

Welsh Dental Committee

Review of the provision of Dental Nurse Training in Wales

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1. CURRENT PROVISION OF DENTAL NURSE TRAINING IN WALES

There are currently 3 approved routes to GDC DN registration available in Wales. These are:

1.1 NVQ Diploma

1.2 NEBDN Diploma

1.3 Certificate of Higher Education (Cardiff University)

Locations

1.1 NVQ Diploma

The NVQ Diploma is offered from four training providers based in Cardiff and Swansea. Each of these training providers cater for dental practices across South and Mid Wales, covering and including practices in Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion.

1.2 NEBDN Diploma

Offered from various locations in Wales: Cardiff, Swansea, Pembroke Dock, Wrexham and Rhos-on-Sea. These providers cater for dental practices in large geographical areas surrounding the training bases. The provider based in Rhos-on-Sea is Llandrillo College and there are campuses in other locations across North Wales and the course could be delivered at one of these if there was adequate demand. There is also a course running from Wrexham which caters for the North East of Wales.

1.3 Cert HE

Currently provided from Porth Dental Training Unit in Rhondda Cynon Taf with training placements in Dental Practices across South and Mid Wales.

Format of training and length of courses

1.1 NVQ Diploma

The programme has changed to a QCF Diploma at Level 3; it includes practical and written assessments and completion of a written examination (Vocationally Related Qualification- VRQ) which is set by the NEBDN. The learners are based in practices across South, West and part of Mid-Wales. It is well established now and employers like the flexibility and the fact that learners learn at their own pace. Recently funding has been granted to a new provider in South East Wales, which is providing 60 extra places. The Modern Apprenticeship framework requires completion of Essential Skills in number, literacy and an award in Employment and Personal Learning Skills in Health alongside the Diploma. The training is delivered in day-release with assessments in the workplace. One provider uses MOODLE, an electronic platform to provide tuition.

The length of the course is typically 18 – 24 months.

1.2 NEBDN Diploma

This is a well established programme and has recently undergone major changes to meet the demands of the GDC. There are now written and practical (Observed Structured Clinical Examination -OSCE) assessments, along with a Record of Experience.

Trainee DNs sit the written examination and pending a pass will sit the OSCEs 6 weeks later. This training is provided on a varying basis, some providers offer day-release, some offer evening tuition and one provider offers this course via distance learning with tutor support. A North Wales provider offers the course content on MOODLE and students are registered with the HE college therefore have access to all college facilities. The North Wales courses are formed by an agreement with the Community Dental Service (CDS) and the College and the dental teaching staff are provided by the CDS.

A South Wales provider plans to develop e-learning via MOODLE in the near future also.

The length of these courses varies – in N Wales the course is 14 months, in Pembroke it is just over 1 year and elsewhere up to 2 years. Resits can extend this.

1.3 Cert HE

The Cert He in Dental Nursing will be offered as a 1 year full time programme in September 2012. The programme will be split with 50% clinical placement 2 days per week and 50% theory two days per week with one day self-study. A variety of assessments are used to ensure students meet the intended learning outcomes directed by Cardiff University and mapped to the GDC learning outcomes. Students complete a Portfolio of Experience which includes development of competencies in all aspects of dental procedures, involvement in patient care through case studies and a reflective section which allows the student to discuss their strengths and weaknesses. Students are allocated practice placements in Dental Foundation Training Practices, Community clinics or in the VT Superpractices. Competency in Impression taking, removal of sutures, applying topical anaesthetic, and rubber dam placement, currently offered as Extended Duties Courses are included in the programme.

This course carries 120 transferrable academic credits and may offer the a potential academic advantage of allowing students to continue Higher Education studies in dentistry.

Costs and funding

1.1 NVQ Diploma

This is the only government funded (DfES) DN training programme and is provided within a Modern Apprenticeship (MA) Framework within a Work-Based Learning (WBL) Contract. Out of the four providers only two currently have government funding. These programmes are offered to candidates free of cost under the Modern Apprenticeship Framework. One provider stipulates a £70 + VAT registration fee to new entrants.

For private students the costs are around £1200. Of the overall figure of 255 undertaking this route only 14 (5.49%) of these are private and funded either by themselves or their employer.

