Understanding and evaluating early career dental professionals' experiences of the General Dental Council

SQW

Contents

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. The General Dental Council (GDC) is responsible for the regulation of approximately 42,000 Dentists and 74,000 Dental Care Professionals (DCPs). The GDC's key function is to '*protect patient safety and maintain public confidence in dental services*', with the following underlying regulatory objectives: to protect the public; to protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of the public; to promote and maintain confidence in the dental profession; and to promote and maintain proper professional standards and conduct.

2. The GDC is committed to improving professional regulation in dentistry and making the system better for patients and fairer for dental professionals. Over recent years, the GDC has been focused on moving regulation upstream. This has centred on promoting professionalism through providing dental professionals with information, tools and continuing professional development (CPD) requirements to meet and maintain high professional standards. Alongside, the GDC has focused on improving and expanding its engagement activities.

3. In addition, the GDC published an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy in 2021, aiming to make the GDC a champion of EDI inside the organisation, with the sector it regulates, and with the public. It has recently developed an EDI Framework which aims to create a 'golden thread' from the Corporate Strategy to the EDI Strategy.

4. It is important that the GDC understands dental professionals' experiences, awareness and perceptions of the GDC and how these are formed, to evaluate and identify any gaps, barriers or strengths in the GDC's existing approaches. The GDC has previously commissioned a range of research studies. Across these previous research studies, the GDC has relevant insights about attitudes, perceptions and experiences, however this has not focused in detail on early career professionals (ECPs). As the GDC has changed its approach and activity to engaging with ECPs and students, and those professionals will have had their practice and/or training affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to varying degrees, it is timely to understand the effects on their perceptions and knowledge of and attitudes towards the GDC.

The research

5. In January 2023, the GDC commissioned SQW, an independent research organisation, to conduct a research study to understand and evaluate the experiences and perceptions of and attitudes towards the GDC among ECPs (those with up to 5 years on the register with the GDC to practise dentistry in the UK), and to understand how the GDC can better work with this cohort to meet its regulatory objectives. The following objectives sat beneath this aim:

   - Understanding knowledge about and awareness of the GDC among ECPs, where and how these are formed, and the impact on perceptions of and attitudes towards the GDC.

- Understanding how professional identity is formed on the journey from training through to the first five years on the register, including a dental professional's identity as a member of a regulated profession and how this impacts their practice.

- Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the experiences of those who were in education and/or training during 2020 and 2021, and any implications for education, training and the transition to practice.

- Evaluating and informing GDC activity to build positive, trusting relationships with ECPs to meet the GDC's statutory objectives.

- Informing ongoing and future work of the GDC with students and ECPs, including implementing the GDC's EDI Strategy and approaches to evaluation.

6. Secondary data and documentation were provided to SQW by the GDC, and SQW undertook a rapid desk-based review, spanning GDC documentation, previously commissioned research conducted in this field, and research reports identified via targeted online searching. Primary data collection included six scoping interviews, an online survey which received 1,479 useable survey responses from ECPs who joined the GDC register since May 2018, and follow-up interviews with 47 ECPs.

Key findings

Perceptions of, knowledge of, and attitudes towards the GDC

Perceptions of the GDC

7. Perceptions of the GDC among ECPs are diverse. Nearly half of survey respondents (44%) reported a positive perception of the GDC, nearly a third (30%) reported a neutral perception, and just over a quarter (26%) reported a negative perception. Responses varied by sub-group; DCPs generally had a more positive perception of the GDC compared to Dentists, and individuals registered with the GDC for a longer period of time were typically more negative in their perceptions.

8. Just over half of survey respondents reported that their perception of the GDC had not changed since their initial registration, with the remaining 47% fairly evenly divided between now viewing the GDC more positively and viewing the GDC more negatively. On the latter, survey findings suggest that there is a statistically significant correlation between the length of time registered with the GDC and perception of the GDC, where the longer an individual is registered with the GDC, the more negative their perception becomes.

Factors influencing perceptions of the GDC

9. ECPs identified a range of factors influencing their perceptions of the GDC. The factor reported as influential most frequently was direct communications with the GDC (28% of respondents), closely followed by the opinions of friends and colleagues (24%). The survey results showed

that respondents who had their views of the GDC influenced by colleagues and friends had typically been on the register for longer than those whose views were influenced by direct contact with the GDC. Other influential factors noted included the GDC's response to COVID-19 and the GDC's website.

10. Most survey respondents generally agreed that GDC communications are effective, and interviewees mentioned how information available via GDC monthly newsletters and the GDC website was clear and concise. Positive sentiment towards GDC communications was reflected in the interviews, with some noting that relevant information was readily available via the GDC website and that the GDC was easily contactable if the information was unclear. Others noted that email updates from the GDC were useful for understanding the most recent changes in the dental sector. That said, some interviewees did identify instances in which the GDC did not provide sufficient information in relation to Fitness to Practise (FtP) or registration processes, while others suggested that the content of communications provided by the GDC was irrelevant to their role or not sufficiently engaging. Suggestions for improvement centred on frequency, format and content.

11. Registration is mandatory to be a practising dental professional in the UK. Most respondents were either satisfied or neutral with regards to different elements of the registration process. The length of time it took to register caused the greatest level of dissatisfaction, particularly among those required to register via the Overseas Registration Exam (ORE) pathway.

12. ECPs were generally satisfied with other ways in which they engaged with the GDC. For example, dental professionals registered with the GDC must complete a minimum number of verifiable CPD hours every five-year cycle. The process for recording and submitting CPD hours was highlighted by some as one of the primary ways in which they communicate with the GDC. Broadly, interviewees who mentioned CPD requirements were happy with the process and felt this had a positive impact on their perceptions.

13. Similarly, ECP survey respondents who had been involved in GDC consultations generally reported that these were valuable and had helped to increase their understanding and/or improved their perception of the GDC.

Knowledge of the GDC

14. Most survey respondents (more than 80%) were confident in their understanding of the GDC's role as a regulator, and more than three-quarters reported having increased their knowledge about the GDC since they first registered. Survey respondents were generally the least confident on the GDC's role in investigating concerns about FtP, although it was still a minority of respondents that did not feel very or at all confident in their understanding (18%).

15. Amongst interviewees, the most frequently reported gap in understanding centred on a lack of knowledge of how the GDC goes about fulfilling its functions, rather than the role of the GDC itself, specifically around how registration fees are spent by the GDC.

16. Where interviewees had not become more knowledgeable, many reported having received a lot of information during their education/training, and felt they already had a good understanding of the GDC's role prior to registration.

Factors influencing knowledge of the GDC

17. Amongst interviewees who reported becoming more knowledgeable of the GDC, contributory factors reported included information from education/training courses, conducting their own research, learning from colleagues and friends, and their own involvement with the GDC (e.g. by going through registration, CPD and/or FtP processes).

18. Several information sources were highlighted by ECPs as having helped to inform their understanding of the GDC's role. The perceptions of colleagues were cited, particularly by those who otherwise reported having limited knowledge of the GDC, as well as direct communications from the GDC and word of mouth via social media.

Upstream activity and promoting professionalism

Preparedness for practice

19. ECPs generally felt well prepared for professional practice at the time of initial registration. Across all survey respondents, 86% reported being either very well or quite well prepared for professional practice at registration. However, this varied by profession, with 92% of Dental Nurses, 87% of Dental Therapists and 86% of Dental Hygienist survey respondents reporting this. In contrast, Dentists felt the least prepared; while 74% of Dentists felt very or quite well prepared, 21% felt not very well prepared or not at all prepared.

20. ECP interviewees attributed their sense of preparedness for professional practice to their education or training, rather than specific action on the part of the GDC. That said, some ECPs interviewed reported that they did not feel well prepared for practice, due to factors including a lack of practical focus during their education or training, having to adjust to the UK system (for registrants from abroad), or a perceived lack of guidance on how GDC rules and regulations work in practice.

21. In terms of how the GDC could have helped them feel more prepared, ECP interviewees reported that the GDC could have done so by hosting information sessions for new registrants, providing more support to registrants from overseas to adjust to the UK context, and more information and guidance for new registrants on litigation. Some ECP interviewees also felt other organisations could have helped them to feel more prepared.

Promoting professionalism

22. Evidence from scoping consultees and documents highlights the increased focus by the GDC on promoting professionalism amongst students and ECPs. A range of activities were identified as being undertaken to support this, including (but not limited to) conferences and dentistry shows, presentations as part of student and new registrant engagement, communications including newsletters, and revising the registrant welcome pack.

23. Previous stakeholder perceptions research identified a number of misconceptions among students and new registrants with regards to the role of the GDC. Partly in response to these findings, the GDC expanded its student and new registrant engagement programme for UK-qualified dental professionals. Overall, while only a small proportion of survey respondents reported attending a GDC student engagement and/or new registrant engagement session, most of those that attended found it to be useful in promoting professionalism and raising awareness of the GDC's remit and upstream and preventative regulatory activities.

Impact on professional practice

24. GDC activities such as setting standards for dental education and training and providing guidance were reported to have had a positive or very positive impact on professional practice. However this varied by professional role; over 70% of Dental Nurses, Therapists and Hygienists responding to the survey reported a positive or very positive impact, compared with only 37% of Dentists. Respondents who viewed the impact of GDC activities more negatively had been on the register for longer on average than those viewing the impact positively.

25. Just over half of ECPs interviewed felt that their experiences of and attitudes towards the GDC influenced their professional practice. They described both negative and positive impacts. The main area of positive influence described in interviews was that following the GDC guidance, rules and regulations had a positive impact on their overall practice. Those describing a negative impact mainly related this to practising defensive dentistry (being over cautious in practice due to fear of an investigation).

Impact on professional identity

26. In interviews, approximately half of ECPs reported that being registered with and regulated by the GDC had an impact on their professional identity and/or how they go about their professional practice. This included feeling a sense of pride from being registered with and regulated by the GDC, ECPs experiencing a sense of security through being part of a larger organisation, and ECPs being mindful of how they are perceived in public or on social media.

27. The impact of being registered with the GDC on professional identity was reported to be particularly important and positive for ECPs who had trained or practiced abroad. On the other hand, several interviewees felt that being registered with and regulated by the GDC had no

impact on their professional identity, reporting that they would continue to practice safely and professionally regardless of their registration with the GDC.

Wider perceptions and suggestions from early career professionals

Response to COVID-19

28. Just over half of survey respondents were in education or training during the pandemic restrictions. The negative impacts of this included access to practical training and time with fellow students. Despite this, there was a cohort of ECPs who felt the pandemic had a positive impact on their education or training, particularly access to dental education.

29. The majority of ECPs felt that there was not anything the GDC could have done to better support their transition into practice during the pandemic, stating this was beyond the GDC's control and remit. Suggestions from those who did think the GDC could have done more included increased support, guidance and communications during the pandemic.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

30. The GDC's EDI Strategy and internal EDI Framework demonstrate a strong organisational commitment to EDI. Despite this, less than half of survey respondents (38%) reported that they were aware of the GDC's EDI Strategy. Respondents who were aware had been on the register for less time on average than those who were not aware.

31. In general, survey respondents felt that the GDC promotes EDI in the dental sector. Key suggestions for how the GDC could further promote EDI within the profession included improving the registration experience (including the ORE) for individuals from overseas, communicating to ECPs more about EDI, and addressing the perceived lack of diversity within the GDC, in terms of staffing and the FtP panel.

Wellbeing and the role of the GDC

32. As part of the survey, respondents were asked to rate how happy and anxious they were feeling the day before they completed the survey. When asked to rank their happiness yesterday, responses varied slightly by role, with Dentists reporting being the least happy and most anxious, while Dental Therapists reported being the happiest and Dental Hygienists the least anxious.

33. Suggestions for how best the GDC could support ECPs' wellbeing fell under two key themes. Firstly, signposting to external wellbeing support; and secondly, the GDC providing wellbeing support, e.g. through webinars or an advice line.

Wider perceptions of the dental profession and future career plans

34. Survey respondents were generally optimistic about the future of their career, with 60% being 'very optimistic' or 'optimistic'. Survey respondents were asked to state how optimistic or pessimistic they felt about several key areas of the dental profession. Respondents were most optimistic about positive developments or opportunities in the sector, including changes in technology, learning and development, and employment opportunities. On the other hand, respondents were most pessimistic about effects of the wider policy environment, such as patient access to NHS dental care, the reform of the NHS dental contract, recruitment and retention of dental staff and financial challenges.

35. Looking forward, the majority of survey respondents expect to still be working in the dental profession in two years' time. 'Mental health and wellbeing' and 'My dental income' were the two most important factors influencing decisions about ECPs' future plans. Interviewees were also asked whether their perception or experience of the GDC has impacted on their future career plans. The majority felt their perception or experience of the GDC had not impacted on their future career plans, positively or negatively, stating that they intended to continue working in the profession and progressing.

Reflections and implications for the GDC

Key findings and associated implications

36. The evidence highlights the importance of raising the visibility of the GDC's role and remit among ECPs, and those in education or training. The GDC's recently introduced student engagement activities were highlighted as having a positive influence on perceptions and understanding of the GDC. The GDC may wish to consider how they can expand this to offer a supportive, personable approach to more students and ECPs (across all roles).

37. Once registered, the GDC undertakes a wide range of activities for and with dental professionals. However, findings indicate that some ECPs are not aware of what the GDC is already doing. This suggests there may be scope for the GDC to consider what information they communicate to ECPs, as well as how they do this, including how they raise and maintain awareness of developments amongst longer-term registrants.

38. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to effective communications and engagement with ECPs. Feedback from this study around the key themes of frequency, format and content provides a variety of suggestions which the GDC may wish to draw on to inform improvements to communication activities. Considering not only the messages to be conveyed, but also ensuring they are communicated to highlight their relevance to all ECPs (as opposed to just Dentists), and where relevant, developing tailored communications, will likely also help with resonance.

39. External factors beyond the GDC's control also play a key part in influencing ECPs' perceptions and understanding of the GDC. Understanding the mechanisms by which this information is passed onto ECPs, and what could be done to improve negative perceptions about the GDC, will likely be important going forward.

40. Given the wide range of challenges facing the dental sector, efforts to support the dental workforce's mental health and wellbeing, such as the suggestion of signposting to external wellbeing support, are likely to be increasingly important for the GDC to consider. The study also highlighted pessimism regarding patient access to care, reform of the dental contract and workforce issues; it may also be useful for the GDC to consider how it can support the sector to address these challenges.

41. In relation to the promotion of EDI, the findings indicate that raising awareness of the GDC's efforts and strategic focus in this area could be a positive action for the GDC to take. Two key areas stand out here: raising awareness of the profile of the GDC FtP panel (and ensuring the panel is, and remains, sufficiently diverse); and focusing on the ORE and how experiences and perceptions of this could be improved.

42. Continuing to monitor and learn from how other regulators and stakeholders engage with students and ECPs (and wider registrants) would likely also be useful for the GDC.

Implications for future monitoring and research

43. This review highlights negative perceptions from Dentists, both of the GDC but also in relation to future career plans, their happiness and anxiety, and the wider profession. Further research could look to explore their experiences in more detail, to understand the specific challenges they are facing which contribute to their perceptions being less positive.

44. This report has highlighted a range of challenges faced by ECPs in relation to the ORE and the perceived lack of recognition of prior experience. The GDC (and others) may therefore also wish to explore further the experiences of individuals from overseas who have completed the ORE.

45. The findings reveal that the wider views of colleagues can impact ECPs' perceptions of, knowledge of, and attitudes towards the GDC. Understanding what has influenced and would help to improve the perceptions of those who have been on the register for longer could be a useful exercise for the GDC to undertake.

46. Engagement with GDC consultation activities appears to have a positive impact on ECP perceptions. However, a relatively small proportion of survey respondents reported having taken part in a consultation activity. Looking forward, widening participation in such activities and exploring perceptions of such activities could be useful for the GDC.

47. There is willingness and interest amongst dental professionals to provide feedback on and to support the GDC to continue to develop and improve. This is encouraging for the GDC looking forward to future research studies.

1. Introduction

1.1   The General Dental Council (GDC) is responsible for the regulation of approximately 42,000 Dentists and 74,000 Dental Care Professionals (DCPs). The GDC's key function is to *"protect patient safety and maintain public confidence in dental services"*[1], with the following underlying regulatory objectives: to protect the public; to protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of the public; to promote and maintain confidence in the dental profession; and to promote and maintain proper professional standards and conduct. It is therefore important that the GDC understands dental professionals' experiences, awareness and perceptions of the GDC and how these are formed, to evaluate and identify any gaps, barriers or strengths in the GDC's approach.

1.2   To this end, the GDC commissioned SQW, an independent research organisation, to conduct a research study to help it understand and evaluate the experiences and perceptions of and attitudes towards the GDC among early career professionals (ECPs; dental professionals who have been registered with the GDC for up to five years). The study was also focused on understanding how the GDC can better work with this group to meet its regulatory objectives. The following objectives sit beneath these aims:

- **Understanding knowledge about and awareness of the GDC among ECPs,** where and how these are formed (including during training) and the impact on perceptions of and attitudes towards the GDC.

- **Understanding how professional identity is formed** on the journey from training through to the first five years on the register, including a dental professional's identity as a member of a regulated profession and how this impacts their practice.

- **Understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic** on the experiences of those who were in education and/or training during 2020 and 2021, including any implications for education, training and the transition to practice.

- **Evaluating and informing GDC** activity to build positive, trusting relationships with ECPs to meet the GDC's statutory objectives.

- **Informing ongoing and future work of the GDC** with students and ECPs, including implementing the GDC's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and approaches to evaluation.

1.3   Overall, this study explores ECPs' experiences as a stand-alone cohort, complementing and building on previous registrant-wide COVID-19 and perceptions research studies commissioned by the GDC.

1.4   Table 1-1 sets out the research questions addressed by the study.

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[1] General Dental Council (2023) [About Us](#)

Table 1-1: Research questions

Research question
What influences perceptions of, knowledge of, and attitudes towards the GDC among early career professionals? How do these change?
How do early career professionals' experiences and perceptions of and attitudes towards the GDC impact on their a) engagement with the regulator and b) professional identity and practice?
What has been the impact of external factors, including COVID-19, on the experiences and needs of early career professionals, and how can the GDC best respond?
To what extent and in what ways is GDC's upstream and prevention activity for early career professionals successful in achieving its aims?
How can the GDC better work with students and early career professionals to promote their professionalism? How does this change during training and the first five years of practice?
How can the GDC build on its activity with early career professionals to continue to promote professionalism through all stages of their careers?
How can the GDC best ensure that it is meeting its equality, diversity and inclusion strategic objectives with regard to students and early career professionals?
How can the findings inform areas for and approaches to further research, monitoring and evaluation?

Source: GDC (2022) Invitation to Tender for a Social Research Study into Understanding and evaluating early career dental professionals' experiences of the GDC

1.5 SQW's work commenced in January 2023 and ran throughout 2023. This section presents the context underpinning the study and the methodology followed. The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Sections 2-4: present the key findings from the research against each of the research questions, grouped thematically.

- Section 5: sets out the key reflections and implications of the research.

1.6 The report contains four Annexes: one which acknowledges the various contributors to the study; a second which provides additional detail on the research methodology; a third providing the research tools (survey and interview guides); and a fourth which sets out survey response data in tables and charts.

Context and rationale

1.7 The GDC's overarching objective, as set out in the Dentist Act 1984 (as amended) is to protect the public[2], through the following objectives: to protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and well-being of the public; to promote and maintain confidence in the dental profession; and to promote and maintain proper professional standards and conduct for these professions. It is therefore important that the GDC understands ECPs' attitudes towards and experiences and perceptions of the GDC and how these are formed, to evaluate and identify any gaps, barriers or strengths in the GDC's approach.

GDC corporate strategies

1.8 The 2017 report '*Shifting the Balance*'[3], supplemented the Corporate Strategy for 2016-2019, and set out the GDC's views on the future of professional regulation in dentistry and its ambition to make the system better for patients and fairer for dental professionals. The document proposed four key categories of recommendations for reforming dental professional regulation: moving regulation upstream to focus on harm prevention; improving first tier complaint handling; working with partners (e.g. other regulators and equivalents) and the professions themselves; and refocusing Fitness to Practise (FtP)[4].

1.9 GDC's Corporate Strategy for 2020-2022[5] sets out the GDC's planned activity, with three underpinning principles: Right time, Right place, and Right touch. Consistent with Shifting the Balance, the strategy reflected the GDC's approach of seeking to promote professionalism, support career-long learning and address issues dental professionals face at every stage of their careers.

1.10 Building on this, in 2023 the GDC published its Corporate Strategy 2023-2025, with four strategic aims[6]:

- Dental professionals reach and maintain high standards of safe and effective dental care.

- Concerns are addressed effectively and proportionately to protect the public and support professional learning.

- Risks affecting the public's safety and wellbeing are dealt with by the right organisations.

- Dental professional regulation is efficient and effective and adapts to the changing external environment.

1.11 In addition, in 2021 the GDC published its EDI Strategy, aiming to make the GDC *"a champion of diversity, equality and inclusion inside our organisation, with the sector we regulate, and with the public"*[7]. More recently, work has also been undertaken internally to develop an EDI

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[2] General Dental Council (2023) About Us
[3] General Dental Council (2017) Shifting the balance: a better, fairer system of dental regulation.
[4] General Dental Council (2017) Shifting the balance: a better, fairer system of dental regulation.
[5] General Dental Council (2020) Corporate Strategy 2020-22: Right time, Right place, Right touch
[6] General Dental Council (2023) Corporate Strategy 2023-2025
[7] General Dental Council (2021) EDI Strategy 2021-2023

framework which aims to "*create a 'golden thread' from the Corporate Strategy to the EDI Strategy and delivery plans*"[8] with four core priorities:

- GDC people understand their statutory EDI obligations and implications for their daily work.

- Registrants, witnesses and the public can effectively engage with the new hearings service.

- To attract and retain talented people to work at the GDC.

- Complete improvements in the collection of quality assured EDI data across the business.

GDC-commissioned research

1.12 In 2018, building on the GDC priority to focus on more effective engagement with current and future dental professionals, the GDC commissioned research on perceptions of the GDC amongst registrants, stakeholders and students and their preferred methods of communication[9]. In general, this study found that GDC communications were viewed as useful and informative. Despite this, key areas for improvement included focusing registrant engagement on topics such as professional development, updates to guidelines, standards or trends in the dental sector; using more direct communication channels/meetings with students; and improving GDC website useability and content.

1.13 In 2020, the GDC commissioned a follow up study to further understand perceptions and identify key changes over time[10]. The study found that overall perceptions of the GDC were more negative (58%) than positive (21%), largely because of views relating to the GDC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, decisions about fees, and ongoing dissatisfaction with FtP processes and communication. Positive sentiment about the GDC decreased with age, and also with the length of time involved with the GDC. Students had more positive perceptions, even when compared to ECPs. In addition, the study identified variation in understanding of the GDC's remit (in line with 2018 findings), with lower awareness of the GDC's role in setting standards in education (49%) than other core GDC functions.

1.14 Finally, the dental sector has faced increasing pressures in recent years, including changes to services implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as suspension of routine dental care during lockdowns and various tiered restrictions[11]. In 2020 and 2021, the GDC commissioned research to explore the impact of the pandemic on dental professionals[12], identifying a range of relevant negative implications, not least issues with mental health and wellbeing and associated influence on career decisions. As restrictions associated with the

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[8] General Dental Council (2023) EDI framework [not in public domain]
[9] DJS Research (2018) Research on perceptions of the GDC and preferred methods of communication
[10] DJS Research (2021) GDC Stakeholder Perceptions research
[11] Pye Tait Consulting (2021) The impact of COVID-19 on dental professionals 2021
[12] Ecorys (2020) The impact of COVID-19 on dental professionals 2020; Pye Tait Consulting (2021) The impact of COVID-19 on dental professionals 2021

pandemic continue to ease, it is important for the GDC to understand any ways it can support new registrants or improve processes/activities.

1.15 In summary, across recent previous research studies conducted, the GDC has relevant insights about attitudes, perceptions and experiences, however this has not focused in detail on ECPs specifically. As the GDC has changed its approach and activity to engaging with ECPs and students, including through the student and new registrant engagement programme running since 2019, it is timely to understand the effects on perceptions and knowledge of and attitudes towards the GDC.

Logic model

1.16 As part of the scoping phase of the study, a logic model was developed outlining the GDC's overall activity relating to the perceptions of ECPs. A logic model is used to demonstrate why the overall work is needed (context and rationale), the inputs involved, and how activities (are expected to) lead to intended outputs, outcomes and wider impacts. The logic model was initially developed by SQW based on insights from the documentary review and scoping interviews, and was presented and refined in a workshop with the GDC.

1.17 Throughout the research study, logic modelling has been used to inform tool design. This was to ensure the research explored the different activities undertaken, the extent to which intended outcomes are realised among different groups, and how far different external factors have an influence.

1.18 Logic modelling remained live throughout the study and was revisited for the final report, to ensure it remained relevant. Minimal updates were made; most changes clarified points, with the only key addition made being adding an input of the in-kind contributions of higher education institutions (HEIs) and dental practices in educating and informing ECPs about the GDC, based on interview data.

1.19 The updated logic model and the underpinning assumptions and external factors which may influence its realisation are presented in Table 1-1.

Table 1-2: Logic Model

Logic Model - *"Understanding and evaluating early career dental professionals' experiences of the GDC"*	
Aims and objectives:	• Understand the experiences, perceptions of and attitudes towards the GDC among early career dental professionals (up to 5 years on register) and how this changes over time. • Ensure early career dental professionals have an accurate understanding of the GDC's role and remit in regulating the profession and supporting and promoting professionalism. • Inform the GDC's work with early career dental professionals to meet its regulatory objectives.

