



THE SOUTH AFRICAN DENTAL TECHNICIANS COUNCIL
DIE SUID AFRIKAANSE RAAD VIR TANDTEGNICI

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Dear Registered Member

This year, 2023, is almost gone. We have a lot to smile back on and be appreciative of as a profession. I want to start by appreciating the Council under the leadership of Prof Owen, who have worked tirelessly over the past 10 months to ensure that we respond and deal with the queries received from the profession especially relating to the Pipeline students. For the past few months, we experienced challenges with our telephone lines and internet due to the theft of copper cables. We have managed to get a temporary plan, but the plan comes with its own challenges. We will continue to monitor the situation and we are currently looking into other plans to address the problem. As a secretariat, we have listened to feedback and critique from the profession. We had several meetings with DENTASA to discuss matters of common interest.

In this newsletter, I will be reporting on the following issues:

1. Update on the Knysna criminal Case
2. Resignation of the Council's Inspector
3. Passing away of Mr. Swanepoel
4. Stakeholder engagements
5. Education Matters
6. Pension fund Matters

UPDATE ON THE KNYSNA CASE

I am pleased to announce that the criminal case (under case no. 461/12/2018) that was opened in 2018 of an illegal/unregistered persons has finally been concluded by the Knysna Court. The person was found guilty of all the charges. The sentence given was imprisonment for 10 Months, or acknowledgement of guilt or Bail Estreatment of R 5000.00 of which 0 Rand is suspended for 0 Years.

The joint collaboration between Council and the members of the profession has produced positive results. Let us continue to work together to deal with unregistered persons. You are reminded that Council can only act if such persons are reported to it, and that this reporting can be anonymous.

RESIGNATION OF THE LABORATORY INSPECTOR

We regret to have to announce the resignation of the Laboratory Inspector, Mr. Khayaletu Mbangeni, who left the Council on 31st of October 2023 to pursue other endeavors. Mr. Mbangeni had worked for the SADTC since 2020. The Council wishes Mr. Mbangeni well in his future undertakings.

The Office will be advertising the position on the Council's website, please be on the lookout for the advert. For any inspections-related queries, please contact Ms Khosi Mkhonza (khosi@sadtc.org.za).

BEREAVEMENT

Council received the news of the passing away of the former Registrar, Mr. JA Swanepoel. Council would always remember him for his dedication to the work of the Council. May his soul rest in peace. The office would also like to pay tribute to other Technicians who have passed away in the last few months.,



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Council met with DENTASA to discuss several matters of common interest. The first meeting was to engage on the coding, the second meeting related work being produced by outside laboratories. These discussions are ongoing.

EDUCATIONAL MATTERS

The dental technology profession has expressed concern that in the last few years very few students have been registered with the Council after completing their programmes. This section is therefore to inform the profession of the current state of education and training in dental technology.

A brief history of the assessment of students for registration

Prior to the then Technikons becoming Universities of Technology dental technology students had to pass a national examination to be registered with Council to practise their profession. However, since then, there had been limited scrutiny of the standards, but the Regulations clearly state that, should Council be concerned, it must, through its education inspectorate, assess the standards of the final practical exit-level examination for suitability for registration. After complaints from parents and the Dental Technology Association of South Africa (DENTASA), and during accreditation visits of Council to all the UoTs in 2018 and 2019, many problems were identified. A critical problem was to do with the assessment of the practical work in the final practical exit-level examination. The accreditation panels interviewed staff and students and also called for the previous years' practical work which had been passed and found that there had been an alarming drop in the standards of the work produced.

Further investigation revealed that there were no objective marking systems in place to assess the work, and none of the universities could provide any evidence as to how the work was assessed. It is a universally accepted principle that students' work be assessed as objectively as possible: technically this requires that the assessment be, *inter alia*, both valid and reliable. Validity in the case of these practical examinations refers to the fact that what is being assessed is relevant to both the work carried out up to that point, and to the world of work. Reliability means that (a) if the same examiner assesses the work over different time intervals, the result would be the same, or (b) if more than one rater assesses the work independently, their results would be the same.

