



“Dazzling teamwork and support”: How the Faculty of Dentistry at the Royal College of Surgeons, in partnership with TestReach, scaled globally to reach students in 40+ countries during the most challenging times.



Background

The Faculty of Dentistry of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) was founded in 1963 with the core mission of advancing the science, art and practice of dentistry through education, study and research. It is one of the Surgical Postgraduate Faculties at RCSI and its focus is on the post-qualification education and examination of dentists in Ireland and overseas.

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Professor Albert Leung is Immediate Past Dean of the Faculty of Dentistry RCSI. He was Dean between February 2020 and March 2023. He is Professor of Dental Education and Head of Department of Continuing Professional Development at University College London, and is RCSI Vice-Chancellor’s Dental Project Lead.

Professor Leung took up the position of Dean at RCSI one month after Brexit, and a month before the first Covid lockdown, bringing a wave of unprecedented challenges with the delivery of the Faculty of Dentistry’s examinations and education output. Professor Leung is sanguine about having navigated such choppy waters, and now, as he moves on from the role of Dean, comments that he “may be forever known as the virtual Dean, the Brexit Dean and the Covid Dean all rolled into one.”



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Immediate Past Dean of the
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Solution

Prior to the pandemic, the Faculty delivered exams on paper in test centres, via face-to-face contacts, or a combination of the two. RCSI was completely committed to supporting the postgraduate education and examinations of qualified dentists around the world, although this traditional examinations delivery model created heavy administration and travel demands. Even 100 in-person candidates in a single location abroad would necessitate RCSI staff and examiners taking flights around the world to administer and conduct the exam, while dentists might also have to travel long distances to the examination centre.

The Faculty of Dentistry had already begun looking at online exam delivery before the pandemic, but it would have been at least a couple of years further on before this might have been considered a viable option within the College.

Entering the first lockdown triggered a sea change in this approach, when Professor Leung as the new Dean realised that Covid would most likely continue

to disrupt education and examinations delivery for a long time. An alternative solution had to be found quickly – they could not wait out the lockdown. **“No change was not an option”** Professor Leung says, **“or I would be the first and last Dean to bankrupt the Faculty.”** Professor Leung was extremely grateful to the marvellous support from colleagues and friends at RCSI who contributed so much to this change process in a brilliant team approach.

TestReach was chosen to deliver the RCSI Faculty of Dentistry exams online, via remote invigilation. It offered strong security for high-stakes examinations, while allowing candidates to sit their exam without having to travel, and this degree of flexibility was essential.

Because TestReach combined an all-in-one assessment software platform with integral remote invigilation, the delivery was seamless and reliable. RCSI also appreciated that the interface was user-friendly and that TestReach, headquartered in Ireland, complied with all EU data regulations. The vast majority of dentistry assessments could be reliably and securely delivered online, with a small



number of the more specialised exams continuing to require a specific face-to-face element.

Professor Leung realised that data gathered using online assessments were extremely useful in managing RCSI's question banks effectively, allowing the college to expand the range and enhance the quality and validity of their on-going assessments.

Results

The switch to remote invigilation had a remarkable impact. **"demand mushroomed rapidly as we were trusted to produce reliable and very efficient assessments that were quality assured and user friendly,"** says Professor Leung. **"I must stress that without TestReach this might never have been possible especially during the pandemic."**

The high level of reliability of the platform, and the presence of well-trained TestReach invigilators watching over the live exams, enormously reduced exam administration tasks. **"It is now a delight to run the exams rather than a burden,"** Professor Leung says.

"Candidates can easily access their exams from the comfort of their home or workplace with minimum fuss, they can receive results faster and the huge reduction in travel is also more environmentally-friendly. I'm glad to say that there is relatively little push back to running exclusive face-to-face exams."

"The relationship between RCSI and TestReach is a special one. During my term as Dean, over 5,600 candidates entered the Faculty of Dentistry's exams, 98% of them via TestReach. Putting this in the context of Dentistry, Dental Schools in the Republic of Ireland qualify less than 100 dentists per year, so you can see that our reach for the online assessments both during and following Covid has been truly multi-national."



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“To train postgraduate dentists effectively, a lot of structured training has to take place. At times when there was no alternative, we were providing a valuable service to our colleagues throughout the world. I remain very grateful to the Faculty Board and colleagues who supported the project. We would have been in serious financial difficulty without bringing this level of innovation to our delivery.”

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up from TestReach, and the online exams are really working out brilliantly for the Faculty of Dentistry, RCSI,” he adds.

“RCSI, along with many organisations, faced unprecedented changes very rapidly when the pandemic struck. I am glad that it turned out to be a very successful outcome, thanks to the dazzling teamwork and support from my RCSI colleagues and the partnership with TestReach.”

About RCSI

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