Context/Rationale	Resources/inputs	Activity/Outputs	Outcomes (interim)	Impacts (long-term)
• The GDC's key function is to *'protect patient safety and maintain public confidence in dental services'*, with regulatory objectives: to protect the public; to protect, promote & maintain the health, safety & wellbeing of the public; to promote & maintain confidence in the dental profession; to promote & maintain proper professional standards and conduct. • To meet these objectives, the GDC therefore needs to understand early career DPs' experiences and perceptions of the GDC and the process of developing professionalism, to identify how the GDC can better work with early career DPs to build trusting relationships and meet regulatory objectives. • The dental sector has faced increasing pressures due to the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery, including suspension of routine dental care during lockdowns and tiered restrictions (Pye Tait, 2021). The GDC need to identify emerging impacts of the pandemic (and other factors) on early career professionals, including ways the GDC can support new registrants or improve activities.	**Internal** • GDC internal resources for activities: ○ Staffing/time ○ Funding from registration fees • GDC website, communications and engagement materials • GDC commissioned research, to inform activities and planning **External** • Research studies from other regulators • In kind contributions from external	**Activities** • Student and new registrant engagement programme, including the delivery of sessions with new registrants and students • Registration processes, including payment, welcome pack and forms • Communication re FtP processes • Other communications and engagement activity • 'Upstream' professionalism activities, including guidance and standards development • Conducting and commissioning research studies, including perceptions, Covid-19 & FtP studies	**GDC** • Improved understanding of early career dental professionals' perceptions and experiences of, and attitudes towards, the GDC. • Effective registration processes • Learning informs FtP communications/ processes. • Improved offer and support for professionalism and CPD for early career professionals **Early career dental professionals and wider stakeholders** • Students and early career dental professionals have an accurate understanding of the GDC's role, remit and responsibilities in regulating the profession and supporting professionalism • Students and early career dental professionals understand what is required	**GDC** • Better able to meet its regulatory objectives • Fewer concerns raised, including FtP referrals **Early career dental professionals and wider stakeholders** • Enhanced professionalism amongst early career dental professionals • Improved quality of patient care

- The GDC is already taking action focusing on these areas, with the 2017 Shifting the Balance discussion report setting out the GDC's views on the future of professional regulation in dentistry, alongside the 2020-2022 and 2023-2025 Corporate Strategy and GDC EDI Strategy.
- To inform this activity, the GDC commissioned research focused on understanding perceptions of the GDC in 2019 and 2021. The 2021 study found that while students tend to have a more positive attitude towards the GDC, this is less positive among registrants. Perceptions are evidenced to change during DPs' first 5 years on the register; understanding when & why is key.
- There is evidence of misalignment between early career DP perceptions of preparedness for practice, and educator perceptions. Understanding retrospective views on this is key.

partners/ stakeholders, e.g., HEIs through course content/delivery, practice owners/colleagues (sharding GDC knowledge, and students for GDC visits/ presentations

- Trend monitoring and reporting, including registration and FtP data

Outputs
- Research reports and other outputs
- Strategy and policy documents
- Monitoring reports, including monthly/annual registration and FtP reports
- Communication materials, including videos, newsletter, website
- Number of people reached by different activities/outputs

of them and what professionalism requires in practice (including CPD), and how the GDC can support that
- Improved perception and experience of the GDC amongst early career dental professionals and those studying to work in the sector, including improved perceptions amongst those with five years on the register

- Improved workforce satisfaction
- Improved confidence in GDC processes, including FtP and registration/ renewal

Assumptions

- The GDC is able to influence and inform student and early career dental professionals' experiences, perceptions of and attitudes towards the GDC.
- Where possible and relevant, the GDC reflects and acts on the findings of research and data regarding dental professional experiences, perceptions and attitudes.
- Students and early career dental professionals engage with GDC materials and communications (e.g., videos, newsletter, website).
- The GDC has consistent messaging to, and engagement with, students and early career dental professionals.
- All dental professionals joining the register, e.g. either following UK education/work or after living/working/studying outside of the UK, get all the relevant messages, content and materials from the GDC

External Factors

- Early career DPs are a diverse and varied cohort (in terms of educational experience and location, practice experience and location, personal characteristics etc.).
- It is easier for the GDC to be in contact with certain dental professions, e.g., dentists, dental therapists and dental hygienists prior to registration (rather than dental nurses and technicians). It is particularly challenging for the GDC to engage with trainee dental nurses.
- Challenges since the Covid-19 pandemic mean early career dental professionals are working under increased pressure.
- There is an increase in private dental care versus NHS provision; unclear whether/how this might affect attitudes, experiences and perceptions of early career DPs.

- Colleague or educator experiences or wider news may affect perceptions of and attitudes towards the GDC – moves towards more team-based working may affect this.
- The requirement for registrants to pay the GDC funding annually may affect perceptions.
- Communications/tone in the Welcome Pack changed c.18 months ago, which may affect perceptions/experiences.
- The overseas DCP route to registration for overseas qualified dentists closed at the beginning of March 2023 which led to a substantial increase in applications before the deadline; this in turn has impacted on the time taken to process the applications.
- Current paper-based registration process thought to negatively affect perceptions; GDC is moving to an online registration process, but there is currently a delay to implementation.
- Perception that there is an increase in defensive dentistry practices amongst dental professionals.

Source: SQW

Methodology

Data collection, analysis and reporting

1.20 Figure 1-1 sets out the overall approach to the research study, with the following sub-sections providing detail as to the activities each strand comprised of.

Figure 1-1: Research study approach
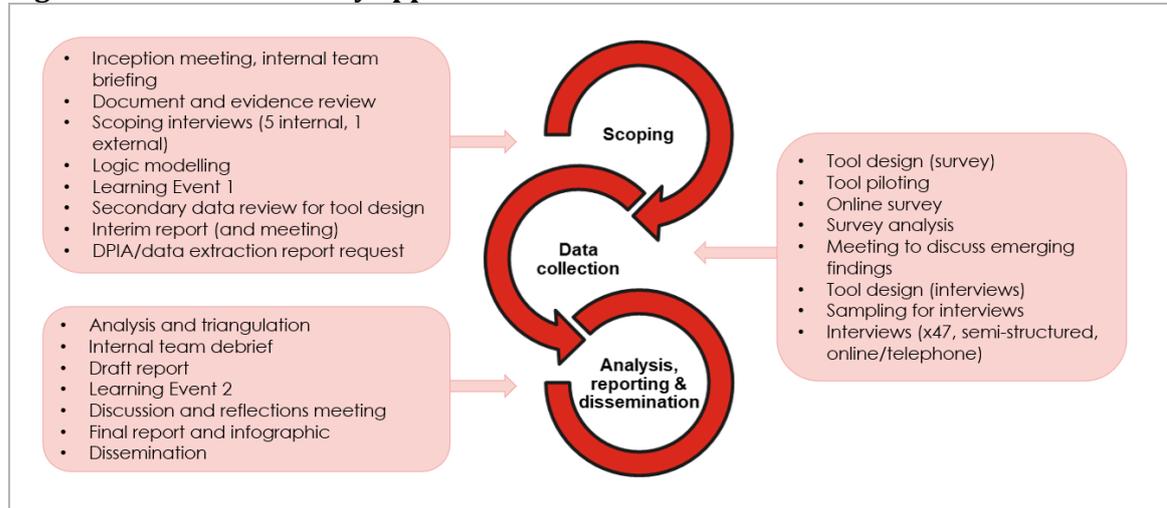
Strand 1: Scoping phase

1.21 The research began with a scoping phase, which comprised:

- Semi-structured scoping interviews with key stakeholders (five internal, one external), focused on building an understanding of what is involved in the GDC's activity with and for students and ECPs, and to explore the rationale and priorities for this study.

- A rapid desk-based review covering GDC documentation (including strategy and registration materials), previously commissioned research conducted in this field, and research reports identified via targeted online searching relating to perceptions and experiences amongst professionals in other regulated healthcare professions.

- A question-mapping exercise against the study research questions. This involved looking at previous GDC-commissioned research studies to identify potentially relevant survey questions and data fields for possible replication in the survey.

- Logic modelling of the GDC's activity relating to the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of ECPs, informed by the documentary review and scoping interviews. The logic model was initially developed by SQW before exploration and refinement via a workshop with key GDC representatives.

- An online learning event with wider GDC colleagues to explore the emerging insights from the scoping phase and their implications for the research workplan.

1.22 The findings from and implications of the scoping phase of the study were shared for discussion and review with the GDC. The finalised research workplan was agreed upon with the GDC.

Strand 2: Data collection phase

1.23 Primary data collection aimed to address the study objectives and research questions. Research tools were developed in collaboration with the GDC and included an online survey, a follow-up interview topic guide, and a briefing note to ensure informed consent at recruitment (see Annex C). Prior to data collection commencing, a full Data Protection and Impact Assessment (DPIA) was developed by SQW in conjunction with the GDC.

1.24 The online survey was live from 29 June to 31 July 2023, distributed by the GDC to 33,289 professionals, along with one reminder email encouraging completion, and an item about the research in the registrant newsletter. In total, **1,479 useable survey responses were received** from ECPs (with 953 complete responses and 526 partial responses included in the analysis). Descriptive statistics regarding the profile of respondents can be found in the data tables in Annex D. The survey comprised mainly closed or Likert scale questions, with a small number of open-ended free text questions included. Routing took place depending on respondents' answers to questions. Respondents did not need to complete all questions if they did not wish to, and could 'save and return' to their partially completed response to the survey if they wished.

1.25 The survey invited respondents to provide their contact details if they might be willing to take part in an interview with an SQW researcher. A total of 250 survey respondents signed up, with a shortlist of c.100 contacts sampled. Sampling was based on several key survey responses, including length of time on the register and perceptions of the GDC, as well as professional and individual characteristics, to ensure a range of views could be collected. More detail on the sampling exercise and final interviewee profile is provided in Annex B. Individuals were invited by SQW to take part in an interview between mid-September and early October, with a total of **47 thirty-minute interviews completed** via MS Teams or telephone. Interviews were semi-structured, following an agreed topic guide aligned with the research questions for the study, and building on interviewees' survey responses. All interviewees were provided with a digital £20 high street voucher as a thank you for their participation.

Strand 3: Analysis, reporting and dissemination

1.26 Utilising the data captured throughout the study, two strands of activity made up the analysis phase:

- Quantitative analysis (using Microsoft Excel) of online survey responses. This included initial question by question analysis, followed by additional cross-tabulation on relevant

factors where possible, for example professional and individual characteristics, to explore whether any correlations existed between key characteristics and responses.

- Qualitative data analysis (using the specialist software package MaxQDA) of interview notes. A coding framework was developed and confirmed with the GDC to ensure a structured approach, with write-ups systematically tagged with agreed codes in order to identify common themes and reveal any emerging relationships in the data. Qualitative survey responses were coded thematically in Excel to understand the key topic areas highlighted.

1.27 Initial survey analysis was shared with relevant GDC leads via an emerging findings presentation in August 2023, with a final learning event with wider GDC colleagues in early December to reflect on overall findings and implications.

Key considerations and limitations

1.28 When considering the findings presented in this report, it is important to keep the following in mind:

- Whilst SQW took efforts to ensure the sample of ECPs interviewed was diverse (sampling as per Annex B), it is not possible to assess how typical their experiences, perceptions and attitudes may be of the whole cohort.

- All interviewees and survey respondents opted-in to the research (taking part was optional), which again may risk their experiences and responses not being entirely reflective of those of their peers.

- We did not track IP addresses for survey respondents, to minimise the amount of personal data captured; it is possible that respondents could have completed the survey more than once. Responses were checked to look for duplicate answers, however none were identified.

- All participants were either in training or practising during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will have affected their early experiences in the dental profession, and it may be that future studies exploring ECP experiences, attitudes and perceptions generate different results based on this.

- Despite receiving survey responses from Clinical Dental Technicians, none signed up for an interview; as such, there are no interview insights from individuals in this role.

2. Perceptions of, knowledge of, and attitudes towards the GDC

2.1 This section describes the perceptions and knowledge of the GDC among ECPs, and their attitudes towards the GDC. This section draws on survey responses and interviews with ECPs, as well as the documentary review and scoping consultations conducted during the scoping phase.

Summary

Perceptions of the GDC

- Nearly half of survey respondents (44%) had a positive perception of the GDC; nearly a third (30%) had a neutral perception and the remainder had a negative perception.

- DCPs generally had a more positive perception of the GDC compared to Dentists. Individuals registered with the GDC for a longer period of time were typically more negative in their perceptions.

- Despite this, just over half of survey respondents (53%) reported that their perception of the GDC had not changed since their initial registration, with the remainder fairly evenly divided between those now viewing the GDC more positively and more negatively.

Factors influencing perceptions of the GDC

- Direct communication with the GDC (28%) and the opinions of friends and colleagues (24%) were the factors most commonly reported as influencing respondent perceptions.

- Respondents generally agreed that GDC communications were effective. However, some interviewees identified instances where the GDC did not provide sufficient information, while others suggested that communications were irrelevant to their role.

- Most respondents were either satisfied or neutral with regards to the different elements of the registration process. The length of time it took to register caused the greatest level of dissatisfaction, particularly among those required to register via the Overseas Registration Exam (ORE) pathway.

- The survey found that respondents who had their views influenced by friends or colleagues reported negative perceptions of the GDC more frequently than those whose views were not influenced by friends or colleagues.

Knowledge of the GDC

- Most survey respondents were confident in their understanding of the GDC's role as a regulator, and more than three-quarters reported having increased their knowledge about the GDC since they first registered.

Factors influencing knowledge of the GDC

- Factors influencing knowledge of the GDC included information from education/training, respondents' research, learning from colleagues and friends, and involvement with the GDC (e.g. by going through registration, CPD, and/or FtP processes).

Overall perceptions

2.2 **Perceptions of GDC among ECPs were diverse**. Overall, nearly half of survey respondents (44%) had a positive perception of the GDC, whilst nearly a third (30%) had a neutral perception and just over a quarter (26%) had either a negative or very negative perception (Table 2-1).

Table 2-1: Perceptions of the GDC among ECP survey respondents

Overall perception	No. of survey respondents	% of survey respondents
Very positive	238	16%
Positive	414	28%
Neutral	437	30%
Negative	203	16%
Very negative	147	10%
Total	**1,466**	**100%**

Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

2.3 Survey responses suggest that **perceptions of the GDC vary depending on the role of the individual**, with some professions typically reporting a more positive perception of the GDC than others. As shown in Table 2-2, respondents registered as Dental Nurses were the most positive, with 59% holding either a very positive or positive perception of the GDC, compared to just 22% of respondents registered as Dentists.

Table 2-2: Perceptions of the GDC among ECP survey respondents, by role (n=1,466)[13]

Profession (number of responses)	Very positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very negative
Dental Hygienist (219)	15%	30%	35%	15%	6%
Dental Nurse (741)	24%	35%	31%	8%	2%
Dental Technician (21)	10%	29%	29%	14%	19%
Dental Therapist (210)	14%	28%	35%	16%	7%
Dentist (460)	6%	16%	26%	28%	24%
Orthodontic Therapist (14)	14%	36%	29%	21%	0%

Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

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[13] Data regarding Clinical Dental Technician responses has been redacted from Table 2-2 due to a low number of responses from this group of professionals (n=5)

2.4 Furthermore, survey findings suggest that **there is a correlation between the length of time registered with the GDC and perception of the GDC, where the longer an individual is registered with the GDC, the more negative their perception becomes** (as shown in Figure 2-1)[14]. These findings are in line with the 2021 Stakeholder Perceptions Research for the GDC, which found that positive perceptions towards the GDC decreased with the length of time involved with the GDC.[15] Reasons for this and the above are discussed further later in this chapter.

Figure 2-1: Perceptions of the GDC among ECP survey respondents, by length of time on the register (n=1,466)
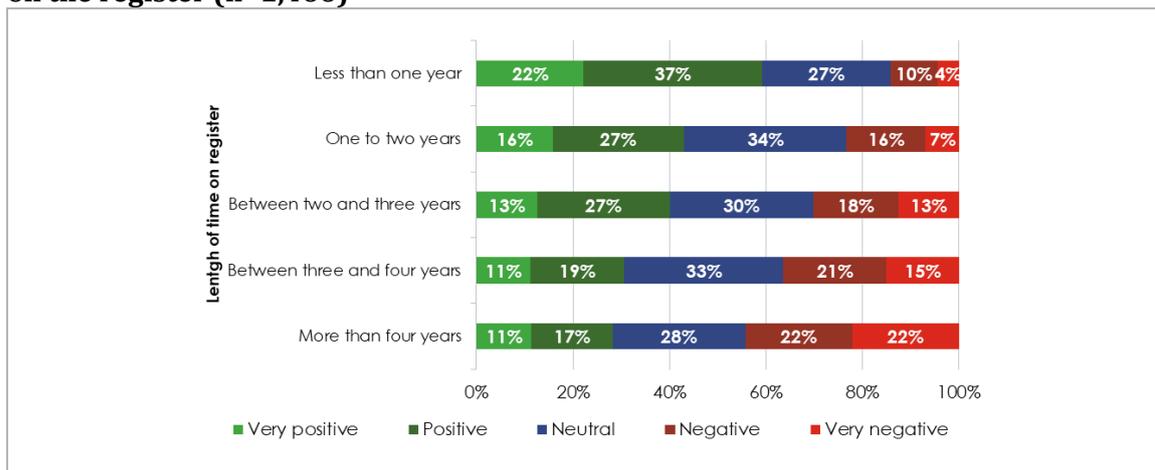
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

Change in perceptions of the GDC over time

2.5 More than half (53%) of survey respondents reported that their **perceptions of the GDC had not changed since initial registration**, with the other half reporting a fairly even split between now viewing the GDC more positively (26%) and now viewing the GDC more negatively (22%).

2.6 Of the interview sample, only six interviewees suggested that their engagement with the GDC had increased over time, with the remaining 41 interviewees believing their engagement had either remained at a similar level (36) or decreased (5).

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[14] Two statistical tests were used to determine this relationship. Firstly, a Chi-square test of independence, which tests the null hypothesis that there is no significant association between the two categorical variables under investigation. In this case, χ^2=117.08, df=16, p=1.99682E-17, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected at a 0.01 confidence level, indicating that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables (in this instance, the length of time an ECP is registered with the GDC and their perception of the GDC). Secondly, we used a Spearman's rank correlation coefficient to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables, where the null hypothesis is that there is no correlation between the two variables under investigation. In this case, ρ=-0.259, df=1443, p= 5.96215E-24, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected at a 0.01 confidence level, indicating that there is a negative correlation (but not necessarily causation) between the two variables (i.e. on average, ECPs who have been registered for longer are more likely to have a negative perception of the GDC).

[15] DJS Research (2021) GDC Stakeholder Perceptions Research.

2.7 Interviewees who reported an increased level of engagement reported being initially unaware of the different ways in which professionals can engage with the GDC, including setting up a personal development plan for continuing professional development (CPD) requirements and taking part in consultations related to regulatory changes. One person had increased their level of engagement due to an ongoing investigation with the GDC.

> *"The change is in terms of new reforms and registration. They try to carry us along with making changes (i.e. consultations) – that is helpful."*
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for less than one year)**

2.8 Interviewees whose engagement had decreased all mentioned having engaged with the GDC during the registration process, but not since. One interviewee called for more opportunities to engage with the GDC, particularly for opportunities to voice their opinions.

> *"More opportunities to engage with them would be good. It would be nice to have more forums for input and discussion."*
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for two-three years)**

Factors influencing perceptions of the GDC

2.9 **The most frequently reported factor influencing survey respondents' views of the GDC was 'direct contact with the GDC'** (28%), followed by the **'experiences of friends and colleagues'** (24%). All other factors received less than 10% of responses, with the GDC's response to COVID-19 (9%) and the GDC's website (8%) being the third and fourth most influential factors respectively.

2.10 Direct contact with the GDC and the experiences of friends and colleagues were consistently identified as among the most influential factors in the survey. The only exception was among ECPs who qualified outside the EEA (n=277), who reported that the GDC's response to COVID-19 (13%) and the GDC website (11%) were more influential than the experiences of colleagues/friends (8%). Several interviewees who qualified outside of the EEA mentioned how the Overseas Registration Exam (ORE) – a two-part exam administered by the GDC as a registration requirement for those qualifying outside the EEA - had been impacted significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic. Impacts including short-notice cancellations, lengthy delays and limited communication, and had in turn impacted their perception of the GDC as a result.[16]

2.11 The survey results showed that **respondents who had their views of the GDC influenced by the experience of colleagues and friends had typically been on the register for longer than those who had their views influenced by direct contact with the GDC[17].** This was

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[16] More information available at: https://www.gdc-uk.org/registration/overseas-registration-exam

[17] Chi-square test: χ^2=58.384, df=4, p=6.33813E-12, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected at a 0.01 confidence level, indicating that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables (in

echoed in the feedback from interviewees. This indicates that dental professionals in their first two years of practice have generally had their perceptions of the GDC informed by the registration process. In contrast, ECP interviewees who had been registered for longer mentioned how, over time, they had heard stories relating to the GDC from colleagues, which influenced their perceptions.

Figure 2-2: Factors influencing perceptions of the GDC, by length of time on the register (n=1,349)
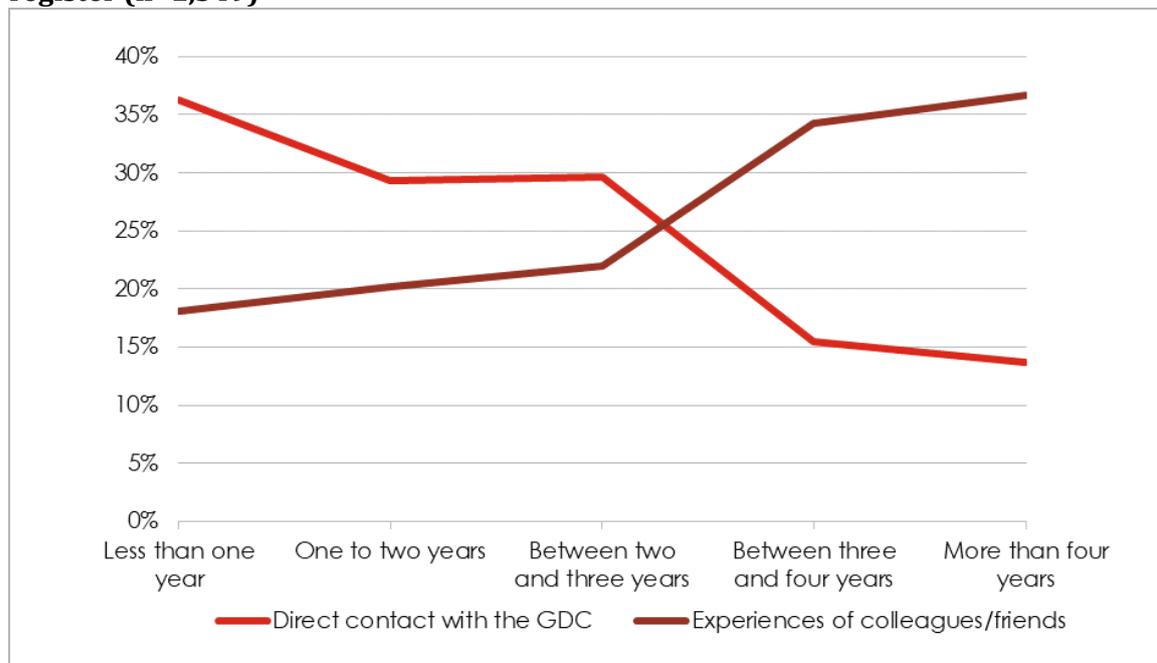
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

Direct contact with the GDC

2.12 **Interviewees reported different instances in which they have had direct contact with the GDC.** Broadly, these can be defined as GDC registration and/or renewal processes, involvement in the FtP process, sending general enquiries via the GDC's online contact form, attendance at regulatory and strategic consultations hosted by the GDC, and receiving broader communication disseminated by the GDC such as through its monthly newsletter or website.

Direct contact with the GDC - communications

2.13 **Overall, survey respondents agreed that GDC communications were generally effective**, with a majority of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with each statement provided (Figure 2-3). Three-quarters reported that the GDC communicates through the right

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this instance, the length of time an ECP is registered with the GDC and the factor which influence perceptions of the GDC).

channels, and a similar proportion (74%) reported that its communications provide relevant information.

Figure 2-3: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements: GDC communications... (n= 1,310 – 1,290)
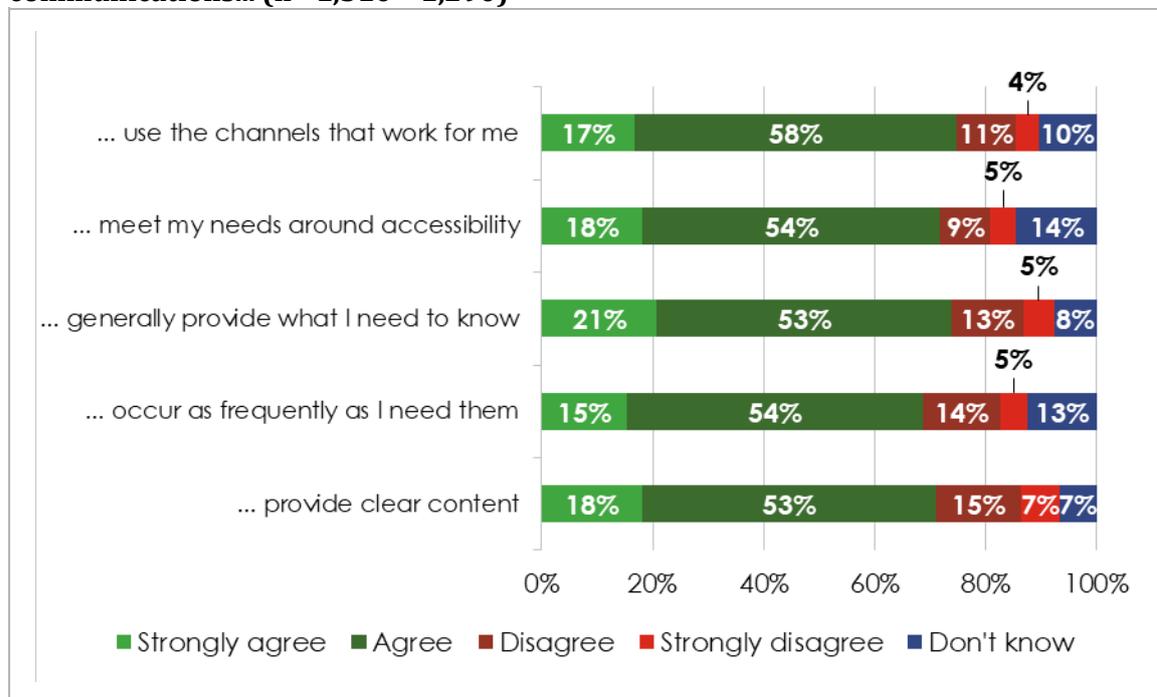
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

2.14 **Positive sentiment towards GDC communications was reflected in the interviews**, with most interviewees responding in the survey that they agreed or strongly agreed that GDC communications generally provided what they needed to know. In interviews, some mentioned that relevant information was readily available, often via the GDC website, and that the GDC was easily contactable if information was unclear.

> *"The information they provide on their website is exactly as you need to know. All the information is readily available, and when I was registering any information I needed was available. The caseworker when I registered was easy to contact if I had any questions."*
> *ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for less than one year)*

2.15 Some also mentioned how email updates from the GDC were useful for understanding the most recent changes in the dental sector, and the impact the changes could potentially have on their profession.

> *"Any information they provide they send through emails. Everything went well so far. They are very straightforward and send information – everything is there, everything on the website – you are informed straight away about any changes or any issues."*
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for two-three years)*

> *"It was very helpful when they brought their stance – a statement about patients buying direct consumer orthodontics. (...) The statement they brought [out], this was very helpful. Most Dentists feel the same way. Clear statements like this that we can direct our patients to – that was quite nice."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for two-three years)**

2.16 In responding to the survey, some agreed that GDC communications generally provided what they needed to know, but were subsequently more critical of GDC communications in the follow-up interview. Some reflected on a particular instance in which they felt the GDC did not provide sufficient information, either in the FtP or registration processes. Another couple suggested that the content of communications provided by the GDC was irrelevant to their role or not sufficiently engaging. This aligns with findings from the Experiences of GDC Fitness to Practise report, where GDC guidance around FtP was described as overly technical and the tone of communication was identified as an area for improvement[18].

> *"I've only become aware of the newsletter this year because I signed up, and I don't see any other guidance aside from that. Other engagement could be improved, and I think there is a disjoin when they could be showing more positive developments, but they seem like a very cold organisation, even if the people behind it are lovely."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)**

2.17 Slightly more interviewees stated in the survey that GDC communications did not provide what they needed to know, than those who said they did. A few believed that the communications provided by the GDC were not relevant for their role, particularly for those in DCP roles. One interviewee noted how a perceived lack of relevant information for DCPs compared to Dentists impacts on how they view themselves as a professional.

> *"A lot of information from the GDC is literally for the Dentists. I get it – obviously they are the first port of call – Technicians, Nurses, [are] always seen behind the Dentist. But the information for us is pretty much non-existent as well. [...] You end up feeling kind of left behind."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)**

2.18 Others mentioned how the limited amount of communication contributed towards their perceptions of value for money from registration fees, and felt that more frequent communication would help to justify the fees.

