

# The final fit – results of research into educational needs of dental nurses

The final theme of our series of articles on dental nurse education and training in the UK focuses on the results of the online survey that was run on the NEBDN website. This is the first part of a two-part article and examines dental nurses qualifications and employment

Dental nurses make up the largest professional group in the dental healthcare team (General Dental Council (GDC), 2014), and have a unique and continuously developing role. Dental nurses work alongside a number of other dental health professionals who provide a varying level of care or specific service contributing to the well being of their patients. To deliver this professionally, we have to ensure that we have access to relevant, specific and recognised training and education, which is affordable and easily accessible.

Last month we invited readers of *Dental Nursing* to take part in the NEBDN online survey. We have had a tremendous response with 600 readers completing the questionnaire so far. Due to the huge amount of information collected, we have divided this particular article into two parts. Part 1 deals with the results and discussion around you, your existing qualifications and your employment. We will contrast and compare these results with past research and identify any changes or trends. Part 2, to be published next month, will look at your future training needs and barriers to education and training.

Over the past few months (Parker M, 2014, Parker and Stuart 2014a; Parker

and Stuart, 2014b; Stuart, 2014), we have tried to highlight the potential effects of some important changes that have been happening within dentistry over the past few years, such as:

- New legislation
- Changing role of the dental nurse professionals
- Existing research into dental nurse education and training
- Existing views of dental nurses on the delivery and format of education and training
- Existing dental nurse aspirations in terms of career development
- Invitation to participate the NEBDN 2014 Dental Nurse survey.

## Why is training and education important?

Patients' oral health needs are becoming more complex and the dental team have to manage an increasingly wide range of health issues (Low and Kalkwarf, 1996). Patterns in oral health are changing (Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2011), along with higher patient expectations and increased dental awareness of the public (Eaton et al, 2000; Burke et al, 2005) and social priorities (Sanz et al, 2008). Like dental practitioners, dental nurses must keep up to date with these changes as well as advances in knowledge resulting from dental research (Schleyer et al, 2002; Parker and Stuart, 2014).

The benefits of improved education and training for dental nurses may also help reduce costs to the health care system through research and development into improved techniques and more effective

preventative treatment (Belfield et al, 2001). This is a fact that is not lost on the Government, who want to develop a new dental contract as a matter of urgency to expand the role of dental care professional as a result of the research findings produced by Pilot Practices. An enhanced sense of professionalism and improved job satisfaction may help attract and retain skilled dental nurses within our profession.

## Aim of survey (Part 1)

The aim of the first part of the survey was to find out how the dental nurse profession perceive their own current training and education opportunities.

## How we have collected the data

In our article, *Writing up the lab sheet*, (Parker and Stuart, 2014b), we invited readers to participate in completing our anonymised online survey into the training and educational needs for dental nurses. The source of some of the questions were intentionally taken from previous surveys (Ross and Ibbitson, 2006; British Dental Association (BDA), 2009; British Association of Dental Nurses (BADN), 2012; Faculty of General Dental Practice (FGDP) 2012) to permit comparison with previous research findings. The questionnaire used both open and fixed response questions and was divided into six sections.

## Results

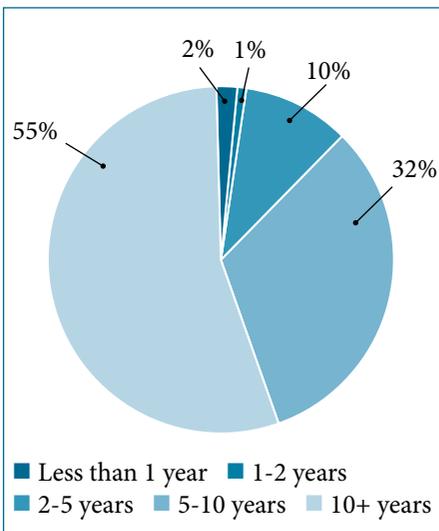
### Dental nurse registration

A total of 600 participants took part in the online survey from 1 to 28 October 2014.

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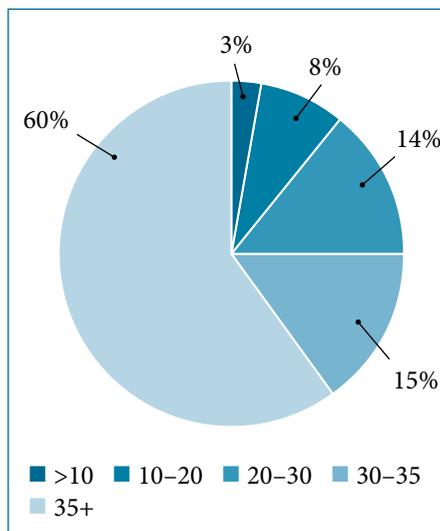
**Table 1. In what type of practice do you mainly work?**