1.2 NEBDN Diploma

This course is not funded centrally however in North Wales the LHB has historically provided funding and to date the majority of trainees in N Wales have been funded through this though it is felt that it is unlikely to continue.

The costs for this course vary across providers. In Pembroke the charge is £795 plus £20 for the Record of Experience. In North Wales the charge is £1200 however this is subsidised by the LHB and inclusive of NEBDN exam fees. In Swansea the cost is £713 + VAT. The exam fees payable to NEBDN are currently £320. With the exception of North Wales this cost is usually in addition to the aforementioned course fees.

1.3 Cert HE

Cardiff University Fees apply to the course, the students are subject to means tested grants and student loans. The fees are £9,000 and Welsh domiciled students receive a grant from WG of £5,535 therefore the remaining balance is £3,465. For overseas students the fees are in the region of £13,000. Students are able to access Local Education Authority (LEA) grants. In September 2010 one student had the entire fee paid via this.

Figure 1 below illustrates the number of DNs in training as at May 2012 and the percentages undertaking each route.

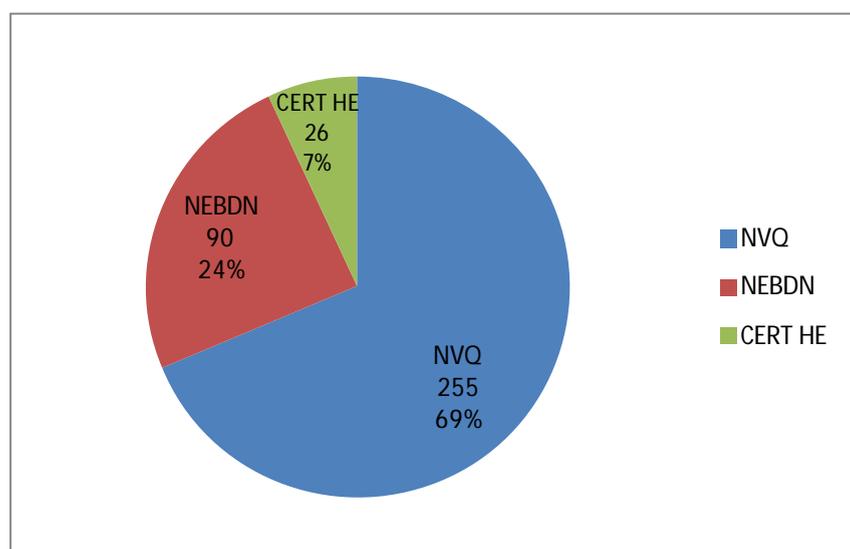


Figure 1 – Numbers of DNs in training and percentages May 2012

The table in Appendix 1 provides more detailed costs and numbers of DNs in training. As at May 2012 there are 371 DNs in training across Wales and providers state that there is capacity for in excess of 500 training places within the existing training routes.

2. CHALLENGES

2.1 NVQ Diploma

The NVQ is a work-based qualification and it focuses primarily on the assessment of clinical competence. Providers have expressed concern at the low levels and ambiguity of the assessment criteria and lack of detail in the standards that students are assessed against.

There is no clear evidence or consistency in the educational level of candidates that undertake the course and it is an assessment lead programme. As learners can progress at their own pace, some students may take as long as 5 years to qualify as dental nurses whereas others can complete in 9 – 12 months. The MA Framework requires completion of Essential Skills in number, literacy and an award in Employment and Personal Learning Skills in Health alongside the Diploma. Standards of delivery vary widely across providers leading to differences in the levels of knowledge and skills of dental nurses upon qualification.

2.2 NEBDN Diploma

NEBDN is currently going through the submission process in order to get the Diploma qualification recognised by the GDC. This has been somewhat of an arduous task as the GDC has scrutinised closely every aspect of the qualification. However, following inspection of the OSCE exam in January 2012, the qualification was granted 'short term sufficiency' and the first cohort was able to register with the GDC.

With regards to the current and future cohorts, NEBDN has produced a revised submission which was sent to the GDC on 14th May. Feedback is due to be received by the NEBDN which will hopefully see the GDC grant provisional approval of the qualification.

