There has been something of a revolution in practice management education and training over recent years. This has been prompted by the demands of the current challenging business environment, patient demands and professional regulation. With such a concerted pressure from all fronts practices have no choice but to raise their game and formalise their management skills with qualifications for managers of all levels within their organisation. They are scanning the market for training and qualifications which will enable them to capitalise on opportunities to develop the most appropriate range of management skills to meet the changing demands of dental businesses.

Since 1997 I have worked closely with practice studying for level 4 management qualifications to enable them to perform first line management duties under the supervision of a senior or strategic manager, in most cases this will be the practice owner. Having developed strong a strong first line management culture, an increasing number of practice managers are now ready to expanding their role and influence, especially those buying a share of the practice they work in and becoming administrative directors contributing management input at the boardroom level. Due to this trend the dental market is now in need of increased level 5 management qualifications provision.

Studying for a management qualification requires a huge investment of money and time on behalf of the student and their sponsoring business, so it is vital to choose a qualification at the right level. The National Qualifications and Curriculums Authority issue descriptors of the intellectual skills, processes and accountability each level of qualification is intended to characterise. On the basis of these descriptors level 4 qualifications are relevant to those who need to:

- Develop a broad base of management knowledge
- Use a wide range of management skills
- Determine responses to a variety of unpredictable situations, using innovative thinking and a wide range of problem solving skills.
- Evaluate information and use the findings for business planning and development

At this level management qualifications build underpinning knowledge of ways to apply and evaluate skills covering many areas of management and non-routine activities. They require learners to provide evidence of appropriate judgement in planning, selecting and presenting information to internal and external customers. These are managers for whom some of their day-to-day work is self-directed and some will be supervised by a senior manager. They will have responsibility for meeting specified quality standards and need a clear understanding of relevant general and dentally specific regulations, plus the ability to apply a high level of interpersonal skills to ensure observation of practice policy and protocols.

The definition of Level 5 qualifications however are that they aim to enable student to develop skills to enable them to:

- Generate ideas through the analysis of information and concepts at an abstract level
- Command a wide range of conceptual skills to formulate policy
- Analyse, reformat and evaluate a wide range of information.

These senior management qualifications focus on diagnostic and creative skills. They aim to develop the ability to exercise appropriate judgement for planning and design processes. Level 5 managers are usually responsible for supervising the work of junior managers and accept responsibility for personal and group decisions. They supervise the work of junior managers and have overall accountability for their designated area of management.
In response to requests from practice managers I have trained over the past 15 years The Dental Resource Company is now launching a new Level 5 Practice Management Qualification. The official launch date of this new Level 5 BTEC Professional Diploma in Dental Practice Management is January 1st 2009. Over 2 years of student study applicants will analyse units on: The dental market and customers, quality systems, financial management, continuous professional development, employment law and health and safety law in the dental environment. Students will need to qualify to register onto this course; however past level 4 students wishing to further their studies will be offered a 10% discount on their course fee when they enrol before 1.1.09

We are moving into an era where the combination of the knowledge and understanding acquired by formal education and training, together with practical application the workplace is the key to management success. Those managers equipped with such skills will be at the forefront of management and reap rich rewards in the dental business environment.

Participants are required to hold a level 4 management qualification and to have senior management work role. On completion of the on-line Phase 1 application candidates will be send the Phase 2 application form to confirm their eligibility for this course.