

# Making a complaint or raising a concern about an education or training provider

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What can the GDC investigate?**

The GDC can investigate concerns about the quality of a dental or DCP education or training programme, especially if there might be risks to patients' safety or graduates' fitness to practise. This could include, for example, concerns about the quality of practice placements, or education or training providers not providing their students with sufficient practical experience of treating patients.

- **What can't the GDC investigate?**

Examples of what we **cannot** investigate include:

- matters of academic judgement, such as academic results;
- issues around tuition fees; or
- grievances against individual staff.

Providers should have their own internal complaints procedures which would normally be the most appropriate route for complaints about the above issues. In addition, there may be a range of other organisations who may be able to investigate.

If you are not sure whether the GDC can investigate your concerns, you are welcome to contact us, in confidence, and we will provide further advice.

- **What should I do before making a complaint to the GDC?**

Before asking us to investigate, we recommend that you attempt to resolve the issue at the local level, e.g. through the education or training provider's own complaints procedures. However, if the complaint includes serious concerns about patient safety or the fitness to practise of registered healthcare professionals, you should contact the GDC (or the relevant regulator) immediately.

- **What information should I include in a complaint?**

Your complaint should include as much detail as possible. We will require:

- the name of the education or training provider involved;
- a summary of any incidents, issues, or key facts;
- details of any other complaints procedures the complaint has already gone through, as well as any findings; and
- permission for the complaint to be forwarded to the education or training provider. Your personal information will not be forwarded to the provider, unless you tell us that you want it to be.

If you do not provide all of the above information, we may not be able to fully consider your complaint.

- **What happens once I've raised a concern with you?**

We will conduct an initial investigation to determine whether the programme is failing to meet our standards, including whether there is a risk that students completing the programme would not be eligible or fit to join our registers and therefore to practise independently as safe beginners.

Normally, a complaint will be forwarded to the education or training provider. We will ask them to respond to us addressing the concerns raised as fully as possible.

We may need to request additional information from the complainant, the education provider, or both. We may also seek the expert opinion of members of the GDC panel of quality assurance inspectors.

- **Will the GDC consider anonymous complaints?**

Yes, but when an anonymous complaint is received, it may not be possible for us to take any further action if insufficient information is provided. Depending on the contents of the complaint or concern, it is possible that the education or training provider may be contacted and given the opportunity to answer the allegations.

We encourage you to provide us with your name and contact information so that we can ask for additional information, if required, and keep you informed about progress and the outcome of your complaint, especially if we are requiring the provider to address the complaint you have raised.

- **I'm a staff member of the institution I'm concerned about. How will I be protected if I make an official complaint against my own employer?**

It is important that staff are encouraged to be candid and feel able to raise concerns, for example, in relation to risks to patient safety.

Individuals should not be blamed or fear reprisal for highlighting unacceptable practices or poor quality care. Many employers will have a whistleblowing policy which outlines the procedure for raising concerns. The GDC Standards for Education require programme providers to respond to issues and concerns raised by staff.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act (1998) protects workers who disclose information about malpractice at their workplace, or former workplace, provided certain conditions are met. The conditions concern the nature of the information disclosed and the person to whom it is disclosed. If these conditions are met, the Act protects the worker from suffering detriment as a result of having made the disclosure. Protection is also available for disclosures made to certain regulators, including the GDC, and, in exceptional circumstances, wider disclosures (for example to an MP or the media) may also be protected.

For advice about the legal protections afforded to whistle-blowers, you might wish to visit the website of [Public Concern at Work](#), an independent charity that offers support and information for whistle-blowers.

- **What can happen as a result of my complaint?**

Once we have completed our investigation and the provider has submitted a response, we will make a decision to:

1. take **no further action** if the response from the education or training provider is sufficient to resolve the matter; or
2. undertake **further monitoring** where it is clear that the education or training provider is failing to meet the standards we require, and we need to seek further assurances that the issues raised continue to be dealt with appropriately. This will take place either through the GDC's annual monitoring process or another agreed method; or
3. undertake a **targeted inspection** where there are serious concerns.

We may also decide that we need to refer the complaint to another organisation or to another department within the GDC. Other bodies that we may refer concerns to include the NHS, systems regulators such as the Care Quality Commission, Monitor, and the Quality Assurance Agency, and professional regulators such as the General Medical Council.

- **What can trigger a targeted inspection?**

A targeted inspection may be necessary when there is evidence of serious failure that has not been addressed sufficiently via an alternative method. Targeted inspections will normally take place if there is evidence of, or potential for, patient harm or future patient harm. This could occur in the event of:

- a continual lack of appropriate supervision for students;
- students undertaking tasks for which they are not competent; or
- a lack of opportunities for students to attain the desired level of competency.

Targeted inspections are generally similar to the regular programme inspections we carry out, but targeted towards the areas of concern as opposed to the programme as a whole. As with the regular inspections, the inspection team will meet with students and with staff involved in the management and delivery of the programme.

- **What does a targeted inspection result in?**

A targeted inspection will result in a formal report, including actions for the provider, to which the provider must respond. A clear action plan will normally be required to show how the actions required will be addressed.

The inspection panel may recommend to the GDC that there is the need for a re-inspection to take place at an agreed stage during remedial action. If the inspection finds that the programme does not meet the GDC Standards for Education, the GDC can take further action. In the case of DCP programmes, the GDC can revoke its approval of the programme, which means that graduating students cannot join our registers until the institution has taken full and effective remedial action. For dentistry programmes, this decision requires referral from the GDC to the Privy Council.

- **How will I know what's happening as a result of my complaint?**

We will acknowledge your initial correspondence within 10 days. If we decide to seek a response from the provider concerned, we will let you know, and keep you updated on any subsequent action we might take.

- **Does the GDC investigate complaints about individual registered dentists or dental care professionals?**

Yes. The GDC's **Fitness to Practise team** can investigate any concerns that a dental professional is falling short of our standards and may not be fit to work as a dental professional. If the situation is serious enough, we can restrict or take away their right to work in the UK.