Less than three months remain until the deadline for statutory registration for dental care professionals. Once registered, it means that dental nurses, dental technicians and clinical dental technicians will be able to perform dentistry and develop their skills to offer further services to complement those of the dentist. Despite this, there are very poor provisions to enable members of the dental team to offer a more professional service. With just 11 centres in the UK providing dental technology training, huge numbers of dental care professionals are missing out on furthering their training because the centres are too far for them to travel.

There are just 11 dental technology centres in the UK and, incredibly, none in Northern Ireland. Dental care professionals in Ireland have to travel to Telford College in Edinburgh. Similarly, those in the south west have to send trainees to either Bristol or London.

To make matters worse, now that the UK has finally legalised the clinical dental technician profession, there's no UK course for people to access, so how can we be expected to encourage people to further themselves professionally and legally if there is no course available that will verify their skills?

A cash injection

The Government recently announced a considerable investment into the dentists’ VT scheme. I applaud any additional money invested into the industry, however, I really feel that the Government needs to take responsibility for its actions now that dental care professionals are required to register with the GDC. Registration is about protecting the patient and not about making a good story for the media. It should be about the growth of professional standards in UK dentistry, which is where the investment is needed.

Currently leading the way in terms of investment for dental technicians, Scotland successfully developed the VT scheme last year for students completing their training. This has resulted in the retention rate in newly qualified students that the rest of the UK can currently only dream about. With such small numbers of dental technicians compared to dentists, why is it so impossible to provide finance for a dental technician VT scheme? At the same time, why can’t funds be made available for a VT scheme for the entire dental team?

If the Government truly believes in the dental team, we have now reached the stage where they need to put the money up. If they don’t, I believe we are going to find ourselves in a position where we will see numerous people working outside the law— not because they want to, but because there isn’t enough access to training or enough financial support. Eventually, if we end up with a combination of registered and non-registered dental care professionals throughout the UK and you are discovered to be working unregistered, who is going to face action, the GDC or you? The Government is aware that they are putting dental technicians in such a position, so the question is why aren’t they doing anything about it?