> *"I suppose the answer is that there is no communication. I get sent the email by them (quarterly or something with updates) but I don't think I hear anything from them apart from that update."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)**

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[18] Finn, G. et al (2022) Experiences of GDC fitness to practise participants 2015 – 2021: A realist study

2.19 Registration is mandatory to be a practising dental professional in the UK. **The experiences of the registration process varied substantially among survey respondents and interviewees.** The majority of survey respondents were either satisfied or neutral with regards to the different elements of registration. The length of time it took to register was the part of the process that caused the greatest level of dissatisfaction.

Figure 2-4: ECP satisfaction with elements of the initial GDC registration process (n=1,280-1,272)
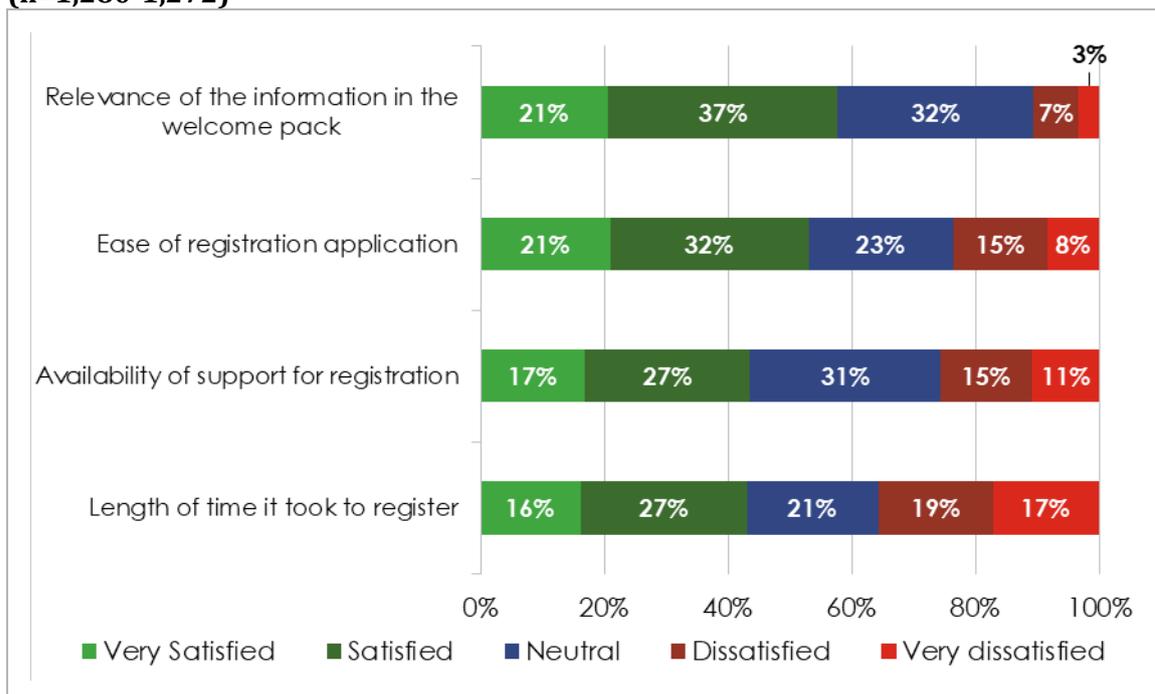
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

2.20 According to the survey, **satisfaction with the initial registration process appears to be dependent on the individual's route to registration,** which varies based on the role they are applying for (Dentist or DCP) and their area of qualification (UK, EEA, or outside of the UK and EEA). UK-qualified ECPs interviewed reported how the registration process had been relatively straightforward, resulting in a positive overall perception of the GDC.

> *"The process for registration the initial time was really smooth, I didn't have any difficulties."*
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for less than one year)**
>
> *"Process was simple and smooth, the [member of GDC registration staff] I had was really good. Everything was good. The emails and communication from them were really accurate and [contained] no jargon, everything was good."*
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for less than one year)**

2.21 In comparison, **satisfaction with the initial registration process, particularly the length of time to register, was generally lower among people who qualified outside the EEA** (Figure 2-5). These professionals are required to pass the ORE before being eligible for registration as an Overseas Qualified Dentist, and the ORE was identified by several interviewees as an important factor influencing their negative perception of the GDC. In particular, they mentioned difficulties in applying for the ORE, and the delays in registration with the GDC as a result.

> *"Initially, I thought the UK Dental Council must be good because it is an institution. I'm trying to apply for my ORE exam at the moment but it is taking so long. Every time my colleagues have tried to apply, the GDC server crashes, which is unacceptable."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Therapist, registered for less than one year)***
>
> *"Back in my country I am a Dentist, I've spent 7 months now waiting for applications to register as a Dentist and Dental Hygienist or Therapist to be approved without any sort of update from them or anything. (...) They are too slow to process anything."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for one-two years)***

Figure 2-5: Survey respondent satisfaction with length of time it took them to register with the GDC, by region of qualification (n=1,278)
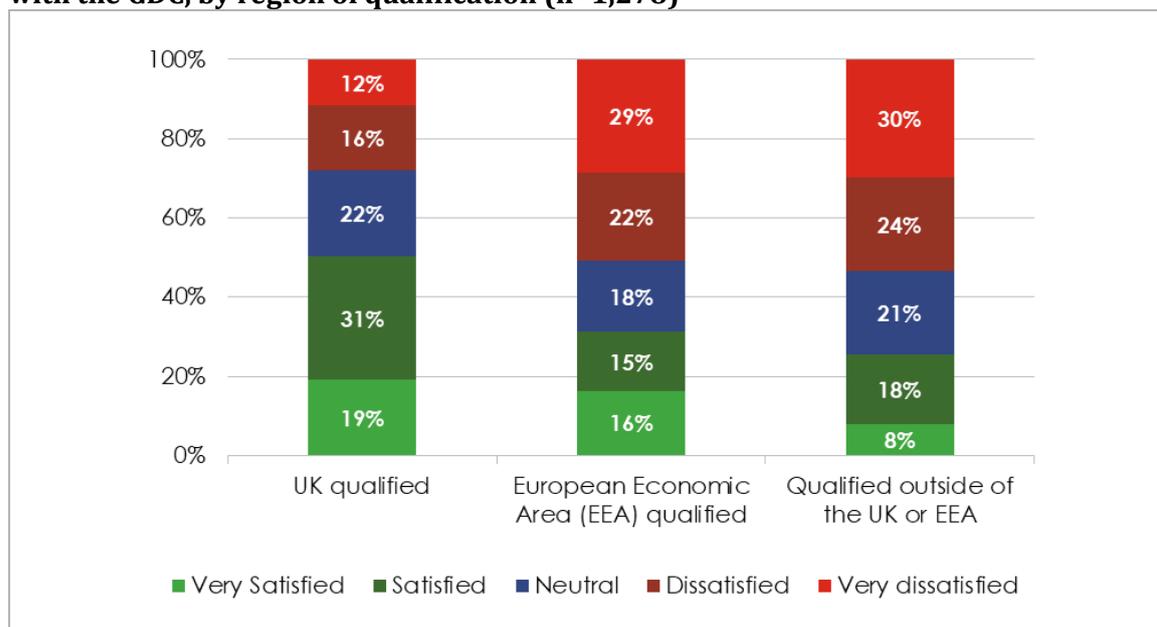
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

2.22 A handful of ECP interviewees mentioned their own difficulties with the registration process (including issues with payment, poor GDC registration staff communication, and delays with receiving their certificate of registration), although they still retained overall positive perceptions of the GDC, stating that they deemed other factors to be more influential.

Direct contact with the GDC – CPD requirements

2.23 In addition to registration, all dental professionals registered with the GDC must complete a minimum number of verifiable CPD hours every five-year cycle, depending on their registered title[19]. The process for recording and submitting CPD hours was highlighted by some survey respondents and interviewees as one of the primary ways in which they communicate with the GDC. **Broadly, interviewees who mentioned CPD requirements were happy with the process and felt this had a positive impact on their perceptions**.

> *"I think we are keeping up to date with anything changing about registration and CPD, e.g. if something is due next year then they will talk about it a couple of months before which is really helpful."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for one-two years)**

2.24 The impact of CPD requirements on the professional practice of ECPs is discussed further in Section 3.

Direct contact with the GDC - Other GDC communication activities

2.25 The GDC also communicates with dental professionals in other ways, including through new registrant engagement sessions and consultations on regulatory and strategic proposals.

2.26 Figure 2-6 shows that **survey respondents who had been involved in GDC consultations generally believed that the sessions had been valuable.** More than three-quarters of survey respondents (77%) who had taken part in a consultation believed that it had helped to increase their understanding of the GDC, and nearly two-thirds (63%) reported an improved perception of the GDC as a result of their participation in a consultation activity. However, a relatively small proportion of survey respondents reported having taken part in a consultation activity. One interviewee who had participated in a consultation exercise mentioned that an increasing number of consultations by the GDC has helped to demonstrate that the GDC values the opinions of its registrants.

> *"The fact they're doing more consultations shows they care, and are taking more things onboard."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)**

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[19] More details can be found at https://www.gdc-uk.org/education-cpd/cpd/enhanced-cpd-scheme-2018/

Figure 2-6: Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that your involvement in the consultation(s) has... (n=160-159)
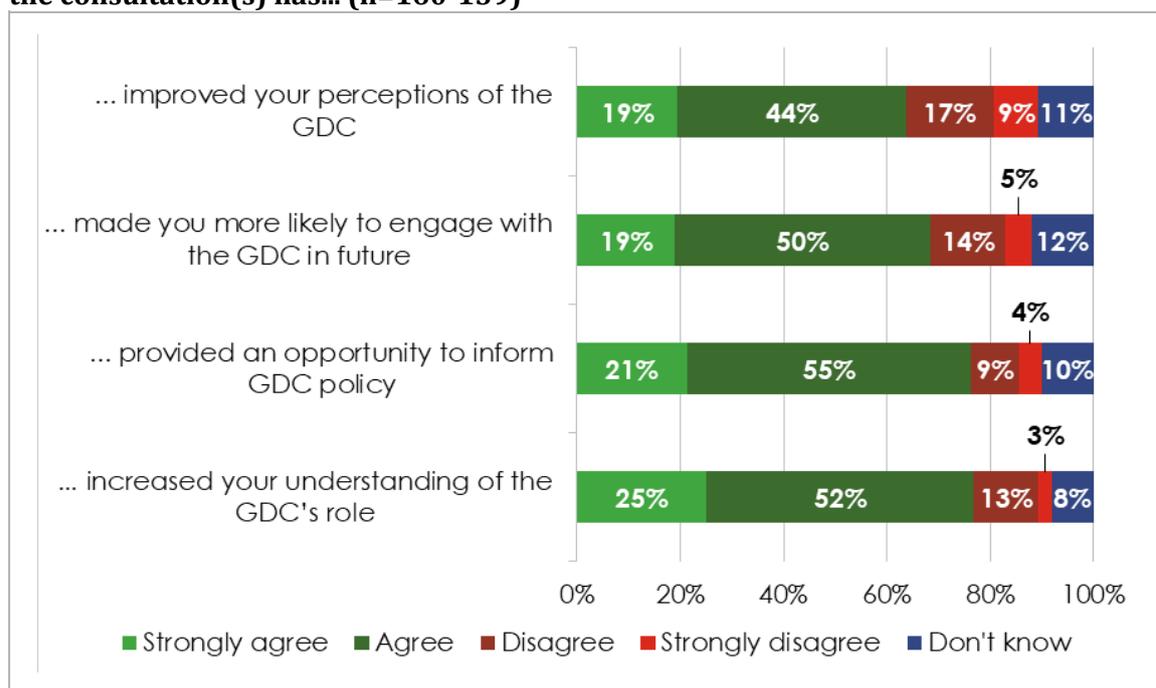
Experiences of friends and colleagues

2.27 **The experience of friends and colleagues was reported by nearly a quarter of survey respondents (24%) as being the most influential factor in their perception of the GDC.** This was particularly true for those who reported having had limited contact with the GDC themselves, but who knew people who had either had more contact (including being involved in a FtP investigation) or who shared their opinions with them.

2.28 Generally, ECPs interviewed who felt positively or very positively about the GDC were not influenced by word of mouth or the opinions of colleagues, or if they were, they noted negative perceptions among colleagues but that they themselves were unaffected by this. Only a couple of ECP interviewees reported word of mouth as a factor that had a positive impact on their perception.

2.29 Instead, the survey results show that **respondents who had their views influenced by the experiences of friends or colleagues typically held a more negative perception of the GDC** (Figure 2-7). Interestingly, the GDC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic had a greater influence on the views of those who perceive the GDC positively.

Figure 2-7: The most influential factor affecting views of the GDC, by overall perception (n=1,466)
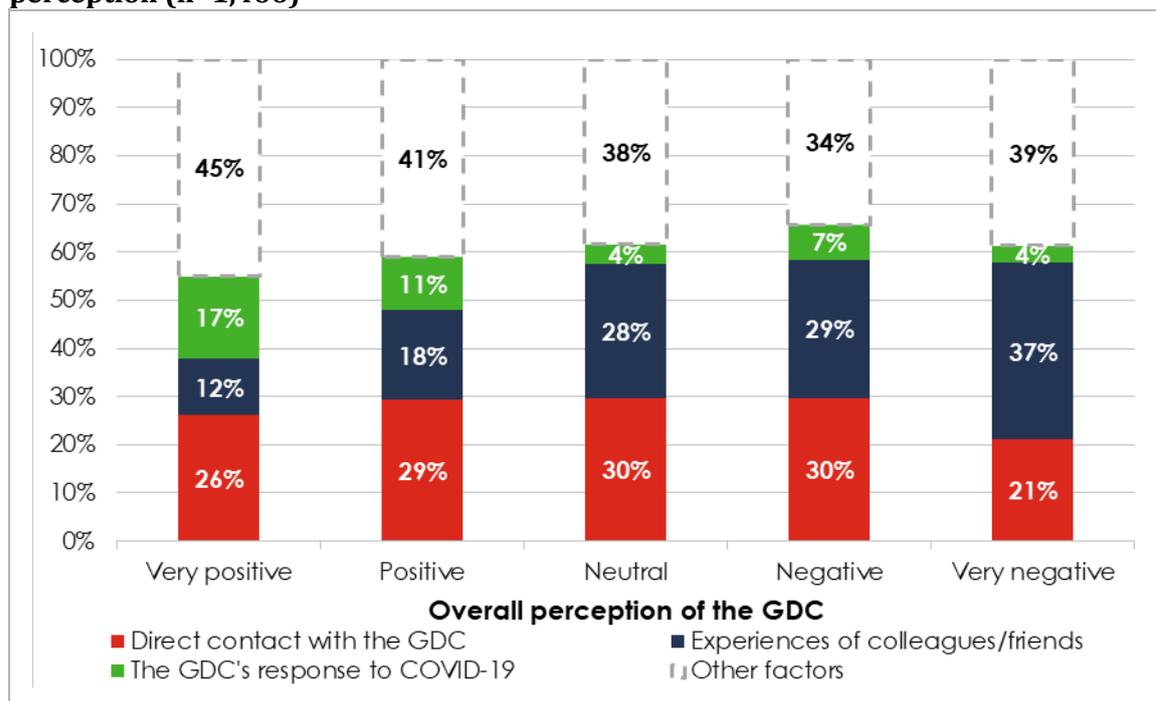
2.30 This **pattern regarding the influence of friends and colleagues is supported by evidence from interviews**, in which a number of interviewees referred to negative stories and anecdotes about the GDC from colleagues/friends, mostly relating to the regulator's role in patient complaints and how they conduct FtP investigations. Some interviewees mentioned that they had colleagues in practice who had been involved in a FtP investigation or who were recounting the experiences they had heard from elsewhere.

> *"I'm hearing these stories from colleagues who have been in the system for a while. No one has anything positive to say about the GDC. I haven't experienced the FtP process myself, but I think it is more tailored towards being on the side of the patients rather than the Dentist."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for one-two years)**
>
> *"Most of the colleagues I've spoken to in the practice, they don't like the GDC that much. When I was a Nurse, Dentists were saying 'the GDC use private investigators to look into cases' – no one was happy about that."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for one-two years)**

2.31 A few interviewees also mentioned how they had **heard negative experiences of the GDC from Dentists and DCPs outside of practice**, including in the education system and through social media such as WhatsApp. Similarly, these experiences related to FtP processes.

> *"I have heard horror stories about the GDC. In my Masters and PhD, I have been told that the GDC is only looking out for the patients, and not for the Dentists. They don't care about us, because patients could walk in and say whatever they want, and the GDC will be on their side."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Therapist, registered for two-three years)**

2.32 For ECPs that felt neutrally about the GDC, this was largely due to a **lack of interactions or direct experience with the GDC**; these ECPs generally only reported interacting with the GDC when they first registered or when paying renewal fees. There were a number of ECPs that reported hearing negative views regarding the GDC from colleagues, but given their own lack of direct experience, their perception of the GDC remained neutral.

> *"It is mainly because I don't have much contact or communication with them. Apart from the original registration, since then there has been the occasional email, but I haven't had any other contact, just the once a year when I have to register. I have heard stories from the past about the GDC being very regulatory and strict, but from my perspective, it has just been very neutral, there hasn't been any contact."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for less than one year)**

The GDC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

2.33 In survey responses, **the GDC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was more frequently cited as the most influential factor in determining the views of people who held a positive perception of the GDC**, when compared to those with an overall negative perception, as noted above (Figure 4-7). This is despite the impact of COVID-19 on the ORE routeway, including difficulties in applying and delays to processes, which some interviewees who qualified outside of the UK reported as a reason why they held a negative view of the GDC.

2.34 Several interviewees said that they appreciated how the GDC communicated during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing timely guidance as changes to public health measures were made. Further insights into the GDC's response to COVID-19, including learning for the GDC going forward, are provided in Section 4.

> *"Again, they kept up to date with the support during COVID-19. It was a really hard time. Obviously we had no idea how to work safely with this new virus. The GDC put out as much as they could in order to help support [us]."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for one-two years)**

General GDC support and other GDC activities

2.35 In addition to the themes already stated, some interviewees identified specific factors which contributed towards their overall opinion of the GDC. Their perceptions centred on:

- **Registration/renewal rates** being perceived as too high, particularly in comparison with other regulatory bodies such as the General Medical Council (GMC).

- A **perceived lack of overall support** for dental professionals, particularly according to Dentist interviewees.

- **Poor communication when reaching out with specific questions or issues**, including individual instances or interactions with the GDC, where the regulator was seen as being unhelpful, unsupportive or impersonal.

> *"Generally, Dentists feel like they constantly up against it – we don't feel that they [GDC] fully do support us."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)***
>
> *"Young Dentists, and all Dentists, generally find that the GDC doesn't really support us as a profession. Their charges are quite high but I'm not sure what they are doing."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)***
>
> *"The delay of the GDC actually getting back to people is the main problem. When they do get back to you, sometimes they will just answer your question with more questions or several links. It is a communication challenge."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for one-two years)***

Knowledge of the GDC

2.36 **More than 80% of all survey respondents reported being very confident or quite confident in their understanding of the GDC's role as a regulator**, and more than three quarters (76%) reported **increased knowledge about the GDC since they first registered**. Survey respondents were generally the least confident in understanding the GDC's role in investigating concerns about FtP, although it was still a minority of respondents that did not feel confident in their understanding (18% felt either not very or not at all confident).

2.37 **Most interviewees felt they fully understood the GDC's role.** Those who reported that they did not fully understand its role typically had a foundational understanding of its regulatory role and the requirements for registration and CPD, but reported more limited knowledge of what the GDC does more broadly.

2.38 Interestingly, amongst interviewees the most frequently reported gap centred more on a lack of knowledge of how the GDC goes about fulfilling its functions than the role of the GDC itself, specifically around how registration fees are spent by the GDC. This is illustrated in the below quotes:

> *"I pay money towards them, it would be nice to actually know exactly what that money is for."*
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for two-three years)***
>
> *"I don't know what day to day the GDC does, I know the bigger picture of their role but I don't now specifically what they do for Dentists and public health patients."*
>
> **ECP interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)**

2.39 **The majority of interviewees reported they had become became more knowledgeable about the role of the GDC since they first registered.** Nine interviewees reported feeling no more knowledgeable of the GDC's role compared to when they first registered. Of these nine, five have been registered for less than one year, and five are registered as Dentists.

2.40 Some of these interviewees mentioned that they were **no more knowledgeable about the GDC because they had received a lot of information during their education/training**, and so they felt they already had a good understanding of the GDC's role prior to registration. The remaining interviewees who felt no more knowledgeable reported receiving limited communication and engagement from the GDC, and so felt they had not gained any knowledge since registration.

> *"So when I started my Dental Nurse course I got a dentistry book and there is a whole chapter on the GDC. That is the first introduction to it, as you go through the course there are then different modules."*
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)***

Factors influencing knowledge of the GDC

2.41 Those interviewees who reported becoming more knowledgeable of the GDC's role highlighted factors which had informed their understanding, including:

- **Information from education and training courses (15 interviewees).** This was mentioned by a number of UK-qualified Dental Nurses who qualified via the National Examining Board for Dental Nurses (NEBDN), which features content on the role of the GDC as part of its curriculum. Others mentioned GDC engagement as part of their course, including distribution of materials and resources (e.g. the GDC standards book).

- **Conducting own research while on the job (12 interviewees).** Some interviewees reported having learnt more through searching for information via different sources. This research was typically initiated by problems or questions which ECPs came across in the workplace.

> *"For example, I didn't know how to upload my CPD, I thought it would all be done by the head Nurse, so I had a quick look through the site and realised it was my responsibility. Before I*

> *registered, I had never had a look, but when I did have look through the website, it was all self-explanatory."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)**

- **Learning from colleagues and friends (11 interviewees).** The experiences of colleagues with the GDC have informed the understanding of the GDC's remit and processes among ECPs. This is not only in relation to processes like FtP, but also the broader roles of the GDC and ways in which ECPs can engage with the regulator.

> *"As time went on and I continued to work in practice and hearing colleagues talk about it, it gave me more of an understanding on what they [the GDC] can do and what they can help you with."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for one-two years)**

2.42 Other factors reported to have affected knowledge were:

- ➢ Involvement in GDC processes such as registration, CPD and FtP.
- ➢ Preparation for job interviews where knowledge of the GDC was assessed.
- ➢ Learning on the job, particularly in relation to how the GDC sets standards of conduct, performance and ethics.

> *"As time has gone on and I understand things to do with (say) cross contamination for example, it's a huge thing for us. Reading it in a book vs. seeing it practice – the GDC says 'these things must be done, you need to meet these standards'. Seeing it in practice, you realise the importance of having that and having that structure there."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for three-four years)**
>
> *"Other people in the office, I have other students who can't work in the UK, and they are constantly updating me on the latest updates. I am on WhatsApp groups which have overseas students, and some people summarise what has been said, so we're constantly seeing the latest [updates]."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Therapist, registered for two-three years)**

Information sources which have informed understanding

2.43 **Several information sources were noted by interviewees to have helped inform ECP understanding about the GDC's role.** The perceptions of colleagues were influential in informing the understanding of many ECP interviewees, particularly those who otherwise reported having limited knowledge of the GDC. This was not only from colleagues within practice, but also from peers from education/training or within social groups.

2.44 A few interviewees mentioned that **word of mouth via social media** has informed their understanding of the GDC. Platforms were mentioned including Facebook, X (Twitter), Reddit, and Quora, where ECPs reported there are shared/heard about experiences and opinions of the GDC.

2.45 **Direct communications from the GDC were also reported as having informed understanding.** Interviewees mentioned a range of different forms of communication, each of which had its own purpose and informed understanding in different ways. In order of frequency mentioned, sources cited were:

- Newsletters/email updates, especially in understanding the most recent updates and changes (e.g. in regulation).

- The GDC website, especially in finding specific information in relation to questions (e.g. specific wording from the standards)

- Registration booklet, especially in helping to set out relevant background information.

- Communication with the GDC via email or telephone, particularly in answering questions regarding registration.

- GDC consultations and research.

- Posters/leaflets displayed in the workplace environment.

2.46 **Information distributed by other organisations and stakeholders within the dental sector has also helped to inform ECP understanding of the GDC.** This includes bodies such as indemnity insurance providers, the British Dental Association and the NHS, as well as articles and journals published by academia.

3. Upstream activity and promoting professionalism

3.1 This chapter outlines key findings in relation to the GDC's upstream and prevention activities and their work with students and ECPs to promote professionalism.

Summary

Preparedness for practice

- ECPs generally felt well prepared for professional practice at the time of initial registration. This varied by profession, with 92% of Dental Nurse, 87% of Dental Therapist and 86% of Dental Hygienist respondents feeling very well or quite well prepared, whereas the figure for Dentists was 74%.

- ECP interviewees attributed their sense of preparedness to their education or training, rather than specific action by the GDC.

- ECP interviewees felt the GDC could have helped them feel more prepared by hosting information sessions for new registrants, providing more support to registrants from abroad to adjust to the UK context, and providing more information and guidance to new registrants in relation to litigation.

Promoting professionalism

- Approximately half of the ECP interviewees who qualified in the UK felt it would have been helpful to have had more student outreach/interactive sessions by the GDC.

- While only 6% of survey respondents reported attending a GDC student engagement session, most of those that attended found it to be useful in promoting professionalism.

Impact on professional practice

- GDC activities such as setting standards for dental education and training, providing guidance on CPD, and providing guidance for dental professionals (among others) were reported to have had a positive or very positive impact on professional practice.

- The longer a survey respondent had been registered with the GDC, the less positively and more negatively they viewed the impact of the GDC's activities on the services and treatments they provide.

Impact on professional identity

- Approximately half of ECPs interviewed reported that being registered with and regulated by the GDC had an impact on how they see themselves as a professional or how they go about their professional practice.

- The impact of being registered with the GDC on professional identity was reported to be particularly important and positive for ECPs who had trained or practiced abroad.

Upstream and prevention activity

3.2 This section explores the impact of the GDC's actions in moving regulation upstream, as well as ECP views on their own preparedness for professional practice at the point of registration.

3.3 Across the GDC's strategic documentation, there is a strong commitment to improving upstream and prevention activity. For example, the 2017 Shifting the Balance report[20] set out a range of actions related to the GDC's upstream activity, and in the 2020-2022 Corporate Strategy[21] the GDC also set out what they have achieved in relation to this area, specifically: establishing new and better channels for digital and face-to-face engagement; a broader, more open and transparent approach to consulting on emerging policy and strategy; introducing an improved scheme for CPD; and a more proportionate and efficient system of regulation.

Preparedness for practice

3.4 **ECPs generally reported feeling well prepared for professional practice at the time of initial registration.** Across all survey respondents, 86% reported being either very well (39%) or quite well (47%) prepared for professional practice at registration, as outlined in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1: Views on their own preparedness for professional practice at initial registration among ECP survey respondents

Preparedness for professional practice	No. of survey respondents	% of survey respondents
Very well prepared	449	39%
Quite well prepared	535	47%
Not very well prepared	120	10%
Not at all prepared	14	1%
Don't know	29	3%
Total	**1147**	**100%**

Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

3.5 However, these **views varied depending on the role of the ECP**. Of the four largest groups of registrants, 92% of Nurses, 87% of Dental Therapists and 86% of Dental Hygienists responding to the survey felt very well prepared or quite well prepared. In contrast, **Dentists felt the least prepared**; while 74% of Dentists responding to the survey felt very or quite well prepared, 21% felt not very well or not at all prepared, as outlined in Figure 3-1. According to survey responses, views on preparedness for practice did not appear to vary by area of qualification.

