

# Level 3 Diploma in the Principles and Practice of Dental Nursing – FAQs

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## 1. What do Centres need to do to deliver the qualification?

To deliver the Level 3 Diploma in the Principles and Practice of Dental Nursing, please visit QualHub: <https://www.qualhub.co.uk/gain-approval-for-our-qualifications/>.

To support you to gain Qualification Approval, you should use the '**Mandatory requirements/evidence for Dental Nursing Centre recognition, qualification approval and quality audits guidance**' document on our website. This document contains details of all the CACHE, General Dental Council (GDC) and Ofqual requirements that you will need to meet for approval and subsequent quality audits. It also contains guidance and helpful examples of processes and procedures that you can use or adapt.

## 2. What does the qualification cover?

There are 17 mandatory units which focus on direct chair side work and support during a range of dental treatments, encourage reflection and encompass the underpinning ethics, professionalism, teamwork and communication required to work as a dental nurse.

## 3. Where is the qualification available for delivery?

The qualification is available for delivery in England and Wales.

## 4. Who is it suitable for?

All those who wish to obtain a dental nursing qualification leading to GDC registration e.g.

- those who wish to work as a dental nurse
- existing trainee dental nurses
- learners who wish to undertake a dental nursing apprenticeship.

## 5. Has the qualification been approved by the General Dental Council (GDC)? What do GDC Centre inspections consist of?

The General Dental Council (GDC) regulates all dentists and dental care professionals (which include dental nurses) in the United Kingdom. They have a two stage process for qualification approval/acceptance. **The Level 3 Diploma in the Principles and Practice of Dental Nursing qualification has been approved by the GDC. Details can be found on their website at [www.GDC-uk.org](http://www.GDC-uk.org)**

## GDC inspections

Centres should be aware that as part of the **GDC inspection process**, the GDC may request at any time to inspect and quality assure **any** aspect of the delivery and assessment of the qualification undertaken by the Centre. At an inspection, the GDC inspection team will meet with staff delivering the qualification including work placement clinical supervisors and with learners registered on it. The GDC will review documents presented before (if appropriate) and at the inspection. All inspections will be in line with guidance which can be found at [www.gdc-uk.org](http://www.gdc-uk.org).

All qualification supporting materials have been produced in line with GDC requirements to ensure continued compliance. Centres will be notified in a timely manner prior to any GDC inspections that are due to take place and will also be provided with supporting preparatory packs ahead of scheduled inspections.

### 6. Is the qualification funded?

The qualification has confirmed funding for:

- 16-18 year olds (DfE Section 96)
- Adult learners (Skills Funding Agency)
- Apprenticeships.

### 7. How can Centres offer the qualification?

The qualification can be taken as either standalone or part of the Apprenticeship Standard for a Dental Nurse (England) and Advanced Apprenticeship in Health (Dental Nursing) framework (Wales).

### 8. What do Centres need in order to deliver the qualification?

#### Qualified staff

Centres must have qualified staff in order to deliver the qualification. The **Qualification Specification** on our website provides Centres with details of:

- roles and responsibilities for Tutors, Assessors, Supervisors, Internal Quality Assurers and Employers
- who can assess knowledge and/or competence
- who needs to be occupationally knowledgeable and/or competent
- who needs to be registered with the General Dental Council
- staff records e.g. requirements such as CVs, qualifications and DBS checks

#### Materials and equipment

In order to deliver, ideally the Centre would have somewhere that they can re-create the dental environment where dental materials and equipment can be made available to learners including having access to anatomical models, such as teeth, skulls, model of the heart, etc. The majority of Tutors will also still be actively working in practice and may be able to borrow items when teaching.

It is therefore suggested that Centres should have an area where the learner can learn about:

- the set-up of a dental surgery - how equipment is stored, tray layouts, decontamination rooms, x-ray rooms. This does not mean that Centres need these actual rooms, but somewhere that is not a classroom where equipment can be displayed and learners/dental nurse trainees can handle equipment, use personal protective equipment - goggles, masks, apron, gloves, etc.
- how equipment needs to be sterilised
- somewhere to learn about charting
- somewhere to mix materials
- somewhere to view anatomical models/phantom heads.

This is not an exhaustive list and each Centre will need to decide on how much they wish to invest in, in order to deliver the qualification. The amount of materials/equipment will vary from Centre to Centre. Some Centres have the resources for a fully set up, functioning surgery, decontamination room and x-ray units whereas smaller Centres may, as a minimum, opt to invest in text books, instruments, materials, skulls and a phantom head. The Centre will also have qualified staff that should also be able to advise them.

