



ANZCA

FPM

President and CEO

Australian and New Zealand
College of Anaesthetists

19 May 2025

To: Dr David Rosengren
Director General, Queensland Health
DG_Correspondence@health.qld.gov.au

Dear Dr Rosengren,

RE: Queensland Anaesthesia advanced training bottlenecks

We are writing to you with recommendations on anaesthesia training in Queensland and bottlenecks that limit the number of trainees and therefore the number of qualified specialist anaesthetists working in the state.

Executive summary

Recommendation: Queensland Health funds and implements an extra 17 training positions per year across Queensland, from 2026.

The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA or college) and the Queensland Directors of Anaesthesia Group have been working together to ensure a clear pathway for Queensland trainees and to identify and understand the full extent of anaesthesia advanced training bottleneck issues that have recently been flagged and will continue to magnify in coming years.

As part of specialty training, anaesthetic registrars need to rotate through tertiary hospitals to gain experience in advanced anaesthetic skills, including exposure to subspecialties such as neurosurgery and cardiothoracic surgery.

These issues are relevant to the following Queensland tertiary hospitals - Princess Alexandra Hospital, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, The Prince Charles Hospital, and Townsville University Hospital. The number of training positions in these hospitals are limited, which has the potential to create barriers to anaesthetic trainees completing training in a timely manner.

In order to offset the projected deficit of training positions and the adverse impact on the training pipeline ANZCA recommends an extra 17 training positions are implemented across Queensland, from 2026.

As the number of training numbers for specialist anaesthetists in Australia are limited by the state and territory health service allocation of registrar positions within anaesthesia training departments, ANZCA would like to work with Queensland Health to agree and implement increased advanced training positions to meet the healthcare needs of the people of Queensland. ANZCA has the capacity to train additional anaesthesia trainees if the number of training positions in hospitals are increased.

Detailed information

Anaesthesia training in Queensland

ANZCA is one of the largest medical colleges across Australia and New Zealand - responsible for the postgraduate training programs of anaesthetists and specialist pain medicine physicians. Setting and fostering the highest standards of clinical practice, safety and high-quality patient care in anaesthesia, perioperative medicine and pain medicine is at the heart of everything we do.

The college has been working with the Queensland Directors of Anaesthesia Group to identify and understand the full extent of Anaesthesia advanced training bottleneck issues that have recently been flagged and will continue to magnify in coming years. We would like to draw your attention to the issues impacting the ultimate success of the Queensland Anaesthesia training program, the training experience of Queensland trainees and ultimately impacting the Queensland healthcare system generally.

Neuroanaesthesia and cardiothoracic anaesthesia advanced training bottlenecks

The ANZCA anaesthesia training program consists of five years' supervised training - two years of introductory and basic training; two years of advanced training; and one year of provisional fellowship training.

As at October 2024 there were around 380 ANZCA anaesthesia trainees in 23 accredited training sites across Queensland. In Queensland, the Queensland Anaesthetic Rotational Training Scheme (QARTS) administers the selection, placement and provides advice to employing organisations of anaesthesia training registrars in Queensland hospitals through four rotations – Central, Southern, Northern and Gold Coast. This is done in conjunction with Queensland Health and the Queensland Directors of Anaesthesia Group in accredited training hospitals.

For trainees who complete all of their training with QARTS, every effort will be made to ensure access to hospitals that provide training in all ANZCA specialised study units (SSUs) including paediatric anaesthesia, obstetric anaesthesia, neuroanaesthesia, cardiothoracic anaesthesia and intensive care medicine. Training in these SSUs is an important part of training specialist anaesthetists for working in Australian hospitals.

