



23 March 2016

Dear All Stakeholders

Registration Exam Review Task Team (RERTT)

As you are aware from Council's recent newsletter (February 2016), the Council established a task team known as the (RERTT) whose mandate is to investigate the feasibility of re-introducing a Council registration assessment.

Background

The registration assessment refers to what was previously known as the "Board Exam". Many of the older members will recall having to travel to Pretoria in days gone by to do a 2-3 day practical exam before they could register with Council as dental technicians. This was a "carry over" from the older apprenticeship system that was out-and-out aimed at testing practical competency. With the introduction of the formal training model in the early 70's, this practice remained for some years until the National Higher Diploma replaced the then Council Diploma. This model provided for the old Technikon to conduct the assessment on behalf of Council. To ensure good standards, Council appointed an Education Inspector, who was tasked with setting minimum requirements and to verify that these requirements were met. With the inception of the UoTs about ten years ago, the playing field, amongst the UoTs, steadily changed. These new institutions resulted not only in a change of name, from Technikon to University of Technology, but also brought about fundamental changes in character and philosophy. Where Technikon was profession/industry driven, the new UoTs are increasingly moving their focus from practical to research base, which leads to postgraduate qualifications. The Council recognizes the value of research and its role in driving the future of any profession. However, we must remain mindful and ensure that the quality and more specifically, the practical skills of qualifying dental technicians and technologists remains at the highest level. After all, what is a professional who does not demonstrate both knowledge and skill? If he/she cannot demonstrate the required practical skill how can such person claim to be a professional?

A further concern is the fact that the UoTs are increasingly demanding that moderators and external examiners are sourced from the profession with one qualification level higher than that of the students being assessed. Although a noble and commendable idea, it is not possible in our profession as yet. The real difficulties are experienced at BTech level where all moderators/external examiners are required to have at least a masters degree. The Council is aware that there are very few professionals, specifically in the private sector, with such qualifications. The departments at various UoTs are under continuous pressure to find suitably qualified persons, and the risk is that moderators/examiners are appointed purely on qualification and often at the expense of professional/practical experience. Often those with masters' qualifications have obtained such in areas not related to the practice of dental technology.

Furthermore, UoTs are under pressure to appoint more academic staff with masters and higher qualifications in order to lecture. Although this may be acceptable and commendable at a theoretical level, it is definitely not working for the Council and this drive is consequently at the expense of proper and relevant practical experience. The Council is aware of very young and inexperienced dental technologists being appointed as lecturers. Bringing in young and new blood is always good, but never can the Council sit back and allow this to happen at the expense of high level skills being transferred to the future professionals.

Again, Council is mindful and respects the fact the UoTs have its mandate and goals and can appoint academic staff based on their own criteria. However, what remains the mandate of Council is to ensure the future of the profession, by validating the skills that graduates demonstrate at the point of registration; that of being "fit for purpose". The UoTs award academic qualifications while Council awards professional registration qualification.

Based on the three points stated above, Council discussed this matter at the Audit and Risk Committee and its other structures. There is a real possibility that the education and training of future students may be placed on the Council's Risk Register. With that being noted, Council is NOT saying that there is a risk at present, but there may be a reason for concern right now and a real risk may present itself in future.

Council at its last meeting on 12 December 2015 appointed a task team to investigate the matter and to report to Council by its mid-year meeting. Although it is premature, the possibility exists that Council may revert back to some form of assessment before registration can be considered. Let's leave the discussion to the task team and when you as professionals are asked to participate in the investigation please avail yourself and assist Council to do what is in the best interest of the profession and ultimately that of the general public.



South African Dental Technicians Council

The Task Team members are:

- David van Eyk. (Member of Council)
- Dr M Mothopi-Peri (Member of Council)
- Patrice Briscoe (Member of Council)
- Thomas Modiba (Deputy Registrar of Council)

The task team is mandated to co-opt, as they may deem necessary, additional members to strengthen the team. They will interview whomever they deem necessary to gather the required information before presenting a report to Council on 16 July 2016.

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Thank you for participating in this critical process that Council has embarked on. Your contribution is highly appreciated. The task team will require submissions/presentations from you stakeholders in two parts, as stated below:-

1. Written submissions:
2. Oral presentations

Instructions for written submissions

- Submissions must be concise, not exceeding 3 pages.
- Contents of the written submission must be limited to the following:-
 - a) What is your experience with Council's Board Exams (the past)? If you have experience with this, what are your experiences regarding this (any benefits, advantages, disadvantages. etc?)
 - b) What do you think about the current situation i.e the quality of dental technicians/technologists qualifying from UoTs today and not expected to write any form of assessment to be registered with Council?
 - c) Which situation do you prefer? Council Registration after passing Board Exams or Council registration without Board exams as is happening currently? Give reasons for this.
 - d) What role do you see Council's Education Inspector playing going forward with whichever situation/option you prefer?
 - e) Do you think a Council board exam will help determine whether a student is practically fit for purpose as a Dental technologist and therefore qualifies for registration as such with Council?
 - f) Is Council in conducting such an examination not undermining the Uots?
 - g) What procedure should be followed for those who do not pass the "fit for purpose" practical examination set by Council?
 - h) Should students whom pass this Council exam be allowed to open their own laboratories serving the public or should there be a min of two to three years employment in a registered laboratory instituted to ensure that the individuals are suited to serve the public and Dentistry in South Africa from a more experienced and professional point of view?
 - i) Any other information that you deem necessary which is related to this discussion.
- The deadline for submissions will be the 15th of April 2016.

Instructions for oral presentations

Data projector and laptop will be provided. Just bring your USB/memory stick.

- Presentations will have 25 minutes time allocation and additional 5 minutes for questions and or comments.
- The Task Team may request the presenter to clarify some aspects from the written submission. In a case where the presenter is not the author of the written submission please familiarise yourself with that document before the oral presentation so that you can be in a position to address questions which might arise from the written submission.
- Presentations will take place on the 23rd of April 2016. Time will be confirmed at a later stage.

Regards
SADTC: RERTT