

# Congratulations, you've qualified - what now?

Which direction should you choose? Nilesh Parmar outlines the choices and options available

I REMEMBER the day well. We all queued up nervously to see our final BDS results pinned unceremoniously on the notice board. I waded through the crowd of my fellow would-be dentists, whom I had suffered with for the last five years, looked up my exam number, and... I PASSED! My first thought was, 'I'm finally a dentist!'

I called my parents, rather emotionally informing them of the good news, then looked around to see if anyone failed, consoled those with their heads in their hands, and off to the bar we went! However, after a few booze-fuelled evenings, the realisation kicks in. Fast forward to getting a VT post and completing a rather interesting VT year, and the time for a decision arrives: what type of dentist do you want to become?

There are so many options and it all depends on what you want; what do you enjoy? What do you loathe? The way I see it is that you have two choices: To post-grad or not to post-grad?

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## The choice is yours

There is nothing wrong with not completing a post-grad qualification. Some of the best dentists in the world have not completed any formal post-graduate qualifications and they've expanded their knowledge in other ways and have been able to apply it better than any other. So do not think that not having a post-graduate qualification makes you any less of a dentist, because it doesn't.

If you decide to hang around in practice, then maybe do a house officer job for a year. Working in hospital, in a 'Max-Fax' unit, can give you a great buzz. You may even get bitten by the dreaded 'Max-Fax bug', which we do during our hospital SHO year; we turn around one day and think, 'maybe I will do medicine, and become an oral maxillofacial surgeon'. After considering the 20 or so years it takes, we usually back down and think 'Let me stick with this dentistry thing and see how that turns out'. The bravest amongst you may continue along the path of medicine, and to those of you that do that, I take my hat off and salute you. I cannot think of a harder task out there than becoming a Max-Fax consultant. Good luck and Godspeed!

If Max-Fax doesn't float your boat, and the idea of doing a post-graduate qualification doesn't appeal to you, then you could become a life-long associate. This is probably the smarter move because you work four days and have three-day weekends. You don't have to worry about running the practice; or CQC; MHRA; and all those other things. Just turn up, do your job and call it a day. However, with the easier life, do come certain issues.

You'll be self-employed, but technically you will still work for someone. Also, if the business coaches have their way, you won't be on a 50% share for much longer, you may not even be on 40%! Instead, you will be on a sliding scale of income, so be prepared to hit an income ceiling that you cannot go beyond.

It is very easy to get into that comfort zone of being an associate, and there is nothing wrong with that. But, if you want to increase

your power, stress and bank balance (so they say), then you may want to buy your own practice.

Apparently, only 10% of dental graduates want to own a practice nowadays. In this day and age, it takes a brave man/woman to set up a squat private practice. You will need



some disposable income to cover the losses in approximately the first three years. But, if you survive those three years, you should be fine.

**Where to train**

If you do decide to do some post-graduate training, where do you do it? Do you complete a recognised course, which may give you some letters after your name, or do you complete a more specific programme with no exit exams or requirements that won't provide any letters? There is another factor that needs to be considered, and that is cost - post-graduate training is very expensive!

When I was doing my MSc at the Eastman, I would work the out-of-hours emergency service for East Essex. This was not fun, as the new contract (UDAs and other foolish ideas) had just kicked in, so there were a lot of irreversible pulpitis issues knocking around. I would study

day and night for six days, and see patients all day Sunday. I would then come along to the Eastman on a Monday morning and get criticised for my 'Green stick border molding' not being done 'the Eastman way'.

I would see what my friends were doing on Facebook and it looked like they were all earning loads, driving nice cars, getting married and/or divorced, and just generally getting on with life. Not so much for me...

I guess what I am trying to say is, post-graduate education is daunting, especially if you decide to become a specialist. Be prepared for the ups and the downs, for abuse and praise, and to repeatedly ask yourself, 'Why am I doing this?'

But it's not all doom and gloom. Once you do finish your post-graduate studies, you will feel great! Remember that feeling when you got your BDS results? Multiply that by 100 and you

will come close to what it feels like to get your first post-graduate degree.

All in all, there are so many options to choose from. My pearl of wisdom (as I'm over 30 now, I feel I can offer these) is:

**1. Learn to do everything well.** Then choose something you enjoy and spend more of your time on that.

**2. If you want to specialise then great, if not, try some short courses.** Then, go abroad, learn all you can and apply it!

One way to become really good at your job, is to apply everything you learn. If a particular technique or skill doesn't work, then okay, you found out the hard way, pick yourself up and move on!

And remember: You are going to be fixing teeth for the majority of your life, so make sure you enjoy it!

Good luck! ■

