



BDJ Jobs Recruitment Whitepaper 2021

I'm proud to present our biennial analysis of recruitment and retention of dentists in the UK, in partnership with the British Dental Association.

A lot has changed since our first Recruitment Whitepaper in 2019, from the implementation of Brexit to the COVID-19 pandemic; so we are one again taking an in-depth, necessary look at how things have changed over the last two years and what it means for dental recruitment and retention in a post-Brexit, post-pandemic Britain.

Our first report found significant variation in response rates for associate positions based on geographical location and the average taxable income for associates was falling across the UK. We also discovered the proportion of dentists qualified in the EEA remained stable in the years leading up to the implementation of Brexit and there wasn't necessarily a shortage of dentists in the UK but a fall in the number of weekly hours worked on primary care dentistry both clinical and non-clinical.

With this report we aim to provide the dental industry with a comprehensive analysis which explores key trends in the dental jobs market and an update on the findings of two years ago. Using expert data from our own platforms, the BDA, GDC and NHS, we have been able to measure how the market continues to change and provide employers and job seekers with a well-rounded understanding of the various factors affecting recruitment in the industry.

I would like to thank Tom King from the BDA for his hard work compiling the research and I hope you find it as insightful and useful as I do.

Joseph Hughes

BDJ Classified Advertising Manager

Introduction

This report sets out an authoritative assessment of the dental recruitment market, analysing long-standing patterns within the workforce as well as the ways in which COVID-19 has changed the behaviour of dentists, DCPs and practices.

The pandemic has had severe implications for the functioning of dentistry across the UK and this has inevitably disrupted the recruitment market. The first lockdown brought an expected collapse in job applications in spring 2020, and the analysis presented below shows that this was followed by a boom in job-seeking activity in the summer of 2020 once routine dentistry had been restored. It is also clear that some long-term problems have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Recruitment problems, previously considered to be an issue only in rural areas, now seem to be affecting major cities. Only London and the South East see a slightly more healthy market of associates looking for work. NHS roles are consistently less favoured than private jobs and for the first-time in recent history early indications from England and Wales show the NHS primary care dentist headcount is shrinking. Advertisements for part-time positions are more likely to receive a response than those for full-time work and associate jobs in non-corporate practices also see a higher applicant response rate than those in corporate practices. Interestingly, it appears that the pandemic has led more dentists to consider working in employed NHS roles, with response rates increasing following the first lockdown, perhaps due to a perception that there is greater security in employed posts.

Despite these trends, there remain increasing numbers of dentists registered with the GDC each year and the significant fall off that many expected to see in dentists coming from Europe post-Brexit hasn't yet manifested. The pipeline for new dentists from dental school has been disrupted slightly, but this will, in fact, lead to a 'bulge' of graduates in coming years, rather than a reduction. The number of Dental Care Professionals, including Dental Nurses, registered at 31 December 2020 has remained largely stable, but more recent registration reports show that the number of dental nurses has fallen off somewhat. Practices are clearly finding recruiting and retaining dental nurses a real challenge.

It remains to be seen whether these trends will persist as the pandemic abates. The post-pandemic world will bring new challenges of its own, principally clearing a substantial treatment backlog. Dentists will rarely have been in more demand, but can they be attracted to work in full-time NHS jobs?

Methodology

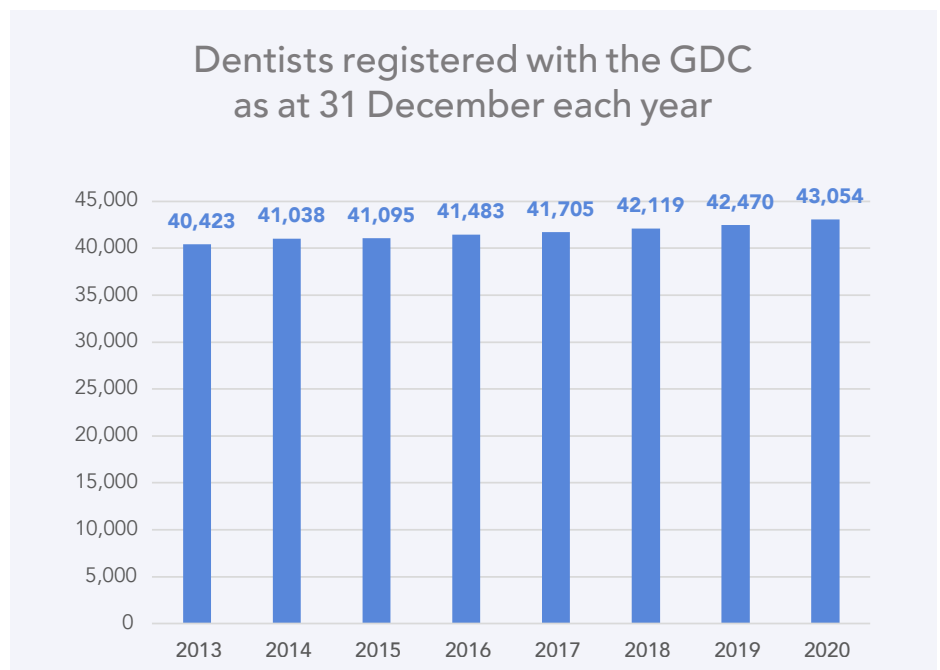
This report draws on a wide range of datasets to support its analysis including those from the GDC Annual reports; NHS Digital figures on Earnings and Expenses Estimates and Working Patterns, Morale, and Motivation; workforce figures from NHS Digital, NHS Education for Scotland, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, and StatsWales; Office of Manpower Economics estimates based on UCAS data; and the Office for Students.

It also draws on research commissioned by the BDJ, BDJ Jobs and the GDC, as well as published research.

