

Education Research Grant program 2021

RACGP application guide



Education Research Grant program 2021: RACGP application guide

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and seas on which we work and live, and pay our respects to Elders, past, present and future.

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Overview

The Education Research Grant (ERG) program aims to continue building research capacity in medical education and training with a specific focus on education improvement. The overarching objective is to develop evidence-based education initiatives that increase training capacity and improve educational outcomes in Australian general practice training. Via a competitive process, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) awards up to eight grants annually to Regional Training Organisations (RTOs) that partner with academic institutions.

Further information and updates on the application process are available on the [RACGP ERG program 2021 website](#).

RACGP contact details and support

For additional information and enquiries, please email the Research Team Coordinator, Tricia Quek, at gpedresearch@racgp.org.au or telephone 03 8699 0584.

Purpose

The ERG program provides an opportunity for RTOs to establish, develop and maintain research partnerships with primary healthcare academic institutions.

The overarching aims of the ERG program are to:

- produce high-quality research evidence regarding general practice education in Australia
- develop research skills of RTO staff, medical educators, general practice registrars, general practice supervisors and training practices, and promote a culture of academic critique and use of evidence in general practice training
- facilitate collaboration between RTOs, training practices and universities
- promote the dissemination of Australian general practice education research outcomes in Australia to ensure this research is used in general practice training programs.

How does the ERG program work?

Funding of up to \$150,000 will be provided to successful research teams to undertake research to improve general practice medical education training. The funded research period runs for one year. Successful 2021 ERG projects are funded to commence on 1 January 2021 and conclude on 31 December 2021.

The RACGP will facilitate a number of research support activities for grant holders during the ERG research year to ensure the attainment of program objectives. The RACGP expects that two members of each ERG research team will participate in these activities, and at least one delegate attending the support activity must be an RTO employee. Activities include face-to-face workshops, webinars and conference attendance. All costs associated with attending these activities will be funded by the RACGP.

The RACGP expects that grant holders will disseminate and publish their project findings during and beyond the funded research period. Most commonly this is done through conference presentations, or publishing findings in a peer-reviewed academic journal or a report accessible on the RTO's website. The RACGP will remain in contact with the RTO project lead beyond the research funded period to assist with results dissemination through RACGP media and communications channels.

