



## A Strategy to Attract, Welcome, Develop, Celebrate and Support Dentists in Training in Northern Ireland

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## *Executive Summary*

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The Northern Ireland Executive has endorsed the need to transform how health and social care services are designed and delivered in NI to meet the increasing demands and changing pressures on the service ([Health and Wellbeing 2026 Delivering Together](#)).

Key to the success of this health and social care transformation in NI will be the ability to plan for, attract, develop, value, support and retain a workforce which can deliver excellent care.

Dentists are key health professionals who must be capable of regularly taking ultimate responsibility for decisions regarding oral health and provision of dental care, drawing on their scientific knowledge and well developed clinical judgement.

They also have a role in improving care through quality improvement and research and by bringing good practice with them to a unit from other centres in NI or from out of programme training and experience in centres of excellence in the rest of the UK or across the world. Many of NIMDTA's dentists in training will remain and become the future practitioners responsible for delivering and leading dental clinical services across Northern Ireland.

It is therefore vital, in order to ensure the of delivery excellent care, that there is ongoing transformation of our approach to postgraduate dental training so that high calibre dentists are attracted, welcomed, developed, celebrated and supported in training programmes in NI. That is the aim of the VALUED strategy. This strategy will only be successful if there is full engagement and support from key stakeholders.

## What is *valued* aiming to achieve?

The aim of this strategy is to enhance the care of patients in Northern Ireland by attracting, welcoming, developing, celebrating, supporting and encouraging high calibre dentists to **train and remain** in Northern Ireland.



Figure 1: Aims of VALUED

## Why is *valued* important?

The Report of the Expert Panel on the configuration of Health and Social Care Services in Northern Ireland [Systems not Structures](#) stated “*patient experience, and their perception of the quality of care they receive, depends in a very significant way on having well- trained, experienced and motivated frontline staff*”. The Report went on to document the increasing difficulty that the Health and Social Care system in Northern Ireland was experiencing in recruiting and retaining staff - “*There is a growing doomsday scenario of not having enough GPs, hospital consultants and junior doctors, nurses, Allied Health Professionals and social care staff that will inevitably lead to people not receiving the care they need*”.

### *Opportunities for training in NI*

[Health and Wellbeing 2026](#), the response of Health Minister Michelle O’Neill to the Report of the Expert Panel set out the Minister’s vision to transform Health and Social Care in NI through



Figure 2: Health and Wellbeing 2026

“a process of rationalisation and reconfiguration to ensure services are delivered sustainably, safely and to the highest possible quality.” Minister O’Neill has recognised that “People who work in health and social care are its greatest strength, working ever harder to provide the care needed by patients and service users’ and the need to “invest in our staff and provide the environment to allow them to do what they do best – provide excellent high quality care”.

Minister O’Neill went on the state that she wanted the “HSC to be an employer of choice, leading by example and investing in the health and wellbeing of its staff” and that she was “determined that the unique store of knowledge, commitment and public service ethos that the HSC workforce represents will be listened to, engaged at nurtured at all levels”.

### *Implications of non-engagement*

Failure to listen to, engage and nurture the next generation of fully trained dentists and clinical leaders may result in increasing difficulties in attracting and retaining experienced dental staff. Improving the morale of postgraduate dental trainees has the potential to increase efficiency, improve patient outcomes and ensure patient safety today as well as encouraging dentists to **train and remain** in Northern Ireland long term.

## *What will **valued** look like?*

Inspired by potential benefits to the system of enhanced engagement with dentists in training in Northern Ireland, NIMDTA in conjunction with HSC partner organisations have developed a VALUED Strategy to ensure that postgraduate dental trainees are welcomed, listened to, developed, celebrated and supported.

Our strategic vision centres around six key aims:



Figure 3: Aims of VALUED

### *Aim 1: To ensure the Voice of trainees is listened to (V)*

Dentists in training enter as new members of established dental teams which vary in size and can be at risk of isolation and disengagement due to their temporary transitional period of training. Dental speciality trainees are often small in number with limited peer support. Providing mechanisms for two-way communication with all dental trainees is essential to improve trainee engagement and to monitor the progress and success of the range of initiatives.



