



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

October 2020

Summary report

Program provider	CQUniversity
Program/qualification name	Bachelor of Oral Health
Program/qualification abbreviation	BOH
Program/qualification code	CB29
Head office address, including State	Bruce Hwy, North Rockhampton QLD 4702
Campus	CQUniversity Rockhampton
Program length	3 Years
Registration division	Dental Hygienist, Dental Therapist, Oral Health Therapist
Registration specialty	NA
Qualification type	HE
Australian Qualifications Framework level	7
Accreditation standards version	Accreditation Standards for Dental Practitioner Programs (Approved Dec 2014)
Date of site evaluation	Paper-based review
Date of ADC decision	29 January 2021
Type of accreditation	Re-Accreditation
Accreditation start date	1 January 2021
Accreditation end date	31 December 2021

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 findings in this report are based on the SET's assessment of the material outlined above, annual reports submitted for the program and the *ADC Report of an evaluation of Central Queensland University Bachelor of Oral Health program March 2015*.

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.

Interviews conducted with key program staff suggest that Bachelor of Oral Health students are supported to achieve the required professional competencies and provided reassurance that the program is producing graduates competent to practice. 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. These matters must be addressed urgently for the program to maintain its accreditation.

Concerns were identified with the program's compliance with screening requirements for Blood Borne Viruses (BBV). This matter must be urgently addressed, and the SET is reassured that action is being taken. Confirmation is required to ensure policies and processes have been implemented. Other key areas of concern included the existing curriculum structure, deficiencies in the range of clinical experiences available to students, placement rotation monitoring, assessment and supervision and program resourcing. The issues raised questions regarding whether all students are receiving adequate education and training to meet the learning outcomes and professional competencies expected by the point of graduation.

The current curriculum structure is not student-centred. The evidence presented 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.

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. It was difficult for the SET to verify issues relating to the clinical experiences available, as this information was not readily available to determine the extent of any deficiency and what impact this may have on students' opportunities to demonstrate competence. 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.

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.

Program resourcing was identified as an issue during the review process especially with the added pressure of COVID-19. The SET was advised of changes to the staffing profile including that recent resignations had not yet been replaced. The program staff are commended for their commitment to the program and to students, but the existing workload is not sustainable and raises concerns as to the long-term ability of CQU to support the program and for the program to achieve its stated learning outcomes.

ADC accreditation decision

The ADC has determined that CQUniversity's Bachelor of Oral Health Therapy program's accreditation is extended for a period of one (1) year from **1 January 2021** until **31 December 2021**, subject to the following conditions:

- 1) To meet Standard 1 – Public safety, the CQU is required to provide by **28 February 2021** evidence that a screening process for all new and existing students for blood borne viruses (BBVs) has been implemented in accordance with the Dental Board of Australia's guidelines. The evidence must demonstrate that all students undertaking clinical placements have been screened before providing patient care.
- 2) To meet Standard 3 – Program of study, by **31 August 2021**, CQU is to provide:
 - a. Evidence of the range of clinical experiences students have undertaken at each year of the program and explain how CQU has determined these experiences are sufficient to show that students are on track to meet the professional competencies of a newly qualified oral health therapist.
 - b. How the provider ensures equitable access to clinical placements for all students to ensure students meet the required program outcomes and expected professional competencies.
- 3) To meet Standard 2 - Academic governance and quality assurance, the CQU is required to provide by **30 April 2021**, details of:
 - a. A clear organisational structure that demonstrates the effectiveness of academic governance processes with regards to how issues are identified and addressed.
- 4) In order to meet Standard 1 – Public safety, Standard 3 – Program of study and Standard 5 - Assessment, the CQU is required to provide by **30 September 2021** details of how the curriculum content is integrated with students' clinical experiences and demonstrates the building of knowledge and skills required for students to progress through the program. This may be as part of curriculum review, or revision of program delivery and sequencing. The information must detail any changes made to program delivery and any changes to assessment practices, and when these will be implemented from.