



HEALTH 70%  
STUDY 93%  
CLINICAL READINESS 85%

HEALTH 85%  
STUDY 72%  
CLINICAL READINESS 68%

HEALTH 95%  
STUDY 80%  
CLINICAL READINESS 82%

**'IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT DENTAL STUDENTS HAVE THE AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THESE ISSUES'**

## By David Westgarth, editor, *BDJ Student*

**A**head of the new academic term, *BDJ Student* caught up with the newly-installed British Dental Students' Association (BDSA) President, Joshua Kennedy from Queen's University Belfast, to discuss his term, problems facing dental students, and why the BDA remains an important asset for dental students

### What are your goals during your term as BDSA President?

**JK** As President of the British Dental Students' Association (BDSA) I will endeavour to build upon the exceptional work of previous and especially this year's student committee. Past Presidents have set a standard which I intend to keep, and I will devote my time in the coming year by representing the Association to the best of my ability. On behalf of the Association, I would like to congratulate the Immediate Past President Jitesh Jassal and the rest of the Executive committee on a very busy and successful year.

In order for the BDSA to continue to not only survive but thrive, community is the foundation. I will aim to foster relationships between the dental universities across the UK and promote the political work of the British Dental Association (BDA) Students Committee to encourage the involvement on the issues most affecting students. I look forward to working alongside the elected BDSA representatives as well as the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the 16 dental universities. Additionally, the relationships the BDSA has with other professional organisations, sponsors and charities are imperative.

I aim to maintain our positive working relationships with the BDA, the European Dental School Association (EDSA) and International Association of Dental Students (IADS). I am encouraged that both the BDSA and BDA Student Committee are thriving, because our students are our future. The BDA Student Committee works with a number of committees such as the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) committee and organisations such as the Dental School Council (DSC) and the UK Committee of Postgraduate Dental Deans and Directors

(COPDEND). Furthermore, I hope that through the collaboration of national dental student associations, I will be able to raise a student point of view in a national and international forum with regard to students' opinions on educational, professional and social aspects of dentistry.

I will make it a priority to address and improve the communication of the BDSA with all dental schools. This is crucial to ensuring greater and wider participation from students from all 16 universities. I welcome the opportunity to work closely with the BDSA council as well as the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the UK dental societies in order to achieve this. The BDSA's communication through the use of social media outlets is crucial to ensure that dental students remain up to date and inspired by the activities of their colleagues across the UK. Furthermore, the BDSA has an excellent platform to draw attention to public health challenges. Roz McMullan's BDA Presidency has inspired me to bring a focus on the mental health wellbeing in dental schools, a concerning situation that has since been spotlighted by a global pandemic and evidenced by the recent BDA Benevolent Fund survey.

## 'Past Presidents have set a standard which I intend to keep, and I will devote my time in the coming year by representing the Association to the best of my ability'

I am very proud of the commitment that UK dental societies demonstrate towards their communities and charities. Each year, 30% of the profits go to the BDSA's chosen charity, which was CLEFT during the 2021/2022 year. I aim to encourage more students within UK dental schools to get involved with charity work and helping out in their local communities. Through this incentive the BDSA will be addressing the need for dental students to take care of their health, as well as be part of and contribute to the wider community. In addition, I believe this incentive will uphold the social responsibility and professional reputation of BDSA.



Joshua Kennedy

### Your role is a busy one! How will you balance your degree with being BDSA President?

**JK** I feel hugely honoured to receive this accolade and I appreciate the members of the Association showing confidence and trust in allowing me to serve as their President. I feel this role will complement my studies

very well and working alongside my colleagues across the UK, Europe and Internationally is a fantastic opportunity. Given the demands of my degree, I am appreciative of my proud family and friends, as well as the supportive staff and students at Queen's University Belfast that will help me carry out my role whilst studying dentistry. Additionally,

the mentorship I receive from past BDSA Presidents Neha Mehta and Jitesh Jassal has instilled me with great confidence in carrying out this role.

### What are the main issues students face today, and how do you hope to better them?

**JK** The BDA Benevolent Fund conducted a study this year that highlighted the issues faced by dental students. 40% of those surveyed reported that they had considered withdrawing entirely from their dental degree. Students facing this decision are not being provided with sufficient support both

financially and in their own state of wellbeing according to the study.

The main contributing factors to financial stress were mental health, family circumstance, final year-funding changes and business closures linked to COVID-19. Furthermore, it was found that certain groups such as international students, postgraduates, carers and those with less access to parental income streams, are all more likely to have unmet support needs when compared to the 'average' dental student.

