



Consultation report

June 2016

Entry-level competencies for dental specialties

Summary

The Dental Board of Australia (the Board) in partnership with the Dental Council (New Zealand) (the Council) have developed entry-level competencies for dental specialities (the competencies).

The Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act ('the TTMR Act') provides that a person who is registered in New Zealand for an occupation is entitled to be registered in the 'equivalent occupation' in Australia. This means that a practitioner who is registered with the Council as a dental specialist and holds a current annual practising certificate for this specialty is entitled to registration with the Board if that specialty exists in Australia.

It is important that where possible, standards and requirements for registration are consistent. This is why the Board and the Council worked together on this project.

The Board is publishing this report to provide a summary of the consultation process carried out to develop the *Entry-level competencies for dental specialities*.

This report:

- identifies key themes from the submissions received
- provides a brief summary of responses to each of the questions posed in the consultation paper
- gives a summary of changes in the final, approved version, and
- sets out the proposed next steps.

The Board developed the competencies to:

- describe the entry-level of competency for dental specialist registration, and
- to enable the consistent and transparent assessment of specialist registration applications from overseas-trained dental specialists.

The [public consultation document](#) provides more detail on the project.

An Expert Reference Group (ERGS) was established to make sure professional input and advice was available throughout the project. The ERGS included representatives of the Board and its registration and notification committees, dental specialist academics, the dental profession, and from the Council. The ERGS was not designed to individually represent each dental specialty. The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) supported the project.

We met with key stakeholders on multiple occasions throughout the development and in the lead up to public consultation. Stakeholders included universities, dental specialist academies, and colleges across Australia and New Zealand.

The competencies were developed in phases to make sure the drafts were tested for clarity and relevance, so the need for the competencies was understood. These phases allowed key stakeholders sufficient time to contribute to drafts and provide constructive feedback.

As well as the targeted stakeholder engagement, the Board released the competencies for public consultation. Submissions were invited over a ten-week period from November 2015 to February 2016. A total of 22 responses were received. Those we have permission to publish are published [here](#).

The final competencies are published on the [Board's website](#).

The Board works on a range of issues associated with the registration pathways for overseas-trained dental specialists.

The competencies provide a framework to support this work including:

- the implementation of a new process to assess overseas qualified specialists
- a review of the current specialist registration standard, and

- exploring the feasibility of an outcome-based assessment model for overseas-trained dental specialists.

The Board would like to thank all those who contributed to the project and provided valuable feedback during the phased development and consultation process.

1. Introduction

The assessment of applications for specialist registration by the Board is done in accordance with the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law). For further background please see the [public consultation document](#) and other information published on the [Board website](#).

2. Dental specialist education

The majority of dental specialists are trained in the university sector at a post-graduate level. All specialist training in the university sector is in New Zealand.

There are no current approved programs of study for the following specialties:

- forensic odontology
- oral surgery, and
- public health dentistry.

The specialty oral and maxillofacial surgery is an approved specialty for the Medical Board of Australia and the Dental Board of Australia. These specialists hold qualifications in medicine and dentistry. The single approved program of study for this specialty is provided by the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons (RACDS).

3. Why did we develop the competencies?

There is no current detailed policy assessment framework that provides clear, consistent and transparent assessment of applications for specialist registration when an applicant has not completed their training in Australia or New Zealand.

The Board developed the competencies to:

- describe the entry-level of competency for dental specialist registration with the Board and the Council, and
- to enable the consistent, efficient, and transparent assessment of specialist registration applications from overseas-trained dental specialists.

The TTMR Act provides that a person who is registered in New Zealand for an occupation is entitled to be registered in the 'equivalent occupation' in Australia. This means that a practitioner who is registered with the Council as a dental specialist and holds a current annual practising certificate for this specialty is entitled to registration with the Board if that specialty exists in Australia. Further information on the application for registration under TTMR is available on the [Board's website](#).

It is important that where possible, standards and requirements for registration are consistent. This is why the Board and the Council worked together on this project.

4. The consultation process

The National Law states that National Boards need to carry out wide-ranging consultation on the content of any proposed registration standard, code or guideline. Though the competencies are not defined as a standard, code or guideline it was critical that the Board still consulted widely to get key stakeholder input into the content. The consultation also allowed the Board to work with stakeholders to help them understand the need for the competencies, and how the Board and Council will use them.

In the development of the competencies the Board followed the agreed process set out in the [Consultation process for National Boards](#). The consultation paper included an assessment of the proposed standard against the COAG principles for best-practice regulation.

The Board engaged with education providers as well as dental specialist academies and colleges to draft the competencies. Before public consultation we engaged with targeted stakeholders in a

preliminary consultation round. The [public consultation document](#) was published on the Board's website and invited submissions from 30 November 2015 to 15 February 2016.

The Board and the Council consulted on the proposed assessment framework and the competencies. The Board notified government and key stakeholders in the profession, including professional associations and consumer organisations of the release of the competencies. The Board also provided key messages to the dental specialist academies and colleges so they could answer any questions about the competencies from their members.

