



# 2023 AMA SPECIALIST TRAINEE EXPERIENCE HEALTH CHECK

## Introduction

The results of the **AMA Specialist Trainee Health Check** come from the 2023 medical training survey conducted by the Medical Board of Australia. This is a national, profession-wide survey of all doctors in training in Australia, which was completed on a voluntary basis.



The purpose of this document is threefold:

- Provide a comparison of the training experience between different speciality training programs and identify areas of excellent experience as well as areas for improvement.
- Compare training experience outcomes within the same specialty training program between 2021 and 2023, to investigate if any areas have improved or worsened over time.
- Highlight key areas that have not seen substantial improvement in the past five years across the majority of colleges.

The report shows the highest-grade trainees gave their overall training program experience a C+ or “a pass”.

No training program, either by subsection or overall, received an “A grade” rating from trainees.

The results of the health check highlight the trainee experience of Australia’s future medical professionals and how it has changed in recent years. It provides an important insight into the areas where specialist medical colleges and health services can focus on and collaborate to build on the quality of vocational training.

The AMA will use the results to inform its advocacy on improvements to training programs and support structure.

The AMA encourages specialist medical colleges and health services to:

- Reflect on how trainees perceive the quality of their training experience.
- Review compliance with the Australian Medical Council (AMC) standards for specialty education and training.
- Internally review education and training policies, with a particular focus on the areas for improvement.

## Key findings

### 2021 v 2023

#### Top 3 areas of improvement



"I never/sometimes get paid for the unrostered overtime" reduced from 50 per cent to 39 per cent, an improvement of 11 per cent.



"The feedback (from examinations and assessments) was timely" changed from 39 per cent to 43 per cent, an improvement of 4 per cent.



"I received support from my college when needed" changed from 44 per cent to 48 per cent, an improvement of 4 per cent.

#### Top 3 areas where there is still work to do



"The college provides me with access to mental health support services" fell from 50 per cent to 47 per cent.



Only 38 per cent of trainees felt they received useful feedback about their exam performance, while only 43 per cent felt exam feedback was timely.



Only 48 per cent of trainees felt they received support from their college when needed.

#### Rural training pathways

It is important for Australia to build a strong medical workforce to provide high-quality healthcare for all communities, including those in rural and remote areas. However, the 2023 Medical Training Survey data shows only **44 per cent** of specialist trainees are interested in a **future in rural practice**.

The survey data also demonstrates that exposure to rural training influences a trainee's interest in working rurally in the future. While only **34 per cent** of trainees working in metropolitan areas are considering a future in rural practice, **78 per cent** of trainees working in a rural area (more than 15 kilometres from a town of 15,000 people) are interested in a future in rural practice.

#### Future intentions in training

Despite years of commitment to medical education and training, many specialist trainees feel uncertain about their future in medicine.

In 2023:

- **37 per cent** of trainees were **concerned about whether they would be able to secure employment** when they completed their training.
- **22 per cent** of trainees were **concerned they would not successfully complete their training program** to achieve fellowship/meet the pathway requirements/secure a place in their preferred college training program.
- **18 per cent** were **considering a career outside of medicine**.

#### Flexible training

Questions relating to flexibility in training were included in the survey for the first time in 2023. Almost one third (30 per cent) of specialist trainees reported they were able to access flexible working arrangements.

However, **one in five (21 per cent)** specialist trainees who considered accessing flexible working arrangements **chose not to** or were **unable to access these arrangements**.