In addition to the services provided by your university, I encourage any student reading this who thinks they need help to access the resources offered by the BDA for all members.

## 'The stark shortage of NHS dentists has made headlines across the UK and the BDA has warned the government must pick up the pace on contract reform'

**Dental politics is of growing importance. What is your message to students about the need to be aware of what's going on in the profession they will be working in?**

**JK** Political decisions affect everyone in a country, including a student. Dental students across the United Kingdom will be considering their future career pathways options. For those dental students in later years considering Dental Foundation Training (DFT)/Vocational Training (VT), the recruitment process often changes and therefore it is of paramount importance to remain informed and up to date. Whether you are in private, mixed or NHS practice, the terms and conditions of employment for dentists are affected by government policies. At present, NHS dentistry has been a massive discussion point. The stark shortage of NHS dentists has made headlines across the UK and the BDA has warned the government must pick up the pace on contract reform of NHS dentistry. This is one of many campaigns currently undertaken by the BDA. The BDA operates campaigns with regard to public health issues (including stress, oral cancer

and the dangers of dental tourism), lobbying politicians on legislation affecting dentists as businesspeople and clinicians as well as championing high standards and promoting policies that benefit dental practice and dental care. I encourage students to find out more about these campaigns and to remain up to date about what is going on within their chosen profession.

**How much do you value the relationship with the BDA and what it offers dental students?**

**JK** The BDA is a professional body and trade union which represents all aspects of dentistry whether it is general practice, the community, academia, the armed forces or the hospitals.

Both the BDA and the BDA believe that together we can achieve more than we could individually.

The BDA offers a variety of opportunities that promote the interests of its members. For example, the BDA operates a number of public health campaigns that include 'Managing Stress in Dentistry', which has come at a critical time for dental

students. Additionally, the Sugar campaign calls for radical action to be taken in order to lower the nation's sugar intake. With tooth decay being the number one reason for hospital admissions amongst young children, it is essential that dental students have the awareness and understanding of these issues.

For those student representatives involved with the BDA, the BDA is starting a Future Leaders Programme which will provide an invaluable opportunity and experience to those involved.

The BDA offers access to Europe's largest dental library which provides a wealth of resources that are invaluable to dental students. There are a great variety of dental career options open to dental graduates which is detailed in the BDA Career Guide. The webpages and podcasts provided by the Association give dental students an insight into these different options, along with other roles in dentistry. I encourage students to check out the *Conversations about careers in dentistry* podcast. Over six episodes Andrea Ogden, BDA Undergraduate and Career Development Lead, explores the unlimited, unknown and maybe even unexpected opportunities that

qualifying as a dentist opens up to you. In these episodes, dental professionals from across the UK discuss the paths they took that changed the course of their careers. The podcast is available on all major platforms including *Apple, Spotify, Google and Podbean* by searching 'BDA Chairside'.

**What can BDA student members expect from the BDSA in the next year?**

**JK** The aim of the BDSA is to promote unity and build relationships between UK dental students. To support this goal, the BDSA has an annual tradition of organising two national student events: the Sports Day and Conference. BDA student members get a £30 discount off tickets for both BDSA Sports Day and BDSA Conference.

In October 2021, the British Dental Students' Association (BDSA) celebrated its return to in-person events through its three-day annual conference in Manchester. The event saw over 450 dental students from across the UK gather in Manchester for an unforgettable weekend of unique educational and networking opportunities, tailored specifically to the next generation of dentists. The next BDSA Conference will strive to uphold this standard and allow dental students from all over the UK to integrate and network with professionals in the field, whilst still being extremely fun and memorable.

This year, Cardiff hosted the first Sports Day since Sheffield in 2019, to celebrate BDSA's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Approximately 500 dental students from across the UK dental schools were in attendance for a weekend full of competitive sports and social activities. For the next BDSA Sports Day we hope to host students from all corners of the UK. If you have not attended this event before, it is not one to be missed. Details for the BDSA Conference and BDSA Sports Day will be released soon.

### Mental health resources

The Mental Health Wellness in Dentistry Group: [www.mhwd.org](http://www.mhwd.org)

Wellbeing Support for the Dental Team: [www.supportfordentalteams.org](http://www.supportfordentalteams.org)

Health Assured: [www.https://bda.org/healthassured](https://bda.org/healthassured)

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41406-022-0344-5>