



MJDF and the modern dental career

The Faculty of General Dental Practice (UK) (FGDP(UK)) and the Faculty of Dental Surgery (FDS) of The Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCS Eng) work side by side to promote high standards of patient care through education, training, assessment and research.

Until now, each faculty has held its own membership examination. The Diploma of Membership of the FGDP(UK) (MFGDP(UK)) was the first-level diploma of the FGDP(UK) and the starting point for the career pathway within general dental practice. This examination was designed to test the knowledge, skills and understanding required for general dental care and sought to recognise the achievement of an appropriate standard of patient care and a commitment to lifelong professional development. The Diploma of Membership of the FDS (MFDS) was designed to support broad-based postgraduate education and general professional training and served as the intercollegiate entry requirement to recognised specialist training programmes.

Modernising dental careers

The introduction of the Modernising Medical Careers (MMC) initiative has changed the way postgraduate medical training is delivered. This move was driven by the need for more flexible training pathways to meet service and personal development requirements. One of the key elements in MMC is the foundation programme, which consists of an integrated two-year programme of general professional training following initial medical qualification. This programme achieves a set of pre-defined, published competencies and outcomes and prepares recent medical graduates for future careers in either generalist or specialist practice.

The General Dental Council (GDC) and the Department of Health have been interested in modernising dental careers in the same way and the UK Dental General Professional Training Liaison Group was commissioned to develop a curriculum for foundation programmes in dentistry. The result was the publication of *A curriculum for UK dental foundation programme training* in 2006. The competencies defined in the curriculum will

inform the educational content and learning outcomes of future foundation programmes in dentistry.

A new approach

It is the view of the two dental faculties of the RCS Eng that foundation programmes in dentistry will become mandatory in the future. It is expected that as well as completing the GPT course, dental graduates will be required to undergo a formal assessment and receive a qualification as a marker of the standard reached.

The dental faculties have therefore sought to provide a modern, educationally sound assessment in their new examination, the Diploma of Membership of the Joint Dental Faculties at The Royal College of Surgeons of England (MJDF RCS Eng). The aim of the new joint examination is to assess candidates' understanding of the structures and processes required to provide quality-assured dental healthcare, and to recognise the successful acquisition of knowledge and skills defined in the foundation training curriculum after completion of the

two-year foundation training programme for all dental graduates. Relying less on traditional tests of knowledge and more on workplace-based demonstration of competencies, the MJDF provides an innovative assessment for today's dentist, in line with the principles of the Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Board.

The GDC has now decided that there will be no formal examination entry requirement for specialist training and selection is likely to be on the basis of a range of criteria demonstrating suitability. The MJDF may therefore become a desirable requirement for entry into postgraduate training programmes generally, including specialist training, and will be the starting point for the FGDP(UK)'s Career Pathway for general dental practitioners.

Shifting gears

The MJDF consists of two written examinations and a portfolio of evidence which demonstrates the candidate's knowledge and application of skills. The Part 1 paper will include different formats of multiple choice and short answer questions. This will test candidates' knowledge and application of knowledge of all aspects of the curriculum. Part 2 will be in the form of objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) and structured clinical reasoning (SCR) exercises. These will assess the philosophy guiding the candidates' practice, as well as their competence and application of knowledge. For the SCR exercises, candidates will receive information relating to clinical scenarios and after some time to assimilate the information, there will follow short, structured discussions about the scenarios with the examiners.

It is recommended that candidates who have yet to start any part of the MFDS or MFGDP(UK) commence with MJDF. However, transitional arrangements are in place to ensure that those who have already commenced either the MFGDP(UK) or MFDS will be able to use completed components from those two examinations towards the new award, provided that all parts of the assessment are completed within the usual five-year period allowed for membership examinations.

The new assessment will also be of relevance to practitioners with more experience post-registration. With more flexible entry into specialist training and the advent of concepts such as the Dentists with Special Interests, all practitioners are advised to

consider the MJDF as a valuable demonstration of having achieved the postgraduate competencies set out in the foundation training curriculum. Those who have completed MFDS or MFGDP(UK) need only take Part 2 MJDF to gain the joint diploma.

Supporting today's dentists

A dedicated MJDF website provides comprehensive information for both prospective and current candidates of the MJDF, MFGDP(UK) or MFDS RCS Eng – see www.fgdp.org.uk/exams/mjdf or www.rcseng.ac.uk/fds/mjdf. The site includes dates of the examinations and revision days, specimen questions, and frequently asked questions. Visitors can also download the *Information for candidates* document, which contains full details of the structure of each stage of the MJDF assessment as well as the examination regulations, guide to the portfolio of evidence and information on the transition arrangements for candidates of the MFGDP(UK) and MFDS RCS Eng.

The FGDP(UK) and FDS have networks of tutors to assist those preparing for their respective membership assessments and increasingly, the activities of these two separate networks will be combined to provide joint teaching for the MJDF. As part of the support network provided for candidates, the two faculties are running a series of revision days leading up to the new examination. These are primarily oriented towards the MJDF, though they are still relevant to candidates intending to complete the MFGDP(UK) and MFDS examinations. So far these have covered topics including radiography, clinical emergencies, cross-infection and practice management, as well as guidance on the exam's structure and format.

The feedback from candidates to these sessions has so far been very positive. One attendee, Alberto Fox-Miyashima, reported that *'there was an overwhelming sense of fulfilment from many of those attending. The way that the lectures were conducted encouraged participation and helped increased confidence among delegates.* Alberto also states that the appeal of the MJDF is the way in which it is assessed, specifically that there is less reliance on traditional tests of knowledge and more emphasis on workplace-based demonstration of competencies. He was also encouraged to see dentists from a variety of dental care settings attending the study day; interest in sitting Part 1 of the diploma has come from dentists with various backgrounds, from general dental

practitioners to hospital dentists, as well as those from the community dental services and armed forces. The next of the revision days, which focuses on Part 2 of the MJDF exam, will take place on 13 October 2007. For information on future study days, please refer to the MJDF website.

Best foot forward

As anticipated, interest in the MJDF has been significant, with around 200 candidates registered to sit the first Part 1 examination on 1 October. The first diet of the Part 2 examination will take place on 26-27 November, and candidates who wish to register for Part 2 should do so by 28 September. Those wishing to register for the next Part 1 exam, to be held on 7 April, should do so by 8 February 2008.

The next MFGDP(UK) Part II will take place over 14-15 November 2007 and candidates who wish to register for the last Part I exam should do so before 1 February 2008.

For more information on the MJDF, the MFGDP(UK) and the MFDS RCS Eng, including submission dates and transitional arrangements, please refer to the *Information for candidates*, which can be downloaded from the MJDF website at www.fgdp.org.uk/exams/mjdf or www.rcseng.ac.uk/fds/mjdf. Information packs are also available from the MJDF examinations department; contact mjdf@rcseng.ac.uk for more details. ■

Ian Pocock
Registrar, Faculty of General
Dental Practice (UK)

DOI: 10.1038/bdj.2007.776

