The Australian Dental Council (ADC) is the external accreditation authority for dental practitioner education and training programs in Australia. The ADC has been appointed to this function by the Dental Board of Australia (DBA), the regulator for dental practitioners in Australia, pursuant to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009 (the National Law). The National Law requires that a dental practitioner program in Australia must be accredited by the ADC if its graduates are to be eligible for registration with the DBA (refer Appendix A for further details).

The Dental Council (New Zealand) [DC(NZ)] prescribes qualifications for registration in dental scopes of practice, and accredits and monitors dental practitioner programs in accordance with Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (refer Appendix A for further details).

Dental practitioner programs in both Australia and New Zealand are accredited using ADC/DC(NZ) accreditation standards for dental hygienists and dental therapists, dentists, dental prosthodontists and dental specialists (http://www.adc.org.au/index.php?id=13). The ADC/DC(NZ) accreditation standards support the defined knowledge, competencies and professional attributes required of graduates to register as a dental practitioner.

Whilst sharing accreditation standards and processes, the ADC and DC(NZ) have developed separate sets of competencies to be used in accrediting dental practitioner programs (http://www.adc.org.au/index.php?id=14). These competencies are used as a key reference point in the accreditation of dental practitioner programs.

Review of program accreditation standards

The ADC and DC(NZ) are responsible in their respective jurisdictions for developing and reviewing accreditation standards. Accreditation standards are approved by the DBA in Australia and the DC(NZ) in New Zealand.

The current set of standards, with the exception of the dental prosthodontist standards, were originally guidelines and were essentially re-badged as accreditation standards in June 2010, following the implementation of the National Law.

The ADC is required to review the accreditation standards regularly. The ADC must ensure that all the relevant stakeholders have input into any review and development of accreditation through wide-ranging consultation. The ADC is also required to ensure that the standards meet relevant Australian and international benchmarks and are based on the available research and evidence.

The DC(NZ) is required to review its standards, policies and processes from time to time to ensure that they meet statutory requirements, are fit for purpose and are consistent with local and international best practice, research and policy trends. When setting standards the DC(NZ) must engage in international benchmarking with comparable jurisdictions.

The requirement for the ADC and the DC(NZ) to maintain accreditation standards that are contemporary and relevant provides the rationale for reviewing the current accreditation standards. The DBA and DC(NZ) (in its capacity as dental practitioner regulator in New Zealand) have requested that the ADC review the accreditation standards, and that this review consider:
• embedding the required competencies and attributes of the specific divisions of dental practitioners;
• indicating expectations regarding the standard and extent of clinical facilities;
• indicating the requirements regarding the level of academic and teaching staff, including appropriate requirements for registration with the relevant regulatory body; and
• including appropriate requirements for peer review.

The ADC will also need to incorporate and/or reference various external reference points and regulatory frameworks, including:

• The Australian Qualifications Framework
• The Higher Education Threshold Standards
• The Health Industry Training Package
• Health Workforce Australia/New Zealand initiatives and resources
• The Procedures for the Development of Accreditation Standards
• The Quality Framework for the Accreditation Function
• The Standards for Vocational Education and Training (VET) Accredited Courses
• The VET Quality Framework

Review and consultation process

The ADC is aiming to complete the review of the accreditation standards by December 2014.

The ADC will undertake wide-ranging consultation that will include setting up a review website, seeking stakeholder comment on the first consultation round questions through a survey monkey, meeting with stakeholder groups, holding stakeholder consultation fora in Australia and New Zealand and inviting comment on all drafts of the accreditation standards throughout the project.

The options for revising the accreditation standards to be considered include:

• creating a single set of accreditation standards for all dental practitioner programs, with the option for a particular standard or standards to address discipline specific matters, if necessary;
• eliminating overlap in the current accreditation standards;
• referencing and/or recognising relevant reference points or regulatory requirements;
• developing a set of standards that can be applied across the VET (in Australia), higher education and specialist dental education and training sectors; and
• developing standards that are evidence-based and outcomes focused.

A consultant will be engaged to undertake the project and the ADC will provide administrative and professional support. The following Steering Committee will oversee the review:

- Dr John Boucher (President ADC) Chair
- Dr Michael Bain (Chair, DC(NZ))
- Dr Jasen Burgess (Director, Accreditation)
- Ms Lyn LeBlanc (ADC CEO)
- Professor Mike Morgan (Chair, Accreditation Committee)
- Dr Rolf Scharfbilling (Chair, Australian and New Zealand Podiatry Accreditation Council)
- Dr Michael Shobbrook (Chair, Council on Chiropractic Education Australia Inc)
- Ms Cathy Snelling (ADC Governing Board Director)
- Ms Marie Warner (DC(NZ) CEO)
Questions Requiring Responses

a. Clarity of the Accreditation Standards

The current suite of ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Standards contain 20 to 22 standards. There are no specific standards for oral health therapy programs but instead there are accreditation standards for dental hygiene and dental therapy programs which currently apply to oral health therapy programs. Although the accreditation standards range across the different dental disciplines they are essentially the same, with some differences in order, some small differences in wording and some additional standards for specialist programs. The accreditation standards would benefit from a streamlining of the requirements.

