



# **Australian Dental Council report of an evaluation of CQUniversity Bachelor of Oral Health program**

March 2021

## Summary report

<b>Program provider</b>	CQUniversity
<b>Program/qualification name</b>	Bachelor of Oral Health
<b>Program/qualification abbreviation</b>	BOH
<b>Program/qualification code</b>	CB29
<b>Head office address, including State</b>	Bruce Hwy, North Rockhampton QLD 4702
<b>Campus</b>	CQUniversity Rockhampton
<b>Program length</b>	3 Years
<b>Registration division</b>	Dental Hygienist, Dental Therapist, Oral Health Therapist
<b>Registration specialty</b>	NA
<b>Qualification type</b>	HE
<b>Australian Qualifications Framework level</b>	7
<b>Accreditation standards version</b>	Accreditation Standards for Dental Practitioner Programs (Approved Dec 2014)
<b>Date of site evaluation</b>	23-24 March 2021
<b>Date of ADC decision</b>	16 June 2021
<b>Type of accreditation</b>	Re-Accreditation
<b>Accreditation start date</b>	1 January 2021
<b>Accreditation end date</b>	31 December 2025

## Background

The Bachelor of Oral Health (BOH) is offered by the School of Health, Medical and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity (CQU). The program was first accredited in 2012. The three-year program enables graduates to register as dental therapists, dental hygienists and oral health therapists, and aims to equip graduates with the knowledge and skills required to practice dental therapy on persons of all ages.

The program was last reviewed in 2015. Since then, an internal review was conducted in 2017, with one of the major recommendations being to cease the off-campus delivery in year one and to transfer some of the hands-on clinical components from year two to year one. Unit updates and the proposed course changes were completed and approved with full-time, on campus delivery commencing in 2020.

## Overview of evaluation

This assessment was undertaken in accordance with the ADC's *protocol to monitor the impacts on accredited programs of the COVID-19 pandemic*.

A two-day site visit was scheduled to take place in August 2020. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in line with the advice of the Australian Government Department of Health and the World Health Organisation (WHO) the ADC made the decision to postpone the visit.

A Site Evaluation Team (SET) conducted a paper-based review based on CQUniversity's self-review against the Standards and associated appendices. The SET held a teleconference on 7 August 2020 to discuss the submission. Additional information was requested from the provider following this teleconference. The SET held a second teleconference to discuss and review the additional information on 7 October 2020. Information submitted by the provider did not address all the SET's queries and interviews were conducted with key program representatives on 16 October 2020, including:

- Dean, School of Health, Medical and Health Sciences
- Head of College – Health Sciences
- Head of Course (Oral Health)
- program teaching staff, and
- external placement supervisors.

A draft report summarising the outcome of the review was sent to the provider on 17 November 2020. In response to the report, additional information, including a 16-page document commenting on the findings of the evaluation was submitted. This additional information was considered by the SET and the report updated to reflect the additional information received. The ADC determined that the program be

accredited until 31 December 2021 subject to conditions and that a site visit be held in 2021 to verify the documentation provided and further explore the issues identified from the paper-based review.

The SET conducted a site visit on 23 and 24 March 2021. During both days of the visit the SET inspected clinical and simulation facilities at the CQUniversity clinic, as well as clinical facilities at the Rockhampton Community Dental Clinic operated by Queensland Health and at a School Dental Clinic.

During the site visit the SET interviewed a range of stakeholders including:

- Dean of School of Health, Medical and Applied Sciences
- Deputy Dean, Learning and Teaching for the School of Health, Medical and Applied Sciences
- Head of College of Health Sciences
- Head of Course (Oral Health)
- Year level coordinators and permanent staff
- Casual academic staff
- Clinical supervisors at both the CQUniversity clinic and external placement clinics
- Professional staff supporting the BOH program
- Members of the Student support and Student experience teams
- Students and recent graduates
- Two employers of graduates from the program.

The findings in this report are based on the SET's assessment of the material outlined above, annual reports submitted for the program, interview evidence and a review of the facilities at the time of the site visit.

## Key findings

Evaluation of the Bachelor of Oral Health program offered by CQUniversity was challenging. Information collected throughout the evaluation process was inconsistent, resulting in difficulties in validating the evidence as provided. Written documentation submitted identified deficiencies within the program and was contradictory to the information collected through interviews held in October 2020 and subsequently at the site visit in 2021.

Interviews conducted at the site visit indicate that Bachelor of Oral Health students are well supported pastorally. However, a lack of consistent and reliable evidence in several key areas meant it was difficult to confirm that the program meets the Accreditation Standards, highlighting several concerns regarding the way in which the program is delivered. There is also a lack of evidence that students develop skills in critical thinking and evidence-based patient care, which are professional competencies for a newly qualified dental hygienist, dental therapist or oral health therapist. A condition following the paper-based review was that the provider confirm that policies and processes exist to ensure the program's compliance with screening requirements for Blood Borne Viruses (BBV). The SET was reassured that this deficiency has been appropriately addressed.

