

# 'I am proud of the legacy we have left behind'

As their terms came to a close and it was time to pass the mantle onto their successors, *BDJ Student* spoke to Past President of the British Dental Students' Association **Joshua Kennedy**, and Past President of the European Dental Students' Association, **Marta Adam**, about their respective terms



Joshua Kennedy

## How would you describe your term as President?

**JK** As I reflect on my term as the President of the BDSA and my role as Vice-Chair of the BDA Student Committee, I am filled with gratitude for the trust and confidence that my peers placed in me. It has been a tremendous honour to serve as a figurehead for dental students across the United Kingdom. Throughout my tenure, I strived to share my vision for our community, placing emphasis on the importance of unity, excellence in dentistry, and the wellbeing of our students. I am proud of the legacy we have left behind, a legacy shaped by the dedication and hard work

of so many passionate individuals. One of the most rewarding aspects of my term has been the connections I've forged with individuals who share my passion for dentistry and student wellbeing. These relationships have been the bedrock of our accomplishments, underscoring the strength of our collective effort.

**MA** Serving as President of EDSA has been an incredibly enriching experience. It allowed me to lead and represent dental students from across Europe, fostering a sense of unity and collaboration among future dental professionals. This term has been a journey of personal and professional growth, filled with opportunities to address challenges and inspire positive change within our organisation. My term as President of EDSA was a culmination of years of dedicated service within the organisation. Prior to my presidency, I had the privilege of being on the board for two more years. This extended involvement meant that my entire student life was deeply intertwined with EDSA, and it greatly contributed to my personal growth.

## How do you think the students will remember you?

**MA** I believe that students will remember my tenure as one marked by a strong commitment to their interests and wellbeing. My aim was always to be an accessible leader, a voice for their concerns, and a source of inspiration for their future careers. During my term we had many new projects which I hope will stay for generations in the organisation. We also made a bunch of documents – we called ourselves 'the board of documents' which I hope will be very



Marta Adam

useful in the future as well.

**JK** I hope that students will remember me as an approachable, accessible, and supportive figurehead who had a strong commitment to our Association. My vision was to ensure the continued success of our Association and build upon the work of previous years. We made significant strides in improving our relationships with stakeholders, such as the Dental Schools Council (DSC), reinforcing the professional reputation of our organisation, and fostering connections with our French and other European counterparts. To spread awareness of the Association's activities, I published numerous articles and worked closely with *BDJ*

*Student.* Nevertheless, I wanted to inspire dental students not only with words but also through actions. In September I completed the Berlin Marathon to raise funds for children born with cleft. This was an unforgettable experience and it is my hope to encourage others to embrace similar challenges in their lives.

### What have you found the most challenging but rewarding part of the role?

**JK** Serving as President presents a multifaceted role characterised by a myriad of challenges as well as opportunities. Most notably, I found it challenging to manage the responsibilities of this role as well as my academic commitments as a 5<sup>th</sup> year dental student at Queen's University Belfast. Balancing all of these commitments has been a crucial learning experience for me. Throughout the year I adapted my approach to leadership by emphasising strategic prioritisation, goal alignment and efficient delegation. These qualities and strategies collectively enabled me to optimise my productivity and time myself both in a personal and professional capacity.

**MA** The role's most challenging aspect was navigating the diverse perspectives and interests within EDSA. It was simultaneously the most rewarding part as well. Learning to balance these varied viewpoints, reaching consensus, and working toward common goals has been a tremendous learning experience. It taught me the value of diplomacy and negotiation, skills that will undoubtedly benefit me in the future.

### How important do you think it is for student associations like the BDSA and the EDSA to engage with the profession to help gain a better understanding of each's priorities and views of dentistry?

**MA** Collaboration between student associations like EDSA and national counterparts like BDSA is of utmost importance. It allows for a broader exchange of ideas, a more comprehensive understanding of the dental profession's priorities, and a stronger sense of solidarity. Such engagement helps dental students bridge the gap between academia and practice, ensuring that they are well-prepared for the profession's evolving landscape.

**JK** The engagement of student associations such as the BDSA and the EDSA with the dental profession is of profound significance. These collaborative interactions serve as a vital channel through which students and established dental practitioners can mutually comprehend and address their respective

priorities and perspectives in the field of dentistry. Such engagement ensures that dental education remains attuned to the ever-evolving requirements of the profession, enabling students to graduate with relevant and up-to-date knowledge and skills. In the UK, projects such as the BDA Future Leaders Programme offers students access to invaluable mentorship and guidance from experienced practitioners, assisting them in making informed career decisions. Additionally, it bolsters the advocacy efforts of the students committee by affording them an enhanced understanding of the concerns and aspirations of the dental profession, thereby facilitating more effective policy advocacy. This interaction also cultivates professional networking and provides a platform for collaborative research and innovation. I believe that the engagement between student associations and the dental profession not only enriches dental education but also strengthens the dental community, fostering a sense of continuity, shared responsibility, and a commitment to the continued advancement of the profession.

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#### What words of advice do you have for your successors?

**JK** As the torch of leadership is passed annually, the weight of responsibility and the opportunity to create meaningful change are never more apparent. Understanding our roots is crucial for informed decision-making, and the past serves as a compass for the future. Advocacy is our primary mission and communication is the cornerstone. The heart of our role is to champion the needs and aspirations of our students. It's an honourable duty that requires empathy, active listening, and tireless teamwork. It is crucial to surround yourself with the right individuals and empower each other to contribute. I believe that relationships are the lifeblood of our Association. Building bridges with

students, sponsors and stakeholders ensures our collective strength and impact. Lastly, don't forget self-care. Leading can be very taxing, so please reach out to others and prioritise your wellbeing.

**MA** To my successors at EDSA, my advice is to remain unwavering in your commitment to our organisation's mission and the wellbeing of European dental students. Listen closely to the needs and concerns of our members and be adaptable in the face of changing circumstances. Your passion for this role and your dedication to making a difference will be your greatest assets.

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#### Finally, what have you learned about yourself, and how will it define your future?

**JK** Serving as the President has been a pivotal journey that has illuminated my strengths and clarified my career goals in the dental field. The demands of this role sharpened my aptitude for time management and prioritisation, skills I'll carry into both clinical and representative roles. Decisiveness and critical thinking have also matured, enabling confident decisions in complex dental cases and policy advocacy. Looking ahead, I aspire to excel in clinical practice while contributing to the dental community through specialisation and a lifelong commitment to professional development.

**MA** Through my term as EDSA President, I've discovered a profound sense of purpose and the ability to effect positive change through leadership. As I move forward, I will carry these values with me, continuing to advocate for positive growth and development, not only in dentistry but also in all my future endeavours.

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