

# UCLan School of Dentistry prepares its first graduates

L. H. Mair<sup>1</sup>

Please send any ideas for feature articles for consideration to:

Rowena Milan,  
British Dental Journal,  
The Macmillan Building,  
4-6 Crinan Street,  
London  
N1 9XW

Email: [r.milan@nature.com](mailto:r.milan@nature.com)

FEATURE

The new School of Dentistry at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) opened on 3 September 2007 and was the first dental school to be built in Britain for many years. This September the School will be complete with all four years of students and the first students will be applying for their vocational trainee positions this autumn. This article reflects on its successful programme and describes how UCLan's School of Dentistry differs from traditional dental schools.

The School of Dentistry at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) is one of three entirely new dental schools established to increase the number of dentists in training and offers a four-year graduate entry course. The School was established by the Cumbria and Lancashire Medical and Dental Consortium, comprising the Universities of Central Lancashire, Cumbria, Liverpool and Lancaster, in association with the Primary Care Trusts of Blackpool, Cumbria, East Lancashire and North Lancashire in response to a perceived shortage of NHS primary dental care in the North West. UCLan delivers the curriculum of the University of Liverpool that pioneered the four-year graduate entry course for dentistry.

## Training for primary care

The new School is very different from a traditional school. Rather than having a combined school and dental hospital in the same building, the central School is in Preston with the clinics housed in four purpose-built Dental Education Centres (DECs) around the North West.

The School at Preston cost £5.25 million and has one of the most sophisticated phantom head rooms in Europe, as well as five fully functional surgeries where the



Students in the Anatomy Resource Centre

students can practise four-handed techniques. There is also a prosthetics teaching laboratory and Anatomy Resource Centre. Towards the end of their first year, students begin their training at one of the four DECs, which then becomes their base for the next three years of clinical training.

The DECs are all in primary care settings rather than secondary care hospitals. Students do all the treatment in one clinic rather than moving the patients between different hospital departments. The staff are very experienced general dental practitioners rather than academically trained specialists and the patients pay full NHS rates for their treatment. This environment is ideal for training students to work in primary care which is, of course,

where the majority will elect to work once qualified.

Each of the DECs has a number of cubicle units and separate surgeries for more advanced work. There is a separate radiography room with digital OPT and intraoral X-ray machines in the surgeries. The students are expected to keep records using Software of Excellence from day one of their clinical training.

## Consolidating the experience

In Year 3 students begin their placements at local hospitals where they gain experience of secondary care maxillofacial surgery, orthodontics and advanced restorative dentistry. The local consultants and specialists have been very supportive

<sup>1</sup>Head of School of Dentistry, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, Lancashire, PR1 2HE  
Correspondence to: Professor Lawrence Mair  
Email: [lhmail@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:lhmail@uclan.ac.uk)  
[www.uclan.ac.uk/dentistry](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/dentistry)

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2010.878

in teaching the students how to assess and refer patients and showing them what can be provided in secondary care. Hopefully, a few students will decide to progress down the avenue of specialisation.

In their final year students will be spending 1.5 days a week working in Enhanced Training Practices to consolidate the experience they have developed in the first three years. These local dental practices will be a stepping stone between the DEC and vocational training. Students will have their 'own' surgery, nurse and list.

Of course this new model produces its own challenges. Lecturing to students distributed over 500 square miles is very different to lecturing to everyone in the same room. The School has invested heavily in state-of-the-art videoconference equipment so that students can not only see the lecturer, but also see and hear their colleagues in the other centres.

The relatively small year cohort of 32 graduate students means that staff get to know the students and *vice versa*. A good social calendar has developed. One of the high spots is the overnight trip to the University's outward bound centre in Wales. Staff student liaison takes on a new dimension when your lives literally depend upon supporting each other!

Research is also developing in conjunction with the Institute for Postgraduate Dental Education at UCLan. This year, two of our students presented a poster at the Annual Conference of the International Association for Dental Research in Barcelona.

The Head of School, Professor Mair comments: 'When I qualified in 1975 I went straight into dental practice and was profoundly grateful to everyone who had taught me practical dentistry. In some ways dentistry has become more challenging than it was in those days and I think we owe it to our students to teach them to be good practitioners. When I was appointed people asked me where we would get the staff. My answer was "Give me a good dentist and I'll make them a good teacher" – it can't work the other way round. I guess at the time it was an aspiration; but it's turned out to be more true than I could ever have predicted. I am very grateful to all my staff for helping me set up the School and reminding me what dentistry is all about.'



UCLan's Dental Education Centres in the North West



Working in theatre



A videoconference being received at the Carlisle DEC