



Australian Dental Council report of an evaluation of Charles Sturt University Bachelor of Dental Science

July 2021

Updated March 2022

Executive summary

Program provider	Charles Sturt University
Program/qualification name	Bachelor of Dental Science
Program/qualification abbreviation	BDentSc
Program/qualification code	4409DS
Head office address, including State	Centre for Rural Dentistry and Oral Health P O Box 883 Orange NSW 2800
Campuses	CSU Albury CSU Bathurst CSU Dubbo CSU Orange CSU Wagga Wagga
Program length	5 Years
Registration division	Dentist
Registration specialty	NA
Qualification type	HE
Australian Qualifications Framework level	7
Accreditation standards version	Accreditation standards for dental practitioner programs (Approved August 2020)
Date of site evaluation	20 – 21 July 2021
Date of ADC decision	9 December 2021

Type of accreditation	Re-accreditation
Accreditation start date	1 January 2022
Accreditation end date	31 December 2028

Background

Charles Sturt University's (CSU'S) Bachelor of Dental Science (BDentSc) program commenced in 2009 with the first cohort of students graduating in 2013. The BDentSc program is a five-year, full-time program that enables graduates to register with the Dental Board of Australia (DBA) as dentists.

The program was reviewed in 2014 and accredited for a period of seven years without conditions.

Concerns were raised with the ADC regarding the program in 2018, but there was not sufficient justification at that time to warrant further action. Further concerns were raised in August 2018 and the ADC was advised that an external review of the program had been instigated by the education provider in response to the concerns of a third party. A monitoring requirement was placed on the program requesting the provider to provide a copy of the external review report. This was provided to the ADC in January 2019. Following consideration of the findings, the ADC determined that there were potentially serious concerns with the program's ability to continue to meet the Accreditation Standards. The ADC determined that as a condition of accreditation, an Accreditation Team (AT) be appointed to undertake a site visit to review the BDentSc program against all the Standards.

The visit was undertaken in April 2019 and identified a range of significant challenges the School faced, calling into question the ability of the program to continue to meet the Accreditation Standards. As a result, the ADC imposed a series of conditions on the program, requiring CSU to provide reports in June 2019, September 2019, November 2019 and March 2020 addressing the issues identified at the visit. A further condition was a further site visit to be undertaken within six months of the April visit. This visit was undertaken in September 2019 verified the information included in the June 2019 report and assessed the progress made by the School to address the shortfalls against the Standards.

The September 2019 site visit established that the School had made significant progress in addressing the issues identified at the April 2019 visit, with clarity provided around reporting relationships, roles and responsibilities and recruitment of new staff was continuing with new appointments about to be made. The additional staff were helping to alleviate pressure on existing staff and students and an increased morale was evident. The program was granted continuing accreditation subject to two monitoring requirements.

All conditions and monitoring requirements for the program were subsequently met within the required timeline.

At the time of the latest site visit, there has been a recent restructure with the School of Biomedical Science merging with the School of Dentistry and Health Sciences to form the School of Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences. However, the CSU Dental School remains a semi-autonomous entity as the Centre of Rural Dentistry and Oral Health. The Head of School remains but has been retitled as the Dean of Dentistry and Oral Health.

Overview of evaluation

An ADC AT conducted a virtual visit on 20 and 21 July 2021 to review Charles Sturt University's (CSU's) Bachelor of Dental Science program. Due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions the visit had to proceed via virtual means. The AT reviewed the Centre for Rural Dentistry and Oral Health's self-review against the Standards, attached appendices and additional information requested following the AT's teleconference of 28 May 2021. The review was undertaken against the new Accreditation Standards that came into effect on 1 January 2021.

During the visit the AT interviewed a range of individuals, including:

- Executive Dean, Faculty of Science and Health
- Interim Head of School of Dentistry and Medical Sciences
- Dean, Centre for Rural Dentistry and Oral Health
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor, First Nations Engagement
- Course Director
- Clinical Director
- Clinic Operations Manager
- Year level coordinators for Years 2 to 5
- Academic staff and clinical tutors teaching into the program, including adjunct appointments
- Members of the External Advisory Committee (EAC)
- Workplace Learning Administrative Officer
- Members of the Student support team
- Students and recent graduates
- Three employers of graduates from the program.

The findings of this report are based on the AT's assessment of the material outlined above and interview evidence.

Key findings

CSU is to be commended for the ongoing improvements in the morale of staff and students under the leadership of the Head of School, now Dean of the Centre for Rural Dentistry and Oral Health. There is student representation on both Faculty and Centre committees and the Dean holds fortnightly meetings with student year level representatives to provide ongoing dialogue to address concerns as they arise. Interviews conducted at the site visit indicate that BDentSc students are well supported pastorally and there are robust student support facilities (both academic and personal) in place. There is a sense of positivity about the program and its future.

The program staff are commended for their commitment to the program and to students. However, the AT is concerned about the significant turnover of staff in the last twelve months. The provider attributes this to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst some new staff have been appointed, some of them are recent graduates and have limited professional experience, which does raise some concerns about their capacity to adequately support and assess students in their clinical judgements. It is recommended that these staff be supported and developed through a comprehensive induction program, as well as mentored by more experienced staff members.