Answer options	Response (%)	Response (n)
General Dental Practice (with only private patients)	10.5	59
General Dental Practice (with only NHS patients)	3.7	21
General Dental Practice (mixed - NHS and Private)	28.2	159
Community Dental Service/ Public Dental Service	23.3	131
Hospital Dental Service	16.2	91
Armed Forces	7.3	41
Orthodontic	2.1	12
Other	8.7	49
Total answered		563
Skipped question		37
<b>Total</b>		<b>600</b>



**Figure 1. How long have you been qualified as a dental nurse?**

Geographical location of employment was identified. There was a fairly even spread across the home countries, with 72.5% (n=461) of responses located in England, 15% (n=87) located in Scotland, 5.9% (n=34) from Northern Ireland, 4.6% (n=27) from Wales and 2.1% (n=12) from other countries. The age range of participants showed a normal distribution curve, with the majority being aged between 34 and 44 years old.



**Figure 2. How many hours a week do you work?**

In terms of their dental nurse registration, 77.2% (n=461) were registered dental nurses 10.9% (n=65) were pre-registration dental nurses in training and 11.9% (n= 71) were other dental care professionals. Some of the respondents within the 'other' category had also worked as dental nurses in earlier parts of their career. For those respondents who answered the question (107 skipped the question),

7.1% (n= 35) were 'grandparented' onto the GDC register. Thirty-seven (7.4%) of the respondents who answered, were currently taking a career break from dental nursing.

When asked their year of qualification, over 55% (n=267) of those who responded had been qualified for more than 10 years; 32% (n=155) had been qualified for between 5 and 10 years; 10% (n= 49) had been qualified for between 2 and 5 years; 1% (n= 6) had been qualified for between 1 and 2 years and 2% (n=7) had been qualified for less than a year (see Figure 1). In terms of a life career, 56% (n=309) said they were definitely planning to stay in dental nursing; 32.7% (n=181) were not sure and 11.4% (n=63) would definitely not be staying in dental nursing.

## Employment

Respondents were questioned about their employment status and it was demonstrated that of those who responded to this question, 60% (n= 254) were in full-time employment, working 35 hours or more per week. One hundred and sixty-nine (40%) worked part-time hours, mainly between 20 and 30 hours per week (see Figure 2). It was interesting to note that of the 254 who worked full-time, 29% (n=73) worked 40 hours or more per week.

When asked which branch of dentistry they were employed in, respondents revealed that the majority (28.2%; n= 159) worked in a mixed NHS/private practice setting, closely followed with respondents working in the Community Dental Service (23.3%; n=131) and Hospital Dental Service (16.2%; n=91) Full results for this question can be seen in Table 1.

When asked which title best described their job, surprisingly only 27.5% (n=157) considered themselves to be a dental nurse. The full results are contained within Table 2.

## Dental nurse qualifications

Of those who responded to the question, the vast majority of respondents (78%; n=380) held the NEBDN National

**Table 2. Which title best describes your main job?**

Answer options	Response (%)	Response (n)
Dental nurse	27.5	157
Pre-registration dental nurse in training	8.9	51
Senior dental nurse	12.1	69
Dental nurse manager	3.9	22
Practice manager	8.2	47
Dental nurse tutor	12.6	72
Oral health educator	2.1	12
Extended Duty dental nurse	10.7	61
Other	13.9	79
Total answered		570
Skipped question		30
<b>Total</b>		<b>600</b>

**Table 3. Have you achieved a post-registration qualification related to your work as a dental nurse?**

Answer options	Response (%)	Response (n)
Radiography	40.3	171
Oral Health Education	39.6	168
Sedation	29.0	123
Extended Duties	22.4	95
Practice Management	12.7	54
Special Care	6.4	27
Orthodontics	5.7	24
Implantology	5.4	23
Treatment Coordinator	3.3	14
Foundation Degree	1.7	7
Not applicable as I am a pre-registration dental nurse in training	10.8	46
Other	21.5	91
Total answered		424
Total skipped		176
<b>Total</b>		<b>600</b>

Certificate/Diploma as their GDC registerable qualification. The City & Guilds NVQ qualification was held by 8.6% (n=42) followed by the SQA SVQ

qualification, which was held by 2.5% (n=12) of those who responded to this question. The results are demonstrated in Figure 3.

Respondents were also asked about post-registerable qualifications. A large proportion of the dental nurses sampled had achieved a post-registration qualification or multiple post-registration qualifications. Their popularity is detailed in Table 3.