Job response rates to advertised roles on BDJ Jobs have been analysed from 1 September 2019 to 31 August 2021. The figures cited below refer only to those advertisements posted by direct employers and exclude those from recruitment agencies. Other than where salaried roles are discussed, the figures refer to applications to associate positions.

Number of dentists

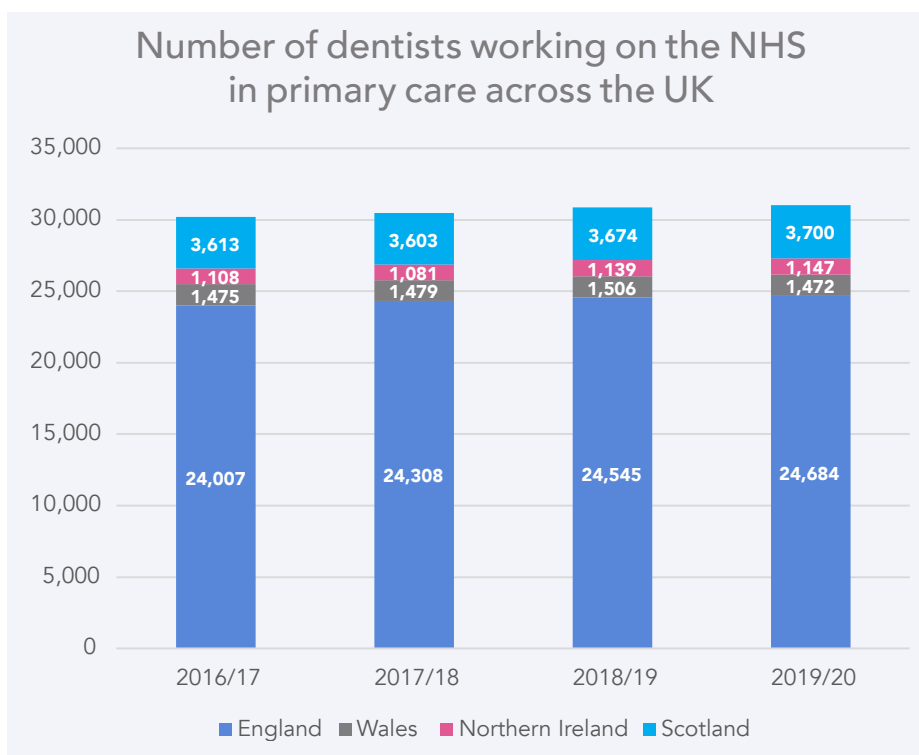
For a number of years, there has been widespread discussion within dentistry about the difficulties recruiting associates to perform NHS work. It is therefore perhaps surprising that the number of dentists has continued to rise year-on-year, reaching a new high of 43,054 as of 31 December 2020. The number registered with the GDC has increased by 6.5% since 2013. It is important to remember that this simply reflects those maintaining a GDC registration and does not mean that all of these dentists are practising clinical dentistry or that they are working full-time. Therefore, these figures only give us part of the picture about the dental workforce.



NHS dentists

As with the overall number of dentists, those working for the NHS has also slowly increased in recent years. In 2019/20, there were 31,003 dentists working on the NHS in primary care dentistry across the UK, which is a 0.5% increase on the previous year. While the number of NHS dentists increased slightly in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, there was a small fall in Wales. In England, figures for 2020/21 have now been released and they also show a fall in the number of dentists, with the number reduced by 951 or 3.9%.¹ This reduces the NHS dental workforce headcount in England to its lowest level since 2013/14.

¹ Figures for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are not yet available.



Source: NHS Digital, NHS Education for Scotland, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and StatsWales

NHS primary care dentists in England – Leavers and joiners

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total	22,799	22,920	23,201	23,723	23,947	24,089	24,007	24,308	24,545	24,684	23,733
Joiners	1,955	1,715	1,693	1,740	1,664	1,646	1,547	1,821	1,753	1,806	1,398
Leavers	1,594	1,412	1,218	1,440	1,504	1,629	1,520	1,516	1,667	2,349	-
Net change from previous year	796	121	281	522	224	142	-82	301	237	139	-951
% change from previous year	3.6	0.5	1.2	2.2	0.9	0.6	-0.3	1.3	1.0	0.6	-3.9

Source: NHS Digital

This fall in the number of primary care NHS dentists in England is a departure from the pattern of the last decade, where, with the exception of 2016/17, the number of those joining NHS dentistry has slightly exceeded the numbers leaving. This almost certainly reflects the impact of the pandemic and widespread unhappiness with working for the NHS, and while some of these dentists may return to NHS work in the coming years, a loss at this level will certainly make it even more challenging for practices already struggling to fill NHS posts.

It is notable that figures from research conducted by NHS Digital show that well-over half of GPs say they are thinking of leaving general dental practice. This is highest among practice owners in Northern Ireland, where 70.4% say that they 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that they often think about leaving general dental practice, but even the lowest levels – among associates in Wales (53.7%) – indicate a significant dissatisfaction among dentists with their working lives and a substantial risk to future workforce supply.² BDA research has also found that in May 2021 nearly half (47%) of dentists indicated they were likely to change career or seek early retirement in the next 12 months should current COVID restrictions remain in place. The same proportion state they are likely to reduce their NHS commitment. **It may be that these NHS dentist figures from England reflect the beginning of the profession starting to vote with its feet.**

The Brexit factor?