Of the trainees who considered flexible working arrangements, but did not access them:

29% Arrangements were not available

25% They were not comfortable asking

24% Arrangements were never offered

23% Felt they didn't have the option to access

18% Felt they were not senior enough

Table 1: 2023 Specialist trainee experience comparison

QUESTIONS	Overall	ANZCA	ACEM	RACGP	CICM	RANZCOG	RCPA	RACP	RANZCP	RANZCR	ACRRM	RACS
<b>COMMUNICATION &amp; ENGAGEMENT</b>												
My College clearly communicates changes to my training program	67%											
I know who to contact at the College about my training program	76%											
The College seeks my views on the training program	50%											
I am represented by doctors in training on the College training/education committees	63%											
The College provides me with access to mental health support services	47%											
<b>Experience rating</b>		C+	C+	C+	C-	C+	C+	D	C+	D+	C+	C
<b>EXAMINATION &amp; ASSESSMENT</b>												
The exams always reflected the College training curriculum	65%											
The College always provided accurate and appropriate information about exams	71%											
I received useful feedback about my performance in the exams	38%											
The feedback was timely	43%											
I received support from my College when needed	48%											
<b>Experience rating</b>		D+	D+	C-	E+	C	C-	D	D-	D-	C+	C-
<b>SUPERVISION &amp; TEACHING</b>												
I have access to protected study time/leave	70%											
My job responsibilities do not prevent from meeting training requirements	61%											
<b>Experience rating</b>		C	C	B-	D+	D+	C+	D	C-	C-	C	D+
<b>WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT &amp; CULTURE</b>												
I have a good work/life balance	63%											
I am confident that I would raise concerns about bullying/harassment/discrimination	77%											
Working unpaid overtime impacts my wellbeing sometimes/never	81%											
You never/sometimes get paid for the unrostered overtime*	39%											
There are safe mechanisms for raising training/wellbeing concerns with the College	52%											
I have to compete with other doctors for access to opportunities*	43%											
<b>Experience rating</b>		C+	C+	B-	C	C-	C	C-	C	C	B-	C
<b>Overall rating</b>		C	C	C+	D+	C	C	D+	C-	C-	C+	C
I am concerned about whether I will be able to secure employment on completion of training / the pathway	37%											

These responses came from 11,500 specialist trainees who completed the 2023 Medical Training Survey.

The experience ratings range from A+ (excellent) to F- (unsatisfactory) and were assigned using the method outlined elsewhere.

\* These questions were reversed such that a lower per cent is better.

- College response was ≥ 10 per cent **more** favourable than the sample average
- Neither more or less likely to answer affirmatively than the average
- College response was ≥ 10 per cent **less** favourable than the sample average

## GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

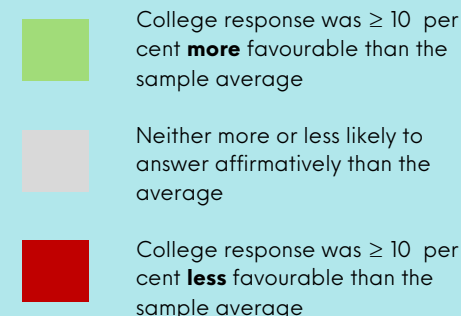
- ANZCA** Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
- ACEM** Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
- RACGP** Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- ACRRM** Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
- CICM** College of Intensive Care Medicine
- RANZCOG** Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- RCPA** Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
- RACP** Royal Australasian College of Physicians
- RANZCP** Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
- RANZCR** Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists
- RACS** Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

