

# The UHI School of Oral Health Science

**Isobel M. Madden**, Rural Training Advisor, NHS Education for Scotland and Head of School, UHI School of Oral Health Science introduces *Vital* to a brand new school for dental hygiene and therapy.



## Meeting the demand

The development of dental teams and the provision of adequate undergraduate and postgraduate training for all members of those teams are paramount for the delivery of primary dental care, especially in the less populated areas of the UK. While the Scottish university dental schools have for many years provided centres of excellence for dental education, the expansion of training programmes has meant that more facilities are necessary to meet the demand.

## Rural access

Historically, students living in the remote and rural areas of Scotland wishing to continue in further education have had no alternative but to leave their local areas and apply for places

in training programmes at the universities and colleges either in the Central Belt of Scotland or further afield. Graduates wishing to work in the remote and rural areas have had difficulties accessing continuing professional development (CPD) programmes because of the distance to major centres and the problems of attracting speakers to areas where only small audiences would be found.

In response to the Scottish Government's Dental Action Plan, the goal of providing undergraduate training programmes and postgraduate CPD has been addressed by the founding of two new dental centres in Inverness and Dumfries, which provide a wide range of clinical and IT facilities for delivery of primary dental care and education of the dental team.





### Education in the Highlands

The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) School of Oral Health Science has been set up in a joint programme involving UHI Millennium Institute (UHI), NHS Education for Scotland (NES) and the NHS Boards of Highland and Dumfries and Galloway. The School will address the training needs of dental hygienists and therapists in the rural areas of Scotland and help address the need for increased primary dental care provision throughout the UK. Despite a distance of 250 miles between sites, the School uses both new centres to deliver the programme of undergraduate education. Places are provided for 12 students per year in a three year BSc in Oral Health Science. In each year, eight students are enrolled at the Inverness Dental Centre and four at the Dumfries Dental Centre. The first group will graduate in 2011, providing a substantial increase in numbers of dental care professionals in Scotland and assisting practitioners in providing a wider range of care for their patients.

### State of the art facilities

Teaching in the School is shared between tutors based at each of the two sites. All teaching material is provided online, using the UHI Blackboard Academic Suite virtual learning environment (VLE). Students can access the full curriculum through the internet for self-directed and reflective study, as well as attending tutorials and clinical sessions in the host centre. State of the art technology using video-conferencing and the Scotia Medical Observation Technology System (SMOTS) between sites provides real-time interactive and synchronous learning.

Clinical Skills Units have been provided within each centre with the facilities to transmit images directly to individual work stations. A fully-equipped Gaumard patient simulator unit, featuring adult and paediatric simulators, is adjacent to the Clinical Skills Unit, allowing training in emergency management.

The dental training clinic in Inverness has 14 dental chairs, including a teaching unit

‘The School will address the training needs of DCPs in rural Scotland and help address the need for increased primary dental care.’



## Case study

Melanie Carson, 28, from Evanton



already, the course is very interesting and we started with clinical practice early on which was great to get the feel of how things felt – hands on.

**How have you found the teaching methods?** I found online learning quite difficult to start off with but it has improved my confidence with computers, which seem to be a vital part of most workplaces now. The video conferencing was quite embarrassing to use at first but that too has become a part of everyday life and I feel okay with it now.

**Occupation prior to course:** At home for last two years with children.

**Work history:** Had worked as a dental nurse for two years before having children.

**Education history:** I left school with four Highers and went into an art degree course but left in the first year. I completed my SVQ dental nursing whilst working.

**Why did you decide to study Oral Health Science?** I really enjoyed the work and environment whilst dental nursing and I knew then that I wanted a career in dentistry. I had thought I would only be able to progress my career in nursing because of my other commitments but when the course came up local to me I jumped at the chance to do it. I hadn't heard of a dental therapist prior to that but after some research I realised it would be a very valuable and interesting career.

**How did you hear about the course at UHI?** I had been told about the building and its purpose before it was built whilst doing my dental nurse training. Whilst thinking about returning to work I thought I would look it up on the internet to see what they had done and saw the course advertised.

**What do you think of the course so far?** I can't believe how much I've learnt

'I had thought I would only be able to progress my career in nursing because of my other commitments but when the course came up local to me I jumped at the chance to do it.'