Since the UK voted to leave the European Union in June 2016, there has been speculation about the impact Brexit would have on migration and the workforce. Some professions, for example nursing, saw an immediate hit to numbers coming from the EU in the aftermath of the referendum. For dentistry, however, there was very little impact in this period. The number of EEA qualified dentists registered with the GDC fell by just 63 from the year before the referendum to after it. The proportion of EEA qualified dentists remained at 16% in both years. Similarly, following the UK's departure from the EU and the end of the 'transition period' on 31 January 2020, there have been media reports of EU workers leaving the UK and of labour shortages in industries such as haulage. Yet, the number of EEA qualified dentists actually increased very slightly from December 2019 to December 2020, and EEA qualified dentists continue to make up 16% of all GDC registered dentists.

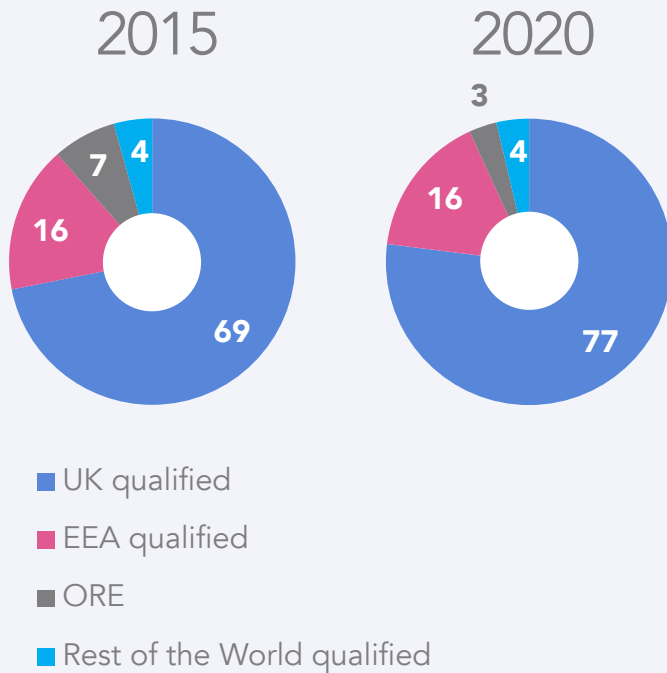
I was fortunate to have a positive experience working within NHS general practice. However, I always knew that I wanted to undergo specialist training regardless of the current NHS system.

Sahar Aghababaie

² NHS Digital, 2020, *Dentists' Working Patterns, Motivation and Morale - 2018/19 and 2019/20*, <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/dental-working-hours/2018-19-and-2019-20-working-patterns-motivation-and-morale/leaving-general-dental-practice>

The largest change in the composition of the register in this regard has been the relative decline of those registered after completing the ORE (probably due to the ORE examinations not taking place during the pandemic) and an increase in the proportion who are UK qualified.

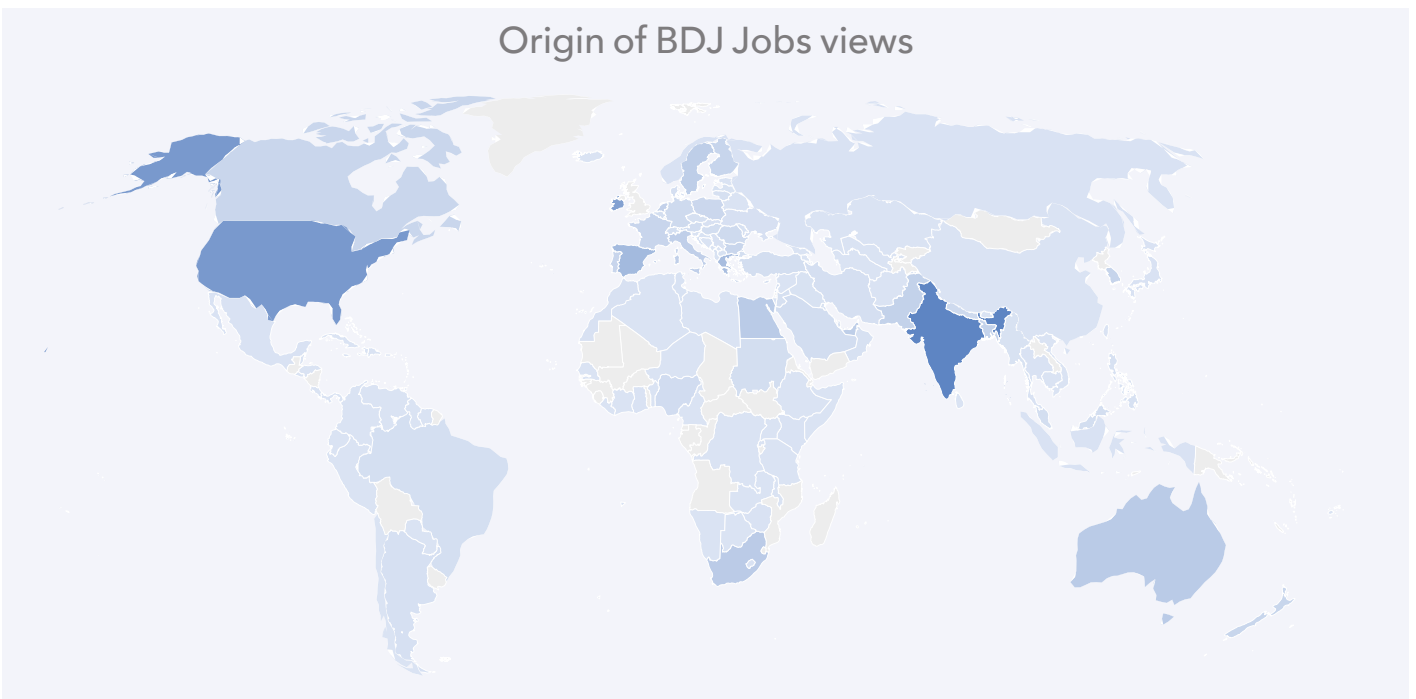
Dentists registered with the GDC by route to registration



