

Concerns about accredited programs policy

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1. Purpose

This document provides information for people considering raising a concern about a dental practitioner program accredited by the Australian Dental Council (ADC).

This policy provides a summary of how concerns are managed by the ADC. The 'How to raise a concern about an accredited program guide' provides further advice about the process. This policy is designed to guide people external to the ADC who have a concern and guide staff members and Accreditation Committee members, in managing the concern.

Concerns can be received by the ADC from any person or entity, including but not limited to education provider staff members, students or graduates of accredited programs, employers of graduates, clinical placement supervisors or providers, members of the community or other external parties.

2. Overview

The ADC is appointed by the Dental Board of Australia (DBA) to accredit education and training programs enabling a graduate to apply for registration as a dental practitioner or dental specialist. The ADC also accredits programs leading to endorsement of registration for conscious sedation.

Section 50(1) of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (National Law) requires the ADC to monitor programs of study approved by DBA to ensure that the program and the education provider continue to meet the ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation standards for dental practitioner programs (the Standards).

Part of the ADC's commitment to meeting this requirement is to have mechanisms to raise a concern that an approved program or an education provider may no longer be meeting the Standards.

This policy and procedure has been developed in line with the [Management of complaints relating to accreditation functions under the National Law – a guidance document](#) (Ahpra/HPACF 2021).

Complaints about the ADC are addressed separately in the Complaints Management Framework available on the [ADC website](#).

3. Scope

In scope

The ADC will only consider and investigate concerns about an ADC accredited program which meet the definition of a systemic complaint. A systemic complaint is information that may be evidence of a systemic issue and may signify a failure of an ADC accredited program or provider to meet one or more of the Standards.

Out of scope

The ADC will not investigate a complaint, grievance or concern relating to a personal complaint and/or a complaint about a registered dental practitioner.

A personal complaint is where the complainant seeks to have a matter investigated and addressed to bring about a change to their personal situation. This could include, for example, matters such as selection, recognition of prior learning/experience, training post allocation, assessment outcomes or dismissal from an education or training program, or an employment or industrial relations issue between staff and an education provider, unless this has a direct relationship to the Standards.

Complaints about registered dental practitioners are handled by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra), Dental Council of New South Wales (for NSW practitioners), or via the Health Complaints Commissioner or ombudsman in the relevant state which are listed in Appendix A.

4. Principles

The ADC welcomes concerns about an accredited program and this policy aims to contribute to the protection of the public through ensuring that accredited programs or education providers continue to meet the Standards during the accreditation period.

Fair and transparent

The ADC is committed to handling concerns about ADC accredited programs in a proportionate and transparent manner that ensures fairness to both the complainant and education provider. Decisions will be made on reliable, verified, relevant and appropriate evidence.

Timely

The ADC aims to acknowledge all concerns in a timely manner and will provide updates to all parties involved on a regular basis. For concerns that indicate a potential high risk to public safety, the ADC will provide an immediate response and escalate the matter to an out-of-session meeting of the ADC's Accreditation Committee.

Respectful behaviour

The ADC will treat all complaints and complainants with respect and courtesy. Respectful behaviour is also expected from complainants and education providers against whom a complaint has been made.

5. Procedure

The ADC procedure for raising and responding to a concern is outlined below.

Submitting a concern

Concerns can be submitted via the following channels:

- complete the 'Raising a concern' online form via the [ADC website](#)
- send an email to accreditation@adc.org.au
- write to the ADC at Australian Dental Council, PO Box 13278, Law Courts VIC 8010
- call the ADC on +61 (0) 3 9657 1777, 9am-5pm (AEST/AEDT) Monday to Friday.

All concerns will be logged in the ADC internal register. The ADC will acknowledge receipt of the concern and provide information about the process that will be followed.

If complainants are unsure whether to raise a concern, or if the ADC is the appropriate organisation to raise the concern with the ADC can be called on the number above for an informal discussion.

Assessment

The concern will be assessed by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Director, Accreditation, Policy and Research to consider whether the concern appears to bring into doubt whether an accredited program continues to meet the Standards and should be investigated further. Additional information may be requested from the complainant. Advice may also be sought from the Chair, Accreditation Committee (or another Committee member if appropriate).

Where it is determined a concern meets the definition of a 'personal complaint' or is otherwise of a minor nature such that it does not raise any issues which might reasonably bring into doubt whether the program meets the Standards, the ADC will contact the complainant to explain its assessment and the matter will be closed. Where appropriate, the complainant may be directed to other concerns and complaints policies and procedures such as those listed in Appendix 1.