There are more assessments in the new Diploma, and OSCEs have been introduced, which is adding to the burden of those running and teaching on the course, though it does strengthen the assessment of the students. There will be limited assessment centres that trainees can attend to sit the examination and at this current time there is no centre in Wales though NEBDN are planning to open one. NEBDN aim that no candidate should travel more than 1.5 hours to an OSCE assessment. Some providers expressed concern regarding the ability of the NEBDN to effectively administrate and communicate with providers as this has previously been problematic. The NEBDN Diploma currently does not sit within the Qualifications Curriculum Framework (QCF) so will therefore not attract government funding under the current system.

2.3 Cert HE

If the programme is expanded to other centres high quality delivery of the programme must be ensured.

Finding adequate suitable training practices to accommodate student dental nurses may present more of a challenge if the programme expands to other centres. The conversion to the 1 year programme in 2012 will mean students will have to complete the academic programme and also ensure that they have sufficient practical experience in the training practices to successfully complete the course.

2.5 Locations and equity of access

There is a need to ensure equitable provision of training across Wales as there are large areas without provision, particularly in the rural areas (see map in Appendix 2). In these areas there are issues with provision of and accessibility to training. The critical mass of practices is reasonably well served by provision, across the South Wales M4 corridor and North Wales however the funding is currently very inequitable. The only centrally funded providers are based in Cardiff and Swansea and though they serve a broad area the choice of training is limited to NVQ only.

2.5 Data Collection for DN Courses in Wales

Currently providers of the well established qualifications do not routinely hold pass/fail and drop off rates which may inform on quality or success. This is an area that needs further consideration for the future.

3. FUTURE DEMANDS

The GDC requires all student Dental Nurses to be enrolled on a course or on a waiting list for a GDC approved dental nurse training programme before they are allowed to work in a dental practice as a Dental Nurse. A named supervising registrant must take full responsibility for the work of the trainee throughout their training.

This is a big change for the profession and is a move towards professionalising the DN workforce. The GDC stipulates that dentists should not work alone and there should always be a DN present. There is a clinical governance risk if there is not an adequately trained workforce to facilitate this. A recent survey commissioned by NLIAH¹ found that many practices are operating outside of GDC regulations with regard to employing trainee and student DNs.

Providers state that there are currently in excess of 500 places for Dental Nurse training available in Wales in specific locations. These numbers reflect less training places available than the number of Practices in Wales, (currently there are 517 Dental Practices in Wales²) and if the CDS and Hospital Clinics are included there is a potential shortfall in available places for DN Training.

Anecdotally a figure of 2-2.5 dental nurses per dentist is considered an ideal workforce requirement though there is no UK evidence available to support this figure.³ There are currently 1801 GDC registered dentists and 2279 dental nurses working in Wales. There is an average ratio across Wales of 1:1.34 (Dentists: DNs) though this varies widely by LHB: Cardiff and Vale is 1:1.43 while Cwm Taf is 1:1.06.⁴ Based on the anecdotal recommended figure these may be perceived as below the necessary levels to ensure safe working practices and patient safety.

As practitioners become more aware of their responsibilities to trainee or student dental nurses under the GDC regulations for Registration, demand for training will increase.

Practitioners need courses to be accessible and minimise the disruption to work while also offering quality training in a timely fashion. This must be a consideration as employers should have confidence in a course in order to fund and allow the student DN to attend.

The skill mix of the workforce should also be considered in the context of basic training and the necessity for Extended Duties training. Consideration should be given to whether this training should be incorporated into basic pre-registration training or remain as post-qualification training which encourages career development. Another consideration is that of DNs undertaking extended duties and therefore moving into other positions such as Oral Health Educator and Health Improvement Practitioner roles as this will also impact on the availability of Dental Nurses.

¹ NLIAH Review of Dental Nurse Education Provision and Funding 2010

² Figure provided from Wales Deanery Dental Section Database May 2012 includes NHS and Private practices

³ Recommendations from American dental organisations.

⁴ Figures from NLIAH Dental Workforce Review May 2012

4 **THE WAY FORWARD**

Members of the working group were tasked with answering a series of questions to identify a future direction for Dental Nurse Training provision in Wales, and their comments have been compiled. The number of responses from the group were disappointing, however those that did respond contributed significantly to the report.

