



Australian Dental Council report of an evaluation of The University of Adelaide's Bachelor of Dental Surgery program

August 2023

Executive summary

Program provider	The University of Adelaide
Program/qualification name	Bachelor of Dental Surgery
Program/qualification abbreviation	BDS
Program/qualification code	BDS
Head office address, including State	Adelaide Dental School, Level 10, Adelaide Health and Medical Sciences Building, Corner of North Terrace and George Street, Adelaide SA 5000
Campus	North Terrace Campus
Program length	5 years
Registration division	Dentist
Registration speciality	N/A
Qualification type	HE
Australian Qualifications Framework level	7
Accreditation standards version	Accreditation Standards for Dental Practitioner Programs (Approved August 2020)
Date of site evaluation	1 – 2 August 2023
Date of ADC decision	1 December 2023
Type of accreditation	Reaccreditation
Accreditation start date	1 January 2024
Accreditation end date	31 December 2030

Background

The University of Adelaide's Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) program is a long-standing program that was last reviewed by the Australian Dental Council (ADC) in 2016. Following that review, the ADC accredited the program until 31 December 2023 without conditions.

In February 2020, a concern was raised with the ADC regarding the University's nine accredited dental practitioner programs, including the Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) program. A response was sought from the School in relation to the matters raised in accordance with the ADC's *Concerns about accredited programs policy*.

Following consideration of the response from the School, the ADC imposed a condition on all nine programs requiring a report detailing the staffing profile to ensure the programs continued to meet the Accreditation Standards. The School responded to the condition in April 2020, with the condition deemed to have been met in May 2020. A further monitoring requirement was imposed by the ADC, requesting additional information to be provided by July 2020 regarding the recruitment that the ADC had been advised was in progress. Throughout 2020, the ADC, in accordance with the ADC's protocol, monitored the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the accredited program.

In November 2020, additional information was provided to the ADC regarding the concern, including a survey of staff and the Faculty's response to the matters raised within the survey. The ADC determined that the matters raised in the survey, if substantiated, raised potentially serious concerns regarding the ability of the programs, including the BDS program, to continue to meet the Accreditation Standards.

In accordance with the ADC's *Concerns about accredited programs policy*, the ADC undertook a targeted review in February 2021 to test the veracity of the matters raised and ensure that the programs, including the BDS program, continued to meet the Accreditation Standards. Following the review, the ADC imposed three conditions the programs. The School responded to the conditions in 2021, with all conditions deemed to have been met by March 2022.

In December 2022, The University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia announced the intention to merge. If a decision to proceed is made, the new university would be operational in 2026. The effect of the potential merger on the School and its programs is uncertain.

Overview of evaluation

An ADC Accreditation Team (AT) received the Adelaide Dental School's submission and various appendices against the Accreditation Standards. The AT requested additional information and clarification prior to the visit following its teleconference held on 8 June 2023.

A site visit was undertaken on 1 and 2 August 2023 at the Adelaide Health and Medical Sciences Building in Adelaide, South Australia. Interviews were held with the following participants:

- Executive Dean, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences
- Deputy Dean, Learning and Teaching
- Dean and Head of School
- Program Coordinators
- Undergraduate Learning and Teaching Lead
- Year level coordinators
- Permanent academic staff
- Casual clinical tutors across all year levels
- Clinical supervisors, internal and external
- Simulation Clinic Coordinator
- Placements Officer
- School Business Manager and other administrative staff supporting the program
- Student support staff
- Current students across all year levels
- Graduates from the past four years
- Members from the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Assessment/moderation committee
- Cultural safety staff
- Potential employers
- A representative from the South Australian Dental Service (SADS)

- Representatives from the Australian Dental Association South Australian branch (ADA SA)

The AT also viewed SADS clinical facilities within both the Adelaide Dental Hospital and two community clinics.

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

Key findings

The School maintains strong engagement with external stakeholders and is held in high regard by external organisations such as SADS and the ADA SA.

The variety and quality of the clinical placements the School offers to students of the program are commendable. The School offers clinical training that is focused on clinical practice and students may have clinical placements in various locations across South Australia. In addition to this, students may be placed in Tasmania (Devonport and Hobart), New South Wales (Wyong) and Canberra. Furthermore, plans are in progress to reintroduce placements in rural communities with the Royal Flying Doctor Service. As another placement option, students may also choose the School's ongoing Community Outreach Dental Program which is supported by a Memorandum of Understanding with Housing Choices Australia and the ADA SA.