#### **To achieve this:**

- We will involve trainees as representatives on Training Committees and School Boards
- We will work with HSC Trusts to seek involvement of trainee representatives on Trust Education Committees
- We will work with HSC Trusts and dental training practices to engage with trainees and listen to their concerns by holding trainee fora and focus groups
- We will work with HSC Trusts and dental training practices to communicate effectively with trainees through email, social media and by developing future trainee newsletters

### *Aim 2: To Acclaim and applaud the success of trainees (A)*

Recognition of achievement is a strong intrinsic motivator and can significantly improve job satisfaction, which is an important component of engagement. Due to the increased service pressures it can be difficult for senior dentists to recognise good work or indeed underperformance and there may be limited opportunities to appreciate the efforts of trainees.

However, dentists-in- training are more likely to be inspired and encouraged if their efforts and achievements are recognised and celebrated. Northern Ireland trainees are high-achieving in many

different areas including examination success, publications in dental literature, service improvement, and contributions to society. It is incredibly important to highlight and celebrate these achievements, at both local and regional levels.

### To achieve this:

- We will acknowledge and acclaim the success of trainees on NIMDTA's website and in trainee newsletters
- We will work with HSC Trusts and dental training practices to acknowledge the contribution of trainees through letters of appreciation, achievement boards and/or award ceremonies
- We will recognise and celebrate the achievements of trainees at NIMDTA's [Annual Educational Excellence Day](#)
- We will work with Queen's University of Belfast and the Ulster Medical Society to recognise and acclaim academic and scholarly success at the [Annual Trainee Research Day](#).



**Figure 5 & 6: Prize Winners at the NIMDTA Educational Excellence Day 2017**

### *Aim 3: To promote Life-work balance and support for trainees (L)*

Working as a dentist in training involves exposure to multiple stressors – high impact decisions and a lack of control over the work that they do. Dentists in training benefit from support to manage these stressful situations and from advice on how to achieve a healthy life-work balance. As dentists will often be required to deal with stressful situations, it is important that dentists in training receive

preparation to cope with situations where their desired outcomes are not obtained and that support mechanisms are in place for those affected by stress or struggling with mental health issues.

**To achieve this:**

- We will meet and greet trainees new to Northern Ireland through Welcome events to introduce them to the leisure, social, and cultural highlights of our country as well as to other trainees.
- We will strengthen the connections between trainees and NIMDTA through the development of a [Trainee Ambassador programme](#).
- We will promote the achievement of a work-life balance through support for less than full time training
- We will work with HSC Trusts and dental training practices to promote rota designs and work patterns which support patient-centred safe care, quality training and education, and trainee health and wellbeing.
- We will work with HSC Trusts and dental training practices to promote rest breaks and to seek the allocation of areas for rest, study and reflection where appropriate.
- We will support trainees to cope with the pressures of their work through resilience training, [mentoring and coaching](#)
- We will work with HSC Trusts and dental training practices to provide trainees with [career advice and professional support](#) and provide an Annual Careers Events for trainees
- We will work with HSC Trusts and dental training practices to facilitate access to Occupational Health and [counselling](#) services
- We will work with HSC Trusts and dental training practices to support trainees returning to work after a period out of programme.



**NIMDTA  
Trainee  
Ambassadors**



**Figures 7 & 8: NIMDTA Welcome Evening August 2017**

### *Aim 4: To provide Up-to-date, high quality training (U)*

Dentists in training frequently emphasise the importance of support for their education and training. Good supervision and meaningful appraisals are essential for trainees, and dentists in training should receive encouragement to participate in or to lead relevant, significant and sustainable projects.