Source: General Dental Council

Source: BDJ Jobs

Origin of BDJ Jobs views



Top 10 countries for BDJ Jobs views - 2021

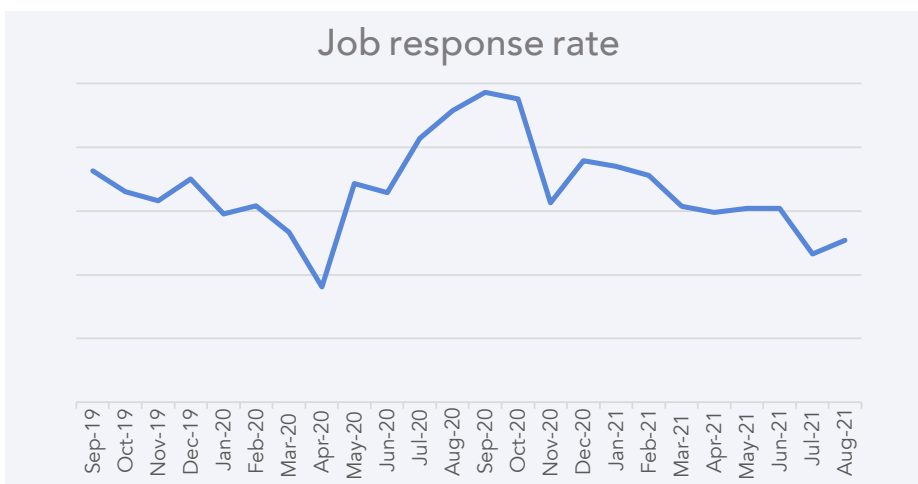
	Change from 2020 position
India	-
United States	+3
Ireland	-1
Spain	-1
Greece	-1
Egypt	+5
Australia	+1
South Africa	-2
Sweden	+5
United Arab Emirates	+3

Source: BDJ Jobs

The job market during the pandemic

The impact of the pandemic on dentistry has been profound and continues even 18 months on from the start of the first lockdown. This has inevitably prompted questions as to whether it will leave a long-term mark on how dentists want to work and the job opportunities available.

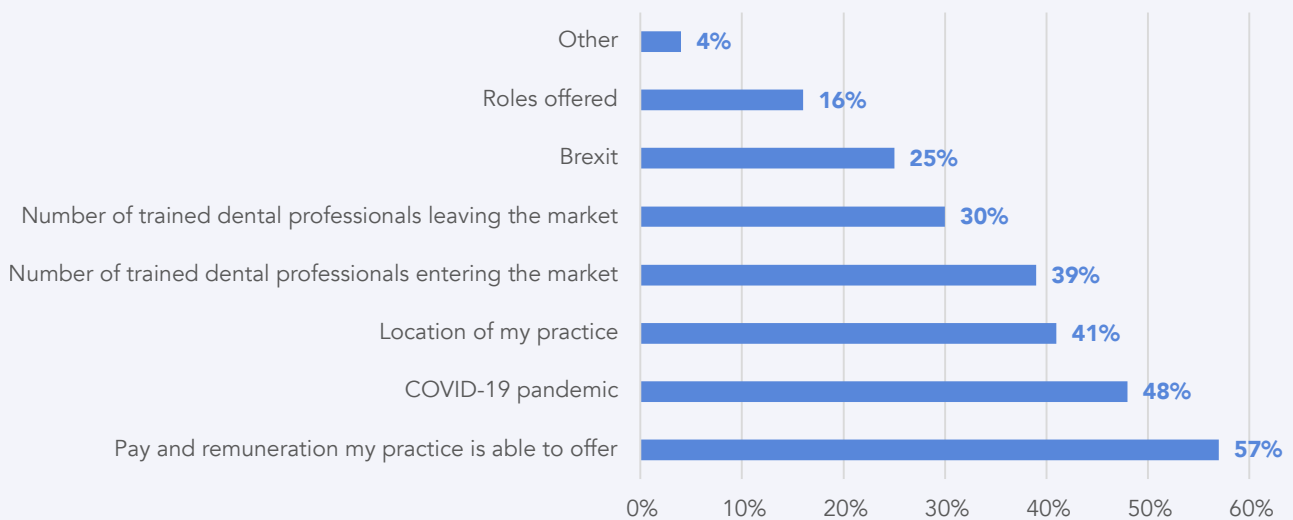
It isn't particularly surprising that, given lockdown, applicant response rates to associate roles fell to a two-year low in April 2020. However, this COVID suppression of the recruitment market was short lived and there was a strong rebound in application rates, particularly after practices reopened for more routine, face-to-face treatment in June. Application rates reached a two-year high in September 2020 and were well above average for the six months from June to November last year. The more recent trend shows that, following a post-lockdown boom, job advertisement response rates have returned to more normal levels.



Source: BDJ Jobs

Despite the summer 2020 spike in job applications, this does not appear to have averted the difficulties practices have long reported in recruiting dentists. Research conducted by the BDJ found that 59% of recruiters found it more difficult to fill vacancies in 2020 and 45% did not anticipate the situation getting any better in 2021. Recruiters felt that the main issue that would cause them difficulties in recruiting in 2021 would be remuneration their practice was able to offer. However, the ongoing impact of the pandemic, the practice's location and the overall numbers of dentists in the market were also considered to be major factors.

Reasons recruiters expected to find it difficult to recruit in 2021



Given the difficulties practices are finding filling vacant posts, it is perhaps surprising then that the same BDJ Jobs research found that 74% of dental jobseekers had found it challenging to find the right role for them in 2020 as well. This appears to be partly influenced by this data taking a snapshot during the pandemic, with this being cited as the second most significant reason that jobseekers struggled to find a role. A survey of BDJ readers found a 34 percentage point fall in the proportion of practices looking to recruit in 2020 compared to 2018. However, the data also indicates that there is a mismatch between jobseekers' criteria for a new role and the positions available, with this mostly coming down to the location of practices and jobseekers not being able to find roles with a desired organisation.