### Specific processes and procedures for dental nursing

Centres must ensure that they have specific processes and procedures relating to dental nursing. This is a requirement of the General Dental Council (GDC) to ensure patient safety and is subject to GDC inspections. Where Centres have existing generic processes and procedures e.g. equality and diversity, health and safety procedures etc. appendices can be added that are specific to dental nursing.

## 9. What are the entry requirements?

Learners should be at least 16 years old. It is the Centre's responsibility to ensure that learners have the necessary underpinning knowledge before entering a placement/the workplace. We do not set any other entry requirements but Centres may have their own guidelines.

## 10. How many credits are required to complete the qualification?

Learners must achieve 49 credits from the 17 mandatory units.

## 11. Unit range

All elements of each unit must be met, including all range, which can be assessed holistically. Where possible, cross referencing can be used to meet the range, especially those ranges that span across a number of units in the qualification e.g. range for individuals. Where possible it is recommended that performance evidence is cross-referenced to cover range e.g. direct observation or reflective account. However, it is recognised that due to the nature of some range, some will be better met through knowledge evidence. Centres have an obligation to support learners in being exposed to a wide practice of dental nursing in order to meet all unit learning outcomes, assessment criteria and range. Where learners do not have access to all elements (for example, not all practices will have extra-oral x-ray machines), learners can attend additional placements in dental nursing outside their day-to-day practice. It is not envisaged that the learner will always undertake the task at the alternative practice placement but shadow another dental nurse. An occasion such as this would provide the learner with the opportunity to observe wider practice that they do not routinely see, providing the chance to also gather evidence for unit DN3 Reflect and develop own practice as a dental nurse. It is acknowledged that not all learners will

get such an opportunity to visit an alternative practice placement. Therefore, assessors can also use the accompanying direct questioning to help their assessment of a learners' knowledge.

## 12. How is the qualification delivered?

Centres will determine their own delivery plan based on the needs of their learners, the number of terms/phases and the model of delivery (i.e. full time, part time or blended).

However, to ensure learners are prepared adequately to embark on a qualification leading to professional registration, and in order to meet the GDC's requirements, particularly in relation to patient safety, the underpinning knowledge must be delivered and assessed before skills criteria and observations are assessed. This includes core areas such as health and safety, infection control, ethics and professionalism and dental anatomy.

**Centres should refer the Qualification Specification in our members area for details of the delivery guidance that must be adhered to.**

## 13. Do learners need to be working to take this qualification?

Learners must be working or on a practical placement to be able to show competence in both knowledge and skills. It is recommended that a **minimum** of 16 hours\* per week be spent in a Real Work Environment.

For learners undertaking the Dental Nursing apprenticeship, providers should refer to the apprenticeship standard (England) document:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-standard-dental-nurse>

Or apprenticeship framework (Wales) document:

<http://www.afo.sscalliance.org> or clarification of requirements.

**\*For learners in specialist practices e.g. orthodontics, please refer to the Qualification Specification, Section 2 in our members area.**

## 14. When can learners enter the workplace/placement?

We request that Centres structure their delivery and assessment of certain specified learning outcomes and/or units that teach the underpinning knowledge to learners to ensure they, and their patients, are safe whilst working in a Real Work Environment/Practice. This includes core areas such as health and safety, infection control, ethics and professionalism and dental anatomy. This learning and assessment will determine whether or not learners can enter the clinical area. Centres must ensure that the learners have been assessed as safe before going into practice.

### Learners already employed

If learners are already employed, it is the employer's responsibility to ensure that the learner/trainee dental nurse is safe to practise. Employers are required to complete an 'Employer declaration of induction' (see Qualification Specification), to evidence this. Within this form, Employers must tick the box stating that the learner/trainee dental nurse has been assessed as being safe to practise before they entered the clinical environment. It is the Centre's responsibility to check that this has taken place and that learners are safe to work in the clinical environment as patient safety is paramount.

This process will be subject to external quality assurance.

**To see which units must be assessed first and delivery guidance, please refer to the Qualification Specification in our members area.**

### 15. How can learners be identified within the workplace/placements?

It is a requirement of the GDC that learners (Trainee Dental Nurses) must be easily identifiable from registered Dental Nurses in the work setting. This is required so that patients are aware that a trainee Dental Nurse may be working with one of the clinicians (Dentists, Hygienists or Dental Therapists). An example of how this could be made clear is by the learner wearing a name badge in the workplace with the title on the badge reading 'student/trainee Dental Nurse'. Other methods of identification of the learner are also acceptable so long as patients are aware and the GDC requirement is met. It may also be necessary to display a poster with this information in the waiting room. An example of what this poster could look like can be found in Appendix O of the Dental Nursing Qualification Specification. There is also a form Appendix O1 that can be used. Patients must also be made aware if a student is assisting in their treatment, the possible implications of this and give consent. Consent must also be recorded prior to treatment commencing.

