City & Guilds Dental Nurse Qualifications

Janet Goodwin highlights dental nurse education

In October 2003, Peter Mathias from City & Guilds and Stephen Lambert-Humble from NEBDN signed an agreement between the two organisations to develop and deliver dental nurse qualifications. After a short period of time the Scottish Qualifications Authority in Scotland also became part of this now tripartite agreement.

City & Guilds, who hold awarding body status with Ofqual and who are part of the National Qualifications Framework, would lead on the delivery of the theoretical and work based assessment aspects of the qualifications. NEBDN would deliver the final assessment/examination.

The new qualifications:

a. NVQ level 2 award in dental nursing
b. NVQ level 3 in certificate dental nursing

were formed around the National Occupational Standards devised by the Learning Skills Council. They provided a staged process for a dental nurse in achieving level 2 initially, then moving on to level 3. The units were a mixture of practical competence and theoretical knowledge delivered in training centres and dental hospitals throughout the UK.

This new way of delivering professional dental nurse qualifications saw the development of new roles, and the introduction of funding for certain age groups of students. This concept saw the emergence of Youth Training Scheme and different types of registered and approved training centres.

The new roles consisted of:

a. Assessor – who confirms that the evidence provided by a student for assessment has been produced and authenticated in accordance with the requirements of the assessment specification.

b. Internal Verifier – who ensures that the assessors are consistent in their interpretation and application of the standards within the award, and the accuracy and consistency of assessment decisions between assessors is maintained.

c. External Verifier – who has a dual role – verifying the performance of the centre to ensure the quality and consistency of assessment against national requirements, and supporting and advising the centre on improving the effectiveness and quality of assessments.

The final examinations for the qualifications, ie the Vocational Related Qualifications were available three times a year in March, June and December.

Present Day

In 2008, both the level 2 & 3 were due to be reviewed as they had reached their five year term; this review coincided with the introduction of statutory registration of dental nurses by the GDC.

The GDC had accepted that the registrable qualification would be the revised level 3 Diploma 4254 in dental nursing; therefore many centres found that the delivery of a level 3 Award 7393 now has little value for dental nurses and it is being withdrawn from December 2012.

The reformatted Level 3 Diploma qualification which has 46 credits and 291 guided learning hours consists of:

Unit 301 Ensure your own actions reduce risks to health and safety
Unit 302 Reflect on and develop your practice
Unit 303 Emergency First Aid
Unit 304 Prepare and maintain environments
Unit 305 Offer information and support to individuals
Unit 306 Provide chairside support during the assessment of patients' oral health
Unit 307 Contribute to the production of dental images
Unit 308 Provide chairside support during the prevention and control of periodontal disease and caries and the restoration of cavities
The nine units above are focused on the practical aspect of the role of dental nursing and assessed by a work based portfolio.

Unit 312 Principles of Infection Control
Unit 313 Assessment of oral health and treatment planning
Unit 314 Dental Radiography
Unit 315 Scientific principles of oral health & dental procedures
The further four units are focused on the theoretical aspects, and are assessed via an hour and a half examination, which is taken at the student's training centre in March, June and December.
The Level 3 qualification also moved into the Apprenticeship Framework, and along with the units above, students also have to complete:

a. Functional Skills in English, maths and ICT (if they do not possess GCSEs level C or above)
b. Employers' rights and responsibilities

During the last year, the contract between the three parties has expired, and City & Guilds now set their own papers and have their own bank of markers, and Chief Examiner. There are many centres around the UK delivering the qualification with between 500 – 700 candidates undertaking the assessment at each sitting.

The examination will be based on 60 questions over a 1 ½ hr examination. Centres will be able to let their students complete the examination on demand, as every paper will be unique.

The advantages of this system will be:
1. Flexibility
2. cost effectiveness
3. that detailed results will be available immediately
4. that centres have more control on candidate assessments
5. that assessments are available on demand

Other changes that have been or are taking place include:

a. The National Occupational Standards for Dental Nurses were revised last year and are now published on the Learning Skills Website.
b. The GDC Learning Outcomes – Preparing for Practice, dental team learning outcomes for registration, have now been published.
c. The City & Guilds 4234 Diploma is due to expire and be reviewed at the end of December 2015

So where does this leave City & Guilds? These changes give City & Guilds the opportunity to re-design and develop a Diploma in the future that is accessible, robust, and fit for purpose.

About the author
Janet Goodwin was born in Bradford in West Yorkshire. Janet now works in the Blackpool area and since 2005 she's worked as qualifications manager for the National Examinations Board for Dental Nurses. She is already involved in some work with the General Dental Council. Since 2002, as an invited professional, she's been involved in working groups for dental nurse registration, overseas registration and DCP education. Janet is also currently working with the Faculty of General Dental Practice to help develop DCP integration within their educational programmes.

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