Source: BDJ Jobs research

Jobseekers' greatest challenges in finding an appropriate role in 2020



Source: BDJ Jobs research

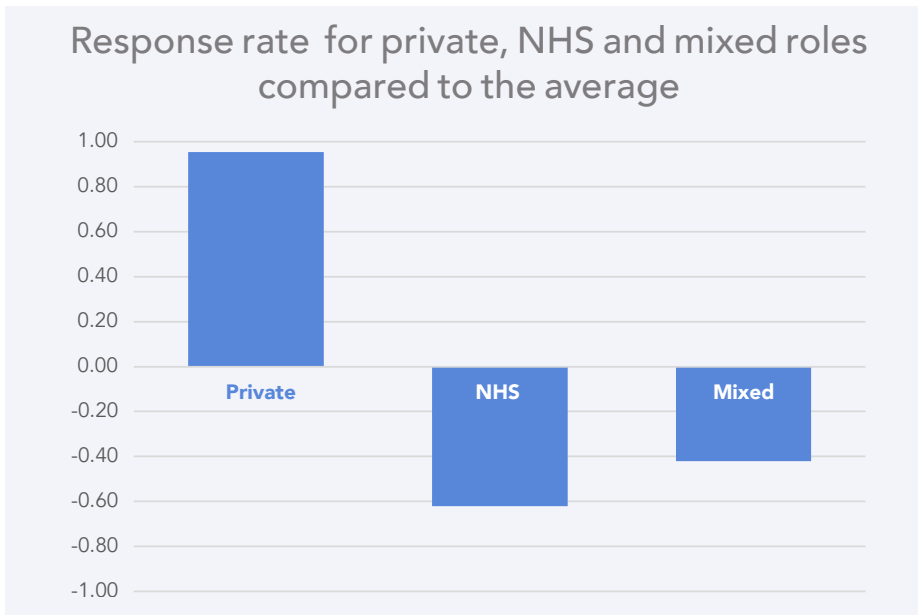
Self-employed and salaried roles

One key dynamic of the Government's approach to providing financial support during the pandemic has been that employed people have been far better paid than the self-employed. With almost all GPs working on a self-employed basis, do dentists now view salaried posts as more appealing given how incomes in self-employed roles were hit during lockdown? The evidence from BDJ Jobs might indicate that this is the case. In the six months before the pandemic (September 2019 – February 2020), response rates for salaried jobs and associate roles were similar, with salaried roles fractionally less popular. However, in the 15 months from June 2020 to August 2021, salaried roles have seen higher response rates in all but one month and on average have seen responses at 1.87 percentage points higher than associate posts.

Private and NHS

Similarly, private income was far less protected than income from NHS contracts over the last 18 months, so are dentists more favourable about NHS roles than they have been in recent years? BDJ Jobs response rates show that not even the pandemic has been able to shift dentists' views of the NHS. Positions in private practices remain much more popular. Over the two years to the end of August 2021, applications to private roles have sat well above the average response rate, whereas those for NHS roles, and even those in mixed practice, were consistently below average. Comparing pre-pandemic periods with more recent trends doesn't suggest that there has been any

dramatic shifts in dentists' preference for private roles over those in NHS and mixed practices.

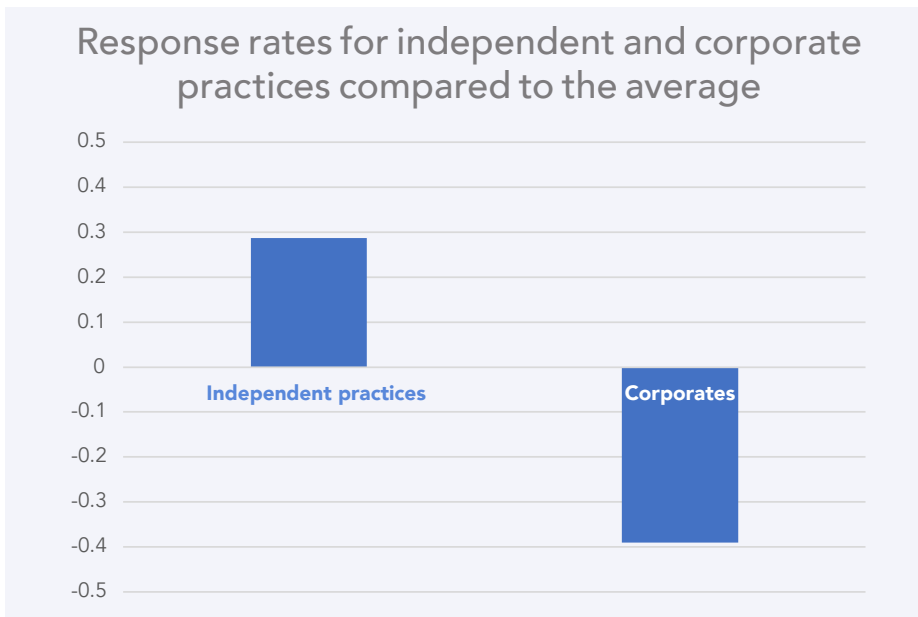


Source: BDJ Jobs

Non-corporate practices and corporates

Another notable pattern in jobseekers' activities on BDJ Jobs is that there is a consistent preference for jobs in independent practices over those with corporates. This has been consistent regardless of the pandemic. In all but one month across the last 24, response rates to roles at corporate practices have been lower than those at independent ones. Following the resumption of routine dentistry in June 2020, the bounceback of job applications was far stronger in the independent sector than it was for corporates. While the evidence suggests that generally pay doesn't differ significantly across the two sectors, O'Selmo, Collin and Whitehead³ found that associates working in corporates had lower job satisfaction, morale and job security than those working for non-corporate practices. In particular, those working in corporates felt that they had significantly less autonomy in the workplace and over clinical decisions. These factors may help us to understand the trends in job response rates.