4.1 Future Directions

The nature of a career in dental nursing as a mostly practical vocation, with supervision from the dentist lends itself well to the old school method of learning whilst on the job, but also needs classroom based teaching to provide the theory that professional status demands. All courses must be approved by the GDC and meet their Learning Outcomes. The current 3 routes to registration in Wales all have GDC approval.

A previous paper⁵ suggested that 'training centres should be organised so that all parts of the country are adequately covered to support all those who wish to undergo training. Overall the training should be co-ordinated to ensure that standards are consistent nationally and that the training is meeting the needs of dental nurses and the demands of modern dental practice. It is clear additional funding will have to be identified.'

It was broadly agreed that training should take place within a 1-2 year time scale. Qualification within a 12 month period should be achievable as long as the requirement for clinical skills and practical work were met.

The group supported Extended Duties training remaining as a post-qualification route as opposed to being incorporated into basic training. Members felt that extended duties training should be undertaken following a reasonable amount of time after initial qualification to ensure professional responsibilities were fully recognised. The GDC Scope of Practice document was cited; "*Additional skills dental nurses could develop during their careers.*" as it was felt this gives clear direction in this respect.

4.2 Funding

There was agreement that Dental Nurse Training should be funded centrally and funded fully for dental practices with NHS contracts who have staff requiring training. It was proposed that the process of funding should bring DN training in line with other registerable healthcare professions in Wales and fund training from the NMET budget. Currently Dental Nursing is one of only two healthcare professions, the other being Pharmacy Technicians, that are not funded via this route.

It was proposed that practices which provide services under an NHS contract of less than 80% of their total income should be assisted under a sliding scale and those practices that are purely private should self fund.

⁵ Thomas D & Jones G. (2006) Report of questionnaire study to assess qualification status of dental nurses working in Wales. NPHS Wales

Those students studying via the Cardiff University Certificate of Higher Education in Dental Nursing (Cert HE) should also continue to be able to access funding via their LEAs on a means tested basis in a similar way to other healthcare professionals undertaking basic professional training.

Consideration should also be given to bursaries to support students in training. These may be provided by WG, Health Boards or Professional bodies and organisations.

4.3 Appropriate use of academic level

There was general agreement that a range of courses at varying levels should be available to meet the needs of the workforce and 'one size does not fit all'.

Several contributors expressed concern that the Cert HE programme was too academic for some students. One respondent commented that 'the current salary range in GDP is below what would be expected of a graduate and any qualification should reflect this.' Conversely, concern was also expressed that the NVQ Diploma is probably set at too low an academic level. In terms of the academic level of the courses available it was felt that programmes should be available on two levels:

- a. A diploma for safe and competent working
- b. A Higher Certificate in Dental Nursing

There was agreement amongst the group that a Cert HE may in the long term be the way forward, but that such academic programmes would need to be available for some time in order for the profession to recognise the importance of a skilled, highly trained and professional workforce. It was also acknowledged that varying formats of the training would need to be available to accommodate the different needs of the workforce.

A contributor commented "My view is that there is a current need for two tiers of training as there is still a need to accommodate trainees in practice who are not academic and suit a more vocational route. I think long-term may see a shift in culture however this is a good 10-15 years away and there is a need to ensure workforce provision now."

The group supported that in Wales there would continue to be three main routes to a Dental Nurse Qualification, these would be a Cert HE and in addition the NEBDN and the NVQ Diplomas.

4.4 Locations

As previously stated in Section 2 there is a need to ensure equitable provision across Wales as there are large areas without provision, particularly in the rural areas. The critical mass of practices is reasonably well served by provision, across the South Wales M4 corridor and North Wales however the funding is currently very

inequitable. The only centrally funded providers are based in Cardiff and Swansea and though they serve a broad area the choice of training is limited to NVQ only.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Wales could develop Cert HE or Foundation Degree courses to accommodate regional access difficulties. There has been interest from an HEI outside of Cardiff University in this respect. An agreement could be reached on content to ensure standardisation across Wales. If this was agreed to be a way forward, CYNGOR could be engaged to advise in its capacity as a nursing, midwifery and allied health professional representative body for all HEI Health Faculties in Wales.

