



# **Australian Dental Council report of an evaluation of Curtin University's Bachelor of Science (Oral Health Therapy) program**

March 2021

Updated March 2022

## 1. Executive summary

<b>Program provider</b>	Curtin University
<b>Program/qualification name</b>	Bachelor of Science (Oral Health Therapy)
<b>Program/qualification abbreviation</b>	BSc (OHT)
<b>Program/qualification code</b>	B-ORALHT
<b>Head office address, including State</b>	17 Monash Avenue, Nedlands WA 6845
<b>Campus</b>	Oral Health Centre of Western Australia
<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>	2-3 March 2021
<b>Date of ADC decision</b>	29 October 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

Curtin University's Bachelor of Science (Oral Health Therapy) program was last reviewed for the purposes of accreditation by the Australian Dental Council (ADC) in 2015. The program was reviewed against the accreditation standards in effect at the time. Several Standards were identified as being 'Substantially met' resulting in conditions imposed on the program. The conditions were subsequently met and two monitoring requirements were imposed regarding the outcomes of scheduled reviews of the School scheduled for 2017 and a Comprehensive Course Review scheduled 2018.

The monitoring requirement regarding the School Review was determined to have been met in 2018. The monitoring requirement regarding the Comprehensive Course Review was removed from the program in May 2020, with the ADC noting that the review had not yet been undertaken. In accordance with the ADC's protocol to monitor the impacts on accredited programs of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ADC determined that the reaccreditation process provided opportunity for the ADC to ensure the program continues to meet the Standards without the need for additional monitoring.

The program enables graduates to apply to the Dental Board of Australia (DBA) to register as a Dental Hygienist, Dental Therapist and Oral Health Therapist.

A paper-based review of the program was undertaken in 2020 since a site visit was not feasible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program was assessed as meeting all standards except for Standard 5 and a condition was imposed around moderation processes to ensure consistency of marking by clinical supervisors. At the time of the visit the provider has submitted a condition report, which is awaiting an ADC decision.

## Overview of evaluation

A Site Evaluation Team (SET) conducted a paper-based review based on Curtin University's 44-page submission and associated appendices. The SET held a teleconference on 16 July 2020 to discuss the submission. Additional information was requested from Curtin University following the teleconference. The SET met by teleconference on 24 September 2020 to discuss the additional information provided.

Due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions across some locations, the follow up site visit on 2-3 March 2021 had to proceed as a combined site and virtual visit with the Chair and one assessor attending in person and the community assessor and ADC representative attending online.

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

- Head of School
- Program Coordinator
- Director of Learning and Teaching
- Clinical Placement and Simulation coordinators from the School of Nursing
- Academic staff teaching into the program
- Clinical supervisors from both the Oral Health Clinic WA (OHCWA) and Dental Health Services Clinic at Mount Henry
- Members of the Student support team
- Students from Years 2 and 3
- A recent graduate
- A representative of the Local Health District
- Representatives from the Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists' Association (ADOHTA) and Dental Hygienists Association of Australia (DHAA)

The SET toured the simulation and clinical facilities at both the OHCWA and the Dental Health Services Clinic at Mount Henry and observed students in both facilities.

During the visit the SET was provided with additional information including logbooks and assessment items. A demonstration was also given of the clinical management software used at both the OHCWA and DHS Mount Henry Clinic.

## Key findings

Since the paper-based review undertaken in 2020, there has been a restructure at Curtin University, with the Bachelor of Science (Oral Health Therapy) (BSc(OHT)) program moving from the School of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences to the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedicine from 1 January 2021. This move offers some positive opportunities for the program including wider interprofessional learning and further potential regional placements. Governance structures within the School are being revised to reflect the restructure and include Oral Health Therapy representation, but this needs to be extended beyond the program convenor to include wider input by students and industry to provide feedback into the design and delivery of the BSc(OHT) program. Whilst the SET acknowledges that at the time of the visit the new structure was in its early days, the School needs to ensure that both OHT staff and students are supported in their integration into the new School and kept informed about governance and program changes and developments. Regular communication and interaction with BSc(OHT) stakeholders will have an added benefit to the School in providing a deeper understanding of the nature and specific requirements of the program.