³ O'Selmo, E., Collin, V., and Whitehead, P., 2018, 'Associates and their working environment: a comparison of corporate and non-corporate associates', *British Dental Journal*, 225:5



Source: BDJ Jobs

Part-time and full-time

Response rates for roles advertised on BDJ Jobs prove that the anecdotal reports that dentists are increasingly looking for part-time work are true. Even prior to the pandemic, response rates for part-time roles were significantly above those for full-time positions. This became even more pronounced in the six months from June 2020, when part-time job response rates became even higher. In July 2020, the response rate was nearly double for part-time jobs compared to full-time. These trends that followed the resumption of routine dentistry have calmed, but part-time roles remain favoured.

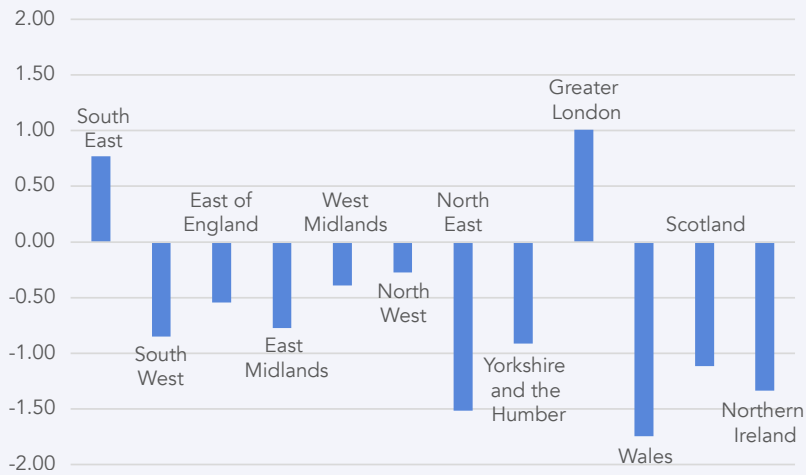
Geography

As discussed, there does seem to be a misalignment of where jobs are available and where dentists are looking to work. BDJ Jobs found that 41% of recruiters felt that the location of their practice was behind their problems filling vacancies.

While recruitment issues are nationwide, anecdotal suggestions are that practices in rural and coastal areas face far greater difficulties recruiting than those in bigger cities. BDJ Jobs research about jobseekers and recruiters provides evidence for this. Greater London was by far the most sought after region by job seekers, with 30% looking for roles in the city, but only 9% of recruiters were offering positions there. The research was also able to identify that half of those working in London did not yet live there, showing there is a strong desire to move into the capital for work. This pattern is also borne out in the behaviour of jobseekers in their responses to job adverts, with

Greater London seeing the highest response rate of all regions. Other than London, only the South East sees a response rate above the UK average and Wales, Northern Ireland and the North East see the lowest levels of response to job adverts. It must be noted that to some extent these figures will reflect the different population sizes in each area.

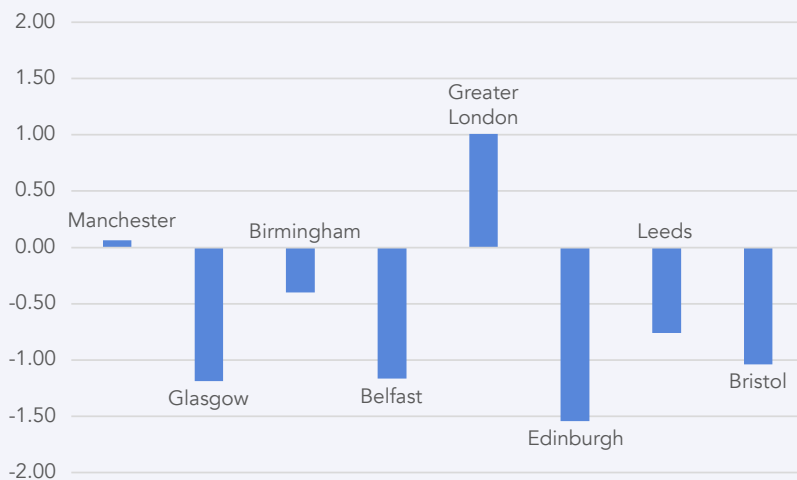
Response rates by region compared to the average



