AUSTRALIAN DENTAL COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL

ADC International accreditation guidelines for dental practitioner programs

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1. Overview

The Australian Dental Council (ADC), through ADC International, offers accreditation services to education providers delivering dental education and training programs outside Australia and New Zealand.

International accreditation involves benchmarking a program against the ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Standards for Dental Practitioner Programs (Standards) and the relevant professional competencies specified by ADC International. Accreditation indicates that a program has demonstrated compliance with the Standards and is expected to prepare graduates with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for safe practice.

These Guidelines are intended to support education providers seeking initial accreditation or re-accreditation of international dental practitioner programs. They explain ADC International's approach to accrediting and monitoring international programs, including the criteria for commencing an accreditation process, the review process, accreditation outcomes, monitoring requirements and fees.

Education providers interested in seeking international accreditation should contact ADC International to arrange an informal discussion before submitting a Notice of Intent. Please email: international@adc.org.au.

Important note: graduates from programs accredited by ADC International are not eligible for registration in Australia unless they meet Dental Board of Australia registration requirements. This includes successful completion of the ADC's assessment and examination process for overseas qualified dental practitioners, where required.

2. About ADC International

The Australian Dental Council (ADC) is responsible for accrediting dental education and training programs in Australia under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme. The ADC has extensive experience in developing accreditation standards, policies and procedures, and in assessing dental practitioner programs against those standards.

ADC International is the international program of the ADC. It offers accreditation and assessment services to education providers and other organisations outside Australia and New Zealand, including accreditation of international dental practitioner programs.

International accreditation is separate from the ADC's assessment and examination pathway for overseas qualified practitioners seeking registration in Australia. It is also separate from any local accreditation, registration or approval requirements that apply in the jurisdiction where the program is delivered.

3. Accreditation context and framework

ADC International's approach to accreditation is informed by the ADC's broader accreditation philosophy and principles. Accreditation is both a quality assurance process and a mechanism for supporting continuous quality improvement. Its primary purpose is to provide assurance that graduates are prepared for safe practice and that accredited programs meet the Standards.

ADC International undertakes accreditation independently and regularly reviews its policies, processes and practices to support quality, consistency and continuous improvement.

Key principles include:

- evidence-based assessment, with education providers responsible for demonstrating how their programs meet the Standards
- peer review, drawing on trained and appropriately qualified assessors with relevant professional, educational and accreditation expertise
- fitness for purpose, recognising that education providers may meet the Standards in different ways
- proportionate and risk-based decision making, including the use of conditions and monitoring requirements where appropriate
- ongoing monitoring, to ensure accredited programs continue to meet the Standards over time.

In applying the Standards to an international program, ADC International takes into account the health, education, regulatory and dental care delivery context of the jurisdiction in which the program is delivered. This does not change the Standards or professional competencies against which the program is assessed, but it may inform how evidence is interpreted and how the program demonstrates that the Standards are met.

4. Regulation of the dental professions in Australia

In Australia, dental practitioners are regulated under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme. The Dental Board of Australia (DBA) is the National Board responsible for regulating the dental profession. The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) administers the National Scheme in partnership with National Boards.

The DBA regulates dentists, dental specialists, dental hygienists, dental therapists, oral health therapists and dental prosthetists. The DBA also recognises 13 dental specialties in Australia:

- dento-maxillofacial radiology
- endodontics
- forensic odontology
- oral and maxillofacial surgery
- oral medicine

- oral and maxillofacial pathology
- oral surgery
- orthodontics
- paediatric dentistry
- periodontics
- prosthodontics
- public health dentistry (community dentistry)
- special needs dentistry.

The discipline in which graduates may seek registration in Australia depends on the registration categories and requirements set by the DBA. Accreditation by ADC International does not exempt graduates from any registration, assessment or examination requirements that may apply in Australia or in any other jurisdiction.

ADC International may also consider programs in dental specialties recognised in New Zealand where those specialties fall within the eligibility criteria for international accreditation.

5. International program accreditation

International program accreditation refers to accreditation by ADC International of dental education and training programs delivered outside Australia and New Zealand.

The purpose of international accreditation is to benchmark programs against the Standards and professional competencies specified by ADC International. International accreditation provides an external quality assurance outcome by confirming that a program has demonstrated compliance with the Standards.

An international program accredited by ADC International may describe itself as accredited by ADC International, provided it continues to meet the Standards, participates in required monitoring activities and pays the relevant fees.