QUESTION 1: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current accreditation standards? What amendments should be made to ensure that the requirements for having a dental practitioner program accredited are expressed in a clear, concise and unambiguous manner?

b. Breadth of the Accreditation Standards

The accreditation standards must cover a broad range of components to ensure new graduates are competent to practise as a registered dental practitioner.

QUESTION 2: Do the current accreditation standards cover the breadth of requirements that should be expected if a program is to equip a graduate with the minimum competencies needed to safely practise as a dental practitioner? If not, what changes are required and why?

Section 10.2 of the ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Guidelines and Explanatory Notes provides a list of courses/topics that might be included in programs for dentists, dental hygienists and dental therapists. (The Guidelines currently refer the reader to CS&HISC Health Training Package for guidance regarding dental prosthetist programs). Section 10.3 provides a list of suggested clinical experiences for dental students. There is a need for the Guidelines to provide appropriate guidance to all dental practitioner programs accredited by the ADC/DC(NZ).

QUESTION 3: Are the suggested courses/topics for dentists, dental hygienists and dental therapists and the list of clinical experiences for dental students in the ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Guidelines and Explanatory Notes sufficient to guide education providers in the development of a curriculum for dental practitioner programs? If not, what changes should be made to the subjects and clinical experiences outlined in the Guidelines?

c. Relevance

The current suite of accreditation standards are essentially re-badged guidelines that pre-date the National Law. It is recognised that some amendment will be required to bring the accreditation standards up to date with current health and education research and policy. There also needs to be consideration of embedding and/or referencing regulatory and other frameworks in the accreditation standards.
QUESTION 4: Are there any changes which should be made to the accreditation standards based on current research findings, government policy or relevant industry guidance? How should higher education and Vocational Education and Training (VET) regulatory frameworks, and other relevant frameworks be incorporated into the accreditation standards?

d. Evidence for compliance

Each of the accreditation standards set an expectation that education providers will provide evidence of policy, procedure, process or practice to demonstrate the achievement of a certain level of performance.

QUESTION 5: To what extent are the accreditation standards clear in their expectations of the evidence required of education providers to demonstrate compliance? What changes to evidence requirements would provide a clearer demonstration of compliance with accreditation requirements?

In keeping with contemporary practice in the development of accreditation standards, the ADC intends to develop standards that are evidence-based and outcomes focused.

QUESTION 6: How could the accreditation standards be written so that compliance is demonstrated by the achievement of the outcomes that are expected of graduates of a dental practitioner program? How could the achievement of these outcomes be measured?
Appendix A: Dental regulation and accreditation in Australia and New Zealand

Australia

To be eligible to be registered as a dental practitioner in Australia individuals must be a graduate of a program accredited by the ADC and subsequently approved by the DBA as providing a qualification for the purposes of registration.

Depending on the program, graduates of accredited and approved programs are eligible to register in the following general registration divisions: dentists; dental hygienists; dental prosthetists; dental therapists; and oral health therapists. Registered dentists who have graduated from an accredited and approved specialist program are eligible to register in the relevant specialty that is taught by the program.

There are a range of pathways for registration in the above named divisions:

- **Dental Prosthetist**: a two-year VET Advanced Diploma of Dental Prosthetics program (with a pre-requisite of a 2 year Diploma of Dental Technology program) or Master of Dental Technology in Dental Prosthetics.
- **Dental Hygienist**: a two year VET Advanced Diploma of Oral Health (Dental Hygiene) or a three-year bachelor level degree (which, depending on the program, may also lead to a dual registration as a dental therapist).
- **Dental Therapist**: a three year bachelor degree (which, depending on the program, may also lead to a dual registration as a dental hygienist) or a graduate diploma following completion of relevant bachelor degree or equivalent training.
- **Oral Health Therapist**: generally a three year bachelor degree in oral health.
- **Dentist**: a four or five year degree, either as four year postgraduate dentistry degree, or five years study as an undergraduate or combined undergraduate and postgraduate dentistry degree.
- **Specialist dentist**: There are presently 13 specialties recognised by the DBA: dento-maxillofacial radiology; endodontics; oral and maxillofacial surgery; oral medicine; oral pathology; oral surgery; orthodontics; paediatric dentistry; periodontics; prosthodontics; public health dentistry (community dentistry); special needs dentistry; and forensic odontology. Specialist dentists are generally graduates of either a university-taught Doctor of Clinical Dentistry masters degree (extended) in the relevant specialty or a specialist training program provided by the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons or the Royal College of Pathology of Australasia.

