Research conducted at JCU has shown that Australian dental graduates trained in rural and remote universities are three times more likely to continue to provide for the remote communities.⁴ Charles Sturt is another new dental school opened in Orange, a remote location four hours west of Sydney. The Australian dental schools support each other and as part of this I was asked to sit on a panel to review Charles Sturt in order to find ways to continually improve the services they provide, prior to their Australian Dental Council (ADC) accreditation renewal. It was great to see universities working together to form a common goal: improving the oral health of Australians and the student body's learning experience.

JCU dental undergraduates spend their fifth year in outreach placements across the country, in desert, rainforests and metropolitan areas. This vocational experience has helped JCU Dental School become the forerunner in overall dental graduate employment.⁵ It is more difficult to do this in the UK; however, the elective programme encourages students to experience different working environments

whilst improving their cultural awareness. I was pleased that one of my old students at KCL came and visited me at JCU. She noticed a tangible difference between the UK and Australia, with the clinic and teaching feeling more informal and relaxed.

Clinical teaching is incredibly rewarding. Making others feel confident in the skills they've learnt is fulfilling and creates a more enjoyable working environment. It may not

'It was great to see universities working together to form a common goal'

be as life changing as delivering a baby, but helping a student extract their first tooth is a proud moment for all involved. With one case at JCU, both the patient and student were incredibly nervous. The patient suffered extreme dental PTSD and had travelled three hours to the clinic from Cape Tribulation. It was satisfying to guide them both through the treatment, using only communication and reassurance.

Before dentistry I completed a diploma in art and design at Winchester School of Art. This gave me a broad set of artistic skills that I have utilised ever since. I learnt how to compose photographs and create stories within them. I enjoy taking candid and colourful snaps; travelling and working abroad has provided ample opportunity to collect beautiful photos from Lake Titicaca to Tasmania. I'm proud to say that a few

of my photos have been published in the *Lonely Planet* magazine, mostly through their monthly Instagram competition (which I'm addicted to)!

When I lived in Australia I spent a lot of time travelling to and from the UK and finally decided to return. I never expected it would be as hard leaving JCU as it was when I originally left the UK; it felt like I was leaving another family.

Once again, I've no idea where I'll be in five years, but I know I will be doing something that is interesting. Working at James Cook University has been absolutely brilliant; it's opened up my academic career exponentially and helped me to find skills I never knew I had. My advice is to be brave and reach for the career you want; I never would have had this opportunity if I had not replied to that email. ■

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Victoria's local beach in Cairns, where she spotted dolphins and crocodiles

PERSONAL ACCOUNT

Dentistry Down Under

Victoria Mellish is a dentist currently working in oral surgery departments in London, but has recently returned from working as the Head of Oral Surgery at James Cook University, Cairns, Australia. Her passion outside of dentistry is photography, and she has had five photographs published in the *Lonely Planet* magazine.

Victoria Mellish eating lavender ice cream at Kate's Berry Farm, Tasmania

Beautiful smiles of the Uros tribe, who chew fluoride enriched Totora reeds from Lake Titicaca

The opportunity to work abroad, with reliable working hours and money to continue extracurricular activities, really tipped the balance for me when applying to uni. I enjoyed working with my dad, who owned his own dental practice; the occasional two (or three) hour lunch breaks with afternoons playing golf really appealed to me! At uni, I would be asked what my plans were in five years' time, but my only thoughts lay in planning my next holiday. I was probably the least likely student to end up working in specialist centres and teaching in universities. I always thought I would work abroad, but eight years after graduating, I'd only travelled 70 miles from my family home! It was at this point when I decided nothing will change, unless I change it.

In 2017 I checked the BDJ Jobs website for work overseas and then remembered an email through my work at King's

College London, describing the expansion of the School of Dentistry at James Cook University (JCU). Although a year had passed since the email, I contacted the Head of Dentistry, Professor Neil Meredith and sent my CV. Fortunately they were looking for an oral surgery lecturer. I arranged an interview whilst on holiday. Travelling from Vietnam to Cairns was a nightmare, with tropical rainstorms and visa issues, but when I visited the university I was amazed. The state-of-the-art clinic and 80 chair simulation lab were stunning and meticulously designed to the smallest detail. Staff and students were happy and friendly, with an overwhelmingly positive attitude. The academic department was small with approximately 15 faculty members, so the potential to make my mark on the young dental school and the scope I would have in my role was incredible.

I relocated a few months later to JCU dental school in Cairns, the only location where two UNESCO World Heritage sites meet: the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree rainforest. My work began with reviewing the old oral surgery curriculum; lectures had focused on advanced oral and maxillofacial surgery and were provided according to staff availability rather than students' learning needs. Following this, I spent my time writing lectures, creating digital teaching content, writing exam questions, marking community projects, updating clinical documents, supervising students on the clinic and treating patients. I'm surprised I got any work done as the staff, students and patients were so chatty! There is a real community spirit; I once apologised to a patient about the air-conditioning that day, to realise he installed the unit in that very room and knew how to fix it!

Rural Australians have poorer oral health than those living in the cities¹ and the prevalence of dental caries in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (hereafter respectfully referred to as Indigenous), is twice as high as the national average.² To address these inequalities, the Australian Government opened new dental schools in rural areas such as Cairns, where the Indigenous population is 10% compared with the national average of 2.8%.³ In its ten years of dental education, JCU has increased the number of Indigenous dentists dramatically, becoming the only Australian University that has trained both Indigenous undergraduates and Indigenous postgraduate dentists. ➤