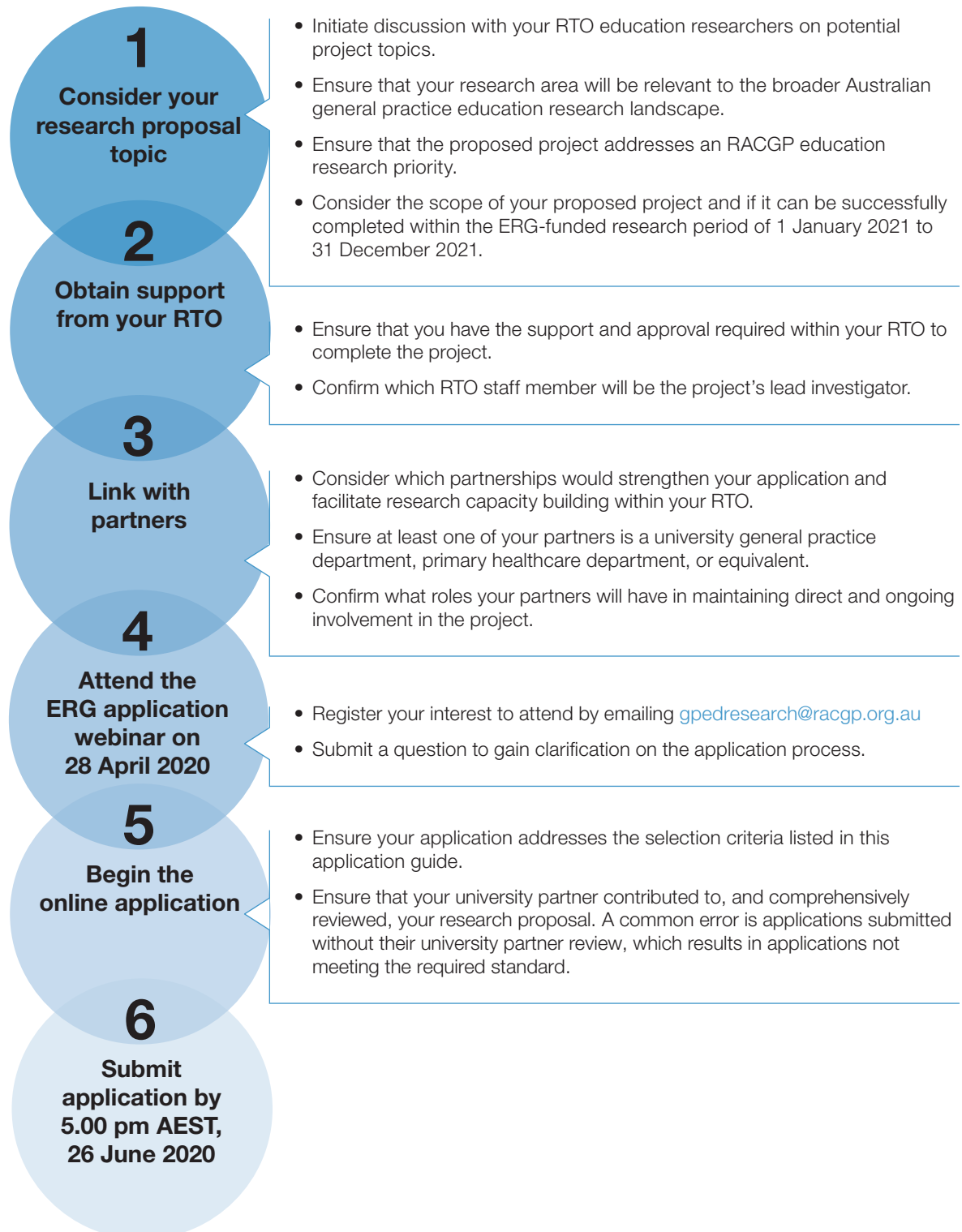
ERG application form

The application submission period for the ERG 2021 round is from 4 May 2020 to 26 June 2020. RTOs must submit applications online via the Smarty Grants portal link on the ERG website. A link to the form and to the Smarty Grants submission portal will be available on the [RACGP website](#) during the submission period.

Please note that each project application through the online portal must be managed by a single team member who has the authority from the RTO to submit the application. As the grant application requires collaboration between multiple stakeholders, interested RTOs will be sent a Microsoft Word version of the application form at the beginning of the application period. This will allow applicants to distribute the form to their teams for input, then a nominated team member can transpose the collated submission content into the online form.

The RACGP will conduct an application webinar on 28 April 2020 to answer queries about the application process and selection criteria. Applicants are encouraged to submit any questions they would like answered prior to the webinar via email to gpedresearch@racgp.org.au

Application process



Selection criteria

For the 2021 grant round, the RACGP has revised this application guide and application form so that both contain more information regarding the standard required by the Academic Assessment Panel (AAP). We encourage applicants to refer to this guide when completing the application form.

Applicants with less research experience are encouraged to submit an application and to contact the RACGP if they require assistance in developing their research proposal or have any questions regarding obtaining ethics approval for their project.

The RACGP receives more applications than grants available, so RTOs are encouraged to allow plenty of time to prepare the application. The criteria that the AAP uses to assess applications is included in this application guide.

Criterion 1 – Eligibility

The proposal must be an RTO-led project with a clear academic institution partnership.

The application must demonstrate:

- that an RTO will actively lead the research project
- how the university's general practice department, primary healthcare department or equivalent will be involved directly in the project.

The AAP expects the applicant to have had meaningful engagement with a suitable academic partner throughout the research project planning and development. Applicants should understand that the ERG program is designed to not only build RTO research capacity, but to also foster collaborative relationships with universities. Meaningful collaboration with your academic partner should also be reflected with sufficient funding allocated in the budget, as well as their role in the governance framework.

In addition to the above partnership with a department of general practice, primary healthcare or equivalent, academic partnerships with other university departments are welcomed.

Criterion 2 – Meets ERG program objectives

The application must demonstrate:

- how the proposal builds on, or questions, existing academic national and international literature, and knowledge and assumptions about Australian general practice training
- how it is relevant to national general practice training
- that it addresses a general practice training policy research priority ([Appendix A](#))
- that it is feasible to complete the project within the time available
- a commitment by the RTO and their research partners to disseminate the results and implications for training, including publishing in peer-reviewed journals
- how the research project will develop research capacity within the RTO; if external contractors or research partners will be performing significant roles in the research project, applicants should explain how their input will translate to increasing research capacity within the RTO.

Proposed research topics should focus on issues beyond assessing participant perceptions of a tool or intervention.

In addition to the Criterion 2 objectives, particular topics have been identified as key research priorities by the RACGP. Research outcomes that address these topics will directly support and inform current RACGP education program and policy development. The topics have been mapped to the existing Department of Health general practice training policy research priorities in Table 1. Applicants will need to demonstrate how their proposal links to the RACGP education research priorities. For further details of how RACGP education research priorities link to the national general practice training policy research priorities, refer to [Appendix A](#).