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[20] GDC (2017) Shifting the Balance
[21] GDC (2020) Corporate Strategy 2020-2022

Figure 3-1: Views on preparedness for professional practice at initial registration among ECP survey respondents, by role (n=1,147)[22]
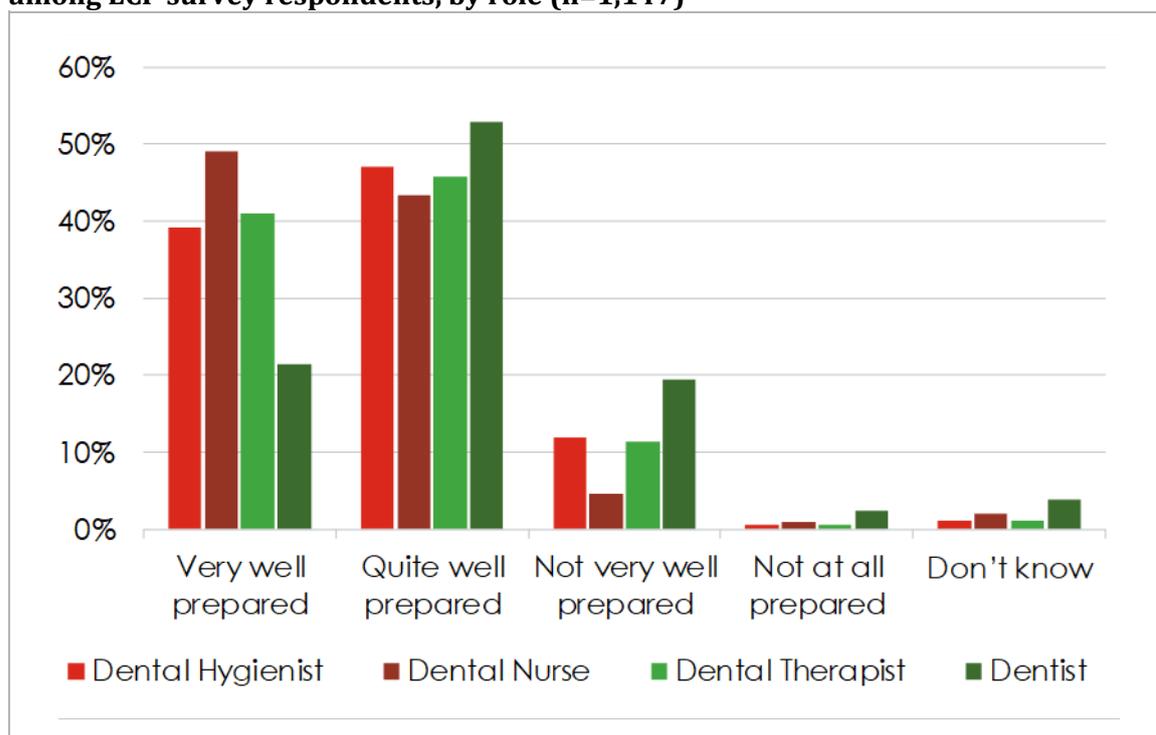
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

3.6 Of the geographic regions with at least 50 survey respondents, only 8% of those who work in the South East reported being not very or not at all prepared for practice, whilst this was reported to a greater extent elsewhere, including in Yorkshire and the Humber (17%), as outlined in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2: Views on preparedness for professional practice at initial registration among ECP survey respondents, by region (n=1,065)

Region (number of responses)	Very well prepared	Quite well prepared	Not very well prepared	Not at all prepared	Don't know
England - East Midlands (73)	38%	41%	15%	0%	5%
England - East of England (58)	47%	45%	9%	0%	0%
England – London (172)	36%	51%	10%	2%	1%
England - North East (48)	40%	40%	10%	6%	4%
England - North West (95)	36%	48%	9%	2%	4%

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[22] This graph only contains responses from the four largest groups of professions represented among survey respondents – Dental Nurses, Dentists, Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists.

Region (number of responses)	Very well prepared	Quite well prepared	Not very well prepared	Not at all prepared	Don't know
England - South East (151)	47%	44%	7%	1%	2%
England - South West (132)	44%	45%	11%	0%	1%
England - West Midlands (90)	37%	49%	10%	0%	4%
England - Yorkshire and Humberside (63)	32%	49%	16%	2%	2%
Northern Ireland (27)	30%	52%	19%	0%	0%
Scotland (83)	42%	46%	10%	2%	0%
Wales (33)	36%	61%	3%	0%	0%
Outside the UK (28)	57%	29%	11%	0%	4%
Prefer not to say (10)	20%	50%	20%	0%	10%
Total	**39%**	**47%**	**10%**	**1%**	**3%**

Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey (excluding regions with <10 respondents)

3.7 Interviews with ECPs explored these views in more detail. In line with the survey findings in Table 3-1**, the majority of ECPs interviewed felt prepared for professional practice when they registered with the GDC.** This was largely reported as being related to their education or training, as opposed to any engagement with or materials from the GDC. This was consistent across all dental professions consulted.

3.8 In particular, interviewees who had trained outside the UK reported feeling very well prepared at registration, due to their previous work experience.

> *"I had 3- or 4-years' experience in my own country, so I didn't need training from a clinical point of view, but only on how the system works in the UK."*
> *ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for three-four years)*

3.9 However, a smaller number of ECPs interviewed reported that they did not feel well prepared for professional practice upon initial registration, and attributed this to factors including:

- **Issues with their education and training**, particularly around a lack of practical or applied focus during their education/training.

- **Having to adjust to the UK system and the GDC rules and regulations** (for registrants trained abroad).

- **A lack of guidance** on how the rules and regulations work in practice.

> *"I think it is mainly understanding the rules and regulations. We are basically left to do it through the CPD. I feel like they could give more direction in what topics we should focus on."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for three-four years)**

3.10 When asked **how the GDC could have contributed to helping ECPs feel more prepared**, interviewees shared a number of suggestions, including:

- Holding information sessions for new registrants.

> *"I think the GDC has already got everything on their website, but it depends on the person as to when they will read the information. I think the GDC could make it a condition that you read the information, and maybe they could think about holding a webinar or seminar for people to explain the main GDC roles and regulations for upcoming new registrants."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Therapist, registered for one-two years)**

- Providing more support to registrants from overseas to adjust to the UK context[23].

> *"They could offer free workshops for those people registered as Dental Hygienists to give them an idea of how things work in the UK. Everywhere you work in the world, there are different protocols that you need to follow."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for less than one year)**

- Providing more information and guidance to new registrants in relation to FtP processes and litigation (as opposed to clinical guidance).

> *"Clinically, no [...] Probably more on that responsibility and litigation side; actually explaining the processes, etc. One of the biggest problems I find amongst my peers is worrying about the GDC and getting sued essentially; the GDC need to deal with that."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)**

- Providing more general information and guidance for new registrants.

> *"They could maybe produce some guidelines or induction when you're first registering. I know the university does assist in that transition, but even just some practical outlines saying 'make sure you have your indemnity', and that 'these are what the requirements are' etc. Just giving them an idea on what to expect in the first year – that will help [the GDC] to be seen as a supportive organisation."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)**

3.11 **A small number of ECP interviewees also reported that they felt other organisations could have helped them feel more prepared**; this was mainly related to universities or training institutions providing more of an emphasis on work placements and practical application, rather than theory. However, as noted in the 2020 Preparedness for Practice of

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[23] This was an action listed in the 2017 'Shifting the balance' report, for the GDC to develop materials for registrants who have trained outside the UK to ease their transition into practising here.

UK Graduates report[24], there are barriers to increasing clinical experience at an undergraduate level, including a full curriculum, lack of patients suitable for student treatment, and cost and resource limitations. This review ultimately indicated, however, that increasing the breadth and depth of clinical experience would be beneficial.

3.12 In terms of whether ECP views on their own preparedness for clinical practice had changed during their first year of registration, the vast majority of ECP interviewees reported that their view had not changed (i.e. they continued to feel as prepared as they had at registration).

Promoting professionalism

3.13 In terms of professionalism, **evidence from scoping consultees and documents highlights the increased focus by the GDC on promoting professionalism amongst students and ECPs**. A range of activities were identified as being undertaken to support this, including (but not limited to) conferences and dentistry shows, presentations as part of student and new registrant engagement, communications including newsletters, and revising the registration welcome pack. In relation to the student and new registrant engagement programme, the GDC presents to students and trainees to explain their remit, their focus on upstream and preventative regulatory activities, and the importance of professionalism to both patients and professionals[25].

Student and new registrant engagement

3.14 Of the 23 ECP interviewees who qualified in the UK, **approximately half felt it would have been helpful to have had more outreach from the GDC while they were studying, or interactive sessions led by someone from the GDC**, to increase the regulator's presence and visibility among university students:

> *"Perhaps they could bring reps from the GDC that we could interact with [whilst studying]. Most of the teaching was through our own teachers, they would give us lectures on how to be professionals – but maybe someone from the GDC come in for the day, give a lecture themselves – that could be an idea."*
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for two-three years)***
>
> *"If they had the capacity, they could do things like online workshops or seminars to ease people in. When you have been a student, you are very closeted. (…) I could have had a bit of hand holding from the GDC to make that transition."*
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Technician, registered for less than one year***

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[24] GDC (2020) Preparedness for Practice of UK Graduates Report 2020.
[25] GDC (2022) Building positive relationships with the next generation of dental professionals.

> *"I think before it would have maybe been nice to have an introduction to the GDC about who and what they are. You just kept hearing 'the GDC', you never had a welcome and 'this is what you are aiming for, and this is what you do'. Never had a proper introduction, just get straight into your training. Even a short video from someone or a pamphlet or someone coming out to speak, but the latter is harder. Even if they could do a short video to show throughout courses or give you a quick introduction [that would be useful]."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)***

3.15 However, some ECP interviewees who qualified in the UK did not feel there was anything more the GDC could have done to engage with them while they were students.

3.16 Previous stakeholder perceptions research identified a number of misconceptions among students and new registrants with regards to the role of the GDC[26]. Partly in response to these findings, the GDC expanded its student and new registrant engagement programme for UK-qualified dental professionals by developing new content, expanding the range of communication activities it delivers, and broadening its reach to include all roles within the dental team[27].

3.17 New registrant engagement sessions are currently only delivered by the GDC to Dentists, and as such questions on this topic in the survey were split for Dentists and DCPs, covering only student engagement sessions with DCPs, and student engagement and new registrant engagement sessions with Dentists.

3.18 **Overall, feedback from attendees at the student engagement (and new registrant sessions for Dentists) was positive.** For DCPs, a relatively small proportion (6%) of survey respondents (n=43) reported attending a GDC student engagement session, while the majority (558, 81%) reported not having attended any. The highest proportion of those who had attended were registered as either a Dental Nurse and/or Dental Therapist (acknowledging that individuals could be registered under more than one role).

3.19 Among those who attended student engagement events, 88% reported that they strongly agreed or agreed that the session gave them a better understanding of the importance of professionalism to patients, while 87% strongly agreed or agreed that the session gave them a better understanding of the importance of professionalism to professionals, as outlined in Figure 3-2.

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[26] DJS Research (2021) GDC Stakeholder Perceptions Research
[27] More information on the programme available at: Building positive relationships with the next generation of dental professionals

Figure 3-2: Views on student engagement sessions among ECP respondents (DCPs only) who reported taking part in a session (n=43)
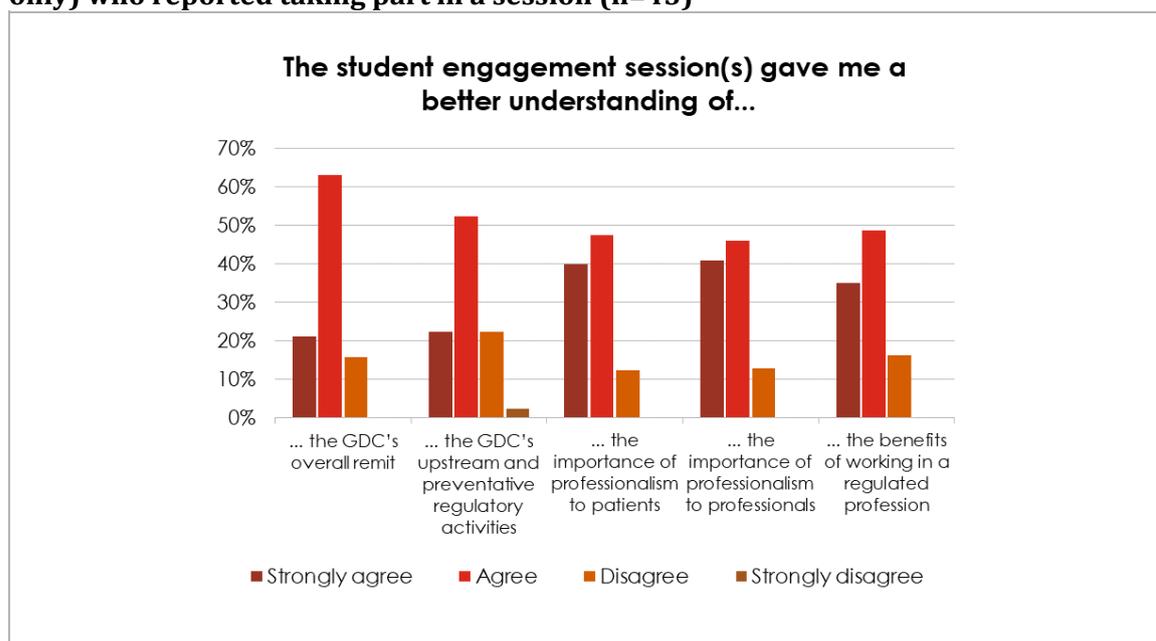
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

3.20 Meanwhile for Dentists, approximately 25% (50 of 201) of UK qualified Dentists had attended at least one student engagement or new registrant engagement session, with 14 having attended both, three attending only new registrant engagement sessions and 33 only attending student engagement sessions. Similar to DCPs, excluding 'don't know responses', more than half of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, as shown in Figure 3-3.

Figure 3-3: Views on student and new registrant engagement sessions among ECP respondents (UK qualified Dentists only) who reported taking part in a session (n=48-49)
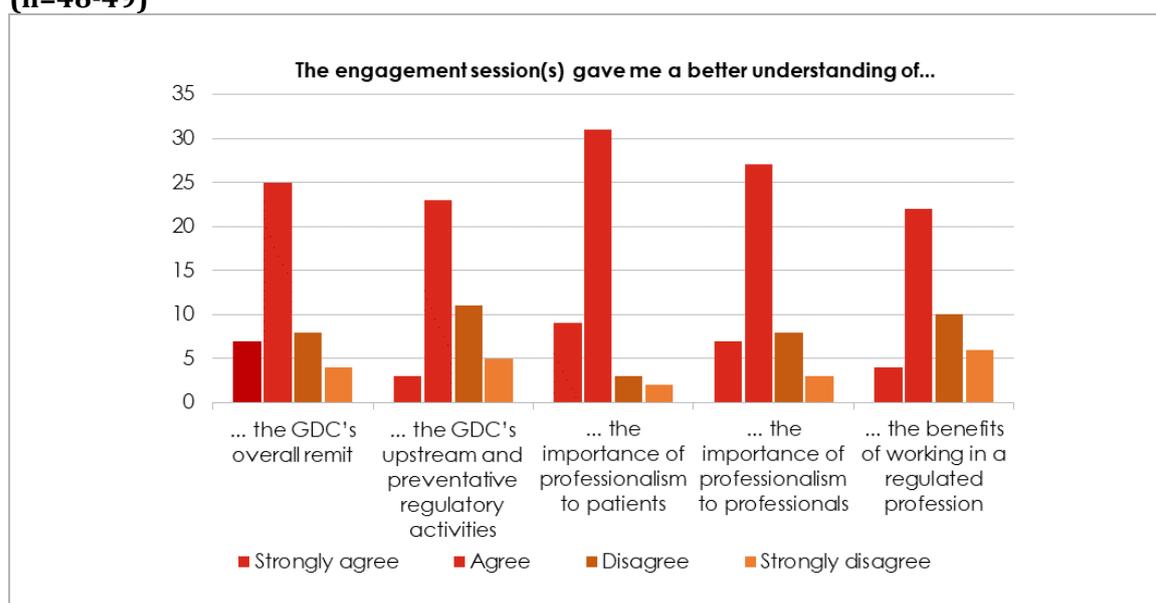
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

Professional practice and identity

3.21 This section explores the impact of ECP views and experiences of, and attitudes towards, the GDC on their own professional practice and professional identity.

Impact on professional practice

3.22 The survey explored ECP views on the **impact of six GDC activities on their professional practice**, namely:

- Setting the standards for dental education and training.

- Ensuring that providers are meeting the standards for dental education and training.

- Investigating concerns about FtP.

- Providing guidance on CPD.

- Setting the standards for the dental team.

- Providing guidance for dental professionals.

3.23 **GDC activities were viewed as having a positive impact in these six areas**, with >60% of survey respondents reporting that the GDC's activities had a positive or very positive impact, as outlined in Figure 3-4.

Figure 3-4: Views on the impact of GDC activities among ECP survey respondents (n=1,118)
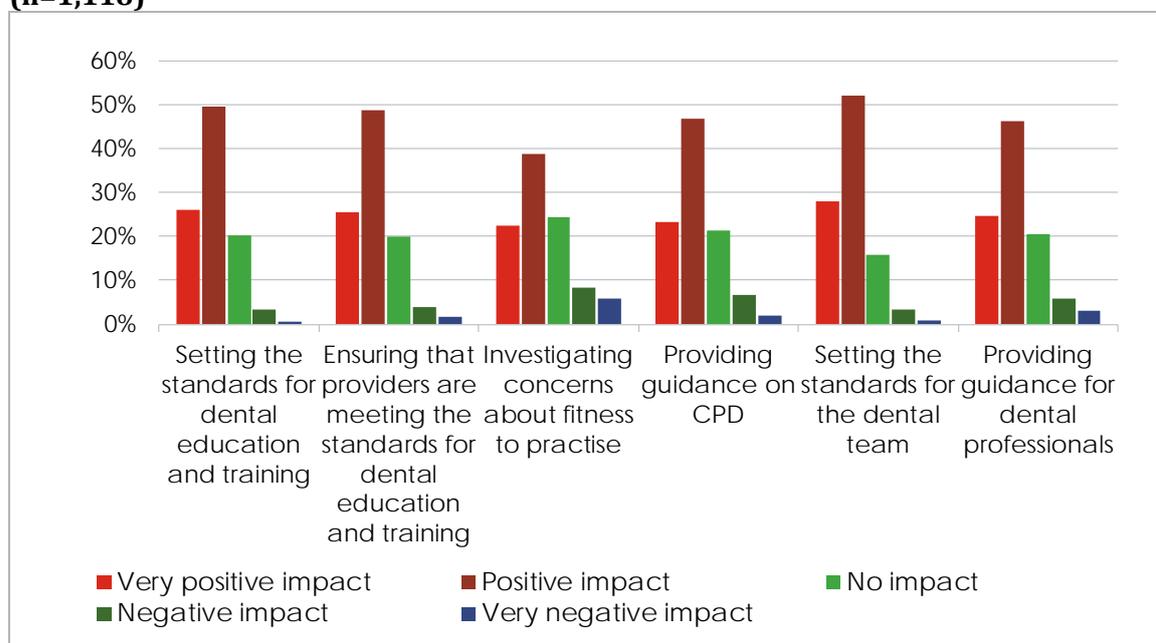
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

3.24 **When asked about the GDC's activities and the overall impact these had on the services or treatments they provide, survey respondents were generally positive**, with 21% reporting they had a very positive impact, and 43% reporting a positive impact. However, this

varied by profession. Whilst over 70% of Dental Nurses, Therapists and Hygienists reported a positive or very positive impact, this was only reported by 37% of Dentists.

Figure 3-5: Overall views on the impact of GDC activities on the services and treatments provided among ECP survey respondents, by role (n=1,125)[28]
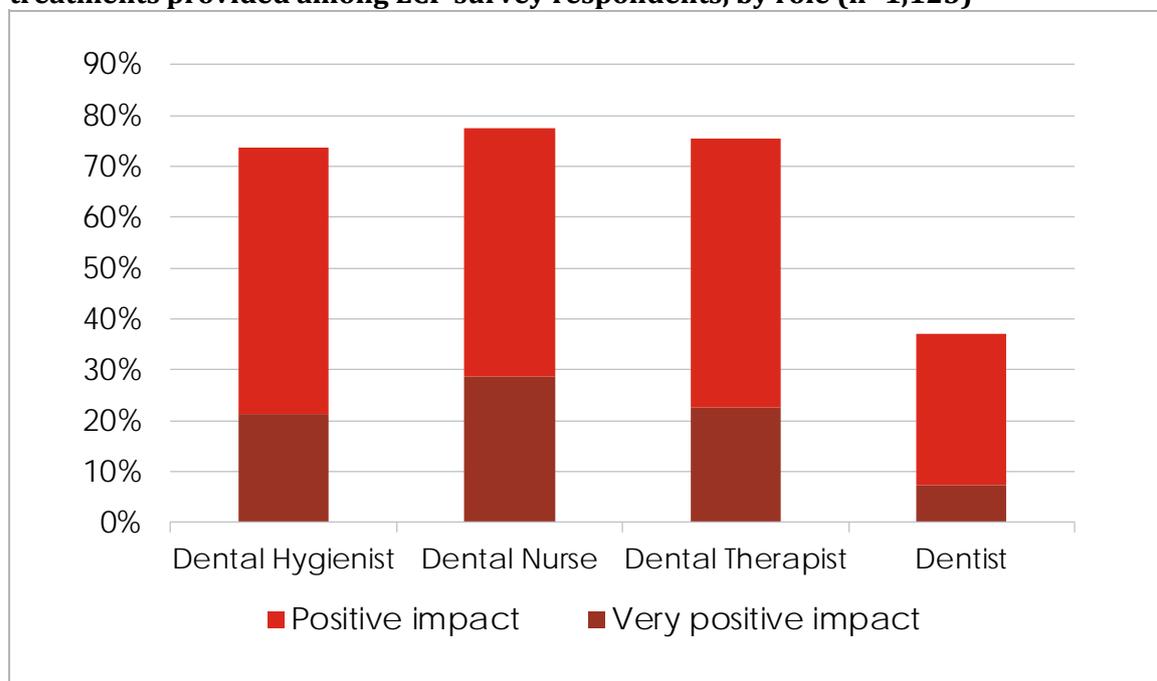
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

3.25 The survey data also revealed that **respondents who viewed the impact of GDC activities less positively and more negatively had typically been on the register for longer**, as outlined in Table 3-3[29]. Among those who joined the GDC register within the last year, 78% described a positive impact and only 9% described a negative impact. Among those who had been on the register for 4-5 years, 49% described a positive impact for services and treatments provided arising from GDC activities, with 34% reporting a negative impact.

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[28] This graph only contains responses from the four largest groups of professions represented among survey respondents – Dental Nurses, Dentists, Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists.

[29] Chi-square test: χ^2=86.320, df=16, p=1.18469E-11, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected at a 0.01 confidence level, indicating that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables (in this instance, the length of time an ECP is registered with the GDC and the views on the impact of GDC activities on services and treatments). Spearman's Rank: ρ=-0.236, df = 1113, p= 7.85215E-16, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected at a 0.01 confidence level, indicating that there is a negative correlation (but not necessarily causation) between the two variables (i.e. on average, ECPs who have been registered for longer are more likely to believe GDC activities have a negative impact on the treatments they provide).

Table 3-3: Overall views on the impact of GDC activities on the services and treatments provided among ECP survey respondents, by length of time on the register (n=1,124)

Length of time on register (number of responses)	Very positive impact	Positive impact	No impact	Negative impact	Very negative impact
Less than one year (381)	26%	52%	13%	7%	2%
One to two years (260)	20%	45%	21%	10%	3%
Between two and three years (205)	19%	41%	22%	9%	9%
Between three and four years (160)	14%	34%	28%	14%	10%
More than four years (109)	18%	30%	17%	21%	13%
Prefer not to say (9)	11%	33%	22%	22%	11%
Total	**21%**	**44%**	**19%**	**10%**	**6%**

Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

3.26 The survey results show that more females said the GDC had a positive or very positive effect on their practice (69%) than males (44%)[30]; similarly more survey respondents identifying as being Christian, Muslim or Hindu reported that the GDC had a positive or very positive effect on their practice than those reporting having no religion.

3.27 A total of 166 survey respondents responded to an open-ended question about the impact of GDC activities on their professional practice; **this cohort largely described negative impacts of the GDC's activities on their professional practice**. These included:

- 'Defensive dentistry' as a result of a perception of the GDC being 'on the side of the patient'.

- GDC requirements being seen as too 'stringent', in particular the notes required to justify dental care decision making.

- A perceived lack of support in how to undertake some critical functions - notably providing evidence of CPD – and a lack of clarity around what is required.

- A fear among ECPs of both litigation by patients and of FtP hearings.

3.28 This was also reflected in interviews with ECPs. **Over half of the ECPs interviewed felt that their experiences of and attitudes towards the GDC influenced their professional practice**. They described both negative and positive impacts because of this perception, and

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[30] Chi-square test: χ^2=73.280, df=4, p=4.60411E-15, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected at a 0.01 confidence level, indicating that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables (in this instance, sex and the views on the impact of GDC activities on services and treatments)

these views were fairly evenly split. They were also fairly evenly split across the different dental professions.

3.29 The main area of positive influence described in interviews was that **following the GDC guidance, rules and regulations has had a positive impact on the overall practice of ECPs**.

> *"We have to respect the values and rules of the GDC when we work. and the rules of GDC are a reminder on how we have to deal professionally with patients."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for three-four years)***
>
> *"I would say it's a positive impact. Mainly, it's nice to have those rules set in place to make sure everyone is following the same guidelines and everyone is continuing to work in a professional way. If the GDC wasn't around it could be all over the place a bit. If you do anything, there's always that risk if you do things wrong you can be struck off. It's reassuring to know there's something in place that not just anyone can go in and work in unprofessional ways. Definitely positive."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for one-two years)***

3.30 However, a similar proportion of interviewees described how their perception of the GDC had a negative impact on their professional practice. This was largely related to **ECPs practising defensive dentistry as a result of these perceptions**.

> *"Every Dentist is affected by GDC in the sense that we are a bit on defence – when we do notes, we write everything to the T - as we have to, just in case. Sometimes the problem is you want to do the right thing, but it's risky and [you're] worried about the GDC side of things."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)***
>
> *"Yes – you certainly don't want to be doing any more treatment that is outgoing or daring. You want to stay within the field. You hear stories that they can be quite harsh."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for two-three years)***

3.31 A number of ECP interviewees were more neutral in their views on the impact of their perceptions on their professional practice, or reported both a positive and a negative impact.

> *"It does affect how I practice to a large extent. In the back of my head, I go through the GDC checklist, and when it is a complicated case, and I always think about what will happen if I get a complaint. I always make sure I cover my back in my notes, which I feel is not a great way to feel but at the same time it helps us to be more careful in our practice."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for three-four years)***

> *"I would like to think even if the GDC wasn't there I would still be scrupulous and do the right thing. But I can't deny their standards shape us as professionals... [ ] standards and candour and honesty. But I naturally practice more defensively because of the GDC. I don't think that's a good thing for patients. Grey areas – we don't offer a top-up fee for services because we don't want to get on the wrong side of the GDC, but if we were to do that, more patients would benefit."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for two-three years)**

3.32 Finally, **several ECP interviewees felt that their views of the GDC did not influence their professional practice**, and instead reported that their practice is influenced by their own values, as well as the training they have received.

> *"The way I practice is based on my values, what I see fit, which goes along with what the GDC expect of you anyways. I wouldn't say my experience with them has an impact."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Technician, registered for three-four years)**

3.33 **When asked what the GDC could do to improve its impact on ECP professional practice, most interviewees did not have strong views on this point**. Some suggestions raised included redefining the standards to make them more concise, changing the scope of practice to allow professionals to do more, simplifying CPD cycles, and improving overall engagement with ECPs. However, none of these points were prevalent among consultees.

