

Dental School in line for top award



The University of Plymouth's work to combine first-rate dental training with outstanding community care has been shortlisted for a prestigious accolade in the Times Higher Education Awards 2023.

The pioneering work of the Peninsula Dental School and the Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise is in the running to win the Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community category.

It recognises the efforts of more than 100 staff and 400 students working and studying with the University, and in communities across Devon and Cornwall.

It is also the second award shortlisting in a week for the University's dentistry team, after the Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise was named among the finalists in the UK Social Enterprise Awards.

The Peninsula Dental School was originally established to tackle oral health inequalities in the South West, and to train dentists who would stay in the region once qualified.

In 2013, it also established the Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise (PDSE) to treat patients who may not otherwise have access to care. In 2021/22, the period covered by the awards, students registered with the Peninsula Dental School – and working at clinics run by PDSE – saw almost 5,600 patients across Devon and Cornwall.

Over the course of 28,000 appointments, 418 dental and hygiene therapy students

were able to deliver crucial primary care to many of the more vulnerable members of society, including those experiencing homelessness and other forms of social exclusion.

Through an Inter-Professional Engagement Module, dental and dental therapy students had the opportunity to work directly with one of 14 host organisations caring for children, people with learning difficulties, older people at risk of isolation, young carers, those experiencing homelessness, and those living in social housing.

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A Supervised Tooth Brushing Programme, led by academics and students, worked with pupils at 146 primary schools to provide advice and guidance on the benefits, and most effective methods, of brushing their teeth.

More than 3,000 children aged 16 and under, who are unable to register with a dentist, were seen at paediatric oral health clinic while a Looked After Children clinic provided treatment to 96 children and unaccompanied young asylum seekers.

Ewen McColl, Head of the Peninsula Dental School, said: ‘This shortlisting is a fantastic achievement for everyone connected with the Peninsula Dental School and Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise. It is further evidence that our approach is yielding benefits, both for our students and staff but the communities of Devon and Cornwall as well. With widespread talk of a crisis in access to NHS dentistry, this positive recognition could not be more timely.’