Investigation

If it is determined there may be issues which bring into doubt whether the program meets the Standards, the CEO and Director, Accreditation, Policy and Research will determine the scope of the

subsequent investigation required. The ADC may contact the complainant to request further information and/or contact other individuals or organisations if they are able to provide information. For example, this might include contacting other regulators.

The ADC will contact the education provider to discuss the concerns that have been raised. The education provider will be given a copy of and/or information about the concern raised and invited to submit a written response.

Consideration by the Accreditation Committee

An investigation report comprising the original concern, any other information gathered in the investigation, the education provider's response and a recommended outcome will be considered by the ADC Accreditation Committee. There are three possible outcomes:

- **No action.** The Accreditation Committee is satisfied that no further action is required to ensure the Standards are met. This will be an appropriate outcome where the investigation has not substantiated the concerns raised; the Accreditation Committee concludes the issues raised do not affect compliance with the Standards; or where the education provider has already taken corrective action, and no further monitoring is required.
- **Monitoring requirement.** The Accreditation Committee is satisfied that the Standards continue to be met but requires further information as part of program monitoring to ensure the issues raised in the investigation are addressed. This will be an appropriate outcome where, for example, an education provider puts in place changes to a program as a result of the concern and further assurance is required of their implementation and effectiveness.
- **Targeted review.** The Accreditation Committee has concerns a program may not be meeting the Standards and determines a targeted review by an ADC Accreditation Team (AT) is required. A targeted review would focus on the standard or standards that may not be fully met. The targeted review will be either a paper-based assessment or a site visit, determined by the nature of the concerns, the standards in question and the appropriate tool to achieve the required level of assurance.

The education provider and complainant will be informed of the outcome.

Concerns received prior to a site visit

If the concern relates to a program for which a site visit is scheduled to occur soon, it may be appropriate for the concern to be shared with the AT reviewing the program. This means the concern will be considered alongside other evidence gathered at the visit to inform the AT's assessment of the program against the Standards.

If the CEO and Director, Accreditation, Policy and Research consider this to be an appropriate course of action, the complainant will be notified of the intention to handle the concern in this way. The education provider will also be sent a copy of and/or information about the concern and invited to submit any further information in writing. The complainant will be provided with access to the published evaluation report of the site visit.

Subsequent concern

If the ADC receives a subsequent concern about an existing issue, the ADC will contact the education provider to discuss the additional concern(s) raised prior to taking any other action. The education provider will be provided with a copy of and/or information about the subsequent concern raised and invited to submit a written response.

An investigation report comprising of the original concern, the subsequent concern and any other information gathered in the investigation, including the education provider's response, will be considered by the Accreditation Committee. There are three possible outcomes, as outlined above.

6. Anonymous concerns

There may be occasions when the ADC receives anonymous concerns about a program. The ADC may be limited in the action and investigation it can take in relation to information which is received anonymously.

The ADC will assess whether there is sufficient basis to investigate the concern further, taking into account the need for the education provider to be able to respond to the concern raised. If there is insufficient basis found the concern will be logged but no further action will be taken.

There may be occasions where it would be appropriate and proportionate to investigate an anonymous concern. This includes, for example, where it is possible to gather documentary evidence which might support the concern, and/or where the same or similar concerns about a program are raised by multiple complainants.

7. Timelines

The ADC aims to:

- acknowledge all concerns within five working days of receipt; and
- keep the complainant(s) and the education provider concerned informed about likely timescales and updated at regular intervals about the progress of any investigation.

The time it takes to investigate a concern will vary depending on the nature of the concern. Factors may include the amount and type of information required, the availability of the education provider and the meeting dates scheduled for the Accreditation Committee.

The assessment of concerns will consider whether a concern indicates a high potential risk to public safety. If a concern indicates a high potential risk, the CEO and Director, Accreditation, Policy and Research may decide to expedite the investigation and, with the agreement of the Chair, Accreditation Committee (or another Committee member if appropriate), escalate the matter to an out-of-session meeting of the Accreditation Committee.

The timescales for any targeted review required will also be influenced by the Accreditation Committee's assessment of the potential risk.

8. Notifications

Dental Board of Australia

Where an initial assessment of a concern indicates a high potential risk to public safety, the DBA will be notified promptly. A high or extreme risk to the safety of the community is one that could/is reasonably likely to result in the registration of graduates from an ADC accredited program who do not possess the knowledge, skills and professional competencies to practice the profession in Australia.