Impact on professional identity

3.34 As outlined in the 2022 report 'Exp*eriences of GDC Fitness to practice Participants*'[31], supporting professional identity is necessary for healthcare professionals to feel part of a group, and professional identity is important in how a registrant makes sense of their role, related to their characteristics, values and norms.

3.35 **About half of the ECPs interviewed reported that being registered with and regulated by the GDC had an impact on them as a professional or how they go about their professional practice**. This included ECPs feeling a sense of pride from being registered with and regulated by the GDC, ECPs experiencing a sense of security related to being part of a larger organisation, and ECPs being mindful of how they are perceived in public or on social media.

> *"There's a sense of pride when you can say you are a registered Dental Nurse. From a member of the public's point of view – being registered with a governing body – it's maintaining that confidence that you are fit to practice. That provides a pride and certain satisfaction from the public point of view."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for more than four years)**

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[31] Hull York Medical School (2022) Experiences of GDC fitness to practise participants 2015 – 2021: A realist study.

> *"I would say so. It is not just a profession, it is our personal life. The GDC requires us to be on our best behaviour in both our professional and personal lives, and there is always the thought about how things stand with the GDC."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for one-two years)**

3.36 Professional identity (and the impact of being registered with the GDC on this) was flagged as being **particularly important for ECPs who had trained or practiced abroad**, as outlined in the quotations below.

> *"Being registered with the GDC is a big thing. It shows that we are qualified to work in this particular field in the UK."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist & Therapist, registered for less than one year)**
>
> *"It's a matter of great pride to be honest. People know that registering with the GDC is not an easy thing, it's quite strenuous and long and expensive. It's a big investment – I'm quite proud of the fact that I'm registered with the GDC."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist & Therapist, registered for less than one year)**

3.37 However, **several interviewees felt that being registered with and regulated by the GDC had no impact on their professional identity**. These interviewees did not report particularly strong views on this point; they reported that they would continue to practice safely and professionally regardless of their registration with the GDC.

> *"I think most people that do the job, love the job and do it for the patients. It doesn't really matter whether you are registered or not. I know it keeps people safe and if there is litigation and complaints there is policy and procedure, but it shouldn't affect the code of ethics."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)**
>
> *"Not really. Most people think we just have to pay. What choice do you have – you have to be part of this. You don't feel proud or anything like that. You have to do it or you won't be a Dentist in the UK."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for three-four years)**

4. Wider perceptions and suggestions from early career professionals

4.1 This chapter outlines key findings in relation to wider perceptions of ECPs on key topics including the GDC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, GDC activity in relation to EDI, the role of the GDC in supporting wellbeing, GDC communications, reflections on the future of the dental profession, and ECPs' future career plans. The chapter covers key findings and suggestions for each of these topic areas before covering ECP reflections as to whether their expectations of the GDC have been met.

Summary

Response to COVID-19

- Approximately half of survey respondents were in education or training during the pandemic restrictions. The most negative impacts of the pandemic on ECPs in education or training included access to practical training (60% negative or very negative) and time with fellow students (56%). Despite this, there was a cohort of ECPs who felt the pandemic had a positive impact on their education and/or training.

- The majority of ECP respondents (both in education/training and in practice during the pandemic) felt that there was not anything the GDC could have done to better support their transition into practice during this time.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- Less than half of survey respondents reported that they were aware of the GDC's EDI Strategy. Furthermore, respondents who were aware of the GDC's EDI Strategy had been on the register for less time.

- In general, respondents felt that the GDC promotes EDI in the dental sector.

GDC communications

- Perceptions of GDC communications were largely positive. Most survey respondents said the GDC uses the right channels and provides relevant information. Suggestions for improvement centred on frequency, format and content.

Wellbeing and the role of the GDC

- Suggestions for how best the GDC could support ECPs' wellbeing fell under two key themes. Firstly, signposting to external wellbeing support; and secondly, the GDC providing wellbeing support, e.g. through webinars or an advice line.

Wider perceptions of the dental profession

- Survey respondents were generally optimistic about the future of their career, with 60% being 'very optimistic' or 'optimistic' about the future. The key professional challenge impacting on their daily practice was 'finding time and opportunities to develop' (41%).

Meeting expectations and future career plans

- Looking forward, the majority of respondents expect to still be working in the dental profession in two years' time. 'Mental health and wellbeing' and 'my dental income', were the two most important factors influencing decisions about ECPs' roles.

Response to COVID-19

4.2 The COVID-19 pandemic had a direct influence on ECPs. This impact was two-fold. Firstly it caused disruption to training, which will have impacted both students and those in the early stages of their career, by limiting the experience gained and training undertaken[32]. Secondly and more widely, the pandemic impacted on the wellbeing of students and ECPs, as recognised in the GDC's Responding to the Changing Strategic Context (2021) strategy document[33], which noted that dental professionals experienced heightened feelings of stress and anxiety.

4.3 As previously commissioned COVID-19 research studies had focused on the impact of the pandemic on dentistry and dental professionals more broadly, it was important for this study to explore the impact of the pandemic on ECP education and/or training, and their transition to practice.

4.4 Overall, **52% (582) of survey respondents indicated they were in education or training during the COVID-19 restrictions**. Those ECPs were then asked to provide insights as to the extent to which the COVID-19 restrictions had impacted on their education and/or training (positively or negatively).

4.5 As shown in Table 4-1, **the most negative impacts were felt in the access to practical training opportunities** (60% negative or very negative) **and time with fellow students** (56% negative or very negative). This was echoed in qualitative comments in response to the survey, with responses highlighting key themes including a lack of opportunities to gain practical experience, reduced teaching time, delays to training activities, as well as a lack of social elements and opportunities to network which would normally be expected during in-person training.

> *"Reduced clinical exposure and patient contact. Very little hands-on activities and few sessions. Repetitive phantom head sessions reducing learning in a clinical environment."*
>
> **ECP Survey Respondent (Dentist, registered for less than one year)**
>
> *"I didn't have the opportunity to make 'friends' and discuss with fellow students about the course due to only meeting once or twice."*
>
> **ECP Survey Respondent (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)**

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[32] Pye Tait (2021) The impact of COVID-19 on dental professionals 2021
[33] GDC (2021) Responding to the changing strategic context.

Table 4-1: Overall views of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on education or training

	Very positive impact	Positive impact	No impact	Negative impact	Very negative impact
Access to practical training (567)	8%	11%	21%	36%	24%
Access to dental education (566)	9%	15%	32%	31%	14%
Time with my educational supervisor (558)	8%	14%	30%	30%	19%
Time with fellow students (560)	8%	9%	27%	26%	30%
Timing of assessment and/or qualification (558)	8%	13%	32%	28%	19%
Transition into practice (558)	9%	13%	39%	24%	16%

Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

4.6 Despite this, **across all six areas there was also a cohort of ECPs that thought COVID-19 restrictions had a positive impact on their education and/or training**, particularly in terms of access to dental education (24% positive or very positive). This is similarly reflected in the qualitative survey comments, with respondents giving examples of positive effects of pandemic restrictions on their education and/or training, including increased access to educational supervision, availability of high-quality online teaching, and the pandemic providing more time to develop understanding of their role and absorb training. In addition, several survey respondents reported that the online method of training or course delivery was their favoured way of working.

> *"The main impact was that my training happened online … it allowed me to have more time to be prepared to complete my training thoroughly and enhance my understanding more of my role and learning."*
>
> **ECP Survey Respondent (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)**

Learning from the GDC's response to COVID-19

4.7 The above range of perceptions across survey respondents, alongside feedback from scoping interviewees, suggests that the impact of COVID-19 on ECPs to some degree centres around the individuals' personal circumstances and preferences, as well as what they were involved in/exposed to at that point. However, it is important for the GDC to understand what worked or did not work so well in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic and how ECPs feel this could be improved. As such, where there was time in interviews, all interviewees were asked if there was anything the GDC could have done to better support them during this period.

4.8 Of the ECP interviewees that were in education or training leading to GDC registration during the COVID-19 restrictions, **the majority did not think there was anything the GDC could have done to better support their transition into practice during this time**, stating that this was beyond the GDC's control and remit.

> *"COVID-19 was a bit of a different thing all together. It impacted us in different ways, I'm not sure what the GDC could have done."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)***

4.9 However, several ECP interviewees pointed to some areas where they would have appreciated more support during their transition to practice.

4.10 Several ECP interviewees reported that they would have welcomed **more support or guidance from the GDC during this time**. Suggestions ranged from an increase in online material available or delivering online webinars, through to producing more specific guidelines related to COVID-19 as opposed to the overall GDC standards.

> *"I think the only thing would have been to have increased the level of online material, so we could have had access to that. I think the GDC is keen on updating people on lockdowns and PPE regulations. I think that training should have been a part of that, by placing some webinars and more material online, that would have been useful."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Therapist, registered for one-two years)***
>
> *"I think maybe produce some guidelines at the time. Generally they don't produce a lot of guidelines apart from the generic standards – more specific guidelines about COVID-19 would have been nice."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for two-three years)***

4.11 Linked to this, some ECP interviewees reported that they would have appreciated **increased communications from the GDC during this period**, comparing the GDC negatively in terms of communication during this time to other key actors, including the Royal College of Dentistry and the British Dental Association.

> *"There wasn't much support or guidance from the GDC. Most advice was from the British Dental Association – the GDC was quiet."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)***

4.12 One survey respondent also noted how they would have appreciated a greater level of support and communication in relation to the ORE.

> *"Delayed sitting for ORE exam. In Dec 2021, we have suddenly received an email to sit for ORE part 2 in the Jan 2022, which is extremely lack of time to prepare for it (sic)."*
>
> ***ECP Survey Respondent (Dentist, registered for less than one year)***

4.13 Views on communications differed between individual ECP interviewees, however, with other ECPs noting that they appreciated that the GDC stayed in touch with them during this period of time.

> *"If GDC sent an update email every week that would [have been] good, saying 'this is the current situation and this is what's happening'. That would have been really good as that shows Dentists that the GDC does care about them and does support them."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for three-four years)*
>
> *"Again, they kept up to date with the support during COVID-19. It was a really hard time. Obviously we had no idea how to work safely with this new virus. The GDC put out as much as they could in order to help support [us]. At the same time, they were as unsure as we were really."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for one-two years)*

4.14 More widely, no ECP interviewees reported that they felt the GDC should have reduced its level of communication during this period.

4.15 It was suggested by some that the GDC should have reduced registration fees during this period.

4.16 **ECP interviewees who were not in training or education leading to GDC registration during this period also noted how the COVID-19 restrictions impacted on their early years as a registered dental professional in several ways, which were largely negative.** These included being placed on furlough and then lacking experience when they did return to work, changes to ways of working to comply with the COVID-19 guidelines, a lack of opportunities for career progression during the period, and delays to registration. However, similar to those that were in training or education during this period, the majority of these ECPs did not see what the GDC could have done to better support them during this period, although one ECP did also report that they felt the registration/renewal fees should have been lowered during this period.

> *"COVID-19 kind of shut down the world, can't blame the GDC about that. COVID-19 did delay us registering but I can't blame the GDC for that."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for less than one year)*
>
> *"I think … because people weren't working and on furlough, and weren't getting paid as much – they [the GDC] could have possibly lowered the fee."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse & Technician, registered for three-four years)*

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

4.17 The GDC's EDI Strategy 2021-2023 and the internal 2023 EDI Framework[34] demonstrate a strong organisational commitment to EDI (as outlined in the Introduction section above).

4.18 **Scoping interviewees were largely positive when asked to reflect on how the GDC is working to meet its EDI strategic objectives with regard to students and ECPs**. It was noted that it was hard for the GDC to influence the diversity of students and registrants, but positive actions highlighted as already being taken in relation to EDI included:

- Producing communication and engagement materials which represent the diversity of registrants.

- Understanding reasonable adjustment requirements and working with examining boards to incorporate these into processes.

- Developing (and delivering on) the organisational EDI Strategy 2021-2023 and internal 2023 EDI Framework.

- Completing equality impact assessments when introducing new processes.

4.19 Survey respondents were asked whether they were aware of the GDC's EDI Strategy. In total, **less than half (38%, 367) of survey respondents reported that they were aware of it, suggesting scope to raise awareness of this strategy more widely**. As shown in Table 4-2, there was variation in awareness by role, with a higher or even proportion of respondents registered as a Dental Therapist, Dental Hygienist or Orthodontic Therapist aware of the Strategy than were not, with the opposite true for the remaining professions. Statistical testing suggests that there is an association between awareness of the GDC's EDI Strategy and an individual's role[35].

Table 4-2: Awareness of the GDC's EDI Strategy (N=974)[36]

	Yes	No
Dental Hygienist (139)	50%	50%
Dental Nurse (479)	37%	63%
Dental Technician (11)	18%	82%
Dental Therapist (139)	51%	49%
Dentist (326)	29%	71%
Orthodontic Therapist (11)	64%	36%

Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

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[34] GDC (2021) EDI Strategy 2021-23; GDC (2023) EDI Framework

[35] Chi-square test: χ^2=36.575, df=6, p= 2.13071E-06, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected at a 0.01 confidence level, indicating that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables (in this instance, the role of an individual and their awareness of of the GDC's EDI strategy)

[36] Data regarding Clinical Dental Technician responses have been redacted from Table 4-2due to a low number of responses from this group of professionals.

4.20 Furthermore, **survey findings show that respondents who were aware of the GDC's EDI Strategy had typically been on the register for less time than those who were not aware** (shown in Figure 4-1)[37]. Respondents were not asked how they had found out about the EDI Strategy, however this could potentially reflect more recent engagement with GDC strategies and documentation during the registration process. Overall, this highlights the importance of raising and maintaining awareness of the GDC's commitment to EDI.

4.21 In addition, over half of those who qualified outside of the UK or EEA were aware of the EDI Strategy (54%, 112) compared to 33% of EEA-qualified and 32% of UK-qualified ECPs.

Figure 4-1: Awareness of the GDC's EDI Strategy by time on the register (N=968)
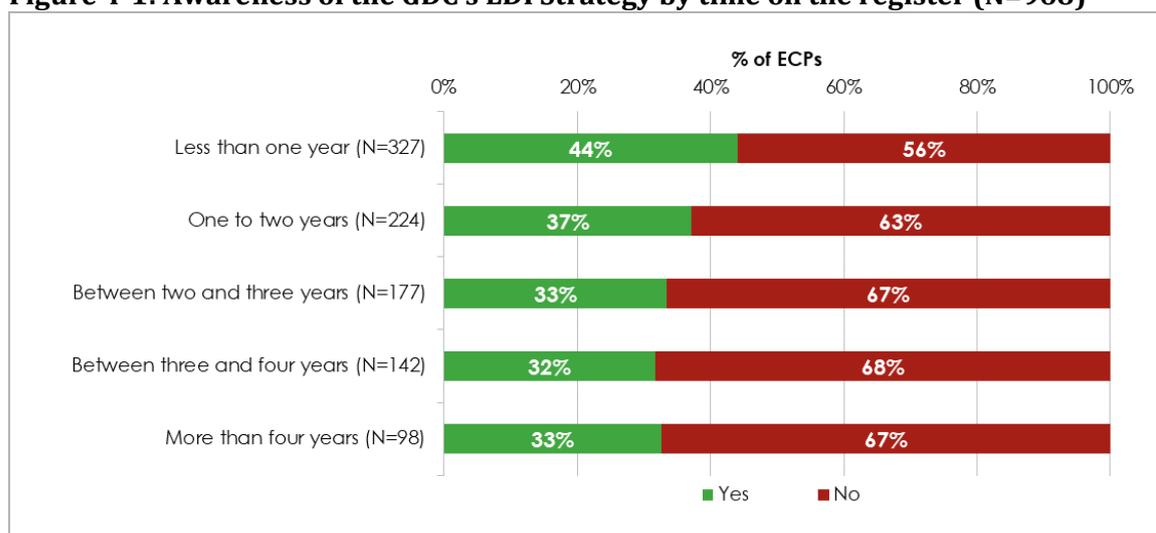
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

4.22 **In general, survey respondents reported that the GDC promotes EDI in the dental sector**; 66% agreed or strongly agreed, 11% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 23% did not know. As shown in Figure 4-2, the proportion of respondents stating that they do not know was higher amongst those who have been on the register for longer.

[37] Chi-square test: χ^2=10.319, df=4, p=0.035, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected at a 0.05 confidence level, indicating that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables (in this instance, the length of time an ECP is registered with the GDC and their awareness of the GDC's EDI Strategy).

Figure 4-2: Extent to which ECPs feel the GDC promotes EDI within the dental profession (N=979)
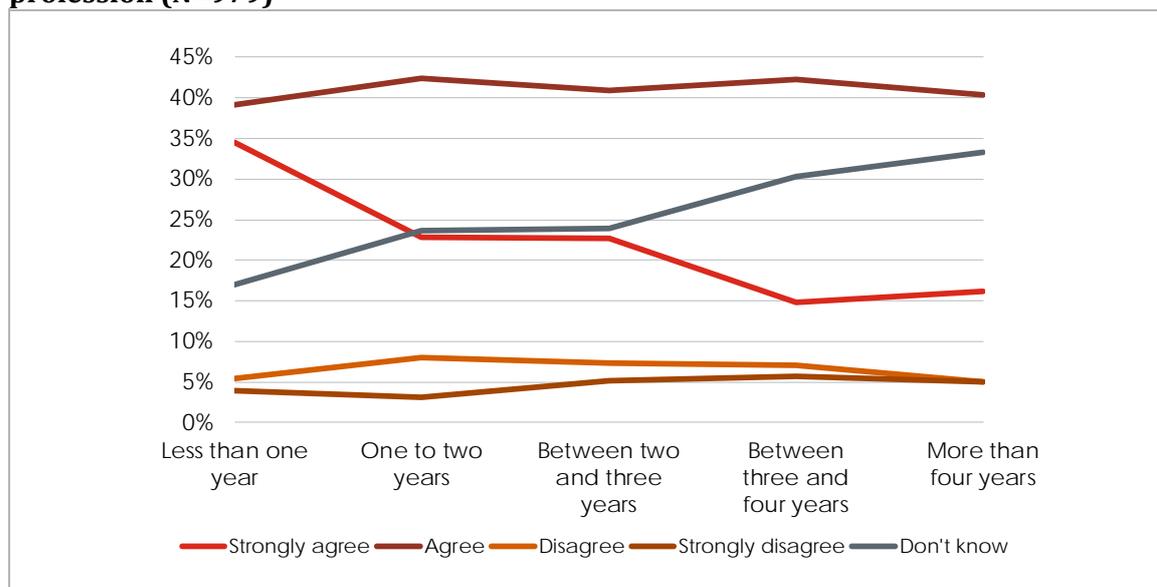
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

4.23 As a follow up question in interviews, ECPs were asked to explain why they agreed or disagreed that the GDC promotes EDI in the dental sector. Interviewees who agreed with the statement in their survey responses highlighted a variety of reasons, including:

- **Dedicated information and guidance on EDI included on the GDC website and in standards**.

> *"There is a lot on EDI on the GDC website and in their principles about the fact we all need to feel equal and are valued and that we can appreciate the diversity between us."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)*

- **Visible efforts to increase the diversity of the GDC FtP panel**.

> *" Yes – they recently sent out to get more Dentists on the panel with an option to apply for ethnic minorities – that came out to get a more balanced workforce on their panel."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)*

- **Communications are professional, inclusive and diverse in representation**.

> *"Just from looking at quotes and information – it's not all the time I'm hearing about a white male – the name in someone's quote isn't just John Smith – you will hear an Asian name. You can see there has been changes – I feel they are open and equal in that sense and making that effort."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)*

- **Inclusion of EDI questions within registration and renewal processes.**

> *"I think for everyone, they will send out the links for everyone. If it is different, e.g. just for Dentists they will flag it. I think they value everyone. When they are asking in forms, they will*

> *not exclude LGBTQIA+ people, older people, never say you can't be this or that because of your preference."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)**

4.24 On the other hand, interviewees who disagreed with the statement that the GDC promotes EDI in the dental sector highlighted two key reasons (suggestions made for how to improve these are included in the following sub-section).

4.25 Despite the progress highlighted by some, **there remains a perceived lack of diversity or range of perspectives amongst GDC FtP panel members**, alongside the view that cases are disproportionately stricter towards certain registrant groups.

> *"I think generally … it all comes back to the way they handle the FtP cases. Generally they tend to be disproportionately and more strict with registrants that have qualified abroad or registrants from ethnic minority backgrounds."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for two-three years)**
>
> *"My relationship with the GDC is mainly bureaucratic – paperwork and applications. I don't know anyone who works for the GDC but I was also told that the GDC is a very old organisation, with old ideas and ways of doing things – don't know though as my interaction is more about the applications. That is basically what I have heard most people thinking of the GDC, that they are very old, stopped in time, and [with] a very narrow mentality."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for one to two years)**

4.26 The **registration process for individuals from overseas**, including who does or does not have to complete the ORE, **was viewed as non-inclusive**.

> *"It is funny how if someone is from the EEA, they don't need to [sit] an exam, but if they're outside out the EEA then they do need to sit an exam. If I was from inside the EEA, then I would already be registered. Either they should make everyone sit the ORE or nobody should. It seems discriminatory."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Therapist, registered for less than one year)**

Suggestions for the GDC in relation to EDI

4.27 In order to understand how the GDC can best ensure it is meeting its EDI strategic objectives with regard to students and ECPs, scoping interviewees and ECP survey respondents and interviewees were asked to reflect on what more, if anything, the GDC could do to promote EDI within the dental profession.

4.28 At the scoping stage, consultees identified areas for improvement, in particular, the importance of ensuring language and communications are accessible to all, including internationally qualified ECPs who may face language barriers, and reflecting on the inclusivity of CPD requirements, for example considering how inclusive these are for those working less than full-time or with caring responsibilities.

4.29 These points align with findings from a 2021 study commissioned by the GMC to explore how lifelong learning for doctors is valued, managed and supported in the UK[38], which found that a key barrier to CPD is the general perception that part-time doctors need to undertake the same amount of CPD as their full-time colleagues. It also found that lifelong learning opportunities were generally in English and could be challenging for doctors who did not speak English as a first language.

4.30 According to ECP survey respondents and interviewees, the following actions could be taken by the GDC to further promote EDI within the dental profession:

- **Improving the registration experience, including the ORE, for individuals from overseas**. Suggestions as to how this could be done included: practical changes to increase the number of ORE slots; reducing the costs of the exam and reducing the waiting time; increasing recognition of prior experience to avoid losing individuals' experience and proficiency; exploring alternatives to the ORE, e.g. mandatory training or shorter examinations for those already working in the UK; and further support or training for individuals preparing for the ORE.

> *"I know they are making the ORE exam more available … because many Dentists are well trained and are ready to start, but they need to sit an exam which is expensive and with a long waitlist, so then they just work elsewhere. So they miss out on that experience and proficiency of these Dentists [whilst they wait to sit the ORE]. They could introduce another way to bring in the people who already have good experience, and they can then provide more Dentists for the public."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Therapist, registered for one-two years)***
>
> *"The major [issue] for me is that I am a Dentist and want to register as one – I would tell them to find another way other than the exam. I understand that a lot of people come and they had those exams but they don't help us to prepare for delivering care. Mandatory training is better than exams. In the end we are Dentists, we have worked for 5 years, I don't understand why we are any different to those who have trained in other areas of the world – why is there discrimination? Sure if there are areas that need training, do that, but don't make us all [complete the exam]."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for less than one year)***

- Several interviewees and survey respondents highlighted **particular examples of groups they felt the GDC should focus on supporting, or that might need additional EDI focus from others.** The work the GDC has done in relation to LGBTQIA+ was recognised as positive, but it was felt that this kind of activity could be expanded to include other groups, including females, professionals with caring responsibilities, professionals with religious beliefs, certain ethnic minorities, and individuals from overseas.

> *"The GDC don't put info out enough to support different groups of people. I have worked with a range of people who have religious holidays or need time out for prayers and practices don't*

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[38] GMC (2021) How lifelong learning for doctors is valued, managed and supported in the UK.

necessarily allow the time for that. The GDC need to be pushing for that and allowing for them to have that time."

ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for less than one year)

"I think what the GDC can do is maybe give us a little bit more leniency –especially [for] women. We have periods every month, childbirth (…) and then we work when we get home as well."

ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for less than one year)

- It was suggested that the GDC could **communicate to ECPs more about EDI and raise awareness of the issue in their communications**; for example, via the GDC newsletter. One interviewee suggested the GDC could mirror the GMC's approach to releasing public statements on what they are doing in this space to raise awareness. Another highlighted the need for improving transparency around EDI statistics of the register; as the GDC provides regular statistical reports on the register and FtP cases, raising awareness of these was suggested as something which could help.

"Write a short article summarising what they are doing, future plans and then distribute this."

ECP Survey Respondent (Dentist, registered for three-four years)

"The GMC – they have published statements that they're working on things to that effect – I'm not sure if GDC have made the same public commitment."

ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for two-three years)

- **It was suggested that the GDC could address the perceived lack of diversity within the GDC**, in terms of recruitment to the GDC and to the FtP panel. It was also suggested that the GDC could perhaps make changes to address the perception that they bring a disproportionate number of FtP cases against those who are of minority ethnic groups.

"I would like to highlight the importance of having highly qualified and open-minded individuals working in the GDC, who can effectively implement globally accepted practices. This is essential for maintaining high standards of care."

ECP Survey Respondent (Dentist, registered for three-four years)

"More inclusion of ethnic minorities in the GDC panel."

ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for one-two years)

- **An action was also suggested to promote careers in the dental profession to schools, particularly in areas of socioeconomic deprivation**. This was a suggestion that emerged at the scoping phase in terms of how to widen representation on the register, and in response to a concern that the population of registrants is potentially not representative in respect of socio-economic background.

> *"Promote dental careers within primary and secondary schools - this was not even put forward as a career option [in] the state schools I attended."*
>
> **ECP Survey Respondent (Dental Hygienist & Therapist, registered for three-four years)**

4.31 **It is important to note that some survey respondents and interviewees did not feel that promoting EDI within the dental profession was within the remit of the GDC**. In addition, some interviewees highlighted that the largest challenge they have around EDI comes from patients and their perceptions.

GDC communications

4.32 Evidence in Section 2 sets out how ECPs feel GDC communications influence their perceptions of the GDC. Overall, perceptions of GDC communications were largely positive, with most survey respondents believing the GDC communicates through the right channels and provides relevant information. To build on this, interviewees were asked how the GDC could better communicate and engage with ECPs. Some interviewees said they would not make changes. Suggestions from others can be grouped under the following key themes.

Frequency of communications

4.33 **The suggestion most frequently made was for the GDC to communicate more frequently with DCPs**. For some, this meant more frequent updates while undergoing GDC registration and/or FtP processes, including both responding to emails and proactively providing timely information on when the individual could expect progress to be made. Ensuring consistency across GDC registration staff supporting applications was also highlighted.

> *"I've heard people didn't get updates and that they're left in the dark, which can make people feel anxious, whereas if they [the GDC] act more supportively by keeping people updated, I think that is a positive step."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)**
>
> *"First, I would like to see that the registration process should be the same for everyone. If you have a case worker who isn't good, then it becomes demotivating when they have asked for the submission again. My whole pack was sent back to me. I generally feel like there is a lot of inconsistency - when the application is happening, it is too subjective. The [GDC registration staff] I have been assigned have been completely different – some are approachable, some are not."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Therapist, registered for less than one year)**

4.34 Other ECPs suggested the GDC could **communicate better with first-time registrants, particularly regarding the requirements and expectations of a dental professional**. Some interviewees mentioned they were unsure of exactly what was next post-registration, and often relied on advice from others within their practice to inform their understanding. A

few interviewees suggested the nature of content which could be useful, including more detail on CPD requirements and how to begin the registration process once qualified.

