

Jeane Freeman MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport

John Swinney MSP  
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills  
*Sent by email*

2 February 2021

Dear Jeane and John,

### **COVID disruption to dental schools**

I am writing to you both to seek urgent action to address the challenges facing dental students, dental schools and the provision of dental services across Scotland.

The COVID pandemic has limited the clinical experience of many dental undergraduates, with a wide-ranging impact on education, training and workforce sustainability.

Dental schools have done their utmost to ensure continuity of education as much as possible, but it now seems that the limitations of the past year may well lead to an extension for final year students of their time at university.

We now face disruption to the pipeline of dentists. If dental students are unable to graduate in 2021 it will have an immediate and longer-term impact on the workforce and patients' ability to access NHS dental services.

Undergraduates will be saddled with unmanageable debt. Any delays will result in additional living costs. Already Scottish dental students can expect to graduate with over £34,000 debt. An additional year of study could push it to over £40,000, and more for those who are from outside Scotland.

The effects of the pandemic on training risk being felt for years to come. Any changes will have an impact not just on this year's graduating class, but potentially on the shape and size of the 2021 intake. We are also concerned about wider long-term implications on postgraduate training over the next few years.

In light of the gravity of this situation we call on you to ensure:

- **Direct financial support for *any* undergraduates who are required to take additional periods of study via an emergency bursary** to support living costs, and prevent the build-up of unsustainable debt.
- **Support for dental schools** covering tuition fees (where applicable), teaching grant and clinical placement funding, to enable schools to effectively plan, provide appropriate clinical time, and minimise disruption for both current and future students.

- **Ongoing support for trainers** to maintain continuity and viability of training posts within NHS practices.

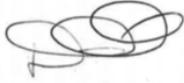
This disruption will have a clear impact on patient access. Graduate dentists are typically given higher needs patients to maximise their clinical experience during their vocational training. Longer-term this disruption may translate into fewer qualified dentists entering the NHS workforce in years to come. There will also be effects on dental core training and dental specialty training.

NHS dentistry is already facing an unprecedented backlog. Disruption to the education and training of young dentists will make this backlog even more difficult to clear.

Oral health inequalities in Scotland are already stark and are expected to widen further as a result of the pandemic. Any progress will hinge on a stable NHS workforce.

I hope you will agree that this situation is extremely serious and that the Scottish Government can support the requests made in this letter.

Yours sincerely,



David McColl  
Chair, BDA Scottish Dental Practice Committee

cc. Jamie Greene MSP, Donald Cameron MSP, Iain Gray MSP, Monica Lennon MSP, Ross Greer MSP, Alison Johnstone MSP, Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP, Beatrice Wishart MSP