

Guide to supporting your SAS or CDO in the GDC SLAA

Process for Entry to a dental Specialist List

The GDC have a structured process to regulate entry on to a dental specialist list in the UK.

Dental professionals registered with the GDC and who have completed an approved specialist training programme in the UK may apply for the award of a Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST) and entry onto the relevant specialist list.

GDC-registered dentists who do not hold a CCST can apply to join a specialist list by submitting evidence that they have an equivalent level of knowledge and experience gained in other ways. This is also known as an assessed application.

These applications are made to the GDC and assessed by Specialist Advisory Committees (SACs), which are intercollegiate bodies within the Royal Colleges that advise on higher specialist training in the dental specialties.

Link here to GDC [Specialist list application pack](#)

NHS England WTE support the education and training of dental professionals, a recent national project focused on the needs of the workforce and identified that many regions require more dental specialists to meet population oral health needs. Importantly they also need to retain them, upskilling local workforce is one proposed model to achieve this.

The NHSE project reached out directly to dental SAS and CDOs and identified 2 key dental staff groups:

1. Those with the enthusiasm to feel valued and recognised for their skills already at specialist level
2. Those aspiring to upskill and provide more specialist care in their region

Results indicated that the most common specialist lists for hospital SAS and Community Dental Officers to aspire to are oral surgery, paediatric dentistry and special care dentistry.

Project key points

- Dental education, including specialist training, is predominantly centralised in larger cities across England.
- Rural and remote areas experience a lack of specialist dental care, resulting in limited opportunities for training and skill development.
- Entry into specialist training is often viewed as an academic pursuit, with perceived barriers to access.
- A significant number of dentists employed in SAS and CDO roles possess, or aspire to possess, advanced skills and experience, yet have not pursued the formal specialty training pathway.
- The SAS and, in particular, the CDO workforce in regions with fewer large cities, such as the Southwest and parts of the North East and North West of England, have demonstrated considerable enthusiasm and interest in upskilling to achieving specialist status, acknowledging the value, recognition, and further opportunities for career development.

The NHSE WTE project identified the following perceived barriers and enablers to upskilling identified by SAS/ CDO dentists:

Perceived barriers:	Perceived enablers:
Financial, personal and geographical	Documentation, clinical experience and professional Support
GDC specialist list entry (SLAA) process	Flexibility
Perceptions of the SAS/ CDO role	Pathway maps and requirements
Trust and national level support	Quality assurance of the process
	Local, financial and personal support

Organisation lead focus group theme identified:

Themes:	
Clear support for SAS/ CDO cohort	Financial barriers
Quality standards	ICB support
Geographical barriers	Deanery (NHSE WTE) support

Summary of SAS/CDO Requirements of an Upskilling Programme

Requirement	Detail
Financial	Salary protection to support those transitioning from senior SAS and CDO roles
Geographical	Local selection of staff to avoid the need for relocation.
Personal	Flexibility to accommodate part-time commitments.
Process	A clear, structured pathway to achieve specialist status.
Quality	Access to specialty examinations to maintain academic rigour.
Evidence	A logbook/ work based assessments and management and leadership projects to document progress and experience.
Support	Access to mentorship and learning resources.
Organisational	Protected time for portfolio development and supervision.
Retention	Post-training job security, benefiting both trainees and local populations by retaining up-skilled staff.

Route to Entry to the dental specialist list

Under the new GDC Specialist List Regulations (2024), there are now updated defined routes to entry:

Oral Surgery and orthodontics

These two specialties have specific European legislation to adhere to, and as such can be defined under the following 5 routes of entry

Route 1 – EEA Oral Surgery qualification – Specialist Oral Surgery qualification awarded by an EEA Member State or Switzerland

Route 2 – Oral Surgery qualification outside UK – Postgraduate Oral Surgery qualification awarded outside the United Kingdom (demonstrating equivalence to CCST in Oral Surgery).

Route 3 – Knowledge and experience – Knowledge and experience in Oral Surgery derived from academic or research work (demonstrating equivalence to CCST in Oral Surgery).

Route 4 – GMC-registered Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon – Registered as a specialist on the General Medical Council's (GMC) register for Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and has completed training equivalent to that required for the award of a CCST in Oral Surgery.

Route 5 – Specialist UK qualification – Specialist qualification awarded in the United Kingdom and relevant knowledge and skill and experience in the specialty in question (demonstrating equivalence to CCST in Oral Surgery).

In this guide, we will focus on entry through **Route 3**.

The other 11 dental specialties

Which include Paediatric dentistry and special care dentistry which we produced guides on the GDC SLAA process) have the following three routes of entry

1. Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST) route
2. Assessed application - UK specialist qualification with equivalent knowledge and experience
3. Professional Qualifications and International Agreements (PQIA) route

Those seeking to join the list without an approved Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST), such as Specialty and Associate Specialist (SAS) Dentists or Community Dental Officers (CDOs) will usually apply through Route 2 or Route 3 below.

Route	Description	Typical Applicants
1. CCST Route	Completion of an approved UK specialty training programme leading to a Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST).	Dentists who have completed a recognised specialist training programme in the UK.
2. Assessed application - UK Specialist Qualification + Equivalence	Holding a UK specialist qualification (for example, an MSc, Diploma, or Fellowship) and demonstrating knowledge, skills, and experience equivalent to a CCST.	Dentists who have not undertaken formal GDC-approved specialty training but have achieved equivalent competence through postgraduate study and professional experience.
3. Professional Qualifications & International Agreements (PQIA) Route	Recognition of overseas or international specialist qualifications under the Professional Qualifications and International Agreements Regulations 2023, or other relevant international recognition agreements.	Dentists trained outside the UK who can demonstrate their qualification and experience are equivalent to UK CCST standards.