4.35 Dental Nurses in particular mentioned that greater communication prior to registration would be beneficial, and they more commonly commented that they were not sure on the requirements for registering.

Format of communications

4.36 **The format of communications was another area that interviewees felt could be improved to allow the GDC to engage better with ECPs**. In some instances, ECPs wanted **opportunities to communicate with the GDC on a more one-to-one basis**, and suggested the GDC could host workshops and seminars to disseminate information across a broad range of topics, particularly for information which is perceived as critically important (such as emergencies, safeguarding and wellbeing). A few interviewees felt that this approach may help the GDC to be perceived as a more approachable and supportive organisation, as well as helping to justify registration fees.

> *"We pay £500 a year for registration, and I feel like we need to get something out of it. It seems like we pay in order to have a licence to practice. There needs to be benefit for the Dentist – workshops, guidance, and understand what is best practice. I feel like I'm paying for the sake of it."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for less than one year)***

4.37 Some ECPs suggested **the GDC could produce more summarised content, making its information more digestible**. While interviewees acknowledged that detail was important in certain instances (particularly in relation to the standards and scope of practice), some felt the GDC could use less technical/complex language in its written outputs, and share content through different formats (e.g., videos and social media to promote headline information) in order to make the content more engaging.

> *"The scope of practice tends to be very extensive, which is good for detail, but they could summarise a lot more on the latest developments to keep the profession engaged. Generally, they could be a bit more digestible and easy to read."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)***
>
> *"Some standards are very wordy. When you're just starting out – it's like learning a whole new language – [there are] so many terms and phrases you've never heard before. Simplifying the wording and bringing in some examples which students could actually understand [would be beneficial]."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for three-four years)***

4.38 In addition to providing alternative means for disseminating information, a few ECPs felt the GDC could **facilitate alternative opportunities or formats for dental professionals to**

input into GDC decision-making, and provide a platform for registrants to give their feedback. Examples given by interviewees included research interviews (similar to those of this research study), feedback sessions, and open forums.

> *"Being open to having those conversations would be better, as we would feel the presence of them. You don't feel their presence unless you think something has gone wrong (i.e. FtP)."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for less than one year)*

4.39 More widely, an interviewee suggested the GDC could **better facilitate communication between dental professionals**, to enable registrants to strengthen their peer support network.

> *"I think maybe it would be a club that you can join for early career professionals where you get peer support and mutual networking opportunities and contact with other people that was facilitated by the GDC. For example, maybe they have a monthly seminar that you can attend and then some social events as well and careers coaching as well."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Technician, registered for less than one year)*

Content of communications

4.40 **A relatively high proportion of DCP interviewees felt that GDC communications often have content tailored towards Dentists which is irrelevant to other DCP roles**. In some instances, the perceived emphasis on Dentists over other dental professionals was noted to impact on how DCPs feel in their role. Some Dental Therapist interviewees specifically mentioned how communications regarding setting up and managing dental practices focused too heavily on Dentists, to the detriment of other roles. In one case, this was not only dependent on the individual's role, but also on where they were located.

> *"More support for Dental Therapists that want to set up their own businesses. There is lots of this in London but not in Yorkshire – [so there's a] lack of knowledge, lack of funding for us all. There needs to be more positivity around our job role - and everyone's - to put us in a better position because of where the NHS contracts are going. The GDC are having nothing to do with it, [it seems they are] not happy to share how we can do our jobs to better support this."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for less than one year)*

4.41 In addition to a more diverse range of content which is relevant to all dental professions, interviewees also mentioned how **communications from the GDC could be improved by being more tailored to their specific needs**. This was particularly true for when ECPs directly contacted the GDC with a query, as some interviewees reported that responses can seem standardised rather than responsive to their needs.

> *"Make responses personal to whoever is asking – they'd have a lot more respect that way."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Technician, registered for three-four years)*

4.42 Some interviewees also felt that the GDC could **increase the accessibility of its content**, particularly for people who are neurodivergent or have specific access needs. They spoke of how current content can be difficult to interpret, and that they have only been able to overcome barriers through alternative support external to the GDC.

> *"Some of the policies were difficult to read because I'm dyslexic, and the policies were written in small font which is difficult to read."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)***

4.43 More widely, for some interviewees, **improving the content of GDC communications centred on increasing transparency**, specifically providing more detail as to how registration fees are spent and more information regarding the FtP process. One interviewee suggested that increasing transparency may help the GDC address issues relating to word-of-mouth, and provide an opportunity for the GDC to provide examples of how the process works in practice.

4.44 Other suggested content for communicating included:

- GDC organisational updates (e.g. updates on the ORE waiting list, length of time to complete registration).

- More practical guidance, particularly in which treatments/procedures the GDC recommends.

- More wellbeing content, including mental health support.

- Wider advice, such as regarding indemnity provision, information relating to unions, GDC perspectives on topical sectoral issues.

4.45 It was also suggested that partnerships with other sectoral bodies (such as the British Dental Association, NHS and Integrated Care Boards) could help to develop more coherent messaging.

Wellbeing and the role of GDC

4.46 As part of the survey, respondents were asked to rate how happy and anxious they were feeling the day before they completed the survey[39]. As shown in Figure 4-3, **when asked to rate their happiness yesterday on a scale of 0-10 (0 = not at all happy and 10 = completely happy), the average score was 6.5.** Over half of respondents (57%) rated their happiness at 7 or above. **When asked to rank their anxiety (0 = not at all anxious and 10 = completely anxious), the average score was 4.7, with a third (34%) of respondents choosing 7 or above.**

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[39] These questions were taken from the ONS validated wellbeing questions, more information here: Surveys using our four personal well-being questions - Office for National Statistics

Figure 4-3: How happy/anxious did you feel yesterday on a scale of 0-10? (N=1,014)
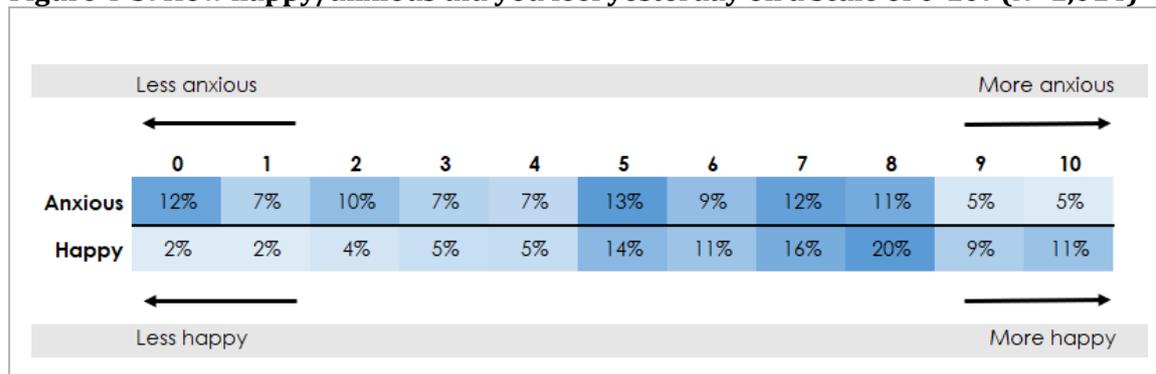
4.47 Of the four professions with the largest numbers of respondents, Dentists were least happy (average 6.0) and most anxious (average 5.3), while Dental Therapists were happiest (average 7.0) and Dental Hygienists were the least anxious (average 4.4). Similarly, those ECPs who have been registered for longest (more than four years) were less happy (average 6.4) and more anxious (average 4.9) than those who have been registered for less than one year (average of 6.9 and 4.4, respectively).

Suggestions for the GDC in relation to wellbeing

4.48 Interviewees were asked what, if anything, the GDC could do to support their wellbeing. Recommendations fell under two key themes:

- **Signposting to external wellbeing support:** the most frequent suggestion was for the GDC to signpost to and promote a range of external wellbeing support (as opposed to offering this itself). For example, this might be via promoting apps via newsletters, or having a dedicated page on the website with suggested resources or tools to use. One interviewee suggested the GDC could secure deals for dental professionals, for example on meditation apps.

> *"The NHS has opened up certain apps if you're struggling – videos on mindfulness, breathing techniques to build resilience – signposting to resources and links like that. If they don't want to take an active approach, fine, but providing information at least would be helpful."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)*
>
> *"Would be quite nice if they could have a wellness part of their page. Something inspiring for people to see. Links on their page to wellness groups that are available and to point you in the right direction to podcasts that they think might be helpful."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)*

- **Providing wellbeing support/training:** some interviewees felt the GDC could itself provide mental health or wellbeing support. Suggested formats varied, ranging from the provision of an advice line through to the delivery of workshops or webinars focused on (for example) how to cope in practice.

> *"Mental health is very important, they could conduct workshops on how important it is to maintain your mental health and point to steps. If the GDC could play a role in that, a lot more people would be inclined to (…) see the GDC as a positive force rather than negative."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Hygienist, registered for less than one year)**

4.49 More widely, one interviewee suggested the GDC could **create a club or peer network for ECPs to get peer support and networking opportunities**. Other interviewees stated that if improvements were made in response to other suggestions, for example those relating to GDC communications and processes (specifically regarding registration, FtP and the ORE), this would likely have a positive impact on their wellbeing.

4.50 It is important to note that some interviewees felt supporting wellbeing was not the role of the GDC specifically; rather it was suggested to be a role of their individual practice, for example.

Wider perceptions of the dental profession

Optimism or pessimism for the future

4.51 **Survey respondents were generally optimistic about the future of their career, with 60% reporting feeling 'very optimistic' or 'optimistic' about the future**, compared to 31% who felt 'pessimistic or very pessimistic'. Survey responses suggest however that optimism about future career decreases with the length of time on the register (Figure 4-4).[40]

Figure 4-4: Future of career optimism/pessimism by length of registration (n=1,057)
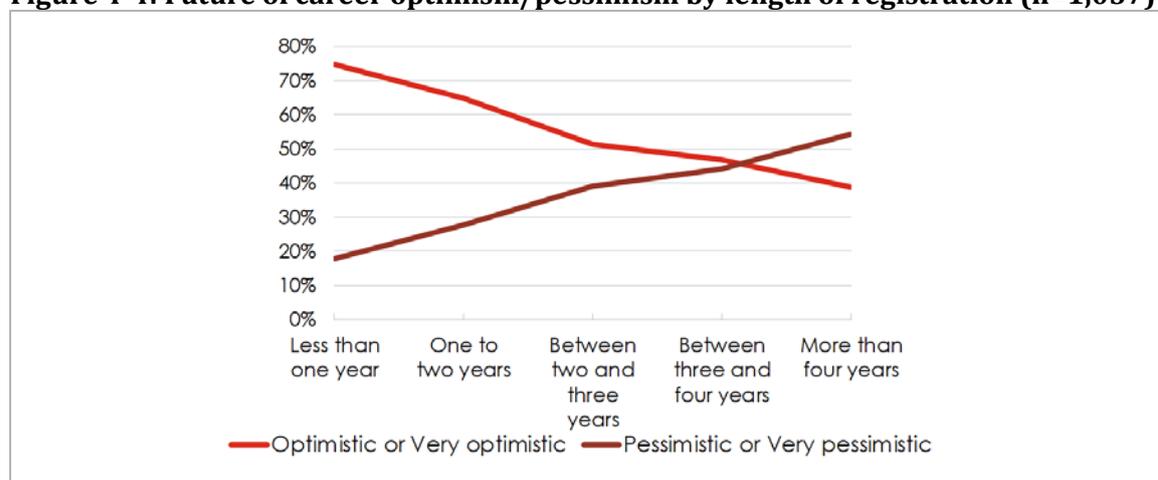
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

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[40] Chi-square test: χ^2= 95.248, df=12, p= 4.72319E-15, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected at a 0.01 confidence level, indicating that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables (in this instance, the length of time an ECP is registered with the GDC and their level of optimism/pessimism). Spearman's Rank: ρ=-0.282, df = 964, p= 2.09349E-19, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected at a 0.01 confidence level, indicating that there is a negative correlation (but not necessarily causation) between the two variables (i.e. on average, ECPs who have been registered for longer are more likely to be pessimistic about the future).

4.52 In addition, **survey responses suggest that the level of optimism/pessimism about their future career varies depending on the role of the individual**, with some professions typically reporting more optimism than others. As shown in Table 4-3, Dentists reported being the least optimistic, with just 46% expressing optimism, compared to more than 66% for all other professions.

Table 4-3: Future of career optimism/pessimism, by role (n=1,057)[41]

	Very optimistic	Optimistic	Pessimistic	Very pessimistic	Don't know
Dental Hygienist (155)	21%	50%	12%	8%	10%
Dental Nurse (524)	25%	40%	16%	10%	9%
Dental Technician (13)	0%	46%	15%	8%	31%
Dental Therapist (155)	21%	48%	12%	6%	12%
Dentist (342)	12%	34%	27%	22%	5%
Orthodontic Therapist (11)	18%	73%	9%	0%	0%

Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

4.53 To gather insights into what is influencing these views, survey respondents were asked to state how optimistic or pessimistic they felt about several key areas of the dental profession. The elements respondents were most optimistic about were **positive developments or opportunities in the sector, including changes in technology** (84% optimistic or very optimistic), **learning and development** (75%), and **employment opportunities** (63%). On the other hand, **respondents were most pessimistic about effects of the wider policy environment**, such as patient access to NHS dental care (64% pessimistic or very pessimistic), the reform of the NHS dental contract (55%), recruitment and retention of dental staff (52%) and financial challenges (51%).

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[41] Data regarding Clinical Dental Technician responses has been redacted from Table 4-3 due to a low number of responses from this group of professionals for this question (n=1)

Figure 4-5: How optimistic or pessimistic do you feel about the following areas of the dental profession? (n=1,054)
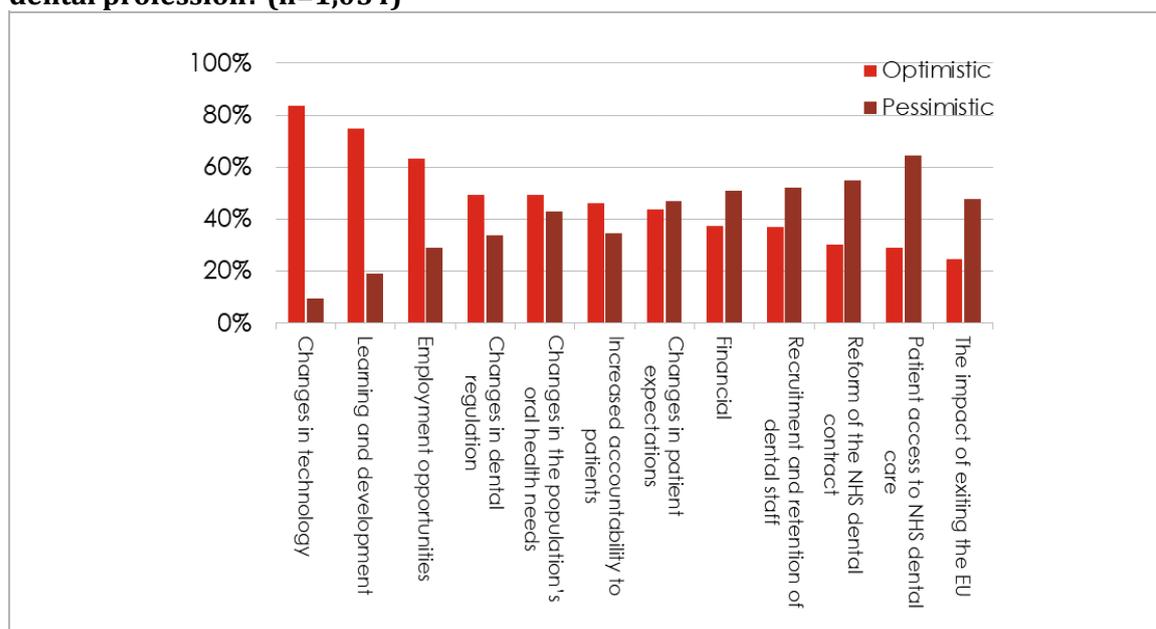
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

4.54 **These findings align with insights from interviewees**, with those who feel optimistic about the future of the dental profession stating this was down to positive developments in the dental sector, such as changes in technology and emerging treatments, employment stability and progression opportunities.

> *"I have been to talks and been on courses talking about the future of oral surgery, and it is really promising."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for less than one year)***
>
> *"I have got an exam tomorrow for my radiology which is an extra qualification for Dental Nurses. In the profession, there is room for progression which I think is great. I am very optimistic about the future, knowing that I will be able to climb the ladder."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for one-two years)***

4.55 On the other hand, those who felt pessimistic about the future of the dental profession largely highlighted NHS pressures and barriers to patient access, increased accountability to patients leading to defensive dentistry, and changes in dental regulation increasing restrictions. Specific challenges for the Dental Nurse profession were also highlighted by interviewees as leading to pessimism, including pay and working conditions.

> *"Pessimism comes from the outlook of NHS dentistry predominantly. Then second going back to the stress and that responsibility level of the profession. The GDC, NHS, it is a combination of all the bodies. I probably have a higher percentage of admin than I do clinical work; to actually help long term with the profession they keep adding on more and more but there needs to be a limit."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for more than four years)**

> *"Working in a dental practice you see people giving up on the role of Dental Nurse. We have Dental Nurses who left to work selling cars, wedding planning, as they can get more money and roles which are less stressful. I have been working in this practice for a year and a half, in that time we lost four Dentists and about five Dental Nurses. I see how the profession is tiring people out and getting stressed; all the legal requirements and not feeling valued is making people give up on the role – it's not very encouraging."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for one-two years)**

4.56 **Some interviewees provided suggestions as to how the GDC can best support them in feeling more optimistic about the future of the dental profession**. For the majority, ideas centred on the **GDC being more supportive of ECPs** in recognition of the complex challenges they are facing in practice on a day-to-day basis. Examples included sharing more information on the wider dental sector, providing more positive or 'good news' updates, and changing the tone of communications to be more personal and supportive.

> *"Whatever the solution is, whether it is the workshops or making sure there is clinically related information or booklets, there needs to be the creation of a positive and nurturing atmosphere for the Dentists. There shouldn't be second guessing from the Dentists. More guidance on what the standards are. I have everything out in front of me, and there is a guidebook here, but the language in the book is very instructional – using language like 'You must' - so it just feels like a rule book. It feels like every page is for the patients' safety, rather than nurturing Dentists' ability."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dentist, registered for less than one year)**

4.57 Other suggestions were more specific and related to those covered in other sections of this report, including advocating for pay improvements, increasing representation of working dental professionals on the FtP panel, and making regulation more straightforward and achievable. Several interviewees also felt it was the responsibility of others, for example the NHS or dental practices, to make changes that would make them feel more optimistic.

Professional challenges

4.58 **A range of professional challenges are faced by ECPs in their day-to-day practice**. To gather insights into these, survey respondents were asked to select the three greatest professional challenges they experience from the list in Figure 4-6.

4.59 The most frequently identified challenge amongst survey respondents was **'Finding time and opportunities to develop'** (41%). This was particularly prevalent amongst those that

qualified in the EEA (53%), those who work in small independent practices (51%), those who joined the register in the last year (50%) and Dental Nurses (49%). Interestingly, the greatest challenge for Dentists (47%) and those who have been on the register for over four years (38%) was 'Administration, including record keeping'.

Figure 4-6: Greatest professional challenges in current daily practice (n=1,025)
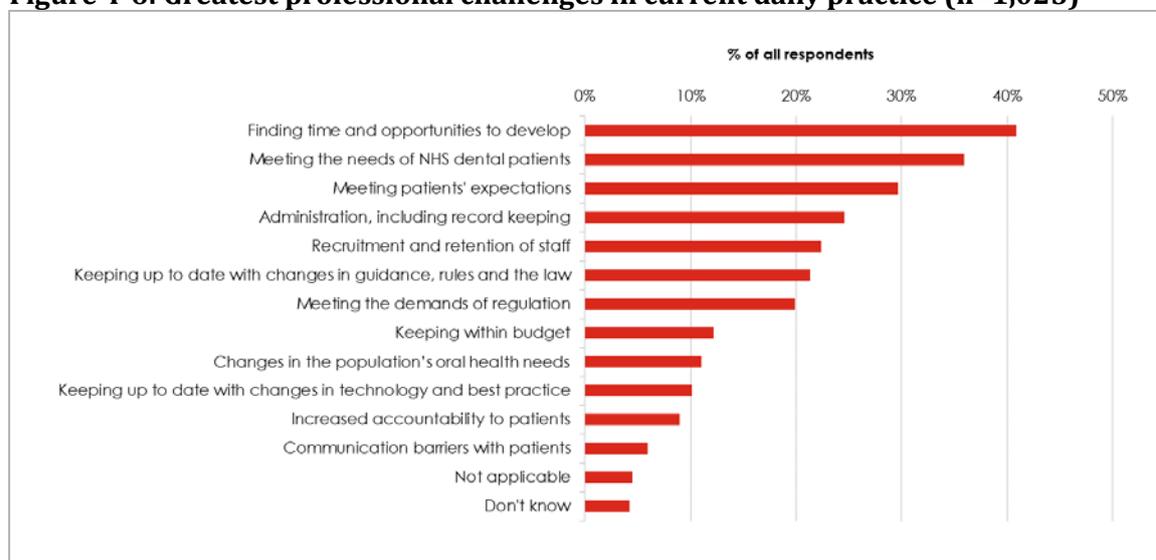
Source: SQW analysis of GDC ECP survey

4.60 **When asked whether the GDC was sufficiently responding to the professional challenges outlined in Figure 4-6, just under twice as many survey respondents responded 'No' (41%) as 'Yes' (21%),** with a large proportion of 'don't know' responses (36%). Across all areas, respondents thought the GDC was not sufficiently responding. For example, 72% of those who selected 'Meeting the demands of regulation' as a challenge thought the GDC was not sufficiently responding to the challenge, compared to just 6% who thought they were. Survey responses also suggest differing views between roles, with almost twice as many Dentists considering the GDC as not responding sufficiently across all challenges identified (62%) as Dental Nurses (29%) and Dental Therapists (33%), for example.

4.61 Interviewees and survey respondents were also asked where they felt the GDC could be playing more of a role in addressing these challenges and addressing sectoral issues. Suggestions mainly focused on **advocating or lobbying for dental professionals with government, key bodies and patients**, to ensure their voice is heard and can influence positive regulatory or policy changes (e.g. in relation to NHS contracts).

> *"I think they should be lobbying for support and raising awareness of the issues in dentistry. It is a hard time at the moment, if we felt like the GDC was supporting us as well and lobbied for the NHS side of things that would be good. …. It would be nice if the public had a different perception of dentistry, and that partly needs to come from organisations dealing with dentistry."*
>
> *ECP Interviewee (Dental Nurse, registered for less than one year)*

4.62 Other specific suggestions included **providing better resources to assist with CPD requirements** (e.g. guidance on NHS dentistry) and **streamlining the ORE process** to help tackle workforce shortages in UK dentistry.

Meeting expectations and future career plans

4.63 Interviewees were asked to reflect on whether, overall, their expectations of the GDC had been met to date. **Of the ECPs who were asked this question (N=29), the majority stated that their expectations had been met, providing positive reflections on their experience**.

> *"I think they have met my expectations, because whenever I have searched for something, I have been able to find it. When I am expecting the answer to a question, I have found the answer for what I need. If not, I can call them and ask the staff there, but that is very rare. So I think they have, yes."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Therapist, registered for one-two years)***

4.64 However, some interviewees felt that their expectations had not, or only partially, been met. Reasons given related to the areas identified for improvement throughout this report, including challenges and delays in registration, GDC communications, the need for additional support, and experiences of the ORE.

> *"I would say they have met my expectations to a certain degree. They increased the ORE seats, they are looking to accept more students, so in some ways they have looked into the issues ... I just wish they could be a bit quicker. They have got so many applicants who are waiting. They are unprofessional and they don't want to deal with individuals. I know some people who work at the GDC, and they say everything is so slow in doing things."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Therapist, registered for two-three years)***

4.65 Looking forward, positively, **the majority of survey respondents expect to still be working in the dental profession in two years' time**, with many expecting to still be in their current post (46%, 455), while 34% expect to be working in another post in the dental profession in the UK and 7% expect to be working in another post in the dental profession outside of the UK. That said, 13% of respondents expect to have left the dental profession to work in another sector and 1% do not expect to be working.

4.66 In terms of variation, Dental Nurses were both most commonly expecting to be in the same role in two years (50%) and to have left the dental profession (21%), while 6% of Dentists expected to leave the dental profession in the next two years. In addition, the more pessimistic someone is about the future of their profession over the next two years, the more they think they will leave the profession (42% of those that were very pessimistic thought that they would leave the sector, compared to 3% of those that were very optimistic). Finally, there was variation by age; survey respondents who reported that they would likely be in the same role in two years' time were on average older than those who did not report this.

4.67 **To understand what influences these expectations, survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of several factors in making decisions about their role.** As shown in Figure 4-7, of the factors listed that might affect a respondent's decisions about their role, greater than 50% of respondents identified each as important ('very' or 'quite'). The two most important factors identified were 'Mental health and wellbeing' and 'My dental income'.

Figure 4-7: Factors influencing decisions on role (n=973)
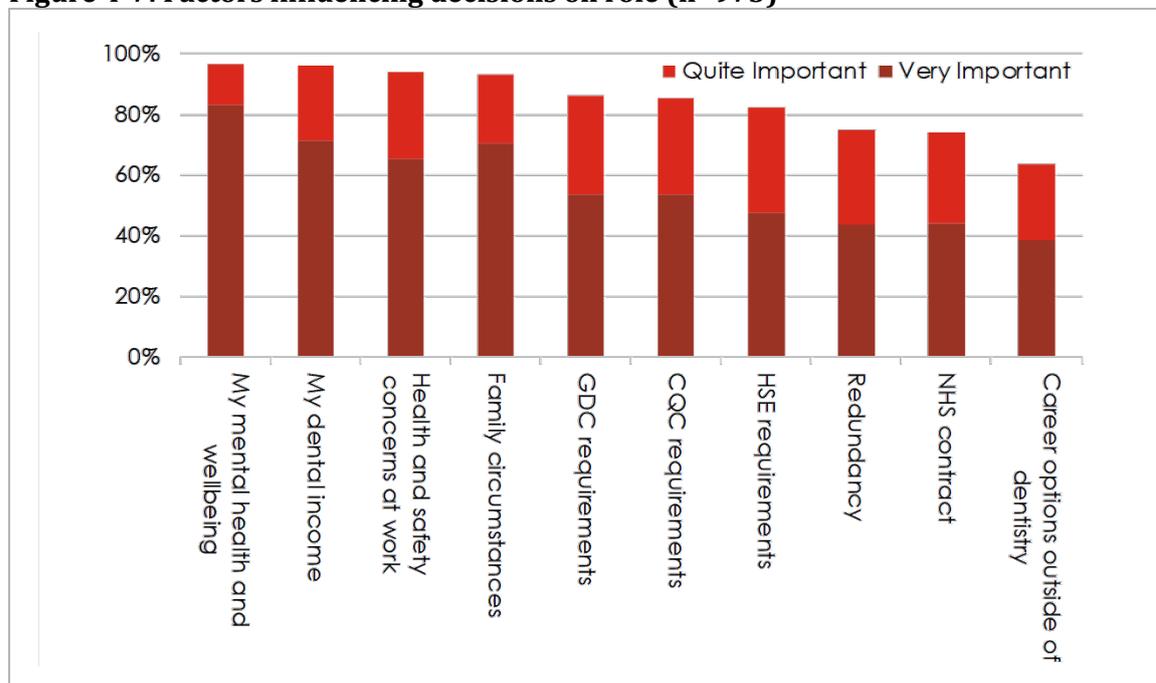
4.68 **Interviewees were also asked whether their perception or experience of the GDC has impacted on their future career plans.** The **majority felt their perception or experience of the GDC has not impacted on their future career plans**, positively or negatively, stating that they intend to continue working in the profession and progressing. That said, a couple did state that even though it has not impacted on their career plans as such, it has made them more likely to be cautious in practice (i.e., defensive dentistry).