In all matters where the Accreditation Committee determines that a monitoring requirement or targeted review is necessary, the ADC will notify the DBA of its decision and the outcome.

Other regulatory organisations

Other regulatory organisations in Australia with roles and functions related to the ADC include:

- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) for matters relating to higher education providers.
- Australian Standards and Quality Authority (ASQA) for issues arising in the vocational education and training (VET) sector.
- Other accreditation authorities/bodies.
- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare.

To facilitate effective resolution of concerns the ADC may refer complaints (or complainants) to these organisations where appropriate.

Reporting

The ADC may include de-identified information in its annual report, or other relevant reports, regarding the number and/or nature of concerns the ADC has received about accredited programs.

9. Roles and responsibilities

Complainant

The role of the complainant is to:

- Attempt to resolve concerns directly with the education provider wherever possible
- Maintain confidentiality of all parties to a complaint process
- Lodge a concern, providing as much detail as possible and
- Participate in an investigation process, if required.

Staff members

All staff members are required to:

- Act in accordance with the ADC values
- Ensure privacy and confidentiality are maintained
- Observe the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness
- Be compliant with this policy in the performance of their duties and
- Keep the education provider and complainant informed of the process as appropriate.

Accreditation Committee members

Accreditation Committee members are required to:

- Act in accordance with the ADC values
- Ensure privacy and confidentiality are maintained
- Observe the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness
- Make decisions in line with this policy and
- Determine actions to be undertaken, in line with this policy and in accordance with the National Law, as a result of their deliberations.

Director Accreditation, Policy and Research

- Act in accordance with the ADC values
- Ensure privacy and confidentiality are maintained
- Observe the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness
- Make decisions in line with this policy
- Determine actions to be undertaken, in line with this policy and in accordance with the National Law, as a result of their deliberations and
- Keep the education provider and complainant informed of the process as appropriate.

Chief Executive Officer

- Act in accordance with the ADC values
- Ensure privacy and confidentiality are maintained
- Observe the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness
- Make decisions in line with this policy and
- Determine actions to be undertaken, in line with this policy and in accordance with the National Law, as a result of their deliberations.

10. Related documents

Legislation and external documents

- [Management of complaints relating to accreditation functions under the National Law – a guidance document](#) (AHPRA/HPACF 2021)
- Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009

ADC documents

- How to raise a concern guide
- Complaints Management Framework
- Privacy Policy
- Australian Dental Council/Dental Council (New Zealand) Accreditation standards for dental practitioner programs (the Standards)
- Accreditation Committee Charter

11. Document information

Policy Owner:	Director, Accreditation, Research and Policy
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*unless otherwise indicated, this policy will continue to apply beyond the review date

Appendix A - Other organisations that can assist

In addition to education providers' own procedures, the following is a list of some other organisations that may be able to assist with concerns about dental education providers.

Organisation and weblink	Responsibilities
Australian Standards and Quality Authority (ASQA) https://www.asqa.gov.au/complaints	Regulates Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers. Complaints are used as intelligence to inform regulation of providers.
National Student Ombudsman National Student Ombudsman - Department of Education, Australian Government	Receives and investigates complaints from higher education students about the actions of their higher education provider.
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Authority (TEQSA) https://www.teqsa.gov.au/complaints	Regulates the higher education sector. Complaints are used as intelligence to inform regulation of providers.

Complaints about registered dental practitioners are handled by the organisations listed below.

Organisation and weblink	Responsibilities
Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency - Home	Works in partnership with the National Boards to ensure that Australia's registered health practitioners are suitably trained, qualified and safe to practise.
Dental Council of New South Wales Dental homepage Dental Council of New South Wales	Manage complaints about the conduct, performance and health of registered health practitioners and students in NSW.
Health complaints organisations by state or territory Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency - Other health complaints organisations	Manage a concern raised about a registered health practitioner.

Appendix B - Definitions

The following definitions are applicable throughout this policy:

Complainant

The complainant is the person who has raised a concern.

Natural justice

The principles of natural justice will be applied to all complaints. This means:

- we will ensure all parties to a complaint are given adequate information and time to participate or respond meaningfully;
- we will give all people affected or implicated an opportunity to present their point of view and respond to facts presented; and
- we will address complaints in an equitable and unbiased manner.

Procedural fairness

The principles which underpin procedures used when making a decision. In practice it includes:

- The respondent to be treated as innocent until such time as the complaint is substantiated.
- Any complaint or grievance is to be investigated promptly.
- The substance of the complaint or grievance must be put to the respondent.
- The respondent must be given the opportunity to provide a response to the complaint or grievance.