Thank you for providing the Australian Dental Council’s (ADC) the opportunity to be a part of the review and respond to this discussion paper. The ADC has focused its response on two questions that relate to the role of the ADC.

**About us**

The Australian Dental Council (ADC) works to protect the health and safety of the public by ensuring dental practitioners meet the high standards required of dental professionals in Australia.

We are an independent accreditation authority assigned the accreditation functions for the dental professions by the [Dental Board of Australia](https://www.dentalboard.gov.au/) under the [National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS)](https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/national-registration-and-accreditation-scheme). Through our role we are responsible for:

* Accrediting education and training programs leading to registration as a dental practitioner.
* Developing accreditation standards, policies, and procedures for Australian-based dental practitioner programs.
* Assessing the professional qualifications, knowledge, judgement, and clinical skills of overseas trained dental practitioners, excluding dental specialists, for the purposes of eligibility to apply for registration to practise in Australia.
* Developing standards, policies, and procedures for the assessment of qualifications and skills of overseas qualified dental practitioners, excluding dental specialists, seeking registration to practise in Australia.

**Q13 How could an Accord support cooperation between providers, accreditation bodies, government and industry to ensure graduates have the relevant skills for the workforce?**

The standard of dental care in Australia is continually evolving and education providers need to keep pace with a range of new therapies, materials, procedures, devices, and new organisational systems to train a future dental workforce that will meet the changing needs of the Australian population. The second National Oral Health Plan (2015 – 2024) has also highlighted that selected population groups and individuals within Australia have a higher rate of oral disease including people living in rural and remote communities, people with intellectual disabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. To address these health disparities, dental schools must ensure that programs prepare graduates to be competent in servicing the distinct needs of these groups through improved models of care, the utilisation of the broader health care team, telehealth, and cultural safety. In its role as the accreditation authority, the ADC is responsible for the development and review of accreditation standards for all categories of registration and the development and review of the professional competencies of the newly qualified dental practitioner (the Competencies). These areas have been the focus of the ADC’s recent review of the accreditation standards (reviewed 2020) and the Competencies (reviewed 2021 – 22).

The ADC takes an outcomes-based approach to accreditation which provides flexibility to respond to changes in community health care needs, technology and innovations in health practice. Education providers are asked to demonstrate that the program of study will produce high-quality graduates with the knowledge, skills and professional attributes necessary to practise the profession. This approach promotes innovation and quality improvement, removes restrictions and barriers for how education providers can demonstrate the accreditation standards have been met, enables variability between education providers and enables education providers to be multi-faceted and align with local needs. This approach also applies to clinical placements and removes the requirement for providers to meet certain numbers of procedures or treatments per student. The tertiary learning sector is changing rapidly, and new ways of learning and assessing are emerging. For example, pathways to academic careers, changes to scope of practice, accessibility of education, micro learning etc. are all emerging trends. Developing an outcomes-based mindset and approach to accreditation can be applied to other professions and can ensure accreditation processes and standards are flexible and can meet the needs of future tertiary learning environments.

The ADC has strong relationships with its stakeholders including education providers, other accreditation authorities, government and the dental profession. The ADC conducts wide public consultation to ensure the accreditation standards and Competencies remain contemporary, fit for purpose and are aligned with the current and future needs of the Australian population.

**Q38** **How can the Accord support higher education providers to adopt sector-leading employment practices?**

Academic workforce issues are impacting on the education sector with factors such as insecure and casual work, gender equity, barriers to career pathways, the attractiveness of university careers and rising student to staff ratios. In its role as the accreditation authority, the ADC has observed increased student to staff ratios and challenges with recruiting academic staff, particularly at senior levels and for specialists. The ADC conducted a survey in 2022 of Australian Dental School staff which showed that leaders of dental schools across Australia had concerns about the lack of qualified academics, registration barriers, work/life balance and flexibility, succession planning and renumeration and reputation.

The most cited barriers to entering dental academia that were raised in the survey include:

* Excessive workload
* Disparity in remuneration compared to clinical practice
* Lack of suitably qualified academics in Australia
* Limited number of scholarships and/or opportunities to do a PhD in Australia
* Focus on full registration instead of being an excellent educator
* Job insecurities
* The requirement for PhD precludes a lot of practising clinicians; and,
* Lack of coherent clinical academic training pathways in Australia.

Strategic change is needed to ensure the sustainability of dental programs in Australia and to ensure that dental schools have the resources to prepare graduates to meet the current and future needs of the Australian population. In this context, the ADC, in partnership with the Australian Dental Association (ADA), the Dental Board of Australia (DBA) and the Australasian Council of Dental Schools (ACODS), initiated a roundtable discussion with key stakeholders to address the barriers to recruit an appropriate dental academic workforce. The aim was to identify the ongoing challenges and barriers to attract a sustainable dental academic workforce, with a focus on potential areas for change in order to support high quality dental education in Australia.

Proposed solutions to the issues that were identified included:

* Improve the connection between clinical practice and academia, this includes strengthening the alignment between the profession and the tertiary sector.
* Create career development opportunities for academic staff.
* Review migration laws to reduce barriers for teaching and research purposes.
* Increase support for PhD students and early career researchers.
* Maximise research opportunities through collaboration and joint advocacy between education providers and the profession.
* Change the type of employment from casual to permanent part time to promote stability.