4.69 The remaining responses included a relatively even mix of negative and positive impacts. Those who identified negative impacts focused on leaving the register due to, for example, the ORE as a barrier to progression and recognition of prior experience, and the overall experience of the GDC and the registration process.

> *"I am looking at other options, because the registration process is so difficult, and so going through all that you have to ask yourself if it is even worth it. The NHS is not that great and it isn't as rewarding as it used to be. When you hear things about how the GDC treats Dentists, it makes it even less attractive."*
>
> ***ECP Interviewee (Dental Therapist, registered for less than one year)***

4.70 On the other hand, some interviewees identified positive impacts, for example the GDC giving ideas for career progression opportunities and aiding their retention. More widely, one interviewee said it is simply positive to be registered with the GDC, with this providing a valuable structure and boundaries to their work.

> *"I think being registered and having to maintain that registration kind of makes you think about your career and staying in it. If you weren't registered it would be easier to flip and get a different job. It has influenced my decisions in a positive way."*
>
> **ECP Interviewee (Dental Technician, registered for less than one year)**

5. Summary, reflections and implications

5.1   The evidence presented throughout this report provides insights on ECPs' experiences and perceptions of, and attitudes towards, the GDC. In this section, we reflect on the findings and present the key implications for the GDC alongside possible areas for consideration. These are designed to help the GDC consider how to make improvements in its approach to working with students and ECPs going forward.

Key findings and associated implications

5.2   **The evidence highlights the importance of raising the visibility of the GDC's role and remit among ECPs, and those in education or training.** The GDC's recently introduced student engagement activities were highlighted as having a positive influence on perceptions and understanding of the GDC, giving a 'face to the name' amongst ECPs who are more recently registered. The GDC may wish to consider how they can expand this activity to offer a supportive, personable approach to more students and ECPs (across all roles), to aid their registration and transition to practice, and to help foster positive perceptions. In person delivery was suggested. The GDC may wish to consider scope for student engagement via alternative formats, perhaps expanding in-person opportunities, and/or introducing video or other mechanisms.

5.3   Once registered, the GDC undertakes a wide range of activities for and with dental professionals, for example developing strategies and delivering consultations, and providing regular updates via newsletters. However, findings indicate that **some ECPs are not aware of what the GDC is already doing.** A key example of this is the EDI Strategy, with only around a third of survey respondents aware of the strategy, with lower awareness amongst ECPs registered for longer than two years. This suggests there may be scope for the GDC to consider what information they communicate to ECPs, as well as how they do this, including how they raise and maintain awareness of developments amongst longer-term registrants.

5.4   **There is no 'one size fits all' approach to effective communications and engagement with early career dental professionals.** Overall, perceptions of GDC communications were largely positive, with most survey respondents believing the GDC communicates through the right channels and provides relevant information. The evidence presented in Section 4 as to how the GDC could make improvements around the key themes of frequency, format and content provides a variety of suggestions which the GDC may wish to draw on to inform improvements to communications activities. For example, improving the content of GDC communications to provide increasing transparency, specifically providing more detail as to how registration fees are spent and more information regarding the FtP process, may prove useful in changing perceptions. Some of this information is already provided by the GDC, e.g. in GDC Annual Reports; considering how this is communicated and how best to raise

awareness of this information amongst registrants would likely be useful for both the GDC and ECPs.

5.5 As the GDC is doing this year (via a separately commissioned study focused on perceptions of the GDC across all registrants), it is important to continue to research, learn from and combine these suggestions with feedback from the 2018 communications research[42], which found differences in the medium or channel that would be most useful for professionals by age. Specifically, it revealed that respondents who were older had typically been influenced by 'direct contact with the GDC' to a greater extent than those aged 18-21. Those aged 18-21 reported being influenced to a greater extent by the GDC website, opinions of tutors/professors, and articles online.

5.6 Considering not only the messages to be conveyed, but also ensuring they are **communicated in a way which highlights their relevance to all ECPs** (as opposed to just Dentists), **and where relevant developing tailored communications,** will likely also help with resonance. Furthermore, professionals may not have the capacity to engage with everything in detail; highlighting key messages and making communications as accessible and succinct as possible could help make life easier for dental professionals and improve their engagement.

5.7 **External factors beyond the GDC's control also play a key part in influencing ECPs' perceptions and understanding of the GDC.** Predominantly this relates to ECPs being influenced by perceptions and previous experiences of the GDC from friends and/or colleagues. Trying to understand the mechanisms by which this information is passed onto ECPs and what could be done to improve negative perceptions about the GDC will be important. It is not only the GDC that plays a role in ECPs' understanding and perceptions of the GDC. It is likely to prove useful for the GDC to engage with key stakeholders, such as trainers and practice owners, and longer-term registrants, to influence their perceptions and attitudes.

5.8 **Given the wide range of challenges facing the dental sector, efforts to support the dental workforce's mental health and wellbeing are increasingly important.** It is important to note that some interviewees felt that supporting their wellbeing was not the role of the GDC specifically, but rather that there may be a role for their individual practice to play in this, for example. However, the suggestions in Section 4 as to a possible role of the GDC in signposting to external wellbeing support could be important here, with the GDC potentially being well-positioned to share links to evidence-based support with dental professionals. Considering differences in support required by different dental professions will also be key, with this review particularly highlighting negative perceptions from Dentists in terms of their own preparedness for practice, of the GDC and in relation to future career plans and the wider profession.

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[42] DJS Research (2018) Communications research

5.9 In relation to the promotion of EDI, as stated above, **raising awareness of the GDC's efforts and strategic focus in this area is likely to be a positive action for the GDC to take.** For example, the GDC could clarify the explicit relevance of the GDC's EDI Strategy to dental professionals and the external sector. In particular, this might be useful for certain dental professions (e.g., Dental Technicians, Dental Nurses and Dentists) and those who have been on the register for longer, who reported less awareness of the GDC's EDI Strategy. In addition, considering the range of suggestions in Section 4 as to how the GDC could further promote EDI will be important going forward. The topic of EDI is one ECPs are alert to, indicating scope for it to remain a key focus and something they would be interested in hearing more about from the GDC.

5.10 Two key areas stand out here:

- The first relates to suggestions that the GDC FtP panel could be more diverse. This may indicate scope for increasing awareness about the profile of the panel, as well as reflection by the GDC as to whether the panel is/remains sufficiently diverse, and ensuring professionals have confidence in the decisions taken in FtP cases.

- Secondly, there may be scope to focus on the ORE and how experiences and perceptions of it could be improved. Overall, there was recognition of some improvement, including recognition from some that the GDC is increasing the number of ORE opportunities available. However feedback suggests that the GDC might want to clarify the purpose of the ORE, and raise understanding regarding the processes and timescales involved. Continued efforts to reduce the waiting list for the ORE, and communicating these efforts to registrants (and potential registrants) may also help with both improving perceptions and experiences, and tackling the patient care backlog being experienced currently.

5.11 **Continuing to monitor and learn from how other regulators and stakeholders engage with students and ECPs (and wider registrants) would likely be useful** for the GDC. A range of examples of good practice were highlighted by ECPs, for example the GMC's updates on strategic plans and updates during the COVID-19 pandemic; continuing to learn from others could be useful to the GDC going forward.

Implications for future monitoring and research

5.12 This section addresses the final research question: how can the findings inform areas for and approaches to further research, monitoring and evaluation?

5.13 This review highlights **negative perceptions from Dentists, in terms of their own preparedness for practice, of the GDC and in relation to future career plans and the wider profession**. For example, Dentists are the least optimistic about the future of the dental profession when compared to other roles, and the greatest professional challenge identified by Dentists was that of 'Administration, including record keeping'. Dentists were the least happy group of ECPs. These findings could align with the wider theme of defensive dentistry

emerging throughout this report. According to the 2022 GDC FtP Statistical Report[43], a higher proportion of the cases by stage involved Dentists than DCPs. Further research could look to explore their experiences in more detail, to understand the specific challenges they are facing which make their perceptions less positive, e.g. FtP, wider interactions with the GDC, contractual/demand concerns, administrative burden, and/or other challenges within the dental profession.

5.14 **The GDC (and others) may also wish to explore further the experiences of individuals from overseas who have completed the ORE**. This report has highlighted a range of challenges faced by ECPs in relation to the ORE and the perceived lack of recognition of prior experience. Undertaking further focused exploration on this topic to identify potential improvements, perhaps through research or consultation on any potential changes to ORE, may prove useful. It may also prove useful to capture the impacts of recent improvements made by the GDC to the ORE process.

5.15 The findings reveal that **the wider views of colleagues can impact ECPs' perceptions of, knowledge of, and attitudes towards the GDC.** The evidence also suggests that the longer an individual is registered with the GDC, the more negative their perception becomes, with positive sentiment falling and negative sentiment increasing year-on-year. This is consistent with the previous GDC Perceptions research[44] findings from 2021, which covered all registrants and showed positive sentiment about the GDC decreasing with age, and also with length of time on the register. Therefore, particularly with the GDC's focus on upstream activity and promoting professionalism, understanding what has influenced and would help to improve the perceptions of those who have been on the register for longer could be a useful exercise for the GDC to undertake.

5.16 **Engagement with GDC consultation activities appears to have a positive impact on ECP perceptions.** Survey respondents who had been involved in strategic and regulatory consultations generally believed that the sessions had been valuable, identifying benefits including increased understanding of and perceptions of the GDC. However, a relatively small proportion of survey respondents reported having taken part in a consultation activity. It remains unclear whether those more positively disposed towards the GDC engaged in consultation exercises in the first place, and hence were receptive to messages and reported a positive effect as a result; widening involvement in consultation exercises is likely to prove key to unpicking this. Given the positive effect of engagement with consultations, as well as positive reflections from interviewees on the opportunity to take part in this research study, the GDC should consider how best to encourage professionals to participate in consultation activities.

5.17 Linked to this, strong engagement with this study indicates there is **willingness and interest amongst dental professionals to provide feedback on and support the GDC as it**

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[43] GDC (2022) Fitness to practice Statistical Report
[44] DJS Research (2021) Stakeholder perceptions research

continues to develop in its role as a regulator. Across both evidence bases we received responses which covered a range of roles, length of time on the register and overall perceptions of the GDC. We also did not reach saturation point in terms of views being collected in survey feedback and interviews, indicating there is scope for further exploration and learning with this cohort. This is encouraging for the GDC for future research studies.

Annex A: Acknowledgements

A.1   The research involved a collective effort, and SQW would like to thank everyone who contributed their time and thoughtful reflections to the process.

A.2   Thanks are especially due to the early career dental professionals who completed the survey and took part in interviews, taking the time to willingly share their experiences and thoughts.

A.3   We would also like to acknowledge the GDC for funding this independent study and extend thanks to the team at the GDC, particularly Susanne Gibson, David Teeman, Shiplu Miah, Humaira Khanom, Jonathan Key and Marie-Jeanne Royer for their input and guidance throughout.

A.4   The SQW research was directed by Lauren Roberts, managed by Carolyn Hindle, and involved a research team comprised of Luke Bailey-Withers, Bill Carroll, Sheetal Parmar and Matthew Timms.

Annex B: Methods and data collection

B.1   This Annex presents additional detail of the methodology followed during the study, including a bibliography of evaluation data sources.

Primary data sources

B.2   SQW employed three primary data collection methods: first, six online scoping interviews; second, an online survey; and finally, a series of qualitative virtual/telephone interviews (using the survey results to inform discussions and define the sample).

B.3   As part of the initial scoping phase, six online interviews were completed focused on building understanding of what is involved in the GDC's activity with and for students and early career professionals, and to explore the rationale and priorities for this study. The GDC supported the identification of five internal stakeholders and one external stakeholder. The GDC contacted these individuals to invite them to opt in to participate in an interview. SQW then arranged and undertook the interviews once consent was provided. A semi-structured topic guide was followed to guide the interviews, with notes captured including verbatim quotes.

B.4   The online survey was distributed to all dental professionals who had registered with the GDC since 1st May 2018, totalling 33,289 registrants. The survey received 1,479 valid responses (4.5% response rate), 953 of which were complete responses and the remaining 526 were partial responses which were sufficiently completed to be included in the analysis. This analysis included cross-tabulation to understand the relationship between variables, supported by statistical significance testing (namely Chi-square test of independence and Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient) where relevant.

B.5   The Chi-square test of independence tests whether the two variables under investigation are related to each other, and where both variables are categorical data, to test a null hypothesis of no relationship between the two variables. Where there is determined to be a statistically significant relationship between two variables, and where data are ordinal (i.e. have meaningful order such as length of time on register and Likert scale responses), the Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient can be used to determine the direction and strength of this relationship. The coefficient can then be hypothesis tested (using a one-sided t-test) to determine whether the calculated direction and strength of the relationship is statistically significant.

B.6   Respondents were invited to take part in interviews at the end of the survey, and 250 provided their contact details for this purpose. To ensure a diversity of participation, purposive sampling was used to select interviewees (with a sampling frame agreed upon with the GDC) based on the following factors: age group, country of work/residence (the latter for those not currently working), ethnic group, length of registration, perception of the GDC

(ranging from very positive to very negative), profession, region of qualification, religion, sex, and working arrangement (part-time or full-time).

B.7 In all, 99 ECPs were contacted and invited to take part in an interview. A total of 47 interviews were completed. The following describes the profile of the interview sample:

- **Country of work/residence** – most interviewees (36, 77%) either worked or resided in England at the time of their interview. Of the remaining 11 interviewees, four (9%) were based in Scotland, four (9%) were based in Northern Ireland and three (6%) were based outside the UK. Of the survey respondents who agreed to take part in an interview, two indicated they worked/lived in Wales, and while both were contacted, neither responded to the invitation to participate in an interview.

- **Length of registration** – the study population was limited to early career dental professionals, defined as those who had initially registered with the GDC since 1st May 2018. While nearly a third of interviewees had been registered for less than one year, each year of registration subgroup made up at least 10% of the sample:

  - Less than one year: 15 (32%)
  - Between one and two years: 8 (17%)
  - Between two and three years: 9 (19%)
  - Between three and four years: 10 (21%)
  - More than four years: 5 (11%).

- **Perception of the GDC** – overall perceptions of the GDC varied among interviewees. In response to the survey, six (13%) indicated they had a very positive perception of the GDC, 14 (30%) had a positive perception, 11 (23%) had a neutral perception, ten (21%) had a negative perception and six (13%) had a very negative perception.

- **Profession** – the largest groups of interviewees were either registered as a Dental Nurse (18 interviewees) or a Dentist (15). Other interviewees were registered as a Dental Therapist (nine), Dental Hygienist (eight), Dental Technician (four) and Orthodontic Therapist (two). A few interviewees (seven) reported being registered for multiple roles, meaning the sum of professions exceeded the total number of interviewees. Clinical Dental Technician was the only profession not represented within the interview sample, as no survey respondents from this profession opted to take part in an interview.

Bibliography

B.8 This section presents an overview of documentation reviewed to inform this report. GDC-commissioned research, statistical reports, strategic documents, and welcome materials were shared and/or signposted to by the GDC (including scoping interviewees), while the documents relating to other healthcare professions were identified via SQW's own online searching.

Table B-1: List of documentation reviewed

Documentation reviewed
GDC-commissioned research, statistical reports, strategic documents, and welcome materials
ADEE (2020) Preparedness for Practice: A Rapid Evidence Assessment
ADEE (2020) Professionalism: A Mixed-Methods Research Study
DJS Research (2018) Communications research
DJS Research (2021) Stakeholder perceptions research
Ecorys (2020) Impact of COVID-19 on dental professionals 2020
Enventure Research (2018) Registrant Survey 2017-18
GDC (2017) Shifting the Balance
GDC (2019) Registration Statistical Report 2019
GDC (2020) Preparedness for Practice of UK Graduates Report 2020
GDC (2020) Corporate Strategy 2020-2023
GDC (2020) Registration Statistical Report 2020
GDC (2021) Registration Statistical Report 2021
GDC (2021) EDI Strategy 2021-23
GDC (2021) Fitness to practice Statistical Report
GDC (2021) Responding to the changing strategic context
GDC (2022) Building positive relationships with the next generation of dental professionals
GDC (2022) Student and new registrant engagement programme continues at pace
GDC (2022) Working in a regulated profession (ppt)
GDC (2022) Fitness to practice Statistical Report

Documentation reviewed
GDC (2023) GDC Welcome Letter, Standards book, Leaflet and other materials
GDC (2023) Corporate Strategy 2023-2025
GDC (2023) EDI Framework
Hull York Medical School (2022) Experiences of GDC fitness to practise participants 2015 – 2021: A realist study
Pye Tait Consulting (2021) Impact of COVID-19 on dental professionals 2021
University of Plymouth (2021) Mental Health and Wellbeing in Dentistry: A Rapid Evidence Assessment

Other healthcare professions
Health & Care Professions Council (2014) Professionalism in healthcare professionals
Health & Care Professions Council (2019) HCPC Stakeholders: Perceptions Audit
Health Education England (2018) Enhancing training and the support for learners: Health Education England's review of competence progression for healthcare professionals
GMC (2020) GMC Corporate Strategy and Perceptions Tracking Survey 2020
GMC (2021) How lifelong learning for doctors is valued, managed and supported in the UK
GMC (2021) Our annual report 2021
GMC (2021) The state of medical education and practice in the UK 2021
GMC (2021) The state of medical education and practice (SoMEP) Barometer survey 2021
GMC (2021) Understanding how external users perceive, access and apply GMC professional standards
GMC (2021) Understanding the experiences of Locum Agency Locums
GMC (2022) GMC Corporate Strategy and Perceptions Tracking Survey 2022
GMC (2022) National training survey 2022
GMC (2022) Our data supporting the Medical Workforce Race Equality Standard in England
GMC (2022) Preparedness of recent medical graduates to meet anticipated healthcare needs
GMC (2022) Understanding doctors' decisions to migrate from the UK
GMC (2022) Understanding the experiences of and attitudes towards Medical Appraisal 2020
Trajectory (2022) Changes to doctors' working practices emerging from the pandemic

Annex C: Discussion guides

C.1 This Annex sets out the survey tool and interview guides used in the study.

Survey tool - early career dental professionals' experiences of the GDC

Introduction

About the research

The General Dental Council (GDC) has commissioned SQW, an independent research consultancy, to lead an important independent study to better understand experiences of dental professionals joining the UK register since 1st May 2018, including experiences of the GDC. The findings will inform the GDC's ongoing and future activities with (and for) those transitioning from training to practice and at the beginning of their careers.

Your participation in the survey

We hope you'll be willing to share your views, perceptions and experiences. Participation in the survey is voluntary. If you do complete it, you don't have to answer every question.

The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete and will be live until Sunday 30th July 2023.

SQW would also like to speak with 50 early career dental professionals to explore some key issues in more detail. Those who are selected and take part in an interview will receive a £20 digital high street voucher. There is space for you to provide your contact details towards the end of the survey if you are interested in taking part.

You can save your responses and return to complete the survey later by clicking the 'Save and Continue Later' button at the bottom of the page. You will then be asked to provide an email address and sent a link to complete the survey. Neither SQW nor the GDC will be able to see the email address you provide for this purpose. Partially completed responses will be included in our analysis.

How your response will be stored and used

- Any information that you provide SQW with will be treated as confidential and all reporting is completely anonymous. If quotes from open questions are used in our reporting we will ensure they cannot be used to identify any individual. Your personal data will be stored securely by SQW throughout the research process and then destroyed within three months of study completion, expected to be in late 2023. The raw, fully

anonymised survey dataset will be securely transferred by SQW to the GDC on completion of the study (not including open response questions).

SQW and the GDC are joint data controllers for the research. SQW's privacy policy is available here and the GDC's privacy policy is available here. The GDC expects to publish a report containing the study findings.

If you have any questions about the study or how your data will be used, or if you would like to request a large text or Welsh language version of the survey, please contact: Carolyn Hindle (Project Manager) at CHindle@sqw.co.uk.

By continuing with the survey, you are confirming that you have read and understood the purpose of the survey, and you are consenting to how your data will be used. Click 'Next Page' to continue with the survey.

Background questions

1. Under which role(s) are you registered with the GDC? (Select all that apply) MANDATORY QUESTION

Clinical Dental Technician
Dental Hygienist
Dental Nurse
Dental Technician
Dental Therapist
Dentist
Orthodontic Therapist
Prefer not to say

2. Are you a specialist?

Yes
No

3. When did you register with the GDC? (If you are or have been registered in more than one role, please answer for the most recent) MANDATORY QUESTION

Before 1st May 2018
On or after 1st May 2018

4. How long have you been on the GDC register in your current primary role?

Less than one year
One to two years
Between two and three years
Between three and four years
More than four years
Prefer not to say

5. What was your region of qualification?

UK qualified
European Economic Area (EEA) qualified
Qualified outside of the UK or EEA
Prefer not to say

6. Which of the following is/are your field(s) of practice? (Select all that apply)

General dental practice
Specialist dental practice
Community dental service
Other hospital settings
Laboratory
Oral public health
Non-clinical (e.g., local authority, regulator, professional body, national/regional body)
Armed forces
In education/training as a student
In education/training as a member of staff (e.g. Foundation Dentist, Dental Core Trainee etc.)
Research
Prefer not to say
Other (please specify):

7. Which of the following best describes the type of organisation you most commonly work in now?

Small independent practice
Small group of independent practices (fewer than ten)
Small group of corporately owned practices (fewer than ten)
Large group of independent practices (ten or more)
Large group of corporately owned practices (ten or more)
Prefer not to say

8. How many Dentists (including yourself, if applicable) are there in the dental practice where you work?

One
Two to four
Five to seven
Eight to Ten
Eleven or more
Not applicable - none
Prefer not to say

9. As part of your work, do you provide any dental care outside your routine surgery environment?

Yes
No
Not applicable
Prefer not to say

10. Approximately how many hours per week do you normally work?

Not currently working
Fewer than 15 hours per week
15 to 30 hours per week
31 to 40 hours per week
More than 40 hours per week
Prefer not to say

11. Where do you predominantly work?

England
Northern Ireland
Scotland
Wales
Channel Islands
Prefer not to say
Outside of the UK (please specify):

12. In which region of England do you currently work?

North East
North West
Yorkshire and Humberside
East Midlands
West Midlands
East of England
London
South East
South West

13. Where do you live?

England
Northern Ireland
Scotland
Wales
Channel Islands
Prefer not to say
Outside of the UK (please specify):

14. In which region of England do you currently work?

North East
North West
Yorkshire and Humberside
East Midlands
West Midlands
East of England
London
South East
South West

Perceptions and attitudes

15. What is your current overall perception of the GDC?

Very positive
Positive
Neutral
Negative
Very negative

16. Since your first contact with the GDC to begin the registration process, has your view of the GDC changed?

Yes, I now view the GDC much more positively
Yes, I now view the GDC slightly more positively
Yes, I now view the GDC slightly more negatively
Yes, I now view the GDC much more negatively
No, my perception of the GDC has not changed

17. Out of the following, what currently most influences your view of the GDC? (Select up to three)

	Most influential	2nd most influential	3rd most influential
Direct contact with the GDC			
Experiences of colleagues/friends			
Publications/articles in journals and newspapers			
Articles online			
Comments on social media			
Opinions of key outspoken professionals			
Opinions of trade unions			
Opinions of professional bodies			
Opinions of tutors/professors			
Opinions of senior colleagues			
The GDC website			
The GDC's response to COVID-19			
Don't know			

Knowledge of the GDC

18. How confident are you that you understand the GDC's role in the following areas?

	Very confident	Quite confident	Not very confident	Not at all confident
Setting standards in education				
Maintaining the register				
Setting and promoting professional standards				
Investigating concerns about impaired fitness to practise				

19. Overall, do you now feel more knowledgeable about the GDC's role compared to when you first registered?

Yes
No

Communication and engagement

20. Thinking about your current experiences of GDC communications, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. GDC communications...

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
... generally provide what I need to know					
... occur as frequently as I need them					
... provide clear content					
... use the channels that work for me					
... meet my needs around accessibility					

Communication and engagement – student engagement

21. Did you attend any GDC student engagement sessions?

Yes
No
Don't know

22. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: student engagement session(s) gave me a better understanding of...

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
... the GDC's overall remit					
... the GDC's upstream and preventative regulatory activities					
... the importance of professionalism to patients					
... the importance of professionalism to professionals					
... the benefits of working in a regulated profession					

Communication and engagement – registration process

23. Thinking back to when you first registered with the GDC, how satisfied were you with the following elements of the initial registration process?

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Ease of registration application					
Length of time it took to register					
Availability of support for registration					
Relevance of the information in the welcome pack					

24. Have you attended any GDC new registrant engagement sessions and/or student engagement sessions?

Only attended GDC student engagement sessions
Only attended GDC new registrant sessions
Attended both GDC student engagement sessions and new registrant sessions
Not attended either GDC student engagement sessions nor new registrant sessions
Don't know

Communication and engagement – engagement sessions

25. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: student engagement session(s) gave me a better understanding of...

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
... the GDC's overall remit					
... the GDC's upstream and preventative regulatory activities					
... the importance of professionalism to patients					
... the importance of professionalism to professionals					
... the benefits of working in a regulated profession					

Communication and engagement – consultations

26. Have you responded to any GDC consultations?

Yes
No
Don't know

27. Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that your involvement in the consultation(s) has...

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
... increased your understanding of the GDC's role					
... provided an opportunity to inform GDC policy					
... made you more likely to engage with the GDC in future					
... improved your perceptions of the GDC					

Communication and engagement – final comments

28. Please tell us what, if any, additional engagement activities you would like the GDC to provide and why. (Maximum 200 words)

Upstream activity and promoting professionalism

29. Reflecting back to the time of initial registration, how prepared were you for professional practice?

Very well prepared
Quite well prepared
Not very well prepared
Not at all prepared
Don't know

30. Thinking about your own professional practice, please tell us to what extent the GDC's activities in the following areas have had a positive or negative impact:

	Very positive impact	Positive impact	No impact	Negative impact	Very negative impact
Setting the standards for dental education and training					
Ensuring that providers are meeting the standards for dental education and training					
Investigating concerns about fitness to practise					
Providing guidance on CPD					
Setting the standards for the dental team					
Providing guidance for dental professionals					

31. Overall, does the GDC have a positive or negative impact on the decisions you make about the services or treatments you provide?

Very positive impact	Positive impact	No impact	Negative impact	Very negative impact

32. Please tell us about any other ways which you think GDC activities have impacted on your professional practice. Have these activities had a positive or negative effect on your professional practice? (maximum 200 words)

Response to the COVID-19 pandemic

33. Were you in education or training leading to GDC registration during the COVID-19 restrictions?

Yes
No
Don't know

34. To what extent, if any, did the COVID-19 restrictions impact your education or training?

	Very positive impact	Positive impact	No impact	Negative impact	Very negative impact
Access to practical training					
Access to dental education					
Time with my educational supervisor					
Time with fellow students					
Timing of assessment and/or qualification					
Transition into practice					

35. Please tell us about any other ways in which the pandemic impacted on your education and/or training, or your transition into practice (maximum 200 words)

Wider perceptions of the dental profession

36. Overall, to what extent would you say you are either optimistic or pessimistic about the future of your profession over the next two years?