Table 2: 2021 v 2023 Specialist trainee experience comparison

QUESTIONS	2021	2023	CHANGE	ANZCA	ACEM	RACGP	CICM	RANZCOG	RCPA	RACP	RANZCP	RANZCR	ACRRM	RACS
<b>COMMUNICATION &amp; ENGAGEMENT</b>														
My College clearly communicates changes to my training program	69%	67%	-2%											
I know who to contact at the College about my training program	74%	76%	2%											
The College seeks my views on the training program	50%	50%	0%											
I am represented by doctors in training on the College training/education committees	64%	63%	-1%											
The College provides me with access to mental health support services	50%	48%	-2%											
<b>EXAMINATION &amp; ASSESSMENT</b>														
The exams always reflected the College training curriculum	67%	65%	-2%											
The College always provided accurate and appropriate information about exams	70%	71%	1%											
I received useful feedback about my performance in the exams	34%	38%	4%											
The feedback was timely	39%	43%	4%											
I received support from my College when needed	44%	48%	4%											
<b>SUPERVISION &amp; TEACHING</b>														
I have access to protected study time/leave	69%	70%	1%											
My job responsibilities do not prevent from meeting training requirements	63%	61%	-2%											
<b>WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT &amp; CULTURE</b>														
I have a good work/life balance	63%	63%	0%											
I am confident that I would raise concerns about bullying/harassment/discrimination	74%	77%	3%											
Working unpaid overtime impacts my wellbeing sometimes/never	80%	81%	1%											
You never/sometimes get paid for the unrostered overtime*	50%	39%	-11%											
There are safe mechanisms for raising training/wellbeing concerns with the College	51%	52%	1%											
I have to compete with other doctors for access to opportunities*	44%	43%	-1%											

This table compares the proportion of respondents answering affirmatively between the 2021 and 2023 Medical Training Survey.

\* These questions were reversed such that a lower % is better



#### GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

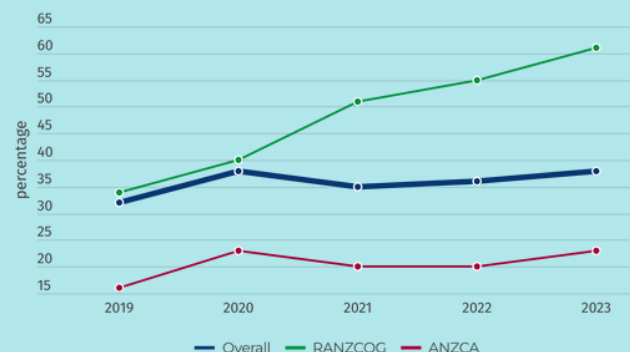
**ANZCA** Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists  
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**RACS** Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

These graphs highlight longitudinal trainee experiences collected since the Medical Training Survey began in 2019 related to: usefulness and timeliness of exam feedback, access to mental health support from the college, and whether the college seeks trainees views on the training program.

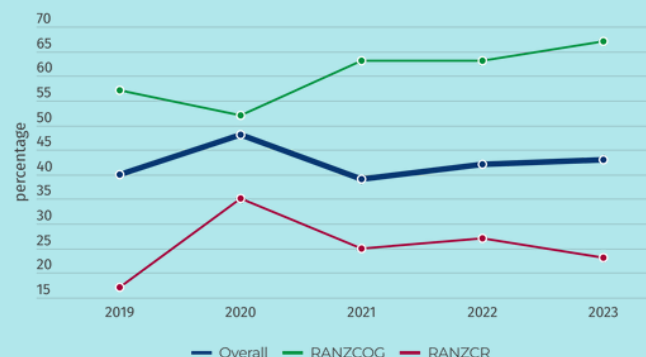
Each graph shows the college average (blue), the highest-rated or most improved college (green), and the lowest-rated college (red).

Longitudinal trainee responses for each college and question explored in tables 1 and 2 of the 2023 AMA STHC are available as [online interactive graphs](#).

**I received useful feedback about my performance in the exams**



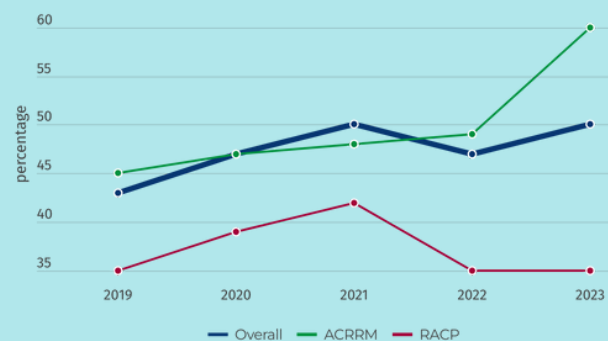
**The feedback was timely**



Since 2019, **on average there has been little improvement** on both the **usefulness** and **timeliness** of exam feedback.

