

ISFE Examination Transitional Arrangements

The General Dental Council introduced new specialty curricula from September 2024.

Intercollegiate Specialty Fellowship Examinations (hereafter ‘the old examinations’ or ‘ISFE’) will be offered until the end of Spring 2027 for those candidates intending to complete their training under the pre-September 2024 curricula. This guidance details transitional arrangements for the winding up of the ISFE examinations.

This guidance is not suitable for candidates undertaking the new GDC curricula (taking effect for all new specialty trainees from September 2024), who should refer to the provisions and regulations of the Dental Specialty Fellowship Examinations <https://dsfe.org.uk/>

Further information on who should transition to the new curricula can be found at [DST curricular transition arrangements](#)

Early eligibility

As part of the transitional arrangements before the ISFE examination is discontinued and the new Dental Specialty Fellowship Examinations are introduced, **some candidates may be allowed to sit the ISFE earlier than usual.** The Board Chair for each specialty may approve a candidate sitting the exam earlier than usual only if the application is appropriately signed off by the candidate’s Training Programme Director (TPD) and Postgraduate Dental Dean (PDD).

To approve an early application, the TPD and PDD must agree that

1. The candidate has made Satisfactory Process (F1) as defined under the Annual Review of Competence Progression (ARCP)
2. On the balance of probability, the candidate has sufficient training to meet the outcomes in the curriculum in order to make a reasonable attempt at the examination.

Should the candidate dispute the decision of the TPD, this should be addressed with the TPD and PDD as per the process set out in the Gold Guide. The ISFE

Secretariat, Board Chairs and the four Royal Colleges will not adjudicate in the decision of the TPD as to the readiness of the candidate to undertake the examination.

Candidates who are allowed to sit the exam early under these arrangements should feel satisfied in their state of preparedness. Candidates who sit the examination early cannot subsequently [appeal](#) an exam result on the basis that they had not yet completed the recommended level of specialty training or did not have sufficient knowledge to complete the exam.

Candidates who have not exhausted all their attempts by the final sitting in Spring 2027 will forfeit any remaining opportunities to sit the examination.

This approach is supported by the current examination regulations:

Dental Public Health Examination Regulations, 2.2.3:

“Evidence of completion, by the date of commencement of the examination diet for which the candidate is applying, of one of [...] the training requirements. This requirement may be interpreted flexibly at the discretion of the Board Chair to allow candidates the opportunity of attempting the examination in the two diets immediately before completion of training.”

ISFE Examination Regulations (excluding Dental Public Health), 2.2.2:

“Evidence of completion, by the date of commencement of the examination diet for which the candidate is applying, of the training requirements [...] for the relevant specialty. In exceptional circumstances, these requirements may be interpreted flexibly at the discretion of the relevant Board Chair, following discussion with the appropriate TPD, to allow candidates the opportunity of attempting the examination in the two diets immediately before the anticipated completion of training.”

Maximising attempts

To maximise the opportunity for candidates to complete both sections of the ISFE examination prior to its discontinuation, a flexible approach will be adopted from the Spring 2026 diets through to the final delivery of the ISFE examinations. **During this period, candidates may apply to sit both Part A and Part B at any available diet and in any order.** This measure is intended to increase the number of possible opportunities for re-sit, should this prove necessary. Candidates must meet the relevant eligibility criteria and are expected to seek the agreement of their Postgraduate Training Director before proceeding.

Those considering attempting both examinations within a short timeframe should carefully reflect on the significant study commitment involved.

Some candidates may be eligible to proceed directly to the new examination structure and are advised to discuss this option with their Training Programme Director.

Cessation of examination

The ISFE examinations will be discontinued after the last diet in Spring 2027. There will be no further opportunity to sit this exam after that date for any candidate.

Certification of Pass at Part A or Part B – advice for all Specialties excepting Dental Public Health

Those who achieve a pass in Part A but do not attain a pass in Part B by the time of discontinuation of the ISFE examinations will be issued with a certificate of completion for Part A. Such candidates will be required to undertake the new Dental Specialty Fellowship Examinations (hereafter referred to as the "new examinations") in full, with no exemptions granted for any component.

Candidates who pass Part B but not Part A must also undertake all parts of the new examinations in their entirety. Such candidates will be informed of their exam pass but will not receive certification. This is because Part B comprises Clinical and Management sections (excepting Dental Public Health) which will be evidenced by work-based assessment when the candidate transfers to the new curricula and Dental Speciality Fellowship Examinations.

It is important to note that no post-nominal designation can be awarded on the basis of passing either Part A or Part B alone. Due to significant changes in the curriculum and examination syllabus, no reciprocal arrangements can be made between the current ISFE and the new examinations.

Certification of Pass at Part A or Part B – advice for trainees in Dental Public Health

Those who achieve a pass in Part A in Dental Public Health but do not attain a pass in Part B by the time of discontinuation of the ISFE examinations will be required to undertake the Dental Speciality Fellowship Examinations. Such candidates will be awarded a certificate of completion for Part A, which may be submitted to receive an exemption from the Short Answer Questions (SAQ) element of the new examination. This exemption will be valid until Spring 2029, irrespective of when

ISFE Part A was achieved. Candidates who have not achieved a pass at the Dental Speciality Fellowship Examination at the end of Spring 2029 will not be eligible for exemption and will require to take the new Short Answer Questions (SAQ) examination.

Candidates should note that this exemption is unique to Dental Public Health. An exemption may be granted in the specialty of Dental Public Health, as both the previous and revised examination formats include a comparable component. For the other dental specialties, the revised examination structure does not assess Critical Appraisal in this manner. Consequently, exemptions cannot be applied in those cases.

There are no reciprocal arrangements in place for Part B Dental Public Health. Candidates should refer to guidance above.