There is also a heavy reliance on adjunct staff, who are delivering the program via block teaching, some of it via virtual means due to ongoing disruptions and travel restrictions arising from COVID-19. The AT is concerned about the lack of interaction for the adjunct staff with onsite staff, and the potential risk of these staff feeling isolated and marginalised from the Centre and from having limited ongoing input into the quality assurance of the program. The AT is of the view that the use of episodic teaching appointments should be a temporary measure only and needs to be progressively replaced by ongoing appointments to provide a continuous presence for consistency in teaching and learning. The AT acknowledges the challenges faced by rural education providers in recruiting staff but is of the view that an adequate staffing profile is needed to ensure longer-term sustainability of the program. There does appear to be a strong commitment from the Faculty of Science and Rural Health to support the program into the future.

Whilst the AT was assured that the Centre of Rural Dentistry and Oral Health will operate autonomously and the recent restructure will have no impact on the governance and delivery of the BDentSc program, the actuality of this remains to be seen.

It is evident that the provider is putting effort into maintaining the relationship with NSW Health and placement clinics and is engaging with the profession via the EAC. However, the EAC appears to be pitched more towards relationship building rather than as an avenue for feedback and contribution into program design and quality improvement. The actual mechanisms for external input into the program remain unclear. Further to this, there is opportunity for wider stakeholder consultation including employers, adjunct staff, external examiners, dental consumers and BDentSc graduates.

The AT does have concerns about the disconnect and level of communication between the Centre for Rural Dentistry and Oral Health and the Enterprise Clinics. There is some interaction with the Dean, but the interaction with subject and year level coordinators is not apparent and it is not clear if the clinical tutors and sessional staff are provided with an understanding of the curriculum or the expected learning outcomes. Furthermore, the focus on the Enterprise Clinics appears to be as a profit-generating venture, which is potentially at odds with ensuring that all students are provided with access to the full range and number of patients to achieve the required professional competencies, including basic

restorative skills. Interviews conducted at the site visit indicate that clinics are sometimes cancelled for students due to staff absences and the inability to find a replacement staff member and that cancelled sessions are not always rescheduled. The AT propose the necessity for an improved and reliable means of interaction between these two interdependent entities to define role responsibilities and enable adequate resourcing of the clinics to ensure the ongoing success of the program. It was also unclear how moderation of clinical supervisors' marking is undertaken to ensure consistency of assessment of clinical competence.

Charles Sturt University collectively is endeavouring to embed cultural safety across the entire University, and this is articulated in the University Strategic Plan. A longer-term plan for the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, First Nations Engagement is for First Peoples' content to be embedded in every single unit and to strengthen university input in terms of research and interaction with community. The Centre for Rural Dentistry and Oral Health is shifting from a position of cultural competency to cultural safety and is to be commended for its work in this space. Interviews with a wide range of stakeholders indicated an openness, acceptance and respect of First Nations People, as well as people from across other diverse cultural groups.

A number of further recommendations have been made by the AT where areas were identified for potential improvement.

ADC accreditation decision

The ADC has determined that CSU's Bachelor of Dental Science program is reaccredited for a period of seven (7) years from **1 January 2022** until **31 December 2028**, subject to the following conditions:

1. To meet Standard 1 – Public safety, Standard 2 – Academic governance and quality assurance and Standard 3 – Program of study, the provider is requested to submit a report to the ADC by **1 February 2022** demonstrating that the staffing profile is sufficient to deliver the BDentSc program. The report should include:
 - (a) the staffing profile for the program detailing the full-time equivalent (FTE) workload of each staff member, their teaching and clinical supervision commitments and whether they are permanent or sessional staff;
 - (b) details of new appointments made, including roles and responsibilities and recruitment still in progress or about to commence; and
 - (c) how CSU ensures that clinics are adequately staffed at all times and the mechanisms in place to ensure that clinical supervisors are made aware of their roles and responsibilities in ensuring that the students develop the required professional competencies.

The ADC has determined that this condition has now been met.

2. To meet Standard 2 – Academic Governance and Quality Assurance, the provider is required to review the membership and terms of reference of the EAC to ensure that:
 - (a) student evaluations, graduate and employer satisfaction surveys and peer review are incorporated as a part of quality assurance processes, and
 - (b) the membership includes a broad range of stakeholders including dental consumers (including patients), internal and external academic, and professional peers.

A report is to be submitted to the ADC by **15 July 2022** advising of changes made to provide evidence that stakeholder evaluation and wide input by a range of dental stakeholders is incorporated into quality improvement processes.
3. To meet Standard 3 – Program of study, CSU must provide quarterly updates of the staffing profile available to support the program and identify any changes. The reports are to be provided by **30 June 2022** and **30 September 2022** and include an update on the progress to fill staffing vacancies and how adjunct and block teaching appointments are used to address gaps in the staffing profile previously identified. The report must detail staffing roles and responsibilities and advise how this is communicated to staff and students.
4. To meet Standard 3 – Program of study, the provider is required to submit by **30 June 2022** details of how the provider ensures all students gain sufficient clinical experience to develop all the professional competencies required of a newly qualified dentist.

5. To meet Standard 3 – Program of Study, evidence is provided by **15 July 2022** of the formalisation and systematic approach to interactions with other dental and health professionals to foster interprofessional collaborative practice.
6. To meet Standard 5 – Assessment the provider is required to provide by **15 July 2022** details of the moderation procedures in place to ensure consistent and appropriate assessment of students' *clinical competence* and how these are communicated to staff.