Very optimistic   Optimistic   Pessimistic   Very pessimistic   Don't know

37. How optimistic or pessimistic do you feel about the following areas of the dental profession?

	Very optimistic	Optimistic	Pessimistic	Very pessimistic	Don't know
Patient access to NHS dental care					
Learning and development					
Changes in technology					
Changes in the population's oral health needs					
Employment opportunities					
Changes in patient expectations					
Changes in dental regulation					
Financial					
Reform of the NHS dental contract					
Increased accountability to patients					
Recruitment and retention of dental staff					
The impact of exiting the EU					

38. What are the greatest professional challenges in your current daily practice? (Select up to three)

Finding time and opportunities to develop
Keeping up to date with changes in guidance, rules and the law
Meeting patients' expectations
Meeting the demands of regulation
Administration, including record keeping
Keeping up to date with changes in technology and best practice
Increased accountability to patients
Meeting the needs of NHS dental patients
Recruitment and retention of staff
Keeping within budget
Communication barriers with patients
Changes in the population's oral health needs
Not applicable
Don't know
Other (please specify):

39. Overall, do you feel the GDC is responding sufficiently to these issues?

Yes
No
Don't know
Not applicable

40. Are there any actions that you think the GDC could take to better respond to these issues? (maximum 200 words)

Wider perceptions of the dental profession – wellbeing

Next we would like to ask you two questions about your feelings on aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of these questions we'd like you to give an answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely".

41. Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday, on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is not at all happy and 10 is completely happy?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Not at all happy

Completely happy

42. Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday, on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is not at all anxious and 10 is completely anxious?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Not at all anxious

Completely anxious

Wider perceptions of the dental profession – future plans

43. Which of the following statements reflects where you think your career will be in two years' time?

I will be working in my current post in the dental profession
I will be working in another post in the dental profession in the UK
I will be working in another post in the dental profession outside of the UK
I will have left the dental profession to work in another sector
I will not be working

44. How important are each of the following in making decisions about your job or role?

	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not at all important
GDC requirements				
CQC requirements				
HSE requirements				
NHS contract				
My mental health and wellbeing				
My dental income				
Health and safety concerns at work				
Family circumstances				
Redundancy				
Career options outside of dentistry				

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives

The GDC's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy states that "The General Dental Council will be a champion of diversity, equality and inclusion inside our organisation, with the sector we regulate, and with the public".

45. Are you aware of the GDC's EDI Strategy?

Yes
No

46. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the GDC promotes equality, diversity and inclusion within the dental profession?

Strongly agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly disagree   Don't know

47. What more, if anything, should the GDC do to promote equality, diversity and inclusion within the dental profession? (maximum 200 words)

Demographic questions

Finally, we'd like to ask you some important questions about you. This is so we can learn more about the answers from early career dental professionals from across the range of personal backgrounds. This is to make sure that we are taking the views of different types of respondents into account, and for analysis purposes. We will not use this information to identify any individual or for any other purposes. Completion of these questions is optional.

48. What is your sex?

Female
Male
Prefer not to say

49. Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

Yes
No (please specify)
Prefer not to say

Please specify:

50. What is your age?

16-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+
Prefer not to say

51. Do you consider yourself to have a disability? The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial long-term effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

Yes
No
Prefer not to say

52. What is your legal marital or registered civil partnership status?

Never married and never registered in a civil partnership
Married
In a registered civil partnership
Separated, but still legally married
Separated, but still legally in a civil partnership
Divorced
Formerly in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved
Widowed
Surviving partner from a registered civil partnership
Prefer not to say

53. Who is your legal marriage or registered civil partnership to?

Someone of the opposite sex
Someone of the same sex
Prefer not to say

54. Who was your legal marriage or registered civil partnership to?

Someone of the opposite sex
Someone of the same sex
Prefer not to say

55. What is your religion?

No religion

Christian (all denominations)
Buddhist
Hindu
Jewish
Muslim
Sikh
Prefer not to say
Any other religion (please specify):

56. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

Straight/Heterosexual
Gay/Lesbian
Bisexual
Other sexual orientation (please specify):
Prefer not to say

57. What is your ethnic group?

White
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups
Asian or Asian British
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
Other ethnic group
Prefer not to say

White - please select:

English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British
Irish
Gypsy or Irish Traveller
Roma
Any other White background (please specify):

Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, please select:

White and Black Caribbean
White and Black African
White and Asian
Any other Mixed or Multiple background (please specify)

Asian or Asian British, please select:

Indian
Pakistani
Bangladeshi
Chinese
Any other Asian background (please specify):

Black, Black Caribbean or Black African, please select:

Caribbean
African background (please specify)

Any other Black, Black British, African or Caribbean background (please specify)

Please specify:

Other ethnic group, please select:

Arab
Any other background (please specify):

Interview sign-up

We would like to speak with early career dental professionals to ask some semi-structured questions to explore some of the issues covered in this survey in more depth. This would be a 30-minute telephone or MS Teams call before early September 2023.

SQW is seeking to conduct interviews with a range of different early career dental professionals, including those in different roles, with different lengths of time on the register, and with different personal characteristics. **This is completely optional.** We are seeking to conduct interviews with a total of 50 dental professionals. We expect that not all who register interest in taking part in an interview will be selected.

Those who are selected and take part in an interview will receive a **digital £20 high street voucher.**

If you are willing to take part in an interview with a researcher from SQW, then please tick the box below to provide your contact details. You will then be routed to another survey page, to provide your preferred name, telephone number and email address.

If you do sign up for an interview, you may be selected and contacted by SQW to diarise the interview. There is no obligation to take part in an interview even if you provide your contact details at this stage.

The contact details you provide to register interest in an interview will only be viewed by SQW, and only for the purposes of contacting you to arrange an interview. All personal data will be deleted by SQW within three months of study completion, expected in late 2023.

A full written consent briefing will be provided by SQW in your invitation to interview before any conversation, which will provide further information about the interview process, including details of how you can withdraw your consent should you wish to.

If you have any queries or would like to withdraw your data please contact CHindle@sqw.co.uk.

Would you like to be invited to participate in a 30 minute interview?

Yes, I would like to be invited to participate in a 30 minute interview
No, I would not like to participate in a 30 minute interview

Please provide your name, email address and telephone number: *

Name:
Email address:
Telephone number:

It will help us when arranging interviews if you could indicate in the table which days and times of day are most likely to be convenient for you to receive a telephone/MS Teams call. We will use this information to arrange with you the best time for an interview

	Early morning (8:00 - 9:00)	Morning (9:00 - 12:30)	Lunch (12:30 - 14:00)	Afternoon (14:00 - 16:00)	Late afternoon (16:00 - 18:00)
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					

You will hear from SQW by early September 2023 if you have been selected for an interview.

Topic guide for interviews with early career dental professionals

Introduction

The [General Dental Council (GDC)](#) wants to understand the experiences and perceptions of, and attitudes towards, the GDC among early career professionals (individuals who have registered to practise dentistry in the UK since 1st May 2018), and to understand how the GDC can better work with this cohort to meet its regulatory objectives. This study will enable the GDC to better understand the perspectives of those transitioning from training to practice and at the beginning of their careers, including their recent experiences as students.

The GDC has commissioned SQW, an independent research and consultancy organisation, to conduct this research study, which will run from January to late 2023. I am a researcher at SQW.

Thank you for recently completing the online survey for this study and registering interest in participating in this interview today. This is an opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences with the SQW research team, and to help inform future GDC activity.

The interview will take around 30 minutes, depending on how much you want to tell us. I will put some questions to you and take notes of our conversation, which will be held securely on SQW servers, accessible to SQW team members only. You don't have to answer all the questions if you don't want to, and you can end the interview at any time without giving a reason.

You will receive a £20 voucher for taking part in this interview. This will be sent to the email address we used to arrange this interview, within the next two weeks.

SQW is independent from the GDC, and we will not share our interview notes with anyone outside of the SQW research team. **You will not be named** in any reporting that SQW does. I will take notes during the interview to capture what you say, and SQW may use direct quotations in our reporting. We will not share identifiable testimony or comments with anyone outside of the SQW research team, unless you tell me something that leads me to believe that an individual is at risk of serious physical and/or emotional harm, in which case anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Can I confirm that you have received and read the briefing note?

Do you have any questions?

Are you happy to proceed, and is now still a good time?

Questions

Background

Q1. I've noted from your survey responses you are a registered (add role(s) from survey Q1), have been registered for (add year(s) from survey Q4 – *note this may have changed slightly now given time lag from the survey*), and work in (add setting(s) from survey Q6), is this all correct?

Perceptions of the GDC

Q2. In the online survey, you said you felt (interviewer add in word selected in survey Q15) towards the GDC. Why is that?

a) What has led to your (interviewer add in word selected in survey Q15) opinion of the GDC?

i) GDC administrative tasks, e.g., registration and/or renewal, logging CPD hours, phoning the contact centre, logging into GDC account, using website

ii) Word of mouth/ perceptions of others (e.g., colleagues/trainers) – if so, who?

iii) Wider GDC strategies and position statements

iv) Media, trade press write-ups of the GDC

v) Fitness to practise views/experiences

vi) Other

b) Has your perception regarding [the key influencing factors] changed over time? If so, why and how?

c) What could the GDC do to [further] improve your opinion of them?

Q3. You also stated that since your first contact with the GDC you (interviewer to add in phrase selected in survey Q16). Why is that?

a) [If no change over time] What has the GDC been doing persistently rightly or wrongly for your perception to have not changed over time? Or where has the GDC's activity failed to have an impact?

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Knowledge of the GDC

Q4. You told us in the survey that you (do/do not – interviewer to add in response to survey Q19) feel more knowledgeable about the GDC's role compared to when you first registered. Why is that?

a) If changed: What factors have informed your understanding of the GDC's role?

b) What information sources have you used to inform your understanding of the GDC? Probe for how/where/why this was picked up, e.g. is your understanding driven by perceptions of colleagues/friends, communications from the GDC, the GDC website, anything else?

Q5. Is there anything about the GDC's role which you feel you do not fully understand?

a) If so, how could the GDC best help you to fully understand its role and remit?

Communication and engagement

Q6. In the survey you stated that you (agree/disagree –add in response from survey Q20) with the statement "GDC communications generally provide what I need to know". Why do you say that?

a) Is there anything you would like GDC communications to include which they don't currently include?

Q7. If time: Is there anything about GDC communications that affects your perceptions – positively or negatively? (e.g. tone, content)

Q8. Overall, has how you engage with the GDC changed since you first registered?

a) If so, how and why?

b) Is there anything the GDC could do to engage more effectively with you?

Upstream activity and promoting professionalism

Q9. Reflecting back to initial registration, you stated that you felt (prepared/not prepared - interviewer to add in response to survey Q29) for professional practice. Why is that?

a) Is there anything the GDC could have done to help you feel more prepared?

b) If time: Is there anything other organisations (e.g., university, training provider etc) or individuals did, or could have done, to help you feel more prepared?

c) We are also interested in whether your views on your own preparedness changed over time. During your first year, did you feel you were actually more prepared than you had thought at initial registration? Or did you feel that you were less well prepared than you'd initially thought (e.g., not aware of the range of challenges you might face as a registrant)?

Q10. What do you think is the reason for [change reported in sense of preparedness]?

a) [UK-qualified only – check responses spreadsheet]: Thinking back to when you were a student, is there anything the GDC could have done to better engage with you at that point?

Q11. Do you think your views and experiences of, and attitudes towards the GDC influence your professional practice?

a) If so, how? Why?

b) Is there anything the GDC could do to improve its impact on your professional practice?

Q12. Do you think that being registered with and regulated by the GDC impacts on how you think of yourself as a professional or how you go about your professional practice?

a) If so, how? Why?

b) Is there anything else the GDC could do to positively impact on how you think of yourself as a dental professional?

Response to COVID-19

Q13. If yes to survey Q33: In the survey you stated that you were in education or training leading to GDC registration during the COVID-19 restrictions. Is there anything the GDC could have done to better support you in your transition into practice?

Q14. If no to survey Q33: To what extent, if at all, did the COVID-19 restrictions impact on your early years as a registered dental professional?

a) Is there anything further the GDC could have done to better support you in this period?

Wider perceptions of the dental profession

Q15. Overall, you stated that you are feeling (optimistic/pessimistic - interviewer to add in response to Q36) about the future of your profession over the next two years. Why is that?

a) How best can the GDC support you to feel more optimistic?

b) If time: Where do you think the GDC should be playing more of a role in addressing sectoral issues? Why?

c) If time: Do you perceive that the GDC's role and remit allow it to address, or stop it from addressing, wider sectoral issues? If so, how/why?

d) We're interested in how the GDC can support professionals to stay in dentistry. Have there been any times when you've considered leaving the register? If so, what kept you/keeps you registered? Was there anything GDC did or could have done to help/support/influence your decision??

Q16. We asked in the survey about how happy and anxious respondents were feeling, and would like to understand the impacts of working as a dental professional on wellbeing.

a) If time: On a day to day basis, what issues most impact on your wellbeing? Probe for working practices (full-time, part-time), personal factors, etc.

b) What could the GDC do, if anything, to support your wellbeing?

Q17. Looking forward, how has your perception or experience of the GDC impacted on your future career plans, if at all?

a) Explore if positive or negative impact, and how this could be improved?

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives

Q18. Thinking about equality, diversity and inclusion, in the survey you indicated that you (agree/disagree – interviewer to add in response to Q46) that the GDC promotes EDI within the dental profession. Why is that?

a) What more, if anything, should the GDC do to promote equality, diversity and inclusion within the dental profession? Probe for details – e.g. how, who to and who with (e.g., educators) etc.

Final questions

Q19. To date, have your expectations of the GDC been met? Please explain.

Q20. If you had to make one recommendation to the GDC which would improve your experiences and perceptions of, and attitudes towards, the GDC, what would it be?

Q21. Do you have any further reflections or comments you would like to add?

Annex D: Detailed survey tables and charts

D.1 This Annex presents detailed survey tables and charts from the analysis conducted but not included in the main body of the report.

Table D-1 : Under which role(s) are you registered with the GDC? Select all that apply (n=1,479)

Role	Count
Clinical Dental Technician	5
Dental Hygienist	221
Dental Nurse	748
Dental Technician	18
Dental Therapist	211
Dentist	466
Orthodontic Therapist	14
Prefer not to say	7

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-2: How long have you been on the GDC register in your current primary role? (n=1,479)

Length of registration	Count
Less than one year	498
One to two years	341
Between two and three years	262
Between three and four years	208
More than four years	151
Prefer not to say	19

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-3: What was your region of qualification? (n=1,479)

Region of qualification	Count
UK qualified	1019
European Economic Area (EEA) qualified	136
Qualified outside of the UK or EEA	309
Prefer not to say	15

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-4: Which of the following is/are your field(s) of practice? (n=1,477)

Field of practice	Count
General dental practice	1297
Specialist dental practice	168
Community dental service	59
Other hospital settings	74
Laboratory	20
Oral public health	29
Non-clinical (e.g., local authority, regulator, professional body, national/regional body)	9
Armed forces	6
In education/training as a student	22
In education/training as a member of staff (e.g. Foundation Dentist, Dental Core Trainee etc.)	68
Research	15
Other (please specify)	28
Prefer not to say	16

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-5: Which of the following best describes the type of organisation you most commonly work in now? (n=1,340)

Type of organisation	Count
Large group of corporately owned practices (ten or more)	318
Large group of independent practices (ten or more)	80
Prefer not to say	82
Small group of corporately owned practices (fewer than ten)	63
Small group of independent practices (fewer than ten)	213
Small independent practice	584

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-6: How many Dentists (including yourself, if applicable) are there in the dental practice where you work? (n=1,339)

Number of Dentists	Count
One	59
Two to four	592
Five to seven	412
Eight to Ten	134
Eleven or more	75
Not applicable – none	31
Prefer not to say	36

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-7: As part of your work, do you provide any dental care outside your routine surgery environment? (n=1,336)

Y/N	Count
Yes	104
No	1121
Prefer not to say	30
Not applicable	81

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-8: Approximately how many hours per week do you normally work? (n=1,478)

Hours per week	Count
Fewer than 15 hours per week	41
15 to 30 hours per week	345
31 to 40 hours per week	775
More than 40 hours per week	212
Not currently working	78
Prefer not to say	27

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-9: Where do you predominantly work/live? (n=1,479)

Region	Count (work)	Count (live)
England (region not specified)	3	0
England - East Midlands	90	6
England - East of England	82	4
England - London	221	25
England - North East	58	1
England - North West	125	4
England - South East	193	15
England - South West	163	7
England - West Midlands	108	10
England - Yorkshire and Humberside	84	8
Northern Ireland	31	1
Scotland	111	6
Wales	42	2
Channel Islands	5	0
Outside the UK	42	12
Prefer not to say	13	7

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-10: What is your current overall perception of the GDC? (n=1,466)

Overall perception	Count
Very positive	238
Positive	414
Neutral	437
Negative	230
Very negative	147

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-11: Since your first contact with the GDC to begin the registration process, has your view of the GDC changed? (n=1,474)

Change in perception	Count
Yes, I now view the GDC much more positively	189
Yes, I now view the GDC slightly more positively	189
No, my perception of the GDC has not changed	774
Yes, I now view the GDC slightly more negatively	175
Yes, I now view the GDC much more negatively	147

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-12: Out of the following, what currently most influences your view of the GDC? (Select up to three) (n=1,349)

Factor	Most influential	2nd most influential	3rd most influential	Total
Direct contact with the GDC	380	126	86	592
Experiences of colleagues/friends	319	282	111	712
Publications/articles in journals and newspapers	49	92	120	261
Articles online	36	55	64	155
Comments on social media	39	73	102	214
Opinions of key outspoken professionals	33	68	60	161
Opinions of trade unions	17	33	40	90
Opinions of professional bodies	49	73	70	192
Opinions of tutors/professors	25	59	64	148
Opinions of senior colleagues	77	111	107	295
The GDC website	107	85	78	270
The GDC's response to COVID-19	116	91	67	274
Don't know	102	45	117	264

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-13: How confident are you that you understand the GDC's role in the following areas? (n=1,379 – 1,363)

GDC role	Very confident	Quite confident	Not very confident	Not at all confident
Setting standards in education	570	623	157	29
Maintaining the register	728	534	90	26
Setting and promoting professional standards	675	554	107	31
Investigating concerns about impaired fitness to practise	560	566	172	65

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-14: Overall, do you now feel more knowledgeable about the GDC's role compared to when you first registered? (n=1,378)

Y/N	Count
Yes	1051
No	327

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-15: Thinking about your current experiences of GDC communications, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. GDC communications... (n=1,310 – 1,290)

GDC communications...	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
... generally provide what I need to know	271	697	170	71	101
... occur as frequently as I need them	198	694	178	63	163
... provide clear content	235	686	197	90	87
... use the channels that work for me	216	748	139	53	134
... meet my needs around accessibility	235	694	117	61	187

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-16: Did you attend any GDC student engagement sessions? (UK qualified students only) (n=686)

Y/N	Count
Yes	43
No	558
Don't know	85

Source: SQW survey

Table D-17: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: student engagement session(s) gave me a better understanding of... (n= 40 - 37)

Student engagement session(s) gave me a better understanding of...	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
... the GDC's overall remit	8	24	6	0
... the GDC's upstream and preventative regulatory activities	9	21	9	1
... the importance of professionalism to patients	16	19	5	0
... the importance of professionalism to professionals	16	18	5	0
... the benefits of working in a regulated profession	13	18	6	0
... the GDC's overall remit	8	24	6	0

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-18: Thinking back to when you first registered with the GDC, how satisfied were you with the following elements of the initial registration process? (n=1280 - 1272)

Elements of registration	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied
Ease of registration application	269	410	299	194
Length of time it took to register	207	344	270	237
Availability of support for registration	214	340	390	188
Relevance of the information in the welcome pack	263	471	403	93

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-19: Have you attended any GDC new registrant engagement sessions and/or student engagement sessions? (n=201)

New registrant engagement sessions and/or student engagement sessions	Count
Attended both GDC student engagement sessions and new registrant sessions	14
Only attended GDC new registrant sessions	3
Only attended GDC student engagement sessions	33
Not attended either GDC student engagement sessions nor new registrant sessions	119

Table D-20: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. The engagement session(s) gave me a better understanding of... (n=49 - 48)

The engagement session(s) gave me a better understanding of...	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
... the GDC's overall remit	7	25	8	4	5
... the GDC's upstream and preventative regulatory activities	3	23	11	5	7
... the importance of professionalism to patients	9	31	3	2	3
... the importance of professionalism to professionals	7	27	8	3	3

Table D-21: Have you responded to any GDC consultations? (n=1,269)

Y/N	Count
Yes	168
No	715
Don't know	386

Table D-22: Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that your involvement in the consultation(s) has... (n=160 - 159)

Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that your involvement in the consultation(s) has...	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
... increased your understanding of the GDC's role	40	83	20	4	13
... provided an opportunity to inform GDC policy	34	88	15	7	16
... made you more likely to engage with the GDC in future	30	79	23	8	19
... improved your perceptions of the GDC	31	71	27	14	17

Table D-23: Reflecting back to the time of initial registration, how prepared were you for professional practice? (n=1,147)

Preparedness for practice	Count
Very well prepared	449
Quite well prepared	535
Not very well prepared	120
Not at all prepared	14
Don't know	29

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-24: Thinking about your own professional practice, please tell us to what extent the GDC's activities in the following areas have had a positive or negative impact: (n=1,131 – 1,118)

Impact of GDC activities	Very positive impact	Positive impact	No impact	Negative impact	Very negative impact
Setting the standards for dental education and training	295	562	229	38	7
Ensuring that providers are meeting the standards for dental education and training	286	548	225	44	18
Investigating concerns about fitness to practise	252	434	272	94	66
Providing guidance on CPD	261	525	241	74	22

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-25: Overall, does the GDC have a positive or negative impact on the decisions you make about the services or treatments you provide? (n=1,125)

Impact on decision-making	Count
Very positive impact	236
Positive impact	489
No impact	216
Negative impact	118
Very negative impact	66

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-26: Were you in education or training leading to GDC registration during the COVID-19 restrictions? (n=1,127)

Y/N	Count
Yes	582
No	486
Don't know	59

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-27: To what extent, if any, did the COVID-19 restrictions impact your education or training? (n=567 - 558)

Impact of COVID-19	Very positive impact	Positive impact	No impact	Negative impact	Very negative impact
Access to practical training	44	60	121	204	138
Access to dental education	51	83	179	176	77
Time with my educational supervisor	47	76	165	165	105
Time with fellow students	44	51	152	147	166
Timing of assessment and/or qualification	47	73	177	156	105

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-28: Overall, to what extent would you say you are either optimistic or pessimistic about the future of your profession over the next two years? (n=1,057)

Outlook on future of dental profession	Count
Very optimistic	213
Optimistic	426
Pessimistic	197
Very pessimistic	135
Don't know	86

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-29: How optimistic or pessimistic do you feel about the following areas of the dental profession? (n=1,066 – 1,054)

Elements of the dental profession	Very optimistic	Optimistic	Pessimistic	Very pessimistic	Don't know
Patient access to NHS dental care	112	197	200	486	71
Learning and development	197	596	141	59	68
Changes in technology	282	603	68	33	71
Changes in the population's oral health needs	136	385	267	187	82
Employment opportunities	190	478	205	101	85
Changes in patient expectations	118	344	280	213	99
Changes in dental regulation	118	405	200	158	177
Financial	94	299	278	261	123
Reform of the NHS dental contract	87	231	212	371	158
Increased accountability to patients	109	376	202	163	204
Recruitment and retention of dental staff	97	295	264	287	113
The impact of exiting the EU	83	178	231	275	290

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-30: What are the greatest professional challenges in your current daily practice? (Select up to three) (n=1,025)

Professional challenge	Count
Finding time and opportunities to develop	419
Keeping up to date with changes in guidance, rules and the law	219
Meeting patients' expectations	304
Meeting the demands of regulation	204
Administration, including record keeping	252
Keeping up to date with changes in technology and best practice	104
Increased accountability to patients	92
Meeting the needs of NHS dental patients	368
Recruitment and retention of staff	229
Keeping within budget	125
Communication barriers with patients	61
Changes in the population's oral health needs	113
Not applicable	46
Don't know	43

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-31: Overall, do you feel the GDC is responding sufficiently to these issues? (n=1,025)

Y/N	Count
Yes	212
No	417
Don't know	367
Not applicable	29

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-32: Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday, on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is not at all happy and 10 is completely happy?(n=1,014)

Level of happiness	Count
0	22
1	21
2	36
3	52
4	55
5	139
6	112
7	166
8	205
9	90
10	116

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-33: Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday, on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is not at all anxious and 10 is completely anxious? (n=1,014)

Level of anxiety	Count
0	122
1	76
2	97
3	76
4	69
5	130
6	96
7	124
8	114
9	54
10	50

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

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Understanding and evaluating early career dental professionals' experiences of the General Dental Council

Table D-34: Which of the following statements reflects where you think your career will be in two years' time? (n=992)

Career in two years' time	Count
I will be working in my current post in the dental profession	455
I will be working in another post in the dental profession in the UK	336
I will be working in another post in the dental profession outside of the UK	65
I will have left the dental profession to work in another sector	130
I will not be working	6

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-35: How important are each of the following in making decisions about your job or role? (n=993 – 973)

Factor	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not at all important
GDC requirements	530	326	98	39
CQC requirements	525	314	105	39
HSE requirements	465	339	128	45
NHS contract	432	294	152	105
My mental health and wellbeing	822	132	28	8
My dental income	707	243	28	12
Health and safety concerns at work	643	280	46	16
Family circumstances	695	223	47	20
Redundancy	423	307	148	95
Career options outside of dentistry	376	245	250	109

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-36: Are you aware of the GDC's EDI Strategy? (n=976)

Y/N	Count
Yes	367
No	609

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-37: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the GDC promotes equality, diversity and inclusion within the dental profession? (n=979)

GDC promotion of EDI within the dental profession	Count
Strongly agree	244
Agree	398
Disagree	65
Strongly disagree	42
Don't know	230

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-38: What is your sex? (n=968)

Sex	Count
Female	761
Male	172
Prefer not to say	35

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-39: Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth? (n=967)

Y/N	
Yes	933
No	2
Prefer not to say	32

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-40: What is your age? (n=970)

Age bracket	Count
16-24	115
25-34	528
35-44	223
45-54	65
55-64	12
65+	1
Prefer not to say	26

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Annex Table D-41: Do you consider yourself to have a disability? (n=968)

Y/N	Count
Yes	39
No	892
Prefer not to say	37

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-42: What is your legal marital or registered civil partnership status? (n=966)

Relationship status	Count
Divorced	29
In a registered civil partnership	6
Married	372
Never married and never registered in a civil partnership	443
Separated, but still legally in a civil partnership	3
Separated, but still legally married	12
Surviving partner from a registered civil partnership	1
Widowed	4
Prefer not to say	96

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-43: Who is your legal marriage or registered civil partnership to? (n=391)

Relationship status	Count
Someone of the opposite sex	382
Someone of the same sex	4
Prefer not to say	5

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-44: What is your religion? (n=962)

Religion	Count
Buddhist	13
Christian (all denominations)	304
Hindu	96
Jewish	3
Muslim	121
No religion	311
Sikh	13
Other	13
Prefer not to say	88

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-45: Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation? (n=963)

Sexual orientation	Count
Straight/Heterosexual	822
Gay/Lesbian	24
Bisexual	33
Other (Asexual)	2
Prefer not to say	82

Source: SQW GDC ECP survey

Table D-46: What is your ethnic group? (n=961)

Ethnic group	Count
White	522
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	25
Asian or Asian British	243
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	42
Other ethnic group	55
Prefer not to say	74

Source SQW GDC ECP survey

SQW

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