In this guide, we will focus on entry through **Route 2**.

It is important to highlight that application to the specialist list is possible for any individual, this document is for those organisations seeking and offering formal support for an employee.

Selection criteria

The decision for an organisation to support upskilling of an SAS or CDO to apply for entry on the GDC specialist route is multifactorial:

- Needs of the local population – organisation waiting lists (RTT/PTL) and case complexity
- ICB support
- Local dental workforce composition
- SAS/ CDO current skill set
- Ability to strategically invest in an individual

Support required

Guides to support SAS and CDO dentists in the upskilling process are available alongside this document to provide a structure for application and aid individual's portfolio creation.

- [Oral Surgery \(link to guide\)](#)
- [Paediatric Dentistry \(link to guide\)](#)
- [Special Care Dentistry \(link to guide\)](#)

These guides offer specialty-specific information to assist applicants seeking entry to the GDC Specialist List via the Specialist List Assessed Application (SLAA) route.

They are designed to complement the guidance and documentation provided by the [General Dental Council \(GDC\)](#).

The needs of an individual SAS or CDO can be variable due to differing past experience and exposure. They must identify their personal needs using the produced guides and relevant dental curricula. The staff member can then discuss how they can approach these gaps through organisation and NHSE WTE support and signposting.

Organisation support may take the form of:

- Facilitating SAS/CDO secondment to other clinical settings to gain skills and WBAs in areas of the curriculum they cannot achieve in your workplace.
- Time given for academic and portfolio related pursuits
- Support in carrying out and promotion of quality improvement, management and leadership projects

Your local NHS England workforce, training and Education body (who oversee regional dental training such as DCT and StR) can also signpost and facilitate access to external resources such as those used for StR training.

Below is an example of how an organisation can select and support an individual in upskilling:

Example Draft Business Case: Upskilling Community Dental Officer to Specialist Level in Special Care Dentistry (2-Year Model)

Executive Summary

This business case outlines the proposal to support the upskilling of an experienced Community Dental Officer (CDO) to achieve GDC specialist registration in Special Care Dentistry over a defined two-year period. This strategic investment addresses the regional shortage of specialists in Special Care Dentistry, improves equity of access for patients with additional needs, and supports NHSE workforce transformation goals.

Background and Case for Change

- There is a critical shortage of GDC-registered specialists in Special Care Dentistry in the South West, impacting service provision and access for patients with complex medical, physical, or psychological needs.
- Current recruitment to specialist posts is challenged by geographic constraints and limited national supply.
- Upskilling experienced Community Dental Officers offers a cost-effective, sustainable, and locally grounded solution.

Proposal

To support a named Community Dental Officer in a structured upskilling pathway leading to GDC specialist registration via the Specialist List Assessment Application (SLAA) route. The two-year upskilling plan includes targeted CPD, clinical mentorship, portfolio development, short-term secondments, and optional postgraduate modular study.

Objectives

- Enable the Community Dental Officer to achieve GDC specialist recognition within 2 years.
- Reduce reliance on external referrals or tertiary services.
- Improve access to specialist dental care for people with additional needs locally.
- Build capacity for long-term service sustainability.

Planned Activities and Timeline (2-Year Model)

Activity	Timeframe
CPD courses (safeguarding, disability awareness, sedation, medical complexity)	Months 1–12
Clinical mentoring and supervision by existing Special Care Dentistry specialist	Months 1–20
Clinical secondment to specialist centre (e.g. 1–2 days/week over 3–6 months)	Months 6–18
Reflective portfolio development and case log compilation	Months 6–22
Optional MSc module(s) in Special Care Dentistry	Months 12–22 (if required)
Examination preparation courses and exam sitting for the DSFE speciality	Months 12–22
Application for GDC Specialist List (SLAA)	Months 22–24

Cost Estimates (2-Year Model)

Item	Estimated Cost
Targeted CPD courses	£2,000
Mentorship sessions	£1,500
Portfolio support/peer review	£1,000
GDC SLAA application fee	£345
Exam preparation and optional MSc modules (if required)	£5,000–£10,000
Examination sitting	£2,000
Clinical secondment (e.g. travel, study leave, partial backfill for 12–24 days)	£1,500–£3,000
Total (estimated range)	£7,345–£19,845

Risks and Mitigations

- *Risk:* SLAA application not accepted.
- *Mitigation:* Ensure early alignment with GDC specialist curriculum and regular progress review.
- *Risk:* Service impact during study time or secondment.
- *Mitigation:* Flexibility in scheduling, backfill support, and use of NHSE study leave. Explore ICB or HEE discretionary funding.

- *Risk:* Limited availability of specialist supervision.
- *Mitigation:* Establish formal partnership with host unit and phased clinical exposure.

Outcomes and Benefits

- New locally trained specialist contributing to Special Care Dentistry service delivery within 2 years.
- Improved access to care for patients with complex needs.
- Development of internal capacity for supervising future trainees.
- Career progression and retention of experienced Community Dental Officers.
- Alignment with national workforce development priorities and the commissioning intentions for Special Care Dentistry.

Recommendation It is recommended that funding be approved to support the upskilling of a Community Dental Officer to specialist level in Special Care Dentistry over a two-year period, aligned with NHS England's long-term workforce strategy and the regional need for improved access to care for patients with additional needs.