Accreditation by ADC International does not mean that graduates are eligible for registration in Australia. Graduates seeking registration in Australia must meet the requirements set by the Dental Board of Australia. This may include successful completion of the ADC's assessment and examination process for overseas qualified dental practitioners.

6. Criteria for commencing the international accreditation process

ADC International will consider whether to commence an international accreditation process on a case-by-case basis.

To be considered for international accreditation, a program should demonstrate that:

- the program prepares graduates to practise at entry level in a dental profession regulated in Australia, or in a dental specialty recognised in Australia or New Zealand
- the program is recognised or accredited by the relevant agency, regulator or accreditation body in its country of origin, where applicable, or is otherwise accepted as a professional dental qualification in that jurisdiction
- program documentation required for the accreditation review can be provided in English
- the education provider is able to participate in the accreditation process, including submission preparation, site visit arrangements, monitoring and payment of relevant fees.

Accreditation of international programs is offered at ADC International's discretion. The decision to commence an international accreditation process will be based on alignment with the ADC's strategic priorities and the feasibility and appropriateness of the proposed evaluation. Relevant factors may include the regulatory context of the program, local accreditation or approval arrangements, the availability of sufficient information in English, travel advisories issued by the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and any other circumstances that may affect the ADC's ability to undertake a fair, safe and robust evaluation.

ADC International may request further information before deciding whether to proceed.

7. Accreditation Standards and Professional Competencies

International education and training programs seeking accreditation by ADC International are assessed against the ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Standards for Dental Practitioner Programs (Standards) and the relevant professional competencies specified by ADC International.

The Standards comprise six Domains:

- Public safety
- Academic governance and quality assurance
- Program of study
- The student experience
- Assessment
- Cultural responsiveness (Australian programs only).

Each Domain is supported by a standard statement and criteria. The criteria are indicators of what is expected of an ADC accredited program. They are not sub-standards assessed in isolation. In assessing a program, ADC International considers whether the evidence demonstrates that each criterion is met and forms an overall, on-balance judgement about whether the relevant Standard is met.

For international programs, Domain 6: Cultural responsiveness is not applicable, as it relates specifically to the preparation of students to provide culturally responsive care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australian programs. ADC International will instead consider how the program prepares graduates to provide safe, respectful and responsive care within the cultural, social and community context in which the program is delivered.

The relevant professional competencies describe the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attributes expected of a newly qualified dental practitioner. The competencies are used to determine whether the program prepares graduates for the relevant category or specialty of practice.

General dental practitioner competencies

The ADC has developed Professional competencies of the newly qualified dental practitioner including dentist, dental hygienist, dental therapist, oral health therapist and dental prosthetists.

Specialist dental practitioner competencies and endorsement for conscious sedation

The Entry-level competencies for dental specialties describe the outcomes expected for graduates of each of the 13 specialties recognised in Australia.

Where relevant, ADC International may also apply competency frameworks recognised by the Dental Council New Zealand, including the Dental Council of New Zealand Competencies for Restorative dentistry.

The Entry-level competencies for endorsement for conscious sedation describe the outcomes expected of graduates of programs leading to endorsement for conscious sedation in Australia.

8. Accreditation participants and roles

International Accreditation Committee

The International Accreditation Committee considers matters relating to international program accreditation within the scope of its terms of reference and delegation. This may include considering accreditation reports, making accreditation decisions or recommendations, and monitoring accredited international programs.

Where a decision falls outside the Committee's delegation, the Committee makes a recommendation to the ADC Board of Directors, which holds ultimate responsibility for accreditation decisions.

Accreditation Team

An Accreditation Team (AT) comprises assessors appointed or invited by ADC International to assess a program seeking accreditation. The AT has three key functions:

- to review the available evidence and determine whether the program meets the Standards
- to provide an overall recommendation on whether the program should be accredited

- to identify conditions, monitoring requirements, recommendations for quality improvement or commendations, where appropriate.

ADC International Secretariat

The ADC International Secretariat coordinates engagement with education providers, provides policy and procedural guidance, supports accreditation submission and site visit arrangements, and supports the AT throughout the accreditation process. The Secretariat also supports preparation of accreditation reports and administers feedback and evaluation processes.

Confidentiality

ADC International requires all participants in the accreditation process to keep confidential all material provided by education providers for the purpose of accreditation. Information collected through the accreditation process is used only for the purpose for which it is obtained.