#### **To achieve this:**

- We will work with HSC Trusts to deliver quality improvement training to Dental Foundation, Core and Specialty trainees. We will work with HSC Trusts and the NI Simulation and Human Factors Network ([NISHFN](#)) to improve simulation based training in NI.
- We will work with dentists in training to improve the access to and quality of formal teaching
- We will work with HSC Trusts and dental training practices to establish Placement Quality Indicators and to continuously improve the quality of training
- We will work with Department of Health, Commissioners and HSC Trusts to align training posts to the best training opportunities



### *Aim 5: To offer Enhanced learning opportunities for trainees (E)*

High performing health care systems are characterised by collective leadership. The Minister has committed to invest in Health and Social Care (HSC) staff to facilitate them to provide excellent, high quality, continually improving care and support. This means that the HSC needs to provide opportunities for staff to develop collective leadership skills, behaviours and capabilities as leadership is the responsibility of all in HSC NI.

#### **To achieve this:**

- We will provide generic professional and leadership training (career development, team-working, improvement skills) within





the Dental Foundation, Core and Specialty ([iQuest](#)) Programmes

- We will support trainees to prepare for professional examinations through the provision of examination preparation courses and study leave. We will offer funding to trainees to assist with the expenses of relevant university postgraduate qualifications.
- We will provide opportunities for trainees to obtain leadership experience.
- We will provide, in partnership with HSC organisations, senior trainees with the opportunity to take a year out of programme to undertake a Clinical Leadership Fellows' Programme ([ADEPT](#))
- We will provide, in partnership with Queen's University Belfast, opportunities for trainees to undertake clinical academic training
- We will provide, in partnership with Queen's University Belfast and the Ulster Medical Society, opportunities for trainees to present their research and quality improvement work.



### *Aim 6: To present a Distinctive training experience (D)*

Dental postgraduate training improves and enhances skills which can be used to deliver high quality care in General Dental Services and therefore should be perceived as a worthwhile endeavour by recently graduated dentists. Dental postgraduate training in Northern Ireland has distinctive benefits including working and training with small local networks enabling good peer and educator support.

#### **To achieve this:**

- We will work with HSC Trusts to secure protected time for Recognised Trainers in their job plans to supervise and train (Time to Train Initiative)
- We will work with HSC Trusts and dental training practices to ensure that Recognised Trainers receive the training and support that they need to provide high quality supervision to trainees (NIMDTA's [Status](#) Programme for Recognised Trainers).
- We will work with HSC Trusts to secure protected teaching time for trainees



- We will work with the HSC Leadership Centre to provide Leadership and Improvement training for senior trainees ([ENGAGE](#))



**HSC Leadership Centre** **ENGAGE** **ndia**  
A Clinical Leadership and Improvement Programme

**Introduction**  
The Northern Ireland Medical & Dental Training Agency in collaboration with the HSC Leadership Centre have developed a new Clinical Leadership and Improvement Programme for Final Year GP, Dental and Specialty Trainees across Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.

The initial pilot programme will offer places to 100 final year trainees and each module will be from 6-9pm each evening.

**Programme Details**

- Module 1: Me as a Clinical Leader (Monday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2016)
- Module 2: Enhancing Personal Resilience (Monday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2017)
- Module 3: Building and Maintaining Effective Relationships and Teams (Monday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2017)
- Module 4: Strategic Leadership – Connecting Our Service (Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2017)
- Module 5: Transformational Change – Inspiring Shared Purpose (Monday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2017)
- Module 6: Engaging effectively with Organisational Leaders (Monday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017)
- Module 7: Critical Conversations (Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017)
- Module 8: Enabling the Voice of Patients and Service Users (Monday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2017)

**PROGRAMME AIM**  
To support the achievement of the primary leadership and improvement goal, that is, ‘*continual and never ending improvement of the well-being of patients and other service users*’ (Don Berwick, 2013). This Clinical Leadership and Improvement Programme has as its foundation Value Based Leadership (Harry M Kraemer). It aims to challenge, develop and support doctors and dentists to ensure they are prepared to lead effectively so they can influence, shape and improve the delivery of high quality patient-centred care in their organisations and across the Health and Social Care