Source: BDJ Jobs

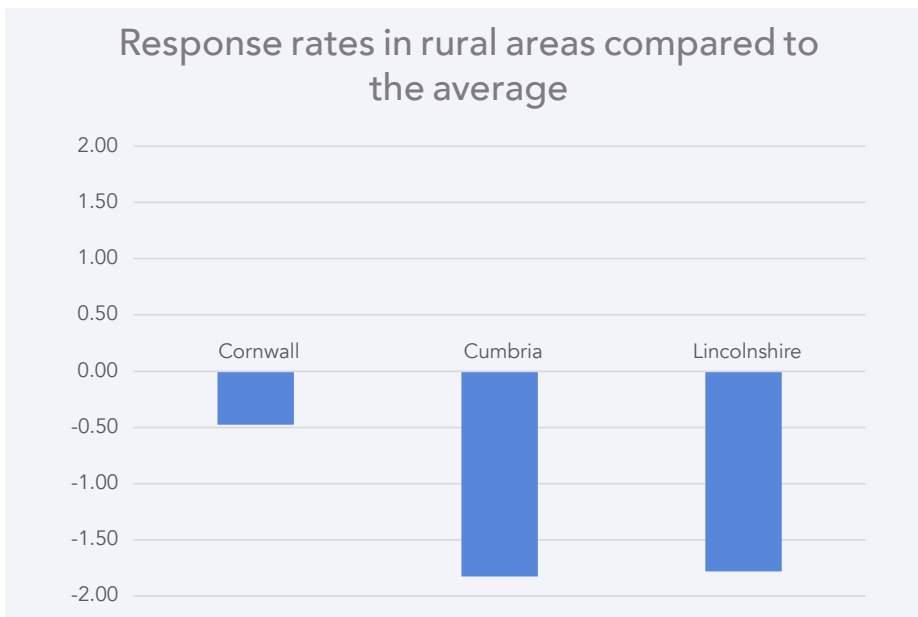
Even with London seeing such high response rates, job applications in other major cities are at much lower levels. Responses in Manchester are slightly above the national average, but Glasgow, Birmingham, Belfast, Edinburgh, Leeds and Bristol are all well below the average rate.

Response rates in major UK cities compared to the average



Source: BDJ Jobs

In fact, contrary to the normal description of Cornwall as being a blackspot for recruitment, job response rates there were higher than those in Scotland's capital and largest city, as well as in Bristol, Leeds, and Belfast. This suggests that the recruitment challenges that had previously been focused in more rural areas are now widespread – with only London and the South East of England as exceptions. This is not to say that there are not still severe issues for practices outside cities. Although the situation in Cornwall, perhaps a quirk of the county's popularity during the pandemic, appears to be less extreme than previously the case, there are clearly profound problems in Cumbria and Lincolnshire, for example, where job application rates via BDJ Jobs are very far below the average.



Source: BDJ Jobs

However, BDJ Jobs research does show that jobseekers may be willing to consider other locations, with 51% having looked outside their preferred area when finding difficulties getting a job. Associates might be wise to consider expanding their searches geographically, given that there are practices across the country looking for new associates. This might help deal with the issue where nearly a third (28%) of jobseekers say the competition for roles meant they were unable to find one. Expanding job searches outside London and the South East of England may end up being far more fruitful.

Dentists' incomes

Dentists' average incomes have fallen considerably over the last 10-15 years. The limited pay rises awarded for NHS work have meant that incomes have eroded in value against inflation, but there have also been falls in take-home pay in cash terms too. The most recent figures show that incomes from both NHS and private work have stabilised somewhat. In England, pay for both associates and practice owners changed little from 2018/19 to 2019/20. Associate pay in Northern Ireland fell slightly and in Scotland saw a modest rise. In Wales, there were sizeable increases in pay, with associates taking home 5.3% more on average in 2019/20 than in the previous year and practice owners' average incomes increasing by 11.3%. Conversely, practice owners in Northern Ireland and Scotland both saw sharp falls in average income, at 5% and 7.6% respectively.

As discussed above, practice owners consider the pay that they are able to offer associates a major barrier to recruitment. Well over half (57%) of recruiters cite this as a major factor in why they find it challenging to fill vacancies.

Moving away from UDAs was not intentional for me, but being able to spend more time with the patients I see is crucial and is not something that would really fit into a UDA based system

Natalie Bradley



Source: NHS Digital

Dental student numbers

Dental schools have a student intake of just over 1,000 students each year and a similar number graduate each summer. Dental schools are each subject to Government-determined caps on the number of dental students they can provide places to, in an attempt to ensure that the flow of dentists into the workforce is well-managed.

Student intake numbers - 2020-21 cohort

Cardiff University	75
King's College London	165
Queen Mary University of London	80
Queen's University of Belfast	55
University of Aberdeen	20
University of Bristol	80
University of Central Lancashire	30
University of Dundee	65
University of Glasgow	80
University of Newcastle upon Tyne	70
University of Plymouth	80
The University of Birmingham	85
The University of Leeds	70
The University of Liverpool	70
The University of Manchester	80
The University of Sheffield	75
TOTAL	1,180

Source: Office for Students

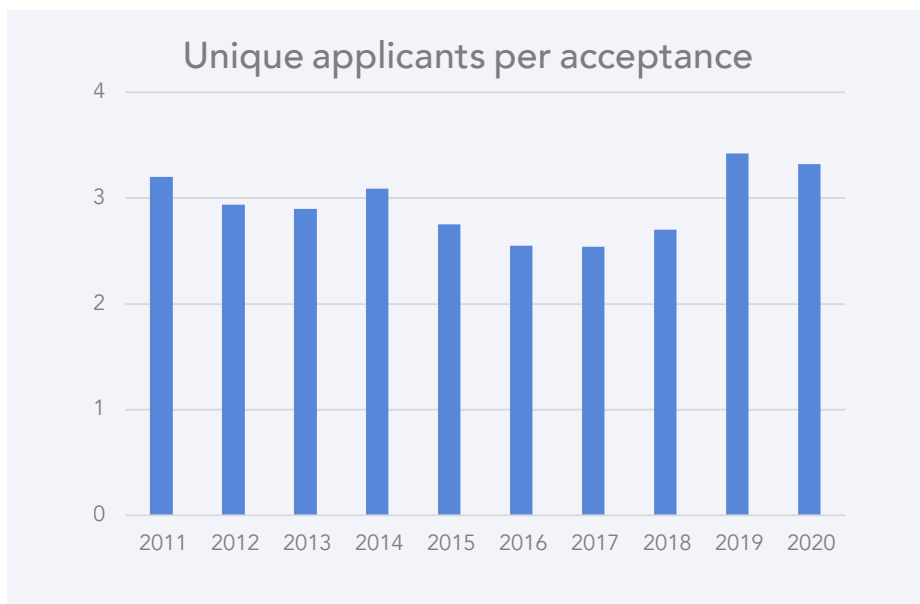
Highly competitive

With restricted numbers of places, dentistry remains a highly competitive subject – with more applications per acceptance than medicine. Throughout the last decade, there have been more than double the number of applicants than there have been acceptances, and in many years more than three-times as many. After a slump in the number of applicants in the mid-2010s, applicants reached a new peak of 4,420 in 2020, a 13.5% increase on the previous year. This means that for every accepted applicant in 2020 there were 3.32 applicants.