### 16. Who can quality assure placements?

To confirm suitability of placements, Centres must ensure that placements are quality assured by **dental registrants**.

### 17. How is the qualification graded?

It is graded pass, merit or distinction across the two external assessment tests. The grade from each test will be combined to give the learner their overall qualification grade. A pass is 60%, merit 76% and distinction 90%.

### 18. How long does the qualification take to complete?

Learners can usually complete the qualification in 1 - 2 years depending on experience and mode of delivery e.g. standalone or via an apprenticeship. The minimum duration for the dental nursing apprenticeship is 18 months.

### 19. What related qualifications can learners progress to?

Learners can progress to a range of qualifications in the following areas:

- specialist dental nursing roles
- dental hygiene or therapy
- dental technology
- teaching dental nursing
- dental practice management.

### 20. Which type of job roles can learners apply for on completion?

Learners may progress into employment as a Dental Nurse or to other career pathways including:

- dental hygiene and therapy
- dental technician
- practice management
- teaching and assessing
- lecturing.

## Assessment FAQs

### 21. How is the qualification assessed? What are the observation requirements?

The qualification is assessed internally and externally.

- Learners are **internally assessed** via various methods (see the assessment methods table on page 25 of the Assessment Specification) for each unit.
- Learners are also externally assessed through the two external assessment tests covering the underpinning knowledge across units DN 12 - 16. The format of the tests will be multiple choice questions and each paper will contain 50 marks with duration of 1 hour 30 minutes for each paper. These are not an open book assessment. They are a formative assessment using criterion referencing. Negative marking is not employed.

#### Observations:

For units which require observations to be undertaken, **learners must have exposure to an appropriate breadth of procedures and patients** (e.g. adults, children and young people, older people and those with special needs e.g. hearing and visual impairments, learning disabilities, mobility issues etc.). Learners should undertake **each activity** relating to patient care on **sufficient occasions** to enable them to develop the skills and the level of competency required to achieve the relevant skills learning outcomes/assessment criteria. Partially competent and not competent indicate that more experience or training is required.

It is the **Centre's/Assessor's responsibility** to ensure that learners are **only signed off as competent** when they can be assured that the learner has **fully** met each of the relevant skills. It is recommended that **multiple methods** of meeting skills criteria are recorded e.g. via reflective accounts/logs, professional discussions etc. to demonstrate consistency and competency.

All skills criteria within the qualification must be achieved.

#### Frequency of observations in practice by Assessors

Learners must be assessed in practice **throughout the duration of the qualification** which is usually 2 years or less depending on experience and the mode of delivery (e.g. standalone or via an apprenticeship). Ideally, **Assessors** should ensure they **observe learners in practice throughout the lifespan of the qualification, to include the beginning, middle and end of the qualification** to ensure learners demonstrate consistency and so that support can be provided in a timely manner.

In addition, it is recommended that multiple methods of meeting skills criteria are recorded e.g. via reflective accounts/logs, professional discussions etc. to demonstrate consistency and competency.

#### Observation tracker templates

An observation tracker has been produced for each unit that contains skills assessment criteria. Each criterion the learner needs to achieve is given. The template gives the grades that can be awarded for the criteria, these are:

C = competent (learner meets the criteria satisfactory)

PC = partially competent (learner meets some of the criteria, but not all)

NC = not competent (learner meets none of the criteria)

If a learner receives either a partially competent or not competent grade, the Assessor must give formative feedback to the learner to help them know how to improve. In addition, a second tracker template will need to be completed for those criteria that require additional observations for satisfactory completion. Once observations have been completed, the Assessor signs off the criteria as achieved.

It is recognised that each learner may not have the opportunity to work with all types of patient or the full range of learning outcomes. Should this be the case, the Assessor needs to ensure they have observed the learner satisfactorily undertaking the procedure on as broad a range of patients and learning outcomes as possible. Internal quality assurance from the Centre will be able to advise the Assessor on specific units and learner achievement on whether the breadth of patient type is sufficient for the observation. The Centre may contact us for guidance where satisfactory completion provides challenges.

There is no compensation between units or between observations and unit tasks within a unit.

**For the unit assessment tasks, please see the Unit and Task Specification in our members area.**

**For the assessment marking guideline and observation trackers, please see the Assessment Specification in our members area.**

## 22. What assessment methods can be used to assess the units?

A recommended range of assessment methods has been identified for this qualification. This gives the opportunity for different learning styles and individual needs of learners to be taken into account.

