

PUBLIC HEARING

Registration Appeals Committee

Registration appeal hearing

12 December 2025

Name: BERRUETA VILLA, Paulina

Case reference: CAS-211794

General Dental Council: Tom Stevens, counsel
Instructed by Zara Gull, ILAS

Appellant: Present
Not represented

Outcome: Appeal dismissed

Committee members: Gill Mullen (Lay) (Chair)
Emma Haywood (Dental Care Professional)
Caitriona Gerber Walsh (Dentist)

Legal Adviser: Jayne Wheat

Professional Adviser: Bev Littlemore

Committee Secretary: Gareth Llewellyn

Miss Berrueta Villa

1. You are in attendance at this appeal hearing before the Registration Appeals Committee (RAC). You are not represented. Tom Stevens of counsel, instructed by Zara Gull of the General Dental Council's (GDC's) In-House Legal Advisory Service, appears for the GDC.

Purpose of hearing

2. This appeal hearing has been convened in accordance with the General Dental Council (Registration Appeals) Rules 2006 ('the Appeal Rules'), pursuant to Section 36J and Schedule 4A of the Dentists Act 1984 (as amended) ('the Act'). The purpose of the hearing is to consider your appeal against the decision taken by the Registrar not to grant your application for entry to the register as a dental therapist.

Background to the appeal

3. Your application for registration as a dental therapist was received by the GDC on 3 March 2023. Shortly afterwards, on 8 March 2023, Section 36C (4) (a) of the Act was amended to remove the diploma in dentistry from the definition of relevant qualifications for this section. As a result, from 8 March 2023, new applicants cannot rely on a degree or diploma in dentistry qualification to join the DCP register. Your application was received prior to this amendment. Accordingly, your application was processed in line with the legislation in force at the time.
4. A Registration Assessment Panel ('the Panel') considered your application on 11 September 2024 and determined that you had not demonstrated that you have the requisite knowledge and skill to be registered as a dental therapist. These requirements derive from Section 36C (4) and (5) of the Act. The Panel identified a number of deficiencies in your knowledge and skill across your training and professional experience. Accordingly, the Panel recommended that your application for registration as a dental therapist be refused.
5. You asked for your application to be reassessed, and you provided further documentation in support of your renewed application.
6. The Panel reassessed your application on 8 May 2025. The Panel again identified a number of deficiencies in your knowledge and skill across your training and professional experience. Accordingly, the Panel recommended that your application for registration as a dental therapist be refused once more.
7. In June 2025 you appealed against the Registrar's decision to refuse your application for registration. In support of your appeal you stated that you were of the opinion that the refusal to grant registration was not an accurate reflection of your qualifications, knowledge and experience. You stated that you have completed a five-year Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) degree in Mexico, and that this primary dental qualification is comparable to the UK equivalent. You referred in particular to your extensive clinical experience practising as a dentist in Mexico. You provided further documentary information in support of your appeal.
8. Your appeal has led to today's hearing.

Evidence

9. In considering this appeal the Committee has considered all the information provided to it, including the documentary information provided by you and the GDC, and the oral submissions that you and Mr Stevens gave.

10. The Committee heard no oral evidence.

Summary of submissions

11. Mr Stevens on behalf of the GDC set out the background to your appeal, and stated that the assessment of whether you possess the requisite knowledge and skill to be registered is a matter for the Committee. Mr Stevens submitted that, in anticipation of this hearing, the GDC has taken the position that you do not possess the requisite knowledge and skill. Mr Stevens noted the further information that you have provided, including your submissions as summarised below, and reminded the Committee that it is not bound by the Registrar's decision to refuse registration. Mr Stevens invited the Committee to consider the matter afresh, and to determine whether, in light of all the information presented to it, you do possess the requisite knowledge and skill.
12. You submitted that you qualified as a dentist in Mexico in 2016, and that your primary dental qualification is equivalent to that awarded by a UK institution. You stated that you undertook a one-year internship as part of this undergraduate degree. You stated that you moved to the UK in 2018. You stated that, since 2018, you have practised overseas on three separate occasions, with your total clinical experience amounting to four months' experience. You submitted that, in refusing registration, the GDC has ignored your professional experience and knowledge, including the references submitted on your behalf, which in your submission demonstrate that you possess the requisite knowledge and skill.
13. In response to the questions of the Professional Adviser you described the typical day-to-day duties that you undertook as a dentist practising overseas. You stated that you subsequently moved to the UK, and that you are not currently working in a dental setting. You stated that you have not undertaken clinical hands-on courses involving the use of mannequins as part of the continuing professional development (CPD) that you have completed over the last seven years in the UK. You described the approach that you would take to the appropriate management and treatment of a patient who might present with scores of 'four' when a basic periodontal assessment (BPE) is conducted. As well as describing your understanding of appropriate periodontal care and treatment, you also described your understanding of key aspects of the routine practice of a dental therapist, including restorations and when to refer issues to a dentist.
14. In response to questions from the Committee, you stated that you recognise that you have no clinical experience in the UK. You stated that you have reflected on how you might enter practice if registered, and stated that you have undertaken CPD focussed on practising in the UK and that you envisage first working as a trainee dental nurse and enrolling on a 'back to practice' course.

Committee's consideration

15. The Committee has taken into account the evidence provided to it, and the submissions made by you and Mr Stevens. The Committee has accepted the advice of the Professional Adviser and Legal Adviser.
16. The Professional Adviser, amongst other advice, summarised the issue that falls to this Committee to determine, namely whether you possess sufficient knowledge and skill to be suitable to be entered on to the register as a dental therapist.
17. The Legal Adviser, amongst other advice, advised the Committee that you bear the burden of demonstrating that your name should be entered on to the register as a dental therapist.

18. The Committee's powers when considering such appeals are set out at paragraph 4 (8) of Schedule 4A of the Act. The Committee may, in short, decide to dismiss the appeal, allow the appeal and thereby quash the decision appealed against, substitute for the decision appealed against any other decision that the Registrar could have made, or remit the case to the Registrar for disposal in accordance with any directions that it may wish to give.
19. In determining your appeal the Committee has considered whether you have demonstrated that you have the necessary knowledge and skill to register as a dental therapist in the UK, having taken into account all of your qualifications, knowledge and experience, however and wherever acquired.

Committee's decision

20. The Committee has determined to dismiss your appeal against the Registrar's decision to refuse your application for registration.
21. The Committee has determined that you have not demonstrated that you possess the requisite knowledge and skill for entry to the register as a dental therapist. The Committee notes that you have not worked in a dental setting in the UK, for instance in the capacity of a trainee dental nurse. The Committee also notes that you do not have extensive experience of practising overseas, as your professional clinical experience since moving to the UK in 2018 amounts to four months' worth of clinical practice, which was carried out in Mexico over three separate occasions. The Committee also notes that you have not undertaken any clinical hands-on courses to augment your knowledge. The Committee also found that you do not appear to have a detailed and clear understanding of key aspects of the *Scope of Practice* for a dental therapist practising in the UK, with particular regard to the subjects of direct access and restorations. As part of its consideration the Committee had regard to the references submitted on your behalf, and in particular those dated 15 October 2024 and 5 October 2025, but considered that these letters were not sufficient to suggest that the identified deficiencies in your knowledge and skill have been met.
22. Accordingly, the Committee has determined to dismiss your appeal.

Right of appeal

23. You may appeal against this decision to the relevant court in accordance with paragraph (6) of Schedule 4A to the Act.
24. That concludes this determination.