Interviews conducted at the site visit indicate that BSc(OHT) students are well supported pastorally. However, the site visit did identify several concerns regarding the way in which the program is delivered. This included training deficiencies in the clinical experiences available to all students to gain experience in adult restorative dentistry, orthodontics, trauma, pulpotomies and extractions. Furthermore, information elicited via interviews at the site visit indicated that some placement providers cannot provide the full range and breadth of clinical experience required for students to demonstrate competent practice and the SET was not assured that all students received an equitable clinical experience or access to patients. There are also issues created by the limited patient mix available to students, for example the restricted age range of up to 18 years at DHS clinics. This raises questions for the SET as to how the provider ensures and assesses that all students are able to demonstrate they can practice safely across the scope of practice expressed in the learning outcomes. A condition has been imposed on the program around this.

The SET has concern around the longer-term resourcing for the program, especially in terms of the increased student numbers. Whilst verbal assurance was given that adequate funding will continue to be allocated to the OHT program, it was not apparent what and when additional resources would be provided to address the insufficient clinical facilities requiring double teaching and the implications of this on staff workload. There was also concern that increased student numbers will exacerbate access to patients and the range of experience needed to fulfill the program learning outcomes. The resources allocated to BSc(OHT) program design and delivery are currently at a level the SET is concerned is not sufficient or sustainable to support the requirements of the program and has significant implications for the program's viability in the longer term, especially if further increases in student numbers are planned.

Whilst there appeared to be clear policies and processes in place to protect the public and ensure safe care of patients and there is evidence that these are appropriately disseminated to students, there is a lack of clarity about the mechanisms for the provider's input into the review and update of OHCWA policies and processes to ensure they remain contemporary. The mechanisms for reporting potential incidents or near misses in the clinic were also unclear to the SET. A condition relating to these concerns has been imposed on the program.

The program staff are commended for their commitment to the program and students.

Several further recommendations have been made by the SET where areas were identified for potential improvement.

## ADC Accreditation Decision

The ADC has determined that accreditation of Curtin University's Bachelor of Science (Oral Health Therapy) program is maintained until **31 December 2025**, subject to the following conditions:

1. To meet Standard 3 – Program of study and Standard 5 – Assessment, a report is required to be submitted by **31 January 2022** detailing:
  - a. how the provider is planning to ensure all students will gain equivalent and sufficient clinical experience in the areas of adult restorative dentistry, orthodontics, trauma, pulpotomies and extractions as indicated in the program learning outcomes and how competency in these areas is assessed;
  - b. how the provider ensures equitable access to clinical placements for all students to gain the required experience in oral health therapy practice as articulated in the program learning outcomes and professional competencies;
  - c. opportunities for students to participate in interprofessional collaborative practice including patient treatment planning that supports holistic management of the patient's clinical care and maintenance.

**The ADC has determined that parts b and c of this condition have been met.**

2. To meet Standard 1 – Public safety, the provider is requested to provide by **31 January 2022** evidence of the mechanisms in place for the School to provide input into ensuring that clinical policies and processes within OHCWA are reviewed, updated and kept contemporary. The report is to include details of the mechanisms for reporting potential incidents or near misses in the clinic.

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

3. To meet Standard 5 – Assessment the provider is required to provide by **30 November 2021** a list of external examiners of the program detailing their qualifications and experience, including currency within the profession as a registered clinical practitioner in oral health therapy, dental hygiene, dental therapy, or GP/specialist dentist.

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

The following monitoring requirement is also imposed:

1. The provider is requested to provide by **31 March 2022** an update on the progress of developing and implementing the capstone unit described at the site visit. The update report should include details of the process and timeline for development and implementation of the unit.

**The ADC has determined that this monitoring requirement has been met.**