One rural respondent commented that an online type course would suit the more rural areas and minimise access issues. The suggestion was made to have online teaching coupled with minimal study days, like in the current Postgraduate Diploma offered for dentists. FE and HE institutions would be well placed to develop courses in this respect and some providers have already started exploring this medium of delivery.

The NEBDN can be delivered via distance learning and online and there are some providers offering this format in England. There will still be a need to conduct work place observation visits to assess the students; this is intrinsic in all three of the qualifications offered and essential to a work-based competence assessment.

IT Considerations

The use of electronic learning platforms was discussed and welcomed. The younger generation expect electronic means and are comfortable with this. The biggest problem is access in terms of internet connectivity as this varies in different locations across Wales. Consideration could be given to engaging NWIS to explore the feasibility of electronic platforms and connectivity though this would require appropriate funding.

NEBDN utilise MOODLE and some providers also use this platform for their students. The Cert HE uses Cardiff University Learning Central and the students utilise this to support their training.

One respondent from rural Wales suggested '...teach the academic side via online and assignments, perhaps with odd study days, the examination and practical could be held in a central location and the practical experience is gained in-house. This would reduce costs and travel.'

Ireland has developed a National DN Training Programme and this has met the needs of a similarly rural workforce. A Joint Committee for DN Training in Ireland was formed to drive this initiative forward and the use of technology has been integral to this. The course initially used video-conferencing to deliver lectures to regional centres. There are six centres: two governing centres (Dublin and Cork) and four regional centres. The course has developed and now uses an interactive website which is mandatory however learners can choose whether to videoconference for

the lectures or undertake them online. Face to face assessments is still a requirement to ensure competence in the clinical skills.⁶

Dental Nurse Education Zone

This is a new collaboration between Smile-on and Tempdent, a dental recruitment and training agency. It was launched in July 2012 and offers both the NEBDN Diploma and the NVQ Diploma via blended e-learning. The NEBDN Diploma is available from July 2012 and the NVQ Diploma from October 2012.

The students will be able to access the underpinning knowledge through the website and work through reading matter, audio PowerPoint presentations, webinars, pre-recorded webcast material and also have access to a discussion board. This will be supplemented with regional workshops. An Assessor/ Tutor will be appointed for portfolio completion and provide feedback and also personal workplace visits for the NVQ. The courses both run for 12 months and the NEBDN has 3 one-day workshops whereas the NVQ is based on in-practice assessments. Both courses require the compulsory completion of a written exam at appointed centres.

⁶ Sheridan C. (2008). Dental Nursing Education and the introduction of technology-assisted learning. *European Journal of Dental Education*, 225-232.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS TO WDC MEMBERS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Locations / Equitable access

- Training should be delivered from strategic locations throughout Wales to ensure equitable provision and access – ideally candidates should not have to travel more than 1 hour to attend.
- If I.T. used successfully then distance learning/ blended approach may suit more rural practices.

5.2 I.T.

- Infrastructure needs further exploration to investigate existing internet accessibility across Wales and particularly in the rural areas - consider engaging NHS Wales Information Services (NWIS) for this purpose.
- Welsh Government should consider investment to develop appropriate platform for delivery and investigate the suitability of existing platforms namely:
 - Development of MOODLE platforms should be explored further to ascertain capabilities.
 - Explore Ireland's use of IT to support DN training
 - Explore Dental Nurse Education Zone as a suitable option

5.3 Funding

- Proposed that Welsh Government should investigate a central funding source for DN training in all NHS funded organisations – via the NMET budget
- That Welsh Government consider the development of a single commissioning body for all DN Training in Wales to oversee the funding allocation.
- Maintain current LEA means-tested grants for Cert HE students
- Explore the potential for bursaries for DN Training

5.4 Academic level

- Maintain current 2 levels – Cert HE and Diploma – this will ensure that there are adequate intakes from various avenues e.g. via employment in practices and also as full-time students to sustain the workforce.
- Consideration should be given to other HEIs developing and providing courses throughout Wales.

5.5 Format/ Length

- Part-time teaching via day/ evening release/ distance learning is preferred mode of delivery
- Tutor workplace observations/ assessments to ensure competency should be maintained across all courses
- Full time for existing Cert HE though new HEI courses could offer flexibility to meet the needs of the sector
- 12 – 18 months is the preferred length of training with a maximum of 2 years.

