid Hendron, NIMDTA;

13th February 2023

Dear Michael

We are writing to you in relation to confirmation of funding arrangements for Dental Foundation Training for the upcoming 2023/2024 training year.

It is our understanding that Brid Hendron, Postgraduate Dental Dean NIMDTA has written to your Department to request continued adoption of the "Block Grant" model which was implemented as an emergency measure during the COVID-19 pandemic and is currently in place until the end of the current training year. We thank your department for implementing this funding model during the recent challenging years.

The NIMDTA application process for Educational Supervisors closes on Monday 13th February, therefore prospective and returning Educational Supervisors are in a difficult position of applying to a scheme without knowledge of the remuneration mechanisms that training practices will be subject to.

We wish to make known the overwhelming support of Educational Supervisors for retention of the block grant. Indeed, we feel it is imperative to put the Department on notice that, following consultation and a survey of colleagues, there is a risk of mass ES withdrawal from the scheme should the Department impose an Item of Service model.

We are sure you and your Department are aware of the impact of the pandemic on clinical undergraduate Dental Education, an impact that is very much in continuance; dental students continue to have reduced clinical exposure to both routine and advanced dental procedures, and the current cohort due to graduate in Summer 2023 have had four out of five undergraduate years disrupted by COVID-19 restrictions on education and clinical practice. This represents a significant and ongoing concern amongst current Educational Supervisors, and is supported by their personal teaching experience with Foundation Dentists (FDs) from the 2020/2021/2022 training years impacted by reduced clinical experience at undergraduate level, which required substantial increased time in teaching compared to pre-COVID.

This year has also seen the rise in DFT places in NI being taken up by Overseas Graduates; this has brought new educational challenges where graduates have entered general practice here in the UK without the usual pre-requisite experience that UK dental graduates must have in order to complete their studies.

It is our experience that this group of FDs were subject to delayed General Dental Council registration, delayed UK VISA granting, and from an educational perspective, required significant time, resources and targeted training (including increased time away from the practice) to enable these graduates to commence patient treatment at a “safe beginner level”. This took many weeks, if not months and luckily, practices were supported in this by the current funding mechanism. Put simply, this would not have been possible had practices been subject to Item of Service funding model.

A recent poll of our current Educational Supervisors demonstrated that over 90% of respondents would withdraw from training should it revert to an IoS model. The protection of patients in ensuring clinical competence in primary dental care practise must be our primary concern in an era of increased educational needs of new graduates. Therein, the role of Educational Supervisors should be adequately supported and maintained in line with high Clinical Educational standards. Many of our ESs have completed certificated qualification in Clinical Education, including PG Cert, PG Diploma and MSc levels. This group also has high numbers of Serial Returners, with many being with the DFT programme for over 6 years. The depth of experience and commitment of our Educational Supervisors cannot be underestimated, and it would be a grave disservice to our FDs, the profession and the wider Health Service should this funding model be upset , and as a result these trainers be lost in the face of rising educational need. Dental Foundation Training safeguards access to HS Dentistry particularly in rural populations where practices choose to train to ensure continued service provision.

Primarily, educational outcomes must remain front and centre in guiding the correct way forward, while financial considerations are secondary. Practically speaking, a block grant mechanism ensures that practices and FDs are shielded from undue service pressure uncondusive to training, ensures high standards of clinical Health Service care to our patients, and allows equity across the UK DFT programmes, under which NI ESs are subject to the same educational contract as their counterparts in England and Wales. We are by no means unique here, indeed the block grant is a well established model throughout the UK.

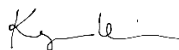
It is our belief that should Foundation Dentists get the best start in Dentistry – if their first experience in General Dental Services is positive - they will be more likely to remain after Dental Foundation Training. FDs thrive in a system where they are valued and investment in their development has been made.

It is the considered view of Educational Supervisors, and indeed we believe of NIMDTA that this can only realistically be achieved with a block grant model. We understand that no system is perfect, and are keen to work with you to ensure that minimum service levels are achieved, subject to a mechanism to consider mitigating circumstances (for example, exceptional training/educational needs of an FD). Consideration could also be given to allow payment of activity above the annual threshold where a foundation dentist consistently produces high levels of Health Service activity where currently this is deducted in full (including patient contributions) from practice schedules. In an era where access to HS Dentistry is in crisis, any barriers to increased access should be removed.

We very much hope that our concerns are fully appreciated by your department, and that we can find a way forward that can stabilise and secure our continued participation providing an important service that we are committed to. It is deeply unsettling for us as ESs, and for the future of this important programme that it seems the funding model is once again in question, and yet again ESs are reconsidering their ability to be able to participate.

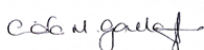
We would respectfully request that clarity can be provided as a matter of urgency, not least as the recruitment process of ESs is already underway and ahead of contracts being signed.

Yours sincerely



Kegan O'Kane

Educational Supervisors representative, DFTNI



Co-signed by:

Ciara Gallagher

Chair, BDA NIDPC

Undersigned by the following Educational Supervisors:

- David Adgey
- Kathy Beirne
- Bibiana Blay-Montagut
- Caroline Boyle
- Katherine Bready
- Tracey Campbell
- Michael Clements
- Christina Davis
- Owen Devlin
- Jeremy Doogan
- Susan Dornan
- Molly Duddy
- Daniel Ewart
- Stuart FitzGerald
- Heather Gardner
- Alyson Graham
- Gavin Maguire
- Cara McAuley
- Rebecca McCarey
- James McKee
- Jennie McLean
- Robert Millar
- Joe Murphy
- John O'Boyle

- Catherine O’Gorman
- Seamus O’Hagan
- Veronie O’Kelly
- Kirsty Palmer
- Liam Quinn
- Stephen Rainey
- Darren Walsh

Training Practice Signatories (in addition to those mentioned above)

Derek Maguire & Leonard Maguire on behalf of DJ Maguire Dental Group – DJ Maguire & Assoc, North St Dental Care, Lisburn Family Dental Care, Turk Dental Care, Strabane Family Dental Care, Newcastle Family Dental Care.