Registration for dental nurses became mandatory on July 31, 2008. As a result, thousands of dental nurses countrywide have paid their registration fees, purchased professional indemnity insurance and will complete their obligatory CPD. However, they have not seen any financial gains to offset the costs incurred.

Question: Will there be a direct financial pay-off for dental nurses who increase their skills through CPD?

Answer: Not in the immediate future.

Question: Why should dental nurses make an investment in their professional development when there’s unlikely to be a return on that investment?

Answer: Dentists and their nurses’ employers will need to play a ‘long game’ here. The way is open for dental nurses to work in roles that directly affect practice profitability. Care co-ordination being just one of many examples this. From a business point of view, any investment is only worth the return it realises, so where a financial investment from the practice is matched by the nurses investment of time and effort to develop relevant skills, together they enable the business to provide more and higher quality healthcare, more profitably.

Implementing change

The first step for individual dental nurses will be to produce their Professional Development Plan (PDP). This should begin with long-term, mid-term and short-term objectives. Once these have been specified, the pathway to achieve them can be determined.

Before individuals can define their development needs, it is essential for the dental business they work in to set long-term objectives. This is the role and responsibility of the practice management. Working in a well-focused and ambitious environment keeps team members engaged, while they work toward a mutually desirable destination.

Over recent years, dental businesses have become more aware of the importance of making an investment in their people. In some regions of the UK, government-backed funding for training and development initiatives promote business skills. To find out what’s available in your region, contact your Business Link or Learning Skills Council.

There can be no doubt that highly trained and motivated dental teams are equally beneficial to patients, dental businesses and dental professionals. The costs of achieving these high levels of care and competence should be borne in the same even-handed way.