Applications and acceptances to study dentistry

	No of unique applicants	No of acceptances	Unique applicants per acceptance
2011	3820	1195	3.2
2012	3515	1195	2.94
2013	3455	1190	2.9
2014	3410	1105	3.09
2015	3010	1095	2.75
2016	2810	1100	2.55
2017	2885	1135	2.54
2018	3040	1125	2.7
2019	3895	1140	3.42
2020	4420	1330	3.32

Source: OME estimates based on UCAS figures



Source: OME estimates based on UCAS figures

COVID disrupts student numbers

The normal flow of students into dental schools has been disrupted for the 2021/22 academic year. In Scotland, dental schools have been unable to accept any dental students this autumn, after strict COVID restrictions meant current students needed to extend their studies by up to a year. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the UK, the unprecedented rise in top A-Level grades under special pandemic arrangements meant dental schools were severely over-subscribed. As a result, the UK Government has agreed to fund additional dental student places beyond the normal cap. However, some dental schools have not had the capacity to be able expand at such short notice, and so the Department for Education has also created a scheme to offer students £10,000 to

switch from over-capacity dental schools to others that could more easily accommodate extra places. It remains to be seen how this fallow year from Scotland combined with a bulge in England will play out in the workforce as these students graduate in five years' time.

Graduations go ahead

Despite concerns that the pandemic would significantly disrupt graduations this summer – with the exception of students at Scottish schools – the overwhelming majority of dental students expected to graduate in summer 2021 have done so. A small number will continue their studies, with this cohort expected to graduate by the end of 2021.

Numbers of DCPs

The last year, in particular, has seen reports of practices struggling to recruit and retain dental nurses, as the difficult working conditions brought about by the pandemic have led staff to look to jobs outside dentistry. Despite this, the number of dental nurses actually increased slightly from 2019 to 2020, with 58,972 on the register. It may be that the COVID effect practices are feeling on the ground has yet to make its mark on the GDC's registration figures. Also, as with dentists, a registration with the GDC does not necessarily mean the dental nurse is currently working. It is very plausible that many dental nurses remained registered at 31 December 2020, but have since stopped working in a dental practice. The figures for 2021 will likely be more revealing as to the challenges practices are facing. The figures from August 2021, following the registration date for DCPs, shows that the number of dental nurses have fallen to 58,053, down by 919 on the GDC Annual Report figures. However, already in September the number of dental nurses registered has increased to 58, 291.

Alongside these reports of pressures recruiting and retaining dental nurses, research conducted by the GDC has found that 17 per cent of practices were expecting to make redundancies of practice staff this year.⁴

⁴ Palmer, H., Campbell-Jack, D., Lillis, J., Elsby, A., conducted on behalf of the GDC, 2020, *The impact of COVID-19 on dental professionals*, <https://gdc-uk.org/about-us/what-we-do/research/our-research-library/detail/report/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-dental-professionals>

Numbers of DCPs registered at 31 December

	2019	2020	Change
Dental Nurse	58,898	58,972	+74
Dental Hygienist	7,563	7,812	+249
Dental Technician	5,776	5,529	-247
Dental Therapist	3,620	3,938	+318
Orthodontic Therapist	695	734	+39
Clinical Dental Technician	375	367	-8
	76,927	77,352	+425

Source: General Dental Council

Overall, the number of Dental Care Professionals registered with the GDC has risen by 425 from 2019 to 2020. There have been big rises in the number of Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists, up by 249 and 318 respectively. However, there has been a large fall in the number of Dental Technicians registered – down by 247 – perhaps, reflecting the particular difficulties that dental laboratories have faced during the pandemic.

Specialisation

For a number of years, the numbers of those on the GDC's specialist lists has remained stable. In 2021, 4,274 dentists were registered with a specialty and this was up by 21 on 2020. Orthodontics remains by far the largest specialty, with nearly double the number of the next largest, oral surgery.

Numbers registered with a specialty

	2021	Change with 2020
Dental and Maxillofacial Radiology	28	0
Dental Public Health	93	-3
Endodontics	312	9
Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology	34	1
Oral Medicine	70	1
Oral Microbiology	7	0
Oral Surgery	719	-5
Orthodontics	1363	2
Paediatric Dentistry	238	-1
Periodontics	382	7
Prosthodontics	445	7
Restorative Dentistry	295	4
Special Care Dentistry	288	-1
Total	4274	21

Of course, these figures only reflect those who have completed a GDC-approved specialist training programme and have a certificate of completion of specialist training (CCST). There will be many other dentists who have developed specialty skills and who are practising in that specialty without being registered with the GDC as a 'specialist'. There are no official statistics about how many dentists have chosen to develop such skills. There are around 350 posts to start the first year Dental Core Training (DCT 1) each year, which are one means by which dentists can gain further skills. There was a sharp increase in the number of applicants to DCT 1 this year, with the number applying up from 631 in 2020 to 821 in 2021.

My reasons for specialising were being able to gain the additional skills to oversee and care for my patients throughout their care pathway and I really enjoyed seeing people that no one else would see or have the skills to treat.

Natalie Bradley

Source: General Dental Council

Contact

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