

Faculty of Dentistry, Oral & Craniofacial Sciences:

Q&A with Professor Mike Curtis, Executive Dean at the Faculty of Dentistry, Oral & Craniofacial Sciences, April 2019.

You've enjoyed senior roles at other dental faculties, what was it about King's that attracted you to this role?

I wanted to work somewhere that was recognised as among the best in the world. The Faculty of Dentistry, Oral & Craniofacial Sciences at King's was an opportunity to work at the largest faculty in Europe and with research teams of the highest quality. I'm excited by the challenge of enabling the faculty to meet our goal of delivering the best possible oral health to society.

What are the benefits of being a large dental faculty?

Because we have so many students, over 800 undergraduates, we need a large staff base to deliver teaching. This gives us critical mass. Unlike smaller faculties, we have multiple specialists in all the different areas of dentistry, which means we can deliver high level post-graduate courses in all the major dental sub-specialities. Similarly critical mass in the basic sciences gives us significant research power in our chosen areas of fundamental research.

For staff that's an attractive draw – working with colleagues in the same specialism accelerates knowledge and research.

What other factors attract students?

Studying in central London is always an attraction, but our location also gives us access to a very varied population base. This means our students enjoy the benefits of hands-on experience with a range of different patients. As well as clinical opportunities in London Bridge at Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Trust, our students have access to King's College Hospital in Denmark Hill with a very different demographic. Further afield we have outreach in settings more akin to Primary Care in Portsmouth and in West Norwood. Having that breadth of opportunity is invaluable for preparing students for the big wide world.

You've recently changed the name of the faculty. Why?

We felt that 'Dental Institute' didn't encompass everything we do. For instance, we have a world-leading team in developmental biology looking at not just mouth and teeth but also the other sensory organs of the head. That sort of work was too buried in the title of Dental Institute, which is why we are now the Faculty of Dentistry, Oral & Craniofacial Sciences.

The new name coincides with a restructuring of our research centres to support our key themes: Development, Regeneration, Repair & Tissue Engineering; Immunity, Infection & Host Microbiome Interactions; and Clinical, Translational & Population Health.

In addition, we're giving dental education a much higher profile by creating a dedicated centre of education and education research and appointing a new dean for education.

What is the faculty approach to education?

Dental curricula evolve. Of course, our students have to meet standards of General Dental Council when they graduate – but how we meet the standards is up to us. What’s exciting is that seminar style, classroom teaching has become less important as we move towards learning environments that benefit small groups using electronic resources. It’s a phenomenon in learning environments that is sweeping through Higher Education, but it’s particularly relevant to dentistry where small groups are much more the norm.

It’s also important to recognise that our students are part of a multi-faculty, global university. They’re not simply here to become dentists. A key aspect of the curriculum is to enhance not just their understanding of dentistry but also how other subjects align to it.

Professor Kim Piper, our Dean of Education, is helping us develop a new curriculum which draws on the overall mission to produce broader graduates.

We’ll also be looking at schemes to bring in students from a wider variety of backgrounds. We simply want the brightest and the best and want to encourage groups that don't have the best opportunities at school.

What are the major challenges facing dentistry?

Across the UK we have an ageing population, so dentistry is becoming more complex as a result. The heavy metal generation – those with teeth filled in the 60s, 70s and 80s – need considerable care as those restorations starts to fail.

Ageing also brings more co-morbidities and use of different medicines for different chronic conditions. These often impact on mouth which complicates the practice of dentistry. Students need to know more about general health to be effective dentists.

Finally, what would you say to someone considering joining King’s?

It’s a very exciting place to come. We’re the largest dental faculty in Europe, rated 1st in the UK and 2nd in the world in the QS World University Rankings 2019. You’ll be part of a multi-faculty, global university. And you won’t just be here to become a dentist – you’ll learn how other subjects fit in with your career.

For more information on the Faculty of Dentistry, Oral & Craniofacial Sciences or to republish this Q&A please contact Laura Shepherd, Communications at the Faculty on laura.2.shepherd@kcl.ac.uk