Education provider

The education provider is responsible for demonstrating that its program meets the Standards at the time of review. This includes preparing and submitting a comprehensive accreditation submission, providing evidence, facilitating the work of the AT and supporting the site visit where one is conducted.

9. International accreditation process

Initial accreditation

Education providers interested in international accreditation for one or more programs should contact ADC International at the earliest possible opportunity to discuss their circumstances and indicative timing. Early discussion and consultation between the ADC and the education provider support a shared understanding of the provider's intentions and the requirements of the accreditation process.

Timelines

Timeframes vary depending on the scope and complexity of the review, the number of programs involved, the completeness of the Notice of Intent and accreditation submission, site visit logistics, travel requirements, availability of assessors and any additional information required.

As a guide:

- education providers should allow sufficient time for ADC International to review the Notice of Intent and determine whether the accreditation process can proceed
- the accreditation submission should be provided at least three months before the site visit
- sufficient time is required after the site visit for the AT to prepare the evaluation report, for the provider to comment on the draft report, and for the final report and accreditation outcome to be considered.

ADC International will work with the education provider to establish indicative timelines for each review. These timelines may be adjusted where additional information is required, where site visit arrangements change, or where other circumstances affect the review.

Early discussion supports a shared understanding of the provider's objectives, the regulatory and education context in which the program is delivered, the requirements of the accreditation process and indicative timelines for review.

Figure 1. Initial accreditation indicative timeline

Notice of Intent

If the provider chooses to proceed, it must submit an International Provider Notice of Intent using the template available on the ADC International website.

The Notice of Intent requests information about:

- the education provider
- the program seeking accreditation
- the qualification to be awarded
- the jurisdiction in which the program is delivered
- local regulation of dental practitioners and clinical facilities
- how dental education and clinical training are structured and delivered
- quality assurance arrangements for the provider and program
- recognition or accreditation of the program in its country of origin, where applicable
- mapping of program learning outcomes and assessments to the relevant professional competencies specified by ADC International
- proposed timing for the accreditation process and site visit.

ADC International expects mapping to the relevant professional competencies to be provided with the Notice of Intent. The accreditation process will not proceed until this mapping has been completed to ADC International's satisfaction.

Following payment of the Notice of Intent fee, ADC International reviews the Notice of Intent and advises the provider of next steps. Additional information or clarification may be requested before a decision is made about whether the accreditation process can proceed.

Orientation session

If ADC International determines that the accreditation process can proceed, an orientation session is arranged with the education provider. The purpose of the session is to explain the Standards, professional competencies, accreditation process, submission requirements and site visit arrangements, and to answer questions from the provider.

Accreditation Team

ADC International appoints an Accreditation Team (AT) to assess the program. The composition of the AT is determined by ADC International, taking into account the type of program, the professional discipline or specialty under review, the jurisdiction in which the program is delivered, and the expertise required to assess the program against the Standards.

The provider is advised of the proposed AT and may identify any potential conflicts of interest.

Accreditation submission

The education provider prepares an accreditation submission that describes the program's design, delivery, governance and outcomes, supported by evidence demonstrating how each Standard is met.

Submissions should be clear, concise and directly address the Standards. Evidence may include policies, procedures, reports, data, meeting records, curriculum documentation, assessment materials, clinical training information and other documentation relevant to the program. Providers are expected to clearly reference and map evidence to the relevant Standards and criteria.

The accreditation submission must be provided in English. Supporting documents should also be provided in English or accompanied by an English translation where required by ADC International.

ADC International requests that the submission be provided at least three months before the site visit to allow sufficient time for review by the AT.

Site visit

A site visit is conducted as part of the accreditation process. Site visits for international programs usually take place over three or four days, depending on the scope of the review, the number of programs being assessed, the delivery locations and the complexity of the program.

The site visit enables the AT to:

- verify and clarify information provided in the accreditation submission
- gather additional evidence to inform the accreditation decision
- assess how the program operates in practice
- observe facilities and clinical training environments, where relevant
- meet with staff, students, graduates, supervisors and other stakeholders.

Interview processes are designed to support open and frank discussion. Staff are not interviewed in the same session as their line manager or others in a direct reporting relationship. Students and graduates are normally interviewed separately from staff.

Individuals are not identified in evaluation reports and comments made by interviewees are treated confidentially.

Re-accreditation

The same general process applies to re-accreditation of international programs before the expiry of the accreditation period. The scope and timing of a re-accreditation review may be informed by the program's accreditation history, previous conditions or monitoring requirements, annual monitoring outcomes and any significant changes to the program or provider.