The current curriculum structure is not student-centred. The evidence as presented for the paper-based review and confirmed during the site visit indicates that sequencing of didactic teaching is driven predominately by resource availability (i.e. when expert speakers are available) and is not always aligned to clinical practice. This could result in the potential for gaps to exist between students' knowledge and clinical performance. The current structure fails to demonstrate how knowledge and skills are scaffolded as students' progress year on year through the program. There was an opportunity to review the curriculum when first year students transitioned from online study to studying full time on campus, however this opportunity has not resulted in substantive change to the program. Minor changes were made to content sequencing, but these are considered insufficient in view of the issues identified. The SET was informed that a more in-depth review of the program, including sequencing and scaffolding of units will take place now a new Head of Program has been appointed. The SET appreciates that the internal process of curriculum change is lengthy but seeks confirmation and evidence that the review process is underway and a timeline for the anticipated completion. The SET also encourages the College to support the new Head of Program in undertaking the review.

A number of training deficiencies in the clinical experiences available to students were highlighted by the provider in the self-evaluation against the Standards submitted, including in the provision of dental hygiene care and dental therapy care to persons of all ages. Information elicited via interviews at the site visit indicated the deficiencies identified in the submission regarding adult scope are an accurate assessment. It was noted that some placement partners could not provide the full range and breadth of clinical experience required for students to demonstrate competent practice and despite the site visit the SET remains uncertain about how equitable clinical experiences are ensured for all students.

As part of the internal review, new clinical placements were secured in varying locations throughout Queensland minimising the reliance on Central Queensland providers. The expansion in clinical placement opportunities has reduced the risk that students will lack of the range of clinical experiences required to develop the professional competencies expected, however the effectiveness of the mechanisms used to organise and monitor student placement rotations to ensure equitable access to these outplacements remains unclear. The evidence gathered suggests that students may have differing clinical opportunities and experiences raising questions as to how the provider ensures that all

students are able to demonstrate they can practice safely across the scope of practice expressed in the learning outcomes. It is important to reiterate that whilst the verbal information obtained through interviews has provided some confidence that this is not the case, written documentation submitted fails to adequately demonstrate this. To reassure the ADC that all Standards are met, CQU must provide evidence regarding assessment processes that demonstrates how students' clinical performance is measured and assessed to the level expected of a newly qualified oral health therapist.

The SET acknowledges a sense of positivity about the program and its future across all stakeholder groups but is concerned that this is largely attributed to the recently appointed staff, particularly the new Head of Program. The SET is concerned about the expectations being placed on the incumbent to bring large-scale change in a short period of time.

The program staff are commended for their commitment to the program and to students. Whilst the new staffing profile appears to have alleviated some concerns about the workload, the SET is of the view that the existing workload is still unsustainable longer term and raises concerns as to the long-term ability of CQUniversity to support the program and for the program to achieve its stated learning outcomes. A particular area for concern was continuity and ongoing sustainability for delivery of the orthodontics component of the program. This is currently delivered by a sessional staff member, and it is unclear what alternative staffing in this area is available in the event of sudden staff departures. An over reliance on sessional staff could be detrimental to the ongoing sustainability of the program.

## ADC accreditation decision

The ADC has determined that CQUniversity's Bachelor of Oral Health Therapy program is reaccredited for a period of five (5) years from **1 January 2021** until **31 December 2025**, subject to the conditions previously applied following the paper-based review and the following additional conditions:

- 1) In order to fully meet Standard 2 – Academic governance and quality assurance and Standard 3 – Program of study, CQU is requested to provide as part of the quarterly monitoring report due on **31 August 2021**, evidence that the planned curriculum review is being undertaken and an implementation plan and timeline for its anticipated completion. The evidence must include an outline of the anticipated changes, including vertical and horizontal scaffolding of the curriculum.
- 2) In order to fully meet Standard 3 – Program of study, the provider is required to submit by **30 September 2021** details of how the provider ensures all students gain equivalent and sufficient clinical experience in the areas of adult restorative dentistry and periodontics.
- 3) In order to fully meet Standard 3 – Program of study, CQU is requested to provide evidence that the staffing profile is sufficient to deliver the BOH program. The report should include clear details of the level of engagement of both permanent and sessional staff members and their teaching and clinical supervision workloads. This is to be submitted to the ADC by **23 July 2021**.
- 4) In order to fully meet Standard 1 – Public safety, Standard 3 – Program of study and Standard 5 – Assessment, CQU is requested to provide by **30 September 2021** a mapping of program learning outcomes against the ADC professional competencies for a newly qualified oral health therapist and provide evidence of how the learning outcomes are assessed both clinically and academically to ensure that all professional competencies are met.