Units DN 1 – 11 and unit UFAE are internally assessed, and units DN 12 - 16 are both internally and externally assessed.

Methods include:

- \*direct observation (by a qualified Assessor who is a GDC registrant and meets our assessment principles)
- expert witness evidence
- professional discussion
- \*reflective accounts (Learner log or reflective diary)
- written and pictorial information
- **optional** task set by us (for knowledge learning outcomes/underpinning knowledge for skills learning outcomes)
- oral questions and answers.

\*Mandatory assessment method

Additional assessment requirements:

- All units must be assessed in line with our Assessment Principles
- Unit UFAE must be assessed in line with the Skills for Health document 'Skills for Health First Aid Assessment Principles'.

It is recommended that **multiple methods** of meeting skills criteria are recorded e.g. via reflective accounts/logs, professional discussions etc. to demonstrate consistency and competency.

### How does expert witness evidence work as an assessment method?

Expert witness evidence can be used as an assessment method for units DN 5, 9 and 10.

It requires a signed supporting statement to be written by an expert witness, such as a registered professional (e.g. Dentist, dental nurses or dental hygienist), who has the opportunity to see the learner working in their workplace situations, and is able to confirm competencies demonstrated by the learner through written examples of observed practice noted against the assessment criteria listed on the 'Expert Witness evidence statement'.

The learner will also be required to provide a supporting statement; this allows further detail to be included by the learner, which may provide opportunity for the learner to demonstrate underpinning knowledge and understanding.

This form of assessment maintains the gathering of witnessed performance evidence, where it would not be possible for an assessor to directly observe the learner's practice.

The expert witness will have been approved by the centre but the evidence provided by the expert witness will be judged against the units' assessment criteria by an assessor who is a GDC registrant and meets our assessment principles.

For further details on expert witness evidence and how it is used, please refer to Section 2 of the **Dental Nursing Assessment Specification**.

## External assessment tests

### 23. When can the two external assessment tests be taken?

Learners can be entered in for the two external multiple choice question (MCQ) tests once they have demonstrated achievement of **all** the learning outcomes and assessment criteria across the knowledge units DN 12- 16.

The responsibility will remain with the tutor to prepare learners and only enter them for the two MCQ tests when learners have the requisite knowledge. Centres are reminded that there are 2 further opportunity for learners to re-sit each multiple choice question test.

In addition, each Centre will be subject to regular CACHE external quality assurance visits throughout the duration of the qualification, which will include reviewing Centre documentation to ensure all requisite learning has taken place and is evidenced before the Centre has entered a learner in for the two external assessment tests.

An external assessment sign up template is provided and can be found in the Qualification Specification at Appendix M.

### 24. What do the external assessment tests look like?

The external assessment consists of Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) designed to test the knowledge of learners covered in units DN 12 – 16 inclusive. There will be two MCQ test papers, each individually graded. Once the learner has taken each test, the grades will be combined to give the learner their overall qualification grade of pass, merit or distinction.

### 25. What is the format of the two external assessment tests?

Each learner has an individual login specific to their test sitting. The learner has a maximum of 90 minutes to complete the assessment. The system is timed and after 90 minutes the learner will be

locked out. There are time warnings at intervals to alert the learner to the amount of time they have remaining. The learner has a timed slot and the assessment must be taken in one sitting.

The assessments must be taken under examination conditions that is, an invigilator must be present to unlock the test and remain with the learner whilst they complete the test(s). The learner is unaware if the responses they have entered are correct or incorrect at the time they sit the assessment.

## 26. Where are the external assessment tests taken?

The two external assessment tests are online, remotely accessed tests undertaken at the Centre. The tests are on-demand, allowing Centres the flexibility of choosing the date and time for submitting learners for their tests. The period of notice that Centres must give for online tests is 24 hours, although 48 hours is recommended.

## 27. Where can Centres schedule the external assessment tests for learners?

To schedule an online test(s) for a learner, Centres should visit <https://ncfe.secureassess.co.uk/secureassess/>.

Information and guidance covering scheduling, delivering and invigilating online tests is provided here: <https://www.qualhub.co.uk/delivery-and-learner-support/forms/online-assessment/>

## 28. Do the two external assessment tests have to be taken one after the other?

It is at the Centre's discretion whether they wish to enter learners in for one or both tests. Some Centres may wish to enter the learner in for one test, gain their result and then enter the learner in for the next one. Alternatively, both tests can be taken one after the other on the same day.