Over a number of years, Queensland public hospitals have seen a significant increase in activity – on average a 2.5% annual increase in separations since 2018-19, the second highest state/territory in the country, with the national average being only 1%.¹ This activity sees anaesthetics involved in approximately 30% of this patient activity. During that time in some Queensland tertiary hospitals, anaesthetic consultant FTE has generally increased, however registrar positions have not. With some hospitals even advising that funding for registrar positions have been cut or registrar rotations have decreased in length by half to facilitate additional trainees through relevant SSUs (which sometimes still results in a bottleneck for training). This has led to significant inefficiencies in workflow and unfortunate lost opportunities for teaching and training. In addition, current registrar feedback is poor in relation to workload, on call, leave availability and other job satisfaction factors. But better than NSW.

These issues are relevant to the following Queensland tertiary hospitals - Princess Alexandra Hospital, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, The Prince Charles Hospital, and Townsville University Hospital.

¹ Table 2.2, *AiHW Admitted patient care 2022-23: How much activity was there?* Accessed from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/myhospitals/intersection/activity/apc>

This registrar position stagnation, funding cut or training length adjustment may also result in prolonged advanced training time for some trainees due to limitations in access to specific volume of practice (VOP) requirements, especially neurosurgery and cardiothoracic surgery. Comprehensive scheme positions are limited by the number of available training posts and hospital roadblocks to access these subspecialty areas. While these are subspecialty, knowledge of these areas is essential for high quality generalist anaesthesia practice.

The flow-on impact of this is trainees are taking longer to work in, and service the Queensland health system as specialists. Further training positions in these subspecialty areas would allow more trainees to complete their training and an overall increase in future qualified specialist anaesthetist workforce numbers. This needs to be matched to the predicted future workforce requirements, building the pipeline of anaesthetic trainees and then specialists. We understand there is an ongoing need for qualified anaesthetists across Queensland, particularly with a view to significant hospital expansions planned over the next 5 to 10 years.

Addressing bottlenecks

ANZCA and the Queensland Directors of Anaesthesia Group have been working together to ensure a clear pathway for Queensland trainees to complete their VOP and to provide the stability and assurances they need to engage with the anaesthesia training program. This includes a need to increase registrar positions to facilitate advanced training for anaesthetic trainees and help address worsening training bottlenecks from 2026. The number of required registrar positions per hospital are summarised below.

QLD Hospital	QARTS rotation	Accreditation length	Registrars required to offset projected deficit	Area of bottleneck
Princess Alexandra Hospital	Southern, Central	156 weeks	4 to 5	Cardiothoracics, neurosurgery
Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital	Central	156 weeks	5	Neurosurgery
The Prince Charles Hospital	Central, Southern	52 weeks	3	Cardiothoracics
Townsville University Hospital (Satellite: Mater Private Hospital (Townsville))	Northern	156 weeks	3 to 4	Cardiothoracics Neurosurgery
Queensland total			17	

Importantly ANZCA accredits anaesthetic departments for training, *not* the number of training positions in a particular hospital. Further, unlike some other specialties, notably orthopaedic surgery, there are no unaccredited anaesthesia positions that could be converted to accredited training positions.

As the number of training numbers for specialist anaesthetists in Australia are limited by the state and territory health service allocation of registrar positions within anaesthesia training departments, we would like to work with you to implement increased advanced training positions in Queensland. ANZCA has the capacity to train additional anaesthesia trainees if the number of training positions in hospitals were increased.

To offset the projected deficit of training positions ANZCA and the Queensland Directors of Anaesthesia Group recommend an extra 17 training positions are implemented across Queensland, from 2026.

It should be noted that these extra positions would account for the current projected training numbers however does not account for any additional or unforeseen future growth in the number of anaesthetic trainees in Queensland. Increased demand may come from future expansion of health facilities within Queensland, unaccounted growing demand and population, and government budget/service commitments, which would further impact access to specialty anaesthesia training

We look forward to working closely with Queensland Health to help deliver high quality anaesthesia care to the people of Queensland; and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your staff to discuss solutions to these Anaesthesia advanced training bottlenecks and trainee rotational positions.

If you have any queries in relation to this letter please contact Dr Yasmin Whately, ANZCA Queensland Education Officer on yasmin.whately2@health.qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,



Professor David Story
President



Mr Nigel Fidgeon
Chief Executive Officer