5. Feedback and questions for consideration

The consultation asked for general views on the proposed competencies and responses to four specific questions. These questions were:

- Do you understand the reason why we have developed the proposed competencies and how we are going to use them?
- Is there any content that you think should be changed or deleted in the proposed competencies?
- We are proposing that the competencies be reviewed in five years' time with the option to review earlier if needed. Do you agree?
- Do you have any other comments?

5.1 Overview of responses

Overall, there was a high level of support for the need for the competencies to be developed and how they will be used.

No submission received dismissed or disagreed with the development of the competencies. Those that suggested changes or outlined minor issues were generally focused on a particular specialty or broader issues needing to be addressed in the wider dental profession that were outside of the scope of the consultation.

5.2 Summary of responses to key questions

5.2.1 Do you understand the reason why we have developed the proposed competencies and how we are going to use them?

In general, respondents approached this as a 'yes' or 'no' question. The majority of respondents supported and agreed with the reasons behind the development of the competencies and how they will be used, noting that the competencies will help in evaluating the competence of dental specialists for the purpose of registration.

Most submissions highlighted that this work is timely and will have a positive effect in the dental profession and the wider community.

5.2.2 Is there any content that you think should be changed or deleted in the proposed competencies?

The majority of submissions that addressed this question took one of two approaches. Respondents either focused on generic changes to competencies that could affect all specialities or chose to focus on specific changes to competencies that may only affect one specialty. All proposed content changes were reviewed within the background information and assumptions provided in the public consultation document.

Some representatives of the different specialties wanted to include a higher level of specific detail to describe the competency level for their particular specialty.

In finalising the competencies the ERGS and the Board were very aware of the need for consistency in structure and approach across the different specialties, noting that there is a need for the competencies to remain relevant over time and not restrict the ongoing development of a specialty.

5.2.3 We are proposing that the competencies be reviewed in five years' time with an option to review earlier if needed. Do you agree?

Overall, respondents to this question felt that five years was an appropriate review period for the competencies. The majority of respondents highlighted the importance for an option to review earlier, if needed, because of changes and/or developments in the profession and emerging technologies.

5.2.4 Do you have any other comments?

Responses to this question were mixed, with some respondents repeating their support for the competencies as essential tools that will support the processing of specialist registration applications in Australia and New Zealand. Other respondents used this question to describe their issues or concerns more generally

Not all of the issues raised in the consultation can be resolved by the implementation of the competencies.

Some of these concerns included:

- the definition of their specialty
- the quality or availability of programs in their specialty across Australia. and
- the use of the challenges in using the Australian Qualifications Framework.

The Board, AHPRA and relevant stakeholders will work to address the other issues raised which were raised that are in the scope of the Board's work.

6. Summary of changes

Following the public consultation, a number of minor agreed changes were made to the consultation draft of the proposed competencies. Any changes to content were considered by the ERGS and the Board considering that- including specific words or terminology may exclude others and could limit the overall usefulness and intent of the competencies. This means that proposed changes that would lead to describing certain specialities in more detail than others could not be adopted.

The final published version of the competencies:

- build on the Australian Dental Council professional attributes and competencies of the newly qualified dentist
- are not intended to define the scope of the specialty but rather the knowledge and competence of the graduate specialist
- are not intended to define a national curriculum for the education and training in the specialty
- describe the broad areas of competence and assume that other documents such as program curricula will describe the detail under each broad area to accommodate innovation and change in practise over time
- use language and descriptors consistent with those of the *Australian Qualifications Framework's (AQF)*¹ Level 9 Masters Degree (extended)
- do not replace other descriptors of the specialty such as those published by dental specialist academies and colleges that may describe the standard expected of specialists post entry-level
- should be read with the definition of that particular specialty, and
- in the context of how they are relevant to the particular specialty, this will mean that competencies generic to all specialities may be demonstrated differently in each specialty.

¹ <http://www.aqf.edu.au/>

In finalising the competencies, the Board considered the feedback from all phases of the consultation, the Board's and Council's experiences when assessing specialist applications for registration, the recommendations from the ERGS, the objectives and guiding principles of the National Law, and the [regulatory principles](#) of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme).

7. Next steps

As well as monitoring the effectiveness and relevance of the competencies, the Board will continue to work on a range of associated issues about registration pathways for overseas-trained dental specialists.

The competencies provide a framework to support this future work including:

- the implementation of a new process to assess overseas qualified specialists
- a review of the current specialist registration standard, and
- exploring the feasibility of an outcome based assessment model for overseas-trained dental specialists.

8. Glossary

National Scheme means the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for health professions. More information about the National Scheme is available at www.ahpra.gov.au

The Board means the Dental Board of Australia.

The Council means the Dental Council (New Zealand).

The National Law means the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law as in force in each state and territory. The National Law is the legislation that sets the requirements for the regulation of the dental profession in Australia.

Trans-Tasman mutual recognition refers to the agreement between the New Zealand and Australian governments that allows individuals in Australia and New Zealand who practise substantially the same registered occupations to move freely between both countries. The relevant legislation in each country is the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act 1997.