**How are you finding fitting in your studies with your everyday life?** I have days when I really struggle; a lot of the work overflows into the evenings and with young children that can be really difficult. I was prepared for hard work but sometimes it can take its toll ... saying that, I get up every morning really looking forward to going in and have no regrets about the course.

with overhead SMOTS camera and video-conferencing unit, while that in Dumfries has four dedicated units for therapy training and a further six units used for outreach training of dental undergraduates from Glasgow University Dental School. Outreach teaching also takes place in Inverness, providing places for students from the University of Dundee Dental School.

Teaching of decontamination procedures is part of mainstream training at all levels. As part of the development of the facilities, a training Local Decontamination Unit (LDU) has been located adjacent to the main clinic in the Inverness Dental Centre, where scenarios can be arranged to teach students all aspects of decontamination and cross infection control. UHI currently offers a Masters programme in Medical Device Decontamination which is provided as a complete online course to students throughout the UK, and it is planned that CPD courses for dental professionals will be offered within the training facility, using the training LDU for interactive sessions.



## Case study

Hannah Irvine, 18,  
from Inverness



**Occupation prior to course:** School

**Work history:** Just work over school summer holidays.

**Education history:** Eight Standard grades and five Highers.

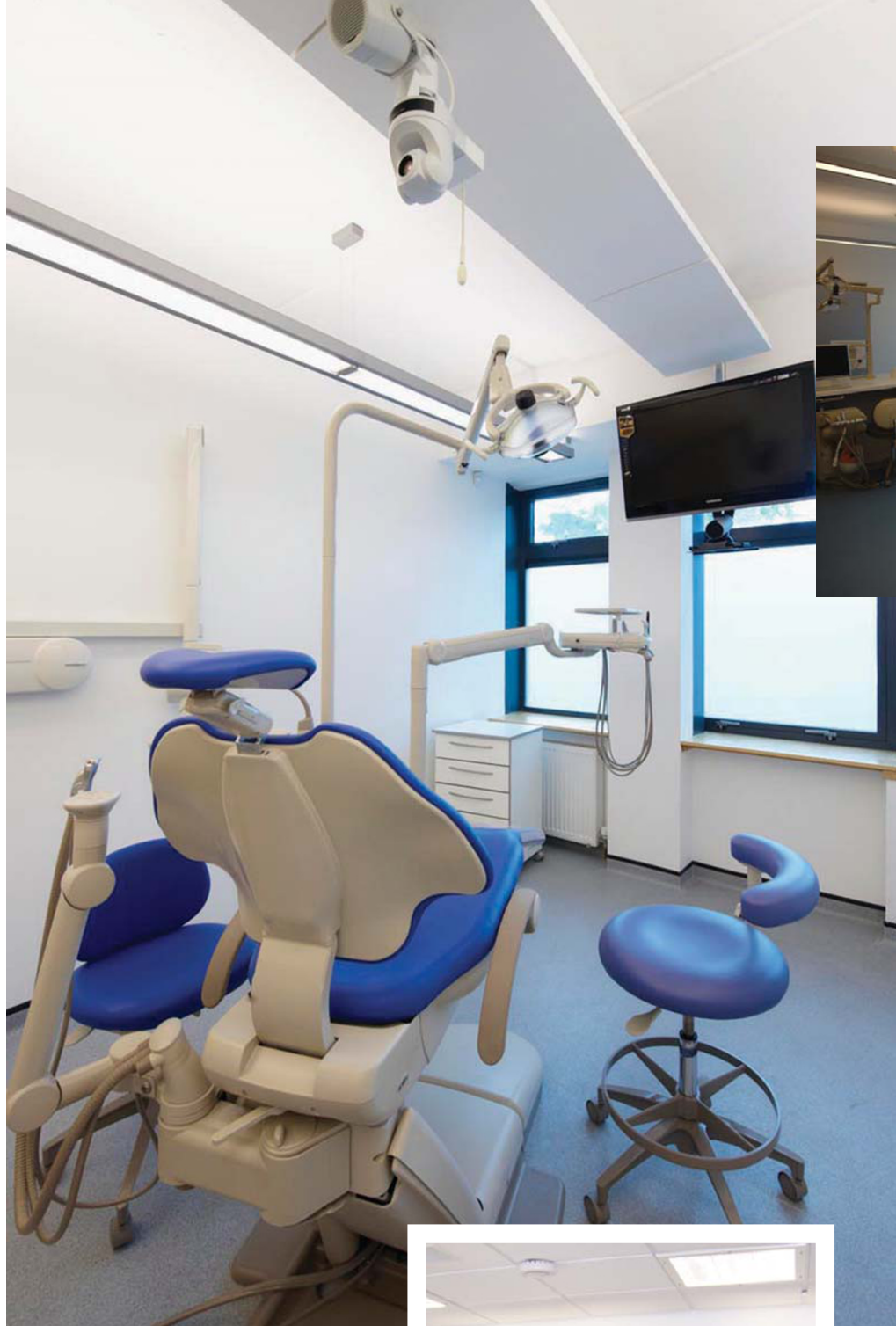
**Why did you decide to study Oral Health Science?** I went on work experience in school as a dental nurse then stayed on at school to get better grades, to go further.