Figure 2. Re-accreditation indicative timeline

10. Evaluation report

Following the site visit, the AT prepares an evaluation report documenting its assessment of the program against the Standards. The report draws on evidence from the accreditation submission, documentation reviewed, information gathered through interviews and observations, and any additional information provided by the education provider.

The report sets out the AT's findings against each Standard, supported by evidence, and identifies whether each Standard is met, substantially met, not met or not applicable. The report also includes the AT's overall recommendation, including any proposed conditions, monitoring requirements, recommendations for quality improvement or commendations.

The education provider is given the opportunity to review and comment on the draft evaluation report before it is finalised. The purpose of providing the draft report is to enable the provider to comment on factual accuracy and on the outcomes proposed by the AT. The draft report, including any proposed conditions or monitoring requirements, is provisional and may be subject to change.

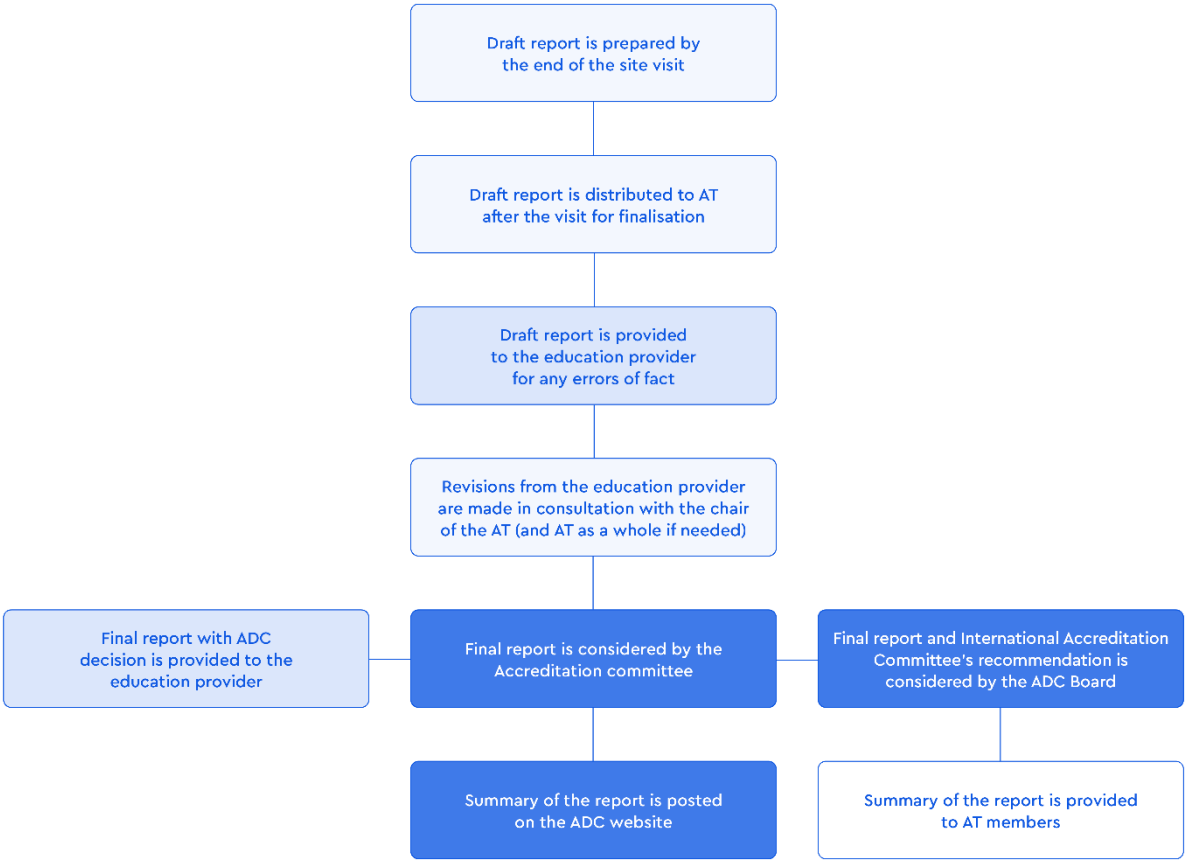
ADC International advises the date by which comments or further evidence must be submitted. Any comments or further evidence received within the specified timeframe are considered before the evaluation report is finalised.

