

Internship and period of assessment arrangement under Dentists Registration Ordinance to take effect from April 1

The Government announced today (January 16) that the provisions on provisional registration, internship and period of assessment in the Dentists Registration Ordinance (DRO) (Cap. 156) will come into effect from April 1. By that date, local dental graduates will need to undergo an internship with provisional registration, while non-locally trained dentists who have passed the licensing examination of the Dental Council of Hong Kong (DCHK) will also need to undergo a period of assessment with provisional registration, before they can obtain full registration in Hong Kong. This arrangement can enrich the clinical experience of local dental graduates and non-locally trained dentists, thereby better protecting citizens utilising dental services.

Following the passage of the Dentists Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024 by the Legislative Council last July, the Government subsequently tabled the second commencement notice at the Legislative Council last December for negative vetting. The vetting period ended yesterday (January 15).

As indicated by the Government during the legislative process, unlike the practice for medical practitioners, there is currently no statutory requirement for dentists to undergo an internship or a period of assessment prior to registration. The requirements for an internship/a period of assessment have been introduced in the DRO in response to feedback from the dental profession in recent years regarding enhancing the practical clinical experience of local dental graduates and non-locally trained dentists in real-life settings. This arrangement will be highly beneficial for further enhancing dentists' professional standards.

Interns/assesseees will obtain the status of provisional registration, and will be appointed as dentists under contractual terms (salary level at 50 per cent of Master Pay Scale Point 30 for civil servants, i.e. \$35,505 per month in the 2024-25 financial year) to undergo an internship/a period of assessment. During this time, they will work in rotation at various service units under the guidance of experienced dentists, including:

- (1) School Dental Care Service;
- (2) emergency dental service;
- (3) hospital dental service (such as specialist services of oral maxillofacial surgery);
- (4) community dental service (such as dental services designated for the underprivileged); and
- (5) general dental service (such as government dental services).

Interns/assesseees will become familiar with the practice in Hong Kong

and hone their communication skills with local patients to prepare themselves for effectively handling the work of a practising dentist. Upon successful completion of their internship/period of assessment, they will be awarded a certificate of experience that enables them to obtain full registration.

Pursuant to the DRO, an internship/a period of assessment generally lasts for 12 months. Since some non-locally trained dentists may have prior practising experience before arriving in Hong Kong, the DRO allows the DCHK to consider shortening the period of assessment on a case-by-case basis. In cases of unsatisfactory performance by an individual intern/assessee, the DCHK may extend or terminate the internship/period of assessment. This is similar to the arrangement under the Medical Registration Ordinance (Cap. 161), which aims to uphold patient welfare.

With relevant provisions in the DRO coming into effect from April 1, sufficient time will be allowed for the DCHK and the Faculty of Dentistry of the University of Hong Kong to streamline administrative and preparatory work, facilitating a smooth transition into the internship arrangement for local dental graduates this summer. In the meantime, non-locally trained dentists who have passed the licensing examination earlier will also have ample time to apply for full registration at the DCHK before the new provisions take effect.

Additionally, non-locally trained dentists who are admitted to Hong Kong through limited registration (LR)/special registration (SR) mechanisms in the DRO are also eligible to apply for migration to full registration if they have served in specified institution(s) for at least five years in aggregate and are certified by the institution(s) as having served satisfactorily by reference to the DCHK's criteria. These LR/SR dentists can obtain full registration when they have passed the required part(s) of the DCHK's licensing examination without undergoing a period of assessment.