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

- Greater collaboration internally and externally with a culture of shared experiences, expertise and support in the pursuit of providing the best care to patients
- Enhanced personal and professional effectiveness through a greater self-awareness and understanding of individual behaviours and their impact on others
- Strengthened resilience to enable positive and collective leadership and improvement in an increasingly dynamic and turbulent environment
- Extended strategic understanding of Health and Social Care and greater capability to deliver transformational change
- Understanding the language, tools and skills of improvement science
- Successful implementation of quality improvement initiatives within their organisations
- Learn how to prepare and publish an abstract e.g. BMJ Quality and Safety

**KEY PRINCIPLES**  
Learners have different personalities and learning styles. Delivery methodologies will be experiential, engaging, providing challenge and leading to action and review. The programme is designed with the following underlying principles:

- We will develop clinical leaders and improvers who add value to their organisations
- We will engage with experienced and respected leaders and improvers in General Practice, Dentistry and Hospital Medicine as role models and contributors
- We will utilise a range of evidence based theories, models and development methods
- We will respond to the emergent learning needs of the participants
- We will focus on learning and practical application
- We will challenge participants both in terms of knowledge and behaviours
- We will evaluate participants’ knowledge, skills, competence and confidence before, during and after the programme

**MODULE STRUCTURE**

- The first two modules are about individuals having the mindset and strength to lead improvement and change within their healthcare environment.
- Building on this the next two modules explore how to work collaboratively and system wide to improve services whilst understanding the strategic context
- The fifth module directly links to how we can achieve transformational and radical change through improvement
- The final three modules are clearly focused on relationships and how they can help to implement and sustain quality improvements.

**Figure 8: ENGAGE Clinical Leadership and Improvement Programme**

## How will *valued* happen?

### *Alignment to Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together*

The aim of enhancing patient care through welcoming, developing, celebrating, supporting and encouraging high calibre dentists to **train and remain** in Northern Ireland aligns completely with the views of the Minister of Health as set out in [Health and Wellbeing 2026](#) in wanting the “*HSC to be an employer of choice, leading by example and investing in the health and wellbeing of its staff*” and in being determined that the HSC workforce “*will be listened to, engaged at nurtured at all levels*”.

### *Alignment with Quality 2020 Strategy*

[Quality 2020](#) is the Department of Health’s strategy to protect and improve quality in health and social care in Northern Ireland. Key goals within the strategy are to transform the culture and

strengthen the workforce. It states “No matter how good our systems and procedures are, they all rely on staff who are **motivated, skilled and trained** to implement them.”

“Without doubt the people who work in health and social care (including volunteers and carers) are its greatest asset. It is vital therefore that every effort is made to equip them with the skills and knowledge they will require, building on existing and emerging HR strategies, to deliver the highest quality.”



VALUED supports the specific aims of Quality 2020 by

- Providing the right education, training and support for trainees to deliver high quality service
- Educating and empowering our trainees to implement quality improvement
- Developing leadership skills amongst our trainees

### *Alignment to COPDEND & GDC Standards and Guidance*

The Committee of Postgraduate Deans and Directors (COPDEND) and the General Dental Council (GDC) provide standards and guidance for all stages of postgraduate dental training:

- [A Reference Guide for Dental Foundation Training \(COPDEND\)](#)
- [Dental Gold Guide 2016: A guide to postgraduate specialty training in the UK \(COPDEND\)](#)
- [Standards for Specialty Education: Standards and requirements for providers \(GDC\)](#)

The aims of VALUED align closely to the themes, standards and requirements of these guidance documents.

### *Alignment to NIMDTA's Mission, Vision and Strategic Aims*

NIMDTA's mission is 'Enhancing Patient Care through training' and its vision is 'To Equip, Develop and Inspire doctors and dentists in training to provide and continuously improve the quality of health care delivery to the population of Northern Ireland'. NIMDTA seeks to produce excellent outcomes in medical and dental education as shown in Figure 13

**Figure 9: NIMDTA Strategic Theme 1: To Produce Excellent Outcome in Medical and Dental Education**

*Alignment with Service Needs*

The purpose of postgraduate training is to provide dentists with the right skills for the needs of patients both as individuals and as a population.