Useful and timely exam feedback is **essential to trainee wellbeing** and to **support progression through training** in a timely manner.

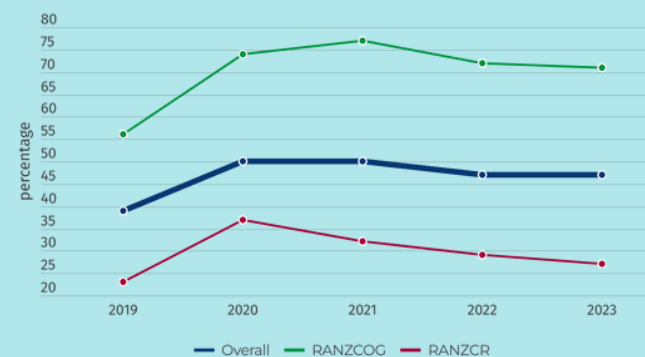
**The college seeks my views on the training program**



On average, only half of specialist trainees felt their college sought their views on the training program. This was a marginal improvement since 2019.

Trainee feedback should be valued and sought after to improve the training program and ensure it is fit for purpose.

**The college provides me with access to mental health support services**



The data in this graph highlight the wide variance in mental health support services offered between different colleges.

On average, less than 50 per cent of trainees are provided mental health support through their college.

## Disclaimer

This publication has been produced as a service to AMA members. Although every care has been taken to ensure its accuracy, it can in no way be regarded as a substitute for professional legal or financial advice, and no responsibility is accepted for any errors or omissions. The AMA does not warrant the accuracy or currency of any information in this publication. The Australian Medical Association Limited disclaims liability for all loss, damage, or injury, financial or otherwise, suffered by any persons acting upon or relying on this publication or the information contained in it, whether resulting from its negligence or from the negligence of employees, agents, or advisers, or from any cause whatsoever.

Comparison of results among specialities must be made with caution, as the survey did not involve a probabilistic sampling frame, but instead was open to all doctors in training in Australia, achieving a response rate of 54.5 per cent (in 2023). Further, as doctors were not randomly allocated to specialist colleges, differences in attitudes and expectations could not be controlled for. Other important covariables (i.e. age, training level, domestic/international medical training) were also not controlled for. These issues introduce biases into the results which cannot be accounted for. Thus, all differences among trainee experiences should be interpreted as specific only to survey respondents and must not be interpreted as representative of the experiences of all doctors in training in Australia.

Specialist medical colleges with low response rates in the Medical Training Survey were not included in the 2023 AMA STHC due to the statistical rigor of the data and trainee privacy (where responses could not be pooled due to low response rates).

All analyses were undertaken by an independent statistician.

## Methods

**Table 1:** this table compares the proportion of respondents answering affirmatively to the selected questions from the 2023 Medical Training Survey. The green and red panels in the table indicate that the responses of the participants of the relevant college rated the question  $\geq 10$  per cent more favourable and less favourable, respectively.

Grey panels in the table indicate the responses of participants of the relative college were neither more or less likely to answer affirmatively than the average response.

The letter ratings correspond to decrements of 5 per cent between 100 per cent and 0 per cent, such that:

- A+ represents a score falling between 95 per cent and 100 per cent.
- A represents 90-95 per cent.
- D or lower, represents a score of 50 per cent or less.
- F-, the lowest rating, represents a score of 15 per cent or less.

**Table 2:** this table compares the proportion of respondents answering affirmatively to the selected questions between the 2021 and 2023 Medical Training Survey.

The green and red panels indicate that the responses of the participants of the relevant college rated the question  $\geq 10$  per cent more favourable and less favourable, respectively, in 2023 compared with the same college in 2021.

Grey panels in the table indicate the responses of participants of the relative college were neither more or less likely to answer affirmatively than the average response.

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