5.6 Data Collection

- Providers to collect and report standardised data regarding intake numbers, drop off rates, pass/ fail rates and average length of training. This should be stipulated as a condition within any agreed educational funding contract.

The authors would like to thank the members of the working group for their contributions.

Membership:

Dental Nurse Training Provider Representatives:

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May 2012

Appended: current providers of Dental Nurse Training in Wales

APPENDIX 1 – Overview of Dental Nurse Training Provision in Wales as at May 2012

Area	Provider	Qualification	Capacity	Existing students	Cost	Funding available	Length of course	Format of course	Comments
South Wales	Cardiff University	Certificate of Higher Education in Dental Nursing	20 +	8 2 nd yr 18 1 st yr	currently £9000 (if students are Welsh domicile then £5535 is paid by WG - balance is £3465)	students eligible for LEA grants	1 yr full time (from Sept 2013)	Full-time – 2 days taught study, 2 days placement in practice, 1 day self-study	120 Transferrable Academic Credits Students placed in approved training practices. First year of full-time course commencing Sept 2012
South East Wales	Tooth Fairies Training Ltd	NEBDN Diploma	100+	29 2 nd yr 16 1 st yr	NEBDN - £999 per year plus exam fees (currently £320)	None	18 months	Every May and November	New Provider
		NVQ Diploma	30+		self funded £1000 per trainee	None	18 months		
South Wales	Aspiration Training Ltd	NVQ Diploma	60 places funded	60	Free	Funded by DfES under Work Based Learning (WBL) Contract and Modern Apprenticeship Framework	18 months	Day release once a fortnight for 10 months then workplace assessments	New provider (commenced 2011) – experienced at delivering healthcare qualifications via funding route.
Cardiff/ SE Wales	University Dental Hospital	NVQ Diploma	10 internal; 20 external	10 internal 20 external	Internal trainees are salaried employees £1200 for external trainees	None	18 – 24 months depending on ability of trainee	Internal – employed full time in UDH External – work-based assessment + tutor support & guidance	Well-established provider.
South & West Wales	Learnkit Ltd Swansea	NVQ Diploma	200+	165	£70 +VAT reg fee – all other costs funded through WBL contract	Funded by DfES under Work Based Learning (WBL) Contract and Modern Apprenticeship Framework	18 – 24 months depending on ability of trainee	Day Release; 1-1 support and assessment in workplace; MOODLE tuition	Provider part of large consortium of trainers. Utilising MOODLE to support provision
		NEBDN Diploma	Unlimited	5 (all in N Wales) [50 across UK]	£713 inc VAT. May rise pending NEBDN changes.	None	Ave 2 years depending on trainee	Distance learning pack with remote tutor support	

Area	Provider	Qualification	Capacity	Existing Students	Cost	Funding available	Length of course	Format of course	Comments
West Wales	Excel Withybush	NEBDN Diploma	15 - 20	8	£795 + £20 for ROE (excludes exam fees of £320)	None	1 year and 6 weeks	Evening course; 1-1 support	
North East Wales	Wrexham Medical Institute	NEBDN Diploma	20	16	£1200 (inclusive of exam fees)	LHB funded to date	15 months	Day release	Run in partnership with CDS.
North Wales	Llandrillo College (Rhos on Sea and other locations depending on need)	NEBDN Diploma	15-25	16	£1200 (inclusive of exam fees)	LHB funded to date	18 months	Day release once a week.	Well established provider. Course includes First Aid certificate and Essential Skills in Numeracy and literacy and NVQ level 2 in Customer Service. Use of MOODLE platform. Students registered with college and access facilities. Run in partnership with CDS.

NOTES

NVQ

NVQ Diploma delivered via WBL contract requires completion of Modern Apprenticeship framework – this includes completion of Essential Skills in number, literacy and an award in Employment and Personal Learning Skills in Health alongside the Diploma.