If additional information provided by the education provider results in substantive changes to the evaluation report, ADC International may provide a further opportunity for the provider to comment on the factual accuracy of the revised report. In these circumstances, comments

are limited to factual accuracy only, and no further evidence may be submitted unless requested by ADC International.

The final evaluation report is considered by the International Accreditation Committee and, where required, the ADC Board of Directors, which makes the final decision regarding accreditation of the program.

Figure 2. Steps in the preparation and finalisation of the evaluation report



11. Accreditation outcomes

ADC International determines an accreditation outcome for the program. The outcome may include accreditation, accreditation with conditions, refusal of accreditation or revocation of accreditation. Accreditation outcomes may also be accompanied by monitoring requirements, recommendations for quality improvement or commendations.

Accredited

Accredited is the status granted to a program when the program meets the Standards.

Accredited with conditions

A program may be accredited with conditions where it substantially meets the Standards but has a deficiency in one or more Standards that can be addressed within a reasonable and defined timeframe.

Where conditions are imposed, the education provider must demonstrate that each condition has been met within the specified timeframe. If the provider does not satisfactorily address a condition within the specified timeframe, ADC International may undertake additional monitoring, impose further conditions or revoke accreditation if it is no longer satisfied that the program meets the Standards.

Accreditation refused

Accreditation may be refused where a new program or a program undergoing re-accreditation has serious deficiencies and does not meet one or more Standards, and the nature of the deficiencies means they cannot be addressed within a reasonable timeframe.

Accreditation revoked

Accreditation may be revoked where an accredited program no longer meets one or more Standards and the nature of the deficiencies means they cannot be addressed within a reasonable timeframe, or where the provider does not comply with monitoring or fee requirements.

Recommendations

Recommendations may be made where the AT identifies areas of the program that meet the Standards but where there is an opportunity to further enhance the quality of the program or its outcomes. Recommendations are intended to support continuous quality improvement. Providers are encouraged, but not required, to act on recommendations.

Commendations

Commendations may be made where aspects of the program are assessed as significantly exceeding the minimum requirements for accreditation.

Appeals

In the event of a grievance about an accreditation process or outcome, informal resolution will be sought where practicable. An education provider may make a formal appeal against an accreditation decision where the decision is appealable under the ADC Program Accreditation – Appeals Policy. The policy outlines the types of decisions that may be appealed and the grounds for appeal.

Duration of accreditation

The period of accreditation for international programs is up to a maximum of five years, unless alignment with a local jurisdiction's accreditation cycle has been agreed by ADC International.

12. International program monitoring

ADC International monitors accredited international programs throughout the period of accreditation to ensure ongoing compliance with the Standards.

Monitoring may include:

- annual monitoring reports
- review of provider reports or data

- targeted requests for information
- documentary reviews
- review of conditions or monitoring requirements
- additional meetings with the provider
- further site visits, where required.

Monitoring is proportionate and risk-based. ADC International may take into account factors such as changes to program leadership, governance, staffing, curriculum, assessment, clinical training arrangements, student support, facilities and resources, student outcomes, regulatory status, local context, or other matters that may affect whether the program continues to meet the Standards.

A monitoring requirement is distinct from a condition of accreditation. A monitoring requirement may be used to obtain assurance that the program continues to meet the Standards over time, including where planned or future changes create uncertainty about ongoing compliance.

Where conditions or monitoring requirements are imposed, the education provider must respond within the timeframe specified by ADC International. Responses should be concise and directly address the matters identified. Where evidence is required, providers should clearly map evidence to the relevant Standard or requirement.

13. Accreditation fees

Fees are payable for international accreditation. Current fee information is available on the ADC International website.

For initial accreditation and re-accreditation, fees may include:

- a Notice of Intent fee
- an initial accreditation or re-accreditation fee
- travel, accommodation, meals and other costs associated with the review, charged at cost where applicable.

For monitoring, fees may include:

- an annual monitoring fee
- costs associated with any additional documentary review, further site visit or other monitoring activity required by ADC International.

Payment requirements, including timing and any additional costs, will be set out in the relevant agreement or correspondence with the education provider.

14. Further information

Further information about ADC International accreditation is available from the links below:

- ADC/DC(NZ) Accreditation Standards for Dental Practitioner Programs
- Professional competencies of the newly qualified dental practitioner
- Dental Board of Australia entry-level competencies for dental specialties
- Dental Council New Zealand Competencies for Restorative Dentistry
- ADC Accreditation Monitoring Framework
- ADC Program Accreditation – Appeals Policy.