In addition to the qualifications held, the majority of respondents (46%; 254) were planning to gain further qualifications with 20.4% (n=112) declaring that they would not be working towards gaining additional qualifications. One hundred and eighty-two (33.2%) were not sure if they wanted to pursue further qualifications in the future. Of those who planned to pursue further qualifications, post-registration qualifications were ranked highly at 46.7% (n=141), followed by hygienist at 15.6% (n=47); dental therapy at 12.3% (n=37); Masters degree at 8.6% (n=26); Foundation degree at 8.6% (n=26); Honours degree at 5.6% (n=17) and PhD at 2.3% (n=7).

In terms of value to their existing career, candidates were asked to indicate the value of dental qualifications to their career progressions. The results are seen in Figure 4.

## Discussion

The respondents are not a representative sample of the dental nursing workforce within the UK. Although there was a pro-rata spread of responses from all of the home countries, the ratio of types of practice where respondents were working did not reflect previous findings. The *BADN Salary Survey* (BADN, 2013) suggests that 60% of the respondents to their survey worked in the general dental service, whereas our survey reported 42.4%. Ross and Ibbetson (2006) reported that 42% of Scottish dental nurses worked in a mixed NHS/private dental practice environment whereas our findings report only 28.2% within the same sphere of practice. This suggests that the sample of dental nurse professionals from this survey are skewed, with 55% of respondents working within public sector organisations. This has to be taken into

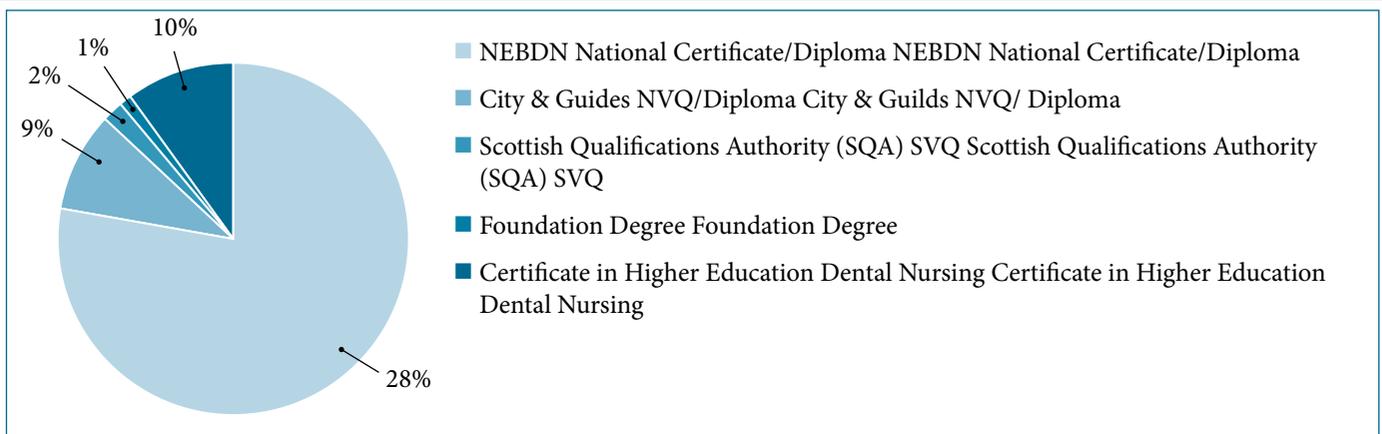
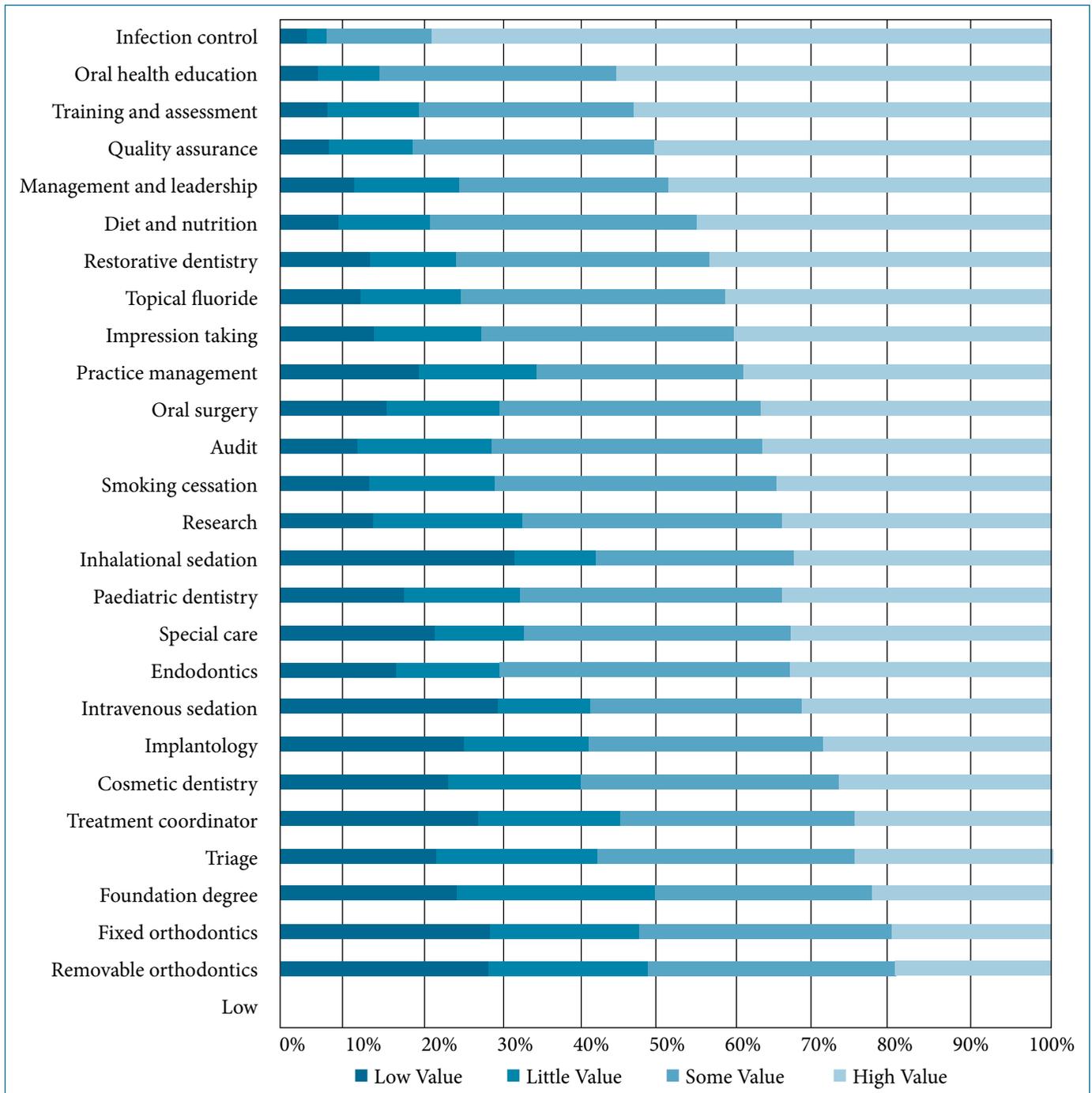