New Zealand

The DC(NZ) accredits the following prescribed qualifications for the following scopes of practice:

- **Dental hygiene and dental therapy**: a three year bachelor degree in oral health, with graduates eligible for registration in both dental hygiene and dental therapy scopes of practice.
- **Clinical dental technician**: a one year fulltime Diploma in Dental Technology with an entry requirement of a three-year bachelor degree in dental technology, or equivalent.
- **Dentist**: a five year bachelor degree.
• **Dental Specialists:**
  - For the following dental specialties: endodontics; oral pathology; orthodontics; paediatric dentistry; periodontics; prosthodontics; special needs dentistry - a three year postgraduate Doctor of Clinical Dentistry.
  - For the public health dentistry (community dentistry) – a two year Masters degree.
  - For the oral and maxillofacial surgery and oral medicine scopes of practice conjoint programs are prescribed - a postgraduate dental qualification plus a medical degree. The dental components are equivalent to a three year postgraduate Doctor of Clinical Dentistry.
  - One oral and maxillofacial surgery program is delivered by a College, with surgical training a minimum of four years.

The DC(NZ) also accredits dental technology and orthodontic auxiliary programs which do not require registration in Australia.

**Common accreditation process**

Accreditation is the status granted by the ADC and the DC(NZ) to dental practitioner programs that meet the stated minimum criteria as set out in the ADC/DC(NZ) accreditation standards. Accreditation of a program signifies that the program provides graduates with the knowledge, professional attributes and competencies necessary to be registered to practise in Australia or New Zealand.

Accreditation of dental practitioner programs protects the public by helping to ensure that programs produce graduates who are competent and who can practise safely. Accreditation also aims to optimise health outcomes and contribute to confidence in the delivery of competent dental services by assuring the quality of, and encouraging improvement in, dental practitioner programs.

While the ADC and the DC(NZ) retain jurisdictional authority for the accreditation of programs in their respective countries, they have adopted a joint Australian and New Zealand accreditation process and policies, including the establishment of a Joint ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Committee in 2005 to oversee accreditation functions.

The Accreditation Committee is an expert standing committee of the ADC and DC(NZ) that makes recommendations to the Governing Boards of the ADC and the DC(NZ) on matters that relate to accreditation. The functions of the Accreditation Committee include:

- consideration of accreditation reports from the Site Evaluation Teams (SETs) that evaluate programs
- making recommendations regarding initial accreditation and re-accreditation
- monitoring accreditation conditions imposed on programs
- monitoring of accredited programs via annual and other periodic reports to ensure continued compliance with accreditation standards.

The membership of the Accreditation Committee consists of dental practitioners, dental academics, a person from the public dental sector, a final year dental student, and community representatives.

The ADC and DC(NZ) are supported in their accreditation function by SETs comprising three to five dental academics, dental practitioners and (in Australia) the Director, Accreditation or delegate, and a community member (in New Zealand). SETs assess whether programs and education providers meet, or continue to meet, accreditation standards by conducting site visits to education providers and evaluating education providers’ submissions. SETs make
recommendations on the accreditation of programs to the Accreditation Committee and may be involved in monitoring of program performance.

**Accreditation standards**

The ADC and the DC(NZ) may accredit a dental practitioner program if, after assessing the program, the ADC and the DC(NZ) are reasonably satisfied that the program of study, and the education provider either:

- meet the approved accreditation standards; or
- substantially meet the approved accreditation standards, and the imposition of conditions will ensure the program meets the standards within a reasonable time.

The current suite of accreditation standards are as follows:

- ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Standards: Education Programs for Dentists
- ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Standards: Education Programs for Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists
- ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Standards: Education Programs for Dental Specialists
- ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Standards: Education Programs for Dental Prosthodontists/Clinical Dental Technicians (NZ)

For Australia, programs that lead to registration as an oral health therapist are accredited against the standards for dental hygiene and dental therapy programs.

The accreditation of programs is guided by the *ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Guidelines and Explanatory Notes* which outline accreditation processes and outcomes, and provide guidance regarding curricula for dental practitioner programs.

**Professional attributes and competencies**

In Australia the current competencies comprise:

- The ADC Professional Attributes and Competencies of the Newly Qualified Dentist
- The ADC Professional Attributes and Competencies of the Newly Qualified Dental Hygienist
- The ADC Professional Attributes and Competencies of the Newly Qualified Dental Therapist
- The ADC Professional Attributes and Competencies of the Newly Qualified Oral Health Therapist.

The DC(NZ) has the following sets of competencies:

- Competency Standards for Performance Measures for Dentists
- Competency Standards for Performance Measures for Dental Therapists
- Competency Standards for Performance Measures for Dental Hygienists
- Competency Standards for Performance Measures for Clinical Dental Technicians.
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<td>ADC</td>
<td>Australian Dental Council</td>
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<td>AHPRA</td>
<td>Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency</td>
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<td>AQA</td>
<td>Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities</td>
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<td>Australian Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>Health Workforce Australia</td>
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