For an assessment to have reliability, each examiner must use the same criteria to assess the work. Unfortunately, no such criteria existed or were used by the universities at that time, despite previous attempts to do so Council therefore

decided to assist the universities, who seemed unable or unwilling to make improvements, and embarked on an extensive series of workshops, together with representatives from the universities. These workshops were to develop objective criteria to determine whether the work produced by the students in their final practical exit-level examination was technically correct so that it would be clinically acceptable to be fitted into a patient's mouth. In addition to using such criteria (which are set out in the form of rubrics) in an examination, it was pointed out to the universities that the very same criteria should be used as a teaching and learning tool from day one, and throughout the entire course. If this is done, then the students would be well prepared for their final examination and would know exactly how their work would be assessed.

Unfortunately, there was some considerable opposition to these criteria from the UoT lecturers, with the result that they were not used for teaching and learning, and not applied correctly by themselves as internal examiner or by their external examiners. Council had motivated from 2019, that the university examiners and the Council examiners should do the assessments together, but this was rejected by the lecturers until recently. As a result, Council had no option but to ask its own examiners to independently assess the work, and perhaps not surprisingly, large discrepancies appeared between the Council and university examiners. Not only that, but there were large discrepancies between the internal and external examiners of each university. In other words, there was no reliability (as measured statistically) between those examiners. Students were being passed when their work was clearly not clinically acceptable: for example, a crown with an open margin still received a pass. There was, however, acceptable reliability between Council examiners, and Council had no option but to accept only its own examiners' results.



Diagnosing the problem

Council is of the opinion that the lowering of standards is most likely due to the comparative lack of practical experience amongst many of the lecturers at the universities. Before a final practical examination is taken, the lecturers must produce sample work to the standard expected of the students in that examination and that sample work must be approved by Council after being assessed by the education inspectorate, from which the Council examiners are drawn.

Since 2019, however, none of the sample work produced by the lecturers has been deemed to be acceptable on first presentation. This has led to recommendations from Council to the UoTs, to release the lecturers for periods of time to commercial laboratories so that they can increase their own skills, for if a lecturer cannot produce what is expected of a student, this will surely perpetuate poor standards and set the students up for inevitable failure. Unfortunately, this recommendation has not been taken up in earnest by the UoTs.

The creation of “pipeline” students

The result of the universities refusing to work with the Council, was that their own examiners produced different results from those of the Council examiners. The universities then, for whatever reason, and against Council’s advice, decided to graduate the students, knowing that the Council examiners’ assessment was that they had not reached a standard suitable for registration with Council. They have become known as the “pipeline students”. Council has publicly expressed its dismay at this development and pronounced it inhumane as these students could not now practice their chosen profession. In an attempt to try to prevent this from happening again, Council passed a resolution as a condition for accreditation, that should a university graduate students *knowing that they cannot register to practice*, then Council would have no option but to recommend to the Minister of Health the withdrawal of accreditation from that university.

A compromise solution for the pipeline students has been reached at the request of the Minister of Health, whereby the students would register with their respective university for non-degree purposes, then register with Council, then be placed in commercial laboratories where they would carry out a defined number of procedures under supervision. After this, following a favourable assessment by the laboratory owners, they would be registered. To date, though, this solution has not been implemented.

Since 2020, only a few students have passed all disciplines to the standard required by Council, and all others have been deemed not to be registrable. Some have failed all disciplines, and some have failed one or two disciplines. According to the Regulations, those students should present for a re-examination.

Some progress and some continued opposition

Following a change in management at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), the university has agreed that the practical exit-level examination will be jointly assessed by the university and Council examiners. Their new programme has been provisionally accredited and they will admit student to the new programme in 2024. Existing students still have to be examined. TUT has agreed to use the rubrics for teaching and learning as well as for the final assessment and a gateway for entrance to the examination. This is a very positive step and bodes well for the future.

DUT likewise has now agreed to a joint assessment of the practical exit-level examination, and this recently took place for the first time. This was a valuable exercise and raised the level of understanding of assessment especially for the external examiners of the university. The results, however, were disappointing, as none of the students were able to pass all four disciplines. They will be recalled for remediation and better preparation for the examination, and will, once prepared, take a re-examination. In the meantime, though, the University once again graduated students from the previous cohorts who did not meet the standards for registration. The university continues to deny, in the face of the facts, that there was ever a drop in standards. This has, despite the university agreeing to a joint examination panel, given the Council no option but to recommend to the Minister, withdrawal of accreditation. Once again, the solution is

a feasible one: register the students for non-degree purposes, recall them and remediate them, and then re-examine them.