NEBDN

NEBDN Diploma new format of the examination is:

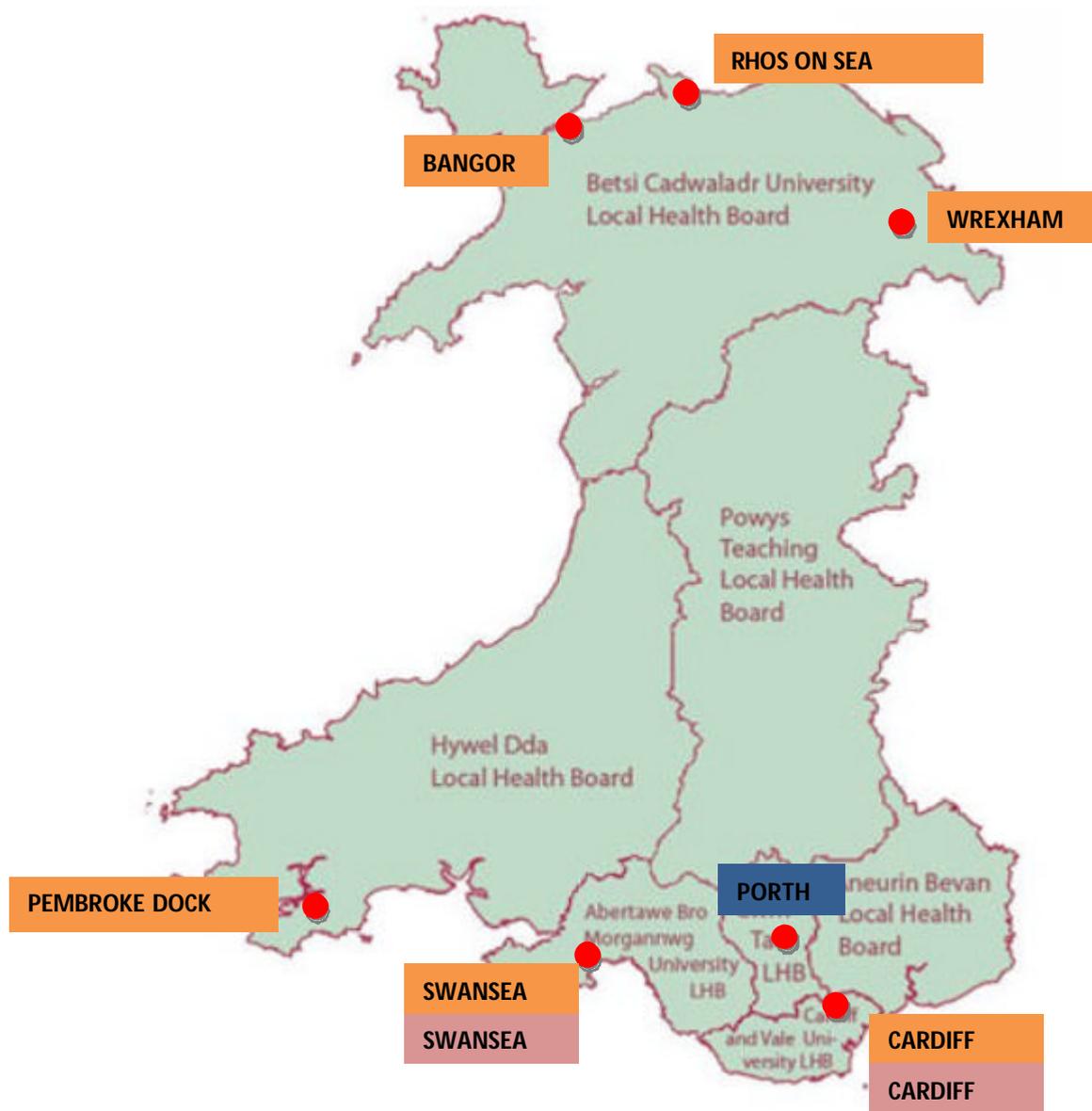
Part 1 – 2.5 hour written paper comprising of 75 MCQ and 50 EMQ. Providing Part 1 is passed then the student will sit Part 2 6 weeks later.

Part 2 – OSCEs – 15 stations, 5 minutes at each station.

Exam fees: £320 for first time; £50 for written resit and £250 for OSCE resit

Limited examination centres though this is expected to increase. NEBDN intends that no candidate should have to travel more than 1.5 hours to an examination centre.