The VALUED strategy supports the provision of a suitably trained dental workforce by promoting opportunities for development of generic capabilities, giving consideration to the sustainability of a dental career through support of work-life balance and periods of transition and providing opportunities for training in specialised areas including education, leadership or management work.

ACTIVITIES
TO PROMOTE EXCELLENCE IN TRAINING BY UPHOLDING THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONALISM , SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY, CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP
TO ENGAGE CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH TRAINING PARTNERS TO PROMOTE HIGH QUALITY EDUCATIONAL DELIVERY
TO ATTRACT, DEVELOP, SUPPORT, VALUE, INSPIRE AND RETAIN HIGH CALIBRE EDUCATORS AND EDUCATION MANAGEMENT STAFF
TO DEVELOP, SUPPORT, VALUE AND RETAIN TALENTED DENTAL AND MEDICAL TRAINERS
TO ATTRACT, WELCOME, DEVELOP, VALUE AND RETAIN HIGH CALIBRE TRAINEES
TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE WITH, ENGAGE AND SUPPORT TRAINEES
TO ENHANCE TRAINING BY PROVIDING ACADEMIC, RESEARCH, SIMULATION, LEADERSHIP AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINEES

*Engagement with essential stakeholders*

As a training agency, NIMDTA is committed to the needs of junior dentists in Northern Ireland.

However this strategy can only be successful through engagement with other key stakeholders:

- Department of Health,
- Health and Social Care Board,
- Public Health Agency,
- HSC Trusts,
- GDP practices,
- Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority,
- Business Services Organisation,
- Queen’s University of Belfast and
- British Dental Association.

This collaborative working is essential to ensure that this strategy is both comprehensive and sustainable. HSC Trusts and dental training practise can help to identify the wide range of trainee achievements and celebrate the successes of highly performing trainees at a local level. There are many stakeholders involved in improving the wellbeing of and support provided to trainees,

including Department of Health, HSC Trusts, dental training practices and the BDA. Through working with these key stakeholders, trainee support could be extended to include improved rota design and practical initiatives such as doctors' and dentists messes.

### *Measuring progress*

Due to the wide range of initiatives to be developed under the VALUED Strategy, a variety of methods will be required to evaluate progress of the strategy. These will include, but are not limited to:

- trainee engagement with Trainee Fora, NIMDTA Training Committees, Trust Education Committees, Trainee Ambassador programme and mentoring programme
- trainee submissions for Trainee Research Day, Educational Excellence Day, and Simulation Conferences
- trainee attendance at Welcome events, Trainee Research Day, Educational Excellence Day, Careers Day, Simulation Conferences, Evidence-Based Medicine workshops and ENGAGE programme
- hits on NIMDTA website and circulation figures of trainee newsletters
- trainee access of NIMDTA professional support services
- trainee examination success
- trainee feedback on individual initiatives
- feedback on valued initiatives from trainees through Trainee Forum and focus groups
- attendance of Recognised Trainers at STATUS events, Clinical Education Day and Professional Support Day
- feedback on STATUS programme from Recognised Trainers
- feedback from host organisations on ADEPT programme
- annual Dental Trainee Survey reports on trainee satisfaction with training
- annual Dental Trainer Survey reports on trainer satisfaction with support provided to them
- monitoring application rates to Northern Ireland training programmes
- VALUED Survey

## Conclusions

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Northern Ireland's strategic plan [Health & Wellbeing 2026](#) recognises that "We must invest in our staff and provide the environment to allow them to do what they do best - provide excellent high quality care. This means providing opportunities to develop their skills and suitable career paths at all levels".

NIMDTA recognise the integral role of junior dentists in providing high quality patient care. Through the VALUED Strategy, NIMDTA is demonstrating its commitment to valuing trainees, striving to ensure that trainees in Northern Ireland are listened to, supported, celebrated, and provided with high-quality training and opportunities. This is essential to ensure patient safety, excellent patient care and the sustainability of health and social care within Northern Ireland. This strategy will only be successful if there is full engagement and support from key stakeholders.



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