**How did you hear about the course at UHI?** During my work experience a dentist told me about this new course.

**What do you think of the course so far?** It is very good. It is great that we have seen patients so early on in the course. It is hard work and keeps me busy.

**How have you found the teaching methods?** It was unusual to start with but it is an effective way of communication with tutors and colleges at long distance.

**How are you finding fitting in your studies with your everyday life?** It is hard to find spare time to spend with friends and family.



### Top notch teaching

The undergraduate teaching support for the BSc Oral Health Science is provided by UHI, while dental therapy tutors manage the course, two tutors working at each site. Senior Dental Officers are also involved in the clinical teaching of the course. Guest lecturers in a range of subjects have been invited to participate, attending one or other of the Centres or video-conferencing from remote sites. For some, this method of teaching has been new and challenging, but all have indicated that they have enjoyed the experience and are eager to explore the opportunities provided for expansion of teaching styles.

The aim of the School is to provide an opportunity for integration of treatment planning for effective management of







primary dental care. Patients are accepted for treatment at the centres through the Salaried Dental Service and by referral from local practitioners, ensuring increased access to care for a substantial number of people across rural Scotland.

**‘The School provides a central hub for CPD for the whole team.’**

The new centres also allow dental professionals to access CPD courses using well-equipped lecture theatres and seminar rooms at both sites as well as the IT and clinical facilities. The use of multimedia encourages them to participate in courses even when time constraints mean they cannot attend in person on the day of the course. A teaching facility within the unit for dental nurse training will open shortly.

The opening of the dental centres and the School of Oral Health Science brings great potential for expansion of the workforce in healthcare in the rural areas of Scotland. The School is helping to address the problems of access to dental care in this part of the UK and provides a central hub for CPD for the whole dental team.

*Isobel interviewed three students currently studying the brand new BSc in Oral Health Science at UHI. Read about their experiences throughout this article.*

## Case study

Gemma MacLennan, 20, from Inverness



### Occupation prior to course:

Dental nurse

**Work history:** Dental nurse, coffee shop assistant

**Education history:** Four Scottish Highers including music, chemistry, English and Gaelic and intermediate 2 maths; nine standard grades.

### Why did you decide to study Oral

**Health Science?** I had an interest in dentistry dating back to when I was in school as I had always enjoyed visiting the dentist and my dad is a dental engineer so I would sometimes go with him to visit different surgeries. I had also had my front teeth fixed due to acid erosion when I was younger and was so grateful to the dentist that I thought this would be a very rewarding and exciting career and anything but boring as no patient is ever the same. After an enjoyable two and a half years dental nursing I decided that what I really wanted to do was this therapy course as I sometimes got frustrated that I could not be more hands on and get involved in treating the patient. The fact that this course was to be run in my hometown was just an added bonus and I could not miss out on this exciting opportunity that I have loved being a part of so far.

### How did you hear about the course

**at UHI?** When I began dental nursing as one of the dentists I worked with had told me that it was going to be run in Inverness in the future. I had asked other

dentists about the course and then just waited until there was more information. I also did research on the course online to find out more about it.

**What do you think of the course so far?** I think the course is very challenging but very exciting. I have never had any regrets in starting it. I have met some great people and I find the course material very interesting. To look back now after almost a year studying it is amazing what I have learnt and achieved. I enjoy the practical sessions the best and it is great that this course has been hands on from almost day one and treating patients so early in the course is such a fantastic way of putting the theory aspect of the course into practice. I find treating patients very rewarding and an exciting learning curve.

**How have you found the teaching methods?** I find the teaching methods very good but as the course material is online I sometimes find it frustrating that it takes so long to access things. It is good that all our information is in one place though.

**‘To look back now after almost a year studying [the course] it is amazing what I have learnt and achieved.’**

**How are you finding fitting in your studies with your everyday life?** At first the workload was a huge shock and I did think ‘how am I going to cope!’ But after a few months you just get used to it and you just adjust like you would do with any change. I still manage to find time to spend with family and go out with friends just maybe not quite as much but I know that three years of my life is not long and it will be well worth it in the end.