



Trainee in Difficulty Policy

Purpose and Scope

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) is committed to providing a training support structure that is fair, consistent, transparent and robust.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on the identification, support and management of trainees who encounter difficulties during their training. This policy sets out what 'in difficulty' means in the context of RANZCOG training. It defines the principles to be employed by the trainee, the supervisor and the college when a difficulty is identified, and the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved.

This policy applies to all RANZCOG trainees and Specialist International Medical Graduates (SIMGs) on the pathway to Fellowship.

1. Definition of a Trainee in Difficulty

A trainee in difficulty is a trainee who is not making the expected progress in meeting training or assessment requirements, not performing in line with expected standards, or is experiencing difficulties in relation to physical or mental health that are impeding their progress and ability to undertake their training program. A trainee may experience difficulties relating to:

- Clinical performance – knowledge, skills and professional behaviour
- Examination performance
- Physical and mental health issues
- Environmental/organisational issues – workplace culture, lack of support, lack of appropriate clinical management or resources, trainee/supervisor relationship difficulties

This policy does not apply to those situations where a trainee is exhibiting notifiable conduct. In these circumstances, the matter should be referred to the relevant registration authority, either the Medical Board of Australia (MBA) or the Medical Council of New Zealand (MCNZ).

2. Principles for Supporting Trainees in Difficulty

The Trainee in Difficulty Policy is based on the following principles:

- **Patient and trainee safety take precedence over all other considerations** – employers and clinicians are bound by mandatory notification requirements to the MBA or MCNZ as appropriate. Reportable behaviours are dealt with directly by the MBA or MCNZ and not by the College.
- **Early intervention** - the difficulty is identified as early as possible, with appropriate and timely intervention to maximise the opportunity for resolution.
- **Local training setting support wherever possible** – trainees and supervisors are best placed to negotiate and implement individually tailored support strategies. Involvement of consultant colleagues and peers is encouraged, particularly if the difficulty relates to the training setting and/or relationships within the setting. The appointment of a mentor may be appropriate.
- **Support is centred on educational progress and professional development** towards meeting the training program requirements.
- **The process is fair and transparent**, and accessible by all parties involved to assist with the resolution of training difficulties.
- **Transfer of important educational information** – to facilitate ongoing support and information about a trainee's educational progress and performance. Such information and existing support arrangements can be transferred between College supervisors and from one training rotation to the next. College staff may facilitate the transfer of relevant educational information.

- **Support is focused and centred on solutions** – appropriate support and guidance is provided to a trainee in difficulty and is centred on solutions within available resources. The trainee is an active participant throughout the process.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 Trainees

Trainees play a key role in managing and directing their own learning within the RANZCOG training programs. Trainees have a responsibility to:

- Actively seek and receive feedback on their performance and progress in training.
- Speak to their Training Supervisor or Mentor if they are aware of an issue impacting on their ability to progress.
- Actively participate in any support processes put in place, including any learning development plans, if required, to address identified difficulties.
- Seek professional health advice if needed.
- Seek confidential advice from the relevant Committee Chair or representative on the Trainees' Committee.
- Notify their employer regarding any workplace difficulties. Be aware of and refer to their employer's workplace policies. Issues related to employment and the management of these are the responsibility of the employer and not the College.
- Attempt to resolve the difficulty in the training setting, in collaboration with their Training Supervisor and/or ITP Coordinator before notifying the relevant Committee Chair.
- Notify the relevant Regional Office about any unresolved training setting or supervision difficulties and/or the Manager of Training Services/Director of Education & Training at College House.

3.2 Training Supervisors

Training Supervisors have responsibilities to both the College and the trainee's employer. Supervisors have a responsibility to:

- Provide frequent and constructive feedback to the trainee regarding their performance and progress in training.
- Identify, assess, support and manage trainees who encounter difficulty in training, including the development of learning plans if required.
- Maintain confidential records of any relevant incidents or conversations with the trainee.
- Notify the relevant ITP Coordinator and/or Committee Chair where an educational difficulty needs to be reviewed and further monitored.
- Be aware of and refer to their employer's workplace policies. Notify the employer regarding any workplace difficulties that have been identified. Issues related to employment and the management of these are the responsibility of the employer and not the College.
- Recommend the trainee contact the training site's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for confidential, fully subsidised external professional counselling and support if needed.
- Ensure that ongoing support is delivered to the trainee where a trainee moves training sites. This includes the handover and implementation of an existing Learning Development Plan.
- Notify the relevant Committee Chair about any unresolved training setting or supervision difficulties.
- Ensure the appropriate workplace policies are adhered to and involve Human Resources personnel when required.
- Immediately notify the senior management of the employing institute if they become aware of serious mental health or other issues potentially affecting the safety of the trainee, patients or others.
- Mandatory report where necessary in accordance with Medical Registration Authority and other legal requirements, where there is a concern for risk to patient safety.

At any stage, Training Supervisors may communicate directly and confidentially with the relevant Committee Chair who may then advise on additional support that could be provided, including further escalation if considered necessary.

3.3 Training/Accreditation Chair and Committees

The Training/Accreditation Chairs and Committees play an important role in assisting the trainee and their Training Supervisor to address and resolve, if possible, the training or supervision issue. Their role is to:

- Actively monitor trainee progression, supervision and training setting issues within and across the ITP or relevant region or cohort to improve training quality.
- Provide advice, support and management oversight to Training Supervisors who are supporting trainees in difficulty.
- Provide advice, support and the offer of a mentor as per the RANZCOG Mentoring Policy, if this has not already been suggested to a trainee who is experiencing difficulties.
- Assess the individual trainee's suitability for the RANZCOG Training Program and, where appropriate, discuss vocational options for the trainee.
- Provide advice and guidance to the relevant Committee Chair to resolve if necessary, a trainee-supervisor relationship issue.
- Ensure the appropriate workplace policies are adhered to and involve Human Resources personnel when required.
- Advise and support supervisors to report a trainee to the relevant Medical Registration Authority where there are concerns about patient safety.

Where support measures have been applied and issues remain unresolved, the Chair of the RANZCOG Training Accreditation Committee and the Director of Education and Training should be notified.

3.4 Employers

Employers have industrial obligations and responsibilities and must also meet the College's Hospital Accreditation Standards for the relevant training program. This includes:

- Management of all employment issues, including performance management and disciplinary matters in a timely, fair and objective way. Such matters may include, but are not limited to workplace bullying, harassment and discrimination, sexual misconduct, drug and alcohol abuse, breaches of workplace policies, unacceptable standard of work that may affect patient safety, work hours and conditions.
- Meeting the College's Hospital Accreditation Standards for the relevant program regarding the provision of a quality environment for RANZCOG training. The College will endeavour to work collaboratively with employers where a difficulty is both an employment issue and a training difficulty.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

This policy and the impact on outcomes of a trainee's progress following the support processes outlined will be monitored and evaluated by the College's Education and Training Committees.

5. Related RANZCOG Documents

- Guidelines on Supporting Trainees in Difficulty
- Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Prejudicial Relationships Policy
- Examiner Roles and Responsibilities
- Release of Examination Results
- Code of Conduct

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