The situation at CPUT seems to have come to an impasse. CPUT continued to graduate student who had been failed by the Council examiners, resulting in Council having recommended withdrawal of accreditation. Unlike the other Universities, though, CPUT has made no commitment to joint examinations, and, of greater concern, their Head of Department has remained adamantly opposed to the use of the rubrics. Council is of the opinion that this is an untenable situation and can only be resolved by means of a directive to the University and to the lecturers, a directive Council cannot give.

The way forward

In light of all these difficulties and the fact that so few students have been registered with Council in the last 4 years, Council has drawn up Regulations for a National Professional Registration Examination (NPRE). Briefly, these state that, once students have completed their programme, they would enter the world of work, and after at least 6 months in full employment, present for the NPRE. It is hoped that the exposure to the commercial world would help them to gain the level of skills they were unable to acquire from their university programme. The Regulations have been lodged with the National Department of Health and Council anxiously awaits their publication.

This has been a difficult few years for both Council and the universities. But recent events, especially at TUT and DUT are encouraging and it is hoped that CPUT will have a change of heart and follow suit. There are solutions to these difficulties, but Council can only offer these solutions as suggestions. Council remains committed to raise the standards of the education and training in dental technology in South Africa and will not compromise on those standards.

SOUTH AFRICAN DENTAL TECHNICIAN EMPLOYEES UMBRELLA FUND

The South African Dental Technician Employees Umbrella Fund was established to help you receive a regular and reliable income when you retire.

Two-Pots System

National Treasury has postponed the implementation of the two-pot system to 1 March 2025, from the initially communicated date of 1 March 2024.

What is the two-pot system?

- Enables limited access to retirement savings if you as a member, are under financial constraints, by allowing one-third (33%) of contributions from 1 March 2025, and investment growth thereon, to be accessible as lumpsums before retirement. One withdrawal per annum will be allowed and taxed at a marginal (personal) tax rate by SARS. The minimum withdrawal amount would be R2000.
- Only funds in the savings component (savings pot) will be accessible for this purpose.

Summary of your risk benefits

As a member of this Fund, you are afforded the below benefits in the event of your death or disability:

Group Life Assurance-Death benefit	
Benefit	3 x annual fund salary
Rate	1.03% of fund salary
Continuation option	Yes, up to normal retirement age
Cover to continue at disablement	Yes
Free cover limit	R2 000 000
Cover termination age	65
Insurer	Sanlam

Free cover limit: the amount of cover that an individual policy member can have without any requirement of medical evidence or underwriting. If your salary level makes you exceed this limit, the insurer will require medical assessments for potential increased cover above the limit.

Disability benefit	
Benefit	75% of monthly salary
Rate	1.31% of fund salary
Continuation option	Yes, up to normal retirement age
Waiting period	3 months
Initial period	24 months
Free cover limit	R60 000
Cover termination age	65
Insurer	Sanlam

*Initial period: Period in which you remain disabled or incapable to perform own occupation and continue to earn disability income.

Funeral benefit	
Benefit	R30 000 member/spouse
Child of age 14 to 21 years	R30 000
Child of age 6 to 13 years	R15 000
Child of age 1 to 5 years	R7 500
Child of stillborn to 11 months	R3 750
Rate	R19.61 pm/pm
Insurer	Sanlam

Complaints

The SA Dental Technician Employees Umbrella Fund Board is committed to resolving complaints from complainants in a professional, efficient and fair manner. The Fund recognises that an effective complaints procedure will minimise the Fund's reputational risk and is a source of information about whether or not members are being treated fairly. Responses sent to the Fund will be addressed in 20 working days, from date of receipt of the complaint.

Please send your complaint in writing to the Fund Principal Officer

Mr. Andre Ferreria

Telephone: 012 333 2184

Email: admin@ptadent.co.za

Pension Funds Adjudicator

The Office of the Pension Funds Adjudicator exists to consider and adjudicate retirement fund members' complaints. The Adjudicator deals with complaints in respect of fund administration, asset investment or fund rule interpretation and application. After hearing both parties (either in writing or in-person hearing), the Adjudicator will make a ruling.

You can find contact details for the Office of the Pension Funds Adjudicator on www.pfa.org.za.