Figure 3 (above). Range of dental nurse registerable qualifications held; Figure 4 (below). Value of qualifications to their career.



account when analysing and discussing the results of the survey. Only 27.5% of respondents indicated their job title as 'dental nurse'. Again the *BADN Salary Survey* suggests that this figure should be closer to 40% (BADN, 2013).

If we assume that the length of time since qualification is similar to the length of time since working as a dental nurse, the figures for nurses working more than 10 years (55%) is similar to BADN figures. Interestingly, our survey suggests that there is a larger proportion of dental nurses that have been working for between 5 and 10 years (32%) compared to BADN figures (20%). The figures for those who have worked less than 5 years are, again comparable, to BADN statistics.

In terms of hours worked per week, our survey indicates that a larger proportion of our respondents were working more than 35 hours per week (60%) than reported in the BADN survey (47%) (BADN, 2013).

The majority of the respondents had a post-registration qualification. Of those who indicated that they had a post-registration qualification, our results indicated that Radiograph (40.3%), Oral Health Education (39.6%) and Sedation (29%) were the three most popular qualifications. This compares favourably with the study by Ross and Ibbitson (2006) who, although the order was slight different, ranked the same qualifications in their top three. The popularity of these qualifications was also demonstrated in the paper by Durkan et al (2012).

Interestingly, when asked to give a value to post-registration qualifications

in terms of their career, apart from Oral Health Education, Sedation and Radiography, other qualifications ranked well down on perceived value. Could this be because Oral Health Education is a transferable qualification that can be used in all forms of specialised and non-specialised environments?

In the Ross and Ibbetson (2006) survey, they reported that 73% of their sample wanted to access further training and education. In our sample, this figure was only 43%. Could this be because the majority of our sample had already achieved further qualifications?

### Conclusion

The results from this survey indicate that a large proportion of dental nurses engage with further training and education after registration. There is considerable motivation among the dental nurse professional workforce to further their skills and progress in their careers.

In Part 2 of this paper, we shall be looking at the future needs that were identified by you in the field of education and training and barriers to training ,including a discussion on what courses training providers should be considering and how they might be delivered. From an NEBDN point of view, we will also be looking to see how NEBDN can develop and enhance our existing and future qualifications to meet the training needs of the modern dental nurse professional.

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