The RACGP education research priority topics are as follows.

- **Exploring tools for in-training and progressive assessment** – examining both formative assessment (to improve trainee performance) and summative assessment (to develop tools for examination purposes).
- **Strategies to promote rural generalism** – examining international perspectives and models that will lead to promotion strategies of rural generalism in the Australian general practice landscape.
- **Exploring predictive ability of Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) Program selection modalities** – assessing how current assessments predict difficulties in practice or training (eg poor communication and teamwork, unsatisfactory professional conduct or duty of care).
- **Capturing learning throughout the GP's professional lifespan (pre-vocational to post-Fellowship)** – examining international perspectives and proposing portfolio applications for the Australian general practice landscape.
- **Increasing general practice supervisor and medical educator workforce and sustainability** – improving understanding of medical educator and general practice supervisor characteristics that will lead directly to increased recruitment, retention and training of general practitioners (GPs) for these roles.
- **Pre-vocational assessment and preparing candidates for success in the AGPT Program** – how to assess a registrar to ensure they have acquired sufficient skills from hospital training time before commencing GPT1.
- **Enhancing research capacity in general practice** – how to identify and develop opportunities to increase research capacity in GPs to enable them to routinely use these skills in clinical work.

Table 1. Mapping RACGP research priorities to general practice training policy research priorities

RACGP research priorities	Department of Health general practice training policy research priorities				
	Competency and its measurement in general practice training	Educational quality and its measurements	General practice training: Workforce and sustainability	Outcomes of training	Workplace training: Optimising the experience
Exploring tools for in-training and progressive assessment	X			X	X
Strategies to promote rural generalism			X		X
Exploring predictive ability of AGPT Program selection modalities	X	X		X	
Capturing learning throughout the GP's professional lifespan	X	X		X	X
Increasing general practice supervisor and medical educator workforce and sustainability			X		X
Pre-vocational assessment and preparing candidates for success in the AGPT Program	X			X	
Enhancing research capacity in general practice			X		

AGPT, Australian General Practice Training; GP, general practitioner; RACGP, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

Criterion 3 – Research proposal

The AAP will assess if the applicant has clearly and adequately addressed the following components of their research proposal:

- research goal/s and research question/s
- specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound targeted objectives with defined key performance indicators
- background and purpose for the project supported by a literature review and a review of current practice (environmental scan) specific to the project topic
- research design and method that addresses the research question
- consideration of ethical issues that may arise from the project and how they may be mitigated
- collaboration
- project governance and management
- project budget.

Guide to writing a successful research proposal

To assist applicants with submitting a successful ERG research proposal we have included the following suggestions for each component assessed by the AAP.

Writing style

Applicants should note that the writing style for an ERG application should be suitable for the diverse members of the assessment panel, and should be aimed towards an audience that is educated but may not be trained in research or expert in medical education content.

Research aim and research question/s

The application should have a clear and concise project aim and research question/s. The question/s are normally refined following the literature review and during the research process, but should be stated at the beginning of a proposal.

Research objectives

Applicants should ensure that the research objectives align with the research questions and the proposed methodology. Research objectives should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. They should have defined key performance indicators. Throughout the term, successful applicants will be required to report on progression towards the achievement of research objectives. Please note that research objectives are not project tasks.

Research objectives should:

- link to the research question
- define a specific aim of the study and identify an outcome measure (description, definition, measurement etc)

Background, purpose and critical appraisal of the literature

Explain the motivation for the research. How was the gap in knowledge identified?

For the literature search and appraisal:

- Identify literature specific to the research topic. Include a statement of the key words used in your literature search.
- Critically appraise the literature and identify valuable contributions to the field. Start with a broad perspective, narrowing down to the specific focus of the proposed study. Identify study limitations and gaps in the literature that you hope to address with your research.
- Consider if the literature review of your research topic would benefit from an international perspective. If there is limited literature currently available in the medical education environment, consider parallels with education and training in other professions. This could add valuable depth to your review.

- Review current practice (ie conduct environmental scan) specific to the research topic.
- Provide a reference list.

A word limit applies to the literature review and environmental scan in the application. Applicants should be aware that a concise literature review is required for publication, so the ability to summarise relevant information on the form is part of the assessment process. Use referencing to direct the reviewer to further information.

Research design and method

Applicants must outline the methods proposed and explain how the design is appropriate to answer the research question. Where the research links to other projects – either existing or proposed – clearly explain the relationship and boundaries. How will your research add to the project, or how will it differ?

Include justifications for:

- choice of design
- number of participants
- sample size calculations, and so on.

If your project refers to previously developed tools, rubrics or