The AT also commended the School on its use of specialists within the program. Staff from other departments, for example Physiology, Health and Medical Sciences and Pharmacology, contribute to teaching in different year levels, and specialists are used in the program. Year 4 students in specialist disciplines are supervised by registered dental specialists, postgraduate students in that discipline or by experienced clinicians with demonstrated ability to teach the specific discipline. Year 5 tutors are experienced practitioners who can supervise endodontic, prosthodontic and periodontic procedures.

The centralisation of administrative support for students and staff has had a negative impact on the workload of academic staff. Due to the potential implication of this on the long-term viability of the program, the School should implement a staffing plan to ensure the sustained support and resource allocation for the program.

The AT expressed concern about how a culturally safe environment for all students is created and maintained within the program, particularly in relation to equity and diversity. To address this, the School is required to provide evidence of how all students' needs are accommodated within the program.

The AT heard concerns that when complaints were reported within the School, some in relation to experiences of bullying and harassment, the process within the School was inadequate to enable people to feel safe to raise concerns, have their concerns acknowledged, and be notified of progress, resolution, and monitoring. The provider must take action to ensure all staff are demonstrating appropriate levels of ethical and professional conduct. The AT also found that the process to manage complaints within the School was disconnected from the broader university complaint management system and the associated supports. The provider must review the complaints management process used within the School, implement improvements, and show how this process is being monitored and evaluated for effectiveness. Evidence that all students and staff receive initial and ongoing training and detailing how the enhanced process is being monitored and evaluated is required. The AT were concerned about some instances they heard with regard to the following:

- Some of those who wanted to submit complaints did not feel safe enough to do so.
- In some cases, complainants' comments appeared to be disregarded, which led to reduced engagement with the process.

- An effective monitoring process is required to document the progress and resolution of complaints that were made.
- Although concerns were raised according to the existing process in place within the School, some concerns were not escalated and brought to resolution.
- Adequate feedback was not given about some of the concerns that were raised, and resolutions for some concerns were not provided nor tested for their effectiveness.

The AT recommends that the School considers engaging an external independent body to undertake work in reviewing and improving its complaints management process.

The AT were concerned that levels of ethical and professional conduct fell short with interview evidence highlighting instances of prima facie bullying and discrimination by some staff members towards students. Consequently, the provider must demonstrate that staff are actively engaged in training focused on providing them with the skills to demonstrate ethical and professional conduct. To follow up on this, the School is required to provide evidence of improvement in ethical and professional conduct.

While progress has been made to integrate cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into the program, continued monitoring of this work is required. The AT requires the School to ensure that all staff have the necessary cultural capabilities to support the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare. The provider must also supply evidence to show how it ensures that the learning environment and clinical placements are culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other culturally and linguistically diverse student populations, and how any cultural safety breaches are identified and addressed.

ADC's accreditation decision

The ADC has determined that The University of Adelaide's Bachelor of Dental Surgery program is reaccredited for a period of seven years from **1 January 2024** until **31 December 2030** subject to the following conditions:

1. To meet Standard 1 – Public safety, Standard 4 – The student experience and Standard 6 – Cultural safety, the School must provide by **11 March 2024** evidence that it has undertaken a review of the complaints management procedures at the School level and how they align with the existing university wide processes.
2. To meet Standard 1 – Public safety, Standard 4 – The student experience and Standard 6 – Cultural safety, the School must provide by **14 June 2024** evidence in its submission for the 2024 targeted review (see condition 6) that it has implemented each of the following at the School level:
 - a) a thorough and cohesive complaints management process based on the review undertaken to meet Condition 1 above that includes mandatory communication to complainants to follow up on concerns raised,
 - b) systems to track and monitor complaints, including final resolutions, that include timelines, reporting and trend identification, and
 - c) ongoing education and training of staff and students on using the enhanced complaints handling procedures.Furthermore, the School must also provide in its **2024 Annual report** evidence that it has evaluated each of the above issues in terms of corrective strategy effectiveness.
3. To meet Standard 1 – Public safety, the School is required to provide by **11 March 2024** adequate and relevant evidence of actions taken to ensure staff are demonstrating appropriate levels of ethical and professional conduct.
4. To meet Standard 4 – The student experience, the School is required to provide by **11 March 2024** evidence of actions taken to ensure that equity and diversity principles are observed and promoted in the student experience.
5. To meet Standard 6 – Cultural safety, the School must show by **11 March 2024** evidence of:
 - a) how the School has ensured that staff, including external clinical supervisors, have the cultural capabilities to facilitate learning for students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health,
 - b) how the School is closely and effectively monitoring the effective establishment and integration of cultural safety in the program, and
 - c) how the School ensures that the learning environment and clinical placements are culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
6. As a condition of reaccreditation, a targeted review in the form of a site visit is to be undertaken in **2024** against Standards 1, 4 and 6, to triangulate the evidence in the School's response to the conditions imposed on the program.