## 29. Can learners review questions in the external assessment tests?

Learners are able to review questions and revise their responses at any time during the test. They may also 'flag' a question and return to it at a later stage however, their overall time to complete the assessment is 90 minutes (for each test).

The MCQ tests are compiled and go through an audit process of revision and scrutiny to ensure that no questions provide information that would enable learners to achieve the correct answer in earlier or subsequent questions.

## 30. How are the external assessment tests marked?

The online assessments are electronically marked. A mark of 60 per cent is required for the learner to achieve a pass in each test.

## 31. When will Centres receive external assessment test results?

Centres will get an instant result with a confirmed result in the Portal 1 day later.

Anyone who has the correct permissions in the Portal can access the results, permissions are controlled by the administrator for the Portal within the centres.

**32. Are there any re-sit opportunities for the two external assessment tests?**

Learners are permitted to re-sit each assessment test twice more either because they failed or to improve their grade.

## Internal and External quality assurance FAQs

### 33. What does internal quality assurance need to cover?

Centres must have an internal quality assurance strategy and process in place. A quality assurance framework is provided in [Appendix K: Quality assurance framework and Training programme framework](#) in [Appendix L](#) in the Dental Nursing Qualification Specification, which can aid the development of internal quality assurance mechanisms utilised by the Centre. Centres are required to ensure their procedures and records for the following are part of their quality assurance processes.

- staff training /qualifications with evidence of relevant continuing professional development
- complaints management
- standard assessment
- learner sign up for the external assessment tests
- programme delivery
- knowledge delivery.

### 34. How frequent are external quality assurance visits?

Our Approval and Quality Assurance Advisor (AQAA) will monitor the internal quality assurance process.

Once Centres are approved and have learners that are registered on the qualification, AQAA's will conduct external quality visits every 3 months in the first year of delivery. This is to reassure us that the correct processes and procedures are being undertaken by Centres, and that learners are getting the right experiences, and above all patient safety is maintained. In addition, the visits will provide support and guidance to Centres throughout the duration of the qualification.

Each Centre will be required to produce evidence for the AQAA within agreed timescales. Examples of the types of evidence that Centres may be able to provide to demonstrate compliance are listed below:

- management systems - including policies, procedures, induction, communication, complaints
- learner/trainee support - induction, ongoing feedback and guidance
- internal quality assurance - sampling plans, tracking, audit, support to Assessors, Tutors, supervisors, professional development for staff
- resources - equipment, staffing
- records - internal quality assurance/Assessor records, standardisation minutes, records of fitness to practice, sampling plans, audits, records of learner achievement
- action plans to improve, any sanctions if concerns are detected.

## Why deliver the NCFE CACHE dental nursing qualification?

Our dental nursing qualification is:

- **Current** – It is based on the GDC Standards for Education and covers all the GDC Learning Outcomes and Skills for Health National Occupational Standards (NOS)
- **Approved by the GDC** – Allowing learners to register with the GDC upon completion of the qualification
- A **stepping stone** for career progression
- **Flexible** – Learners can take the qualification as standalone or part of an apprenticeship
- **Graded** – It is the only current qualification to allow learners to achieve a pass, merit or distinction
- **Funded** – It is fully funded for 16-18 year olds, adults and apprentices
- **Robust and rigorous** – With quality assurance processes in place throughout the lifespan of the qualification
- **Supported** by knowledgeable and skilled staff.

## What support materials are available?

We have developed a great range of tailored support materials for each member of the delivery team, employers/placements and learners including:

- Qualification Specification
- Key Facts
- Mandatory requirements/evidence for Dental Nursing qualification approval and quality audits form and guidance documents
- Qualification purpose statement.

### Available for CACHE Centres only (in our members area):

- **\*Full Qualification Specification** (delivery guidance and exemplar policies, procedures etc.)
- **Unit and Task Specification** (unit content and assessment tasks)
- **Assessment Specification** (full marking guidelines for each task and observation trackers)

\*There are also a number of appendices, policies and statements to support Centres with the delivery and assessment of the qualification. These can be found in the **Dental Nursing Qualification Specification** and can be used in their current form or Centres can produce their own in line with the appendices, policies and procedures provided. In addition, Centres must ensure that they have specific processes and procedures (where possible) relating to dental nursing. This is a requirement of the General Dental Council (GDC) to ensure patient safety and is subject to GDC inspections. Where Centres have existing generic processes and procedures e.g. equality and diversity, health and safety procedures etc. appendices can be added to these generic documents with specific information relating to dental nursing. Centre documents will be subject to external quality assurance throughout the duration of the qualification.

To find out more about this qualification take a look at our key facts by visiting the [qualification page](#) or call our Customer Support team on 0345 347 2123.