Dental Nurse Training Bases in Wales

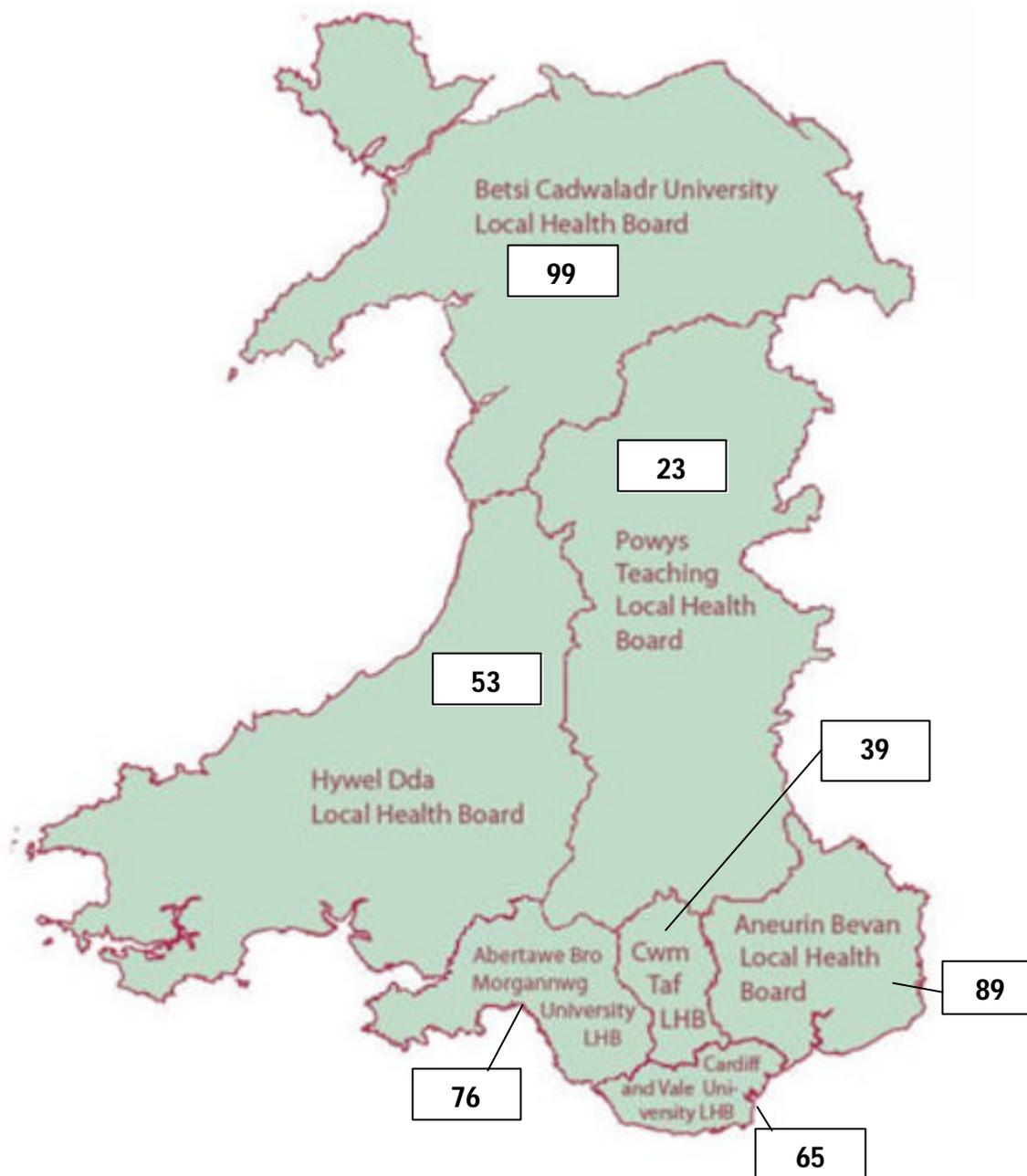


KEY TO TRAINING BASES

- NEBDN DIPLOMA
- NVQ DIPLOMA
- CERT HE

Appendix 3

Number of Dental Practices listed by Local Health Board⁷



⁷ Figures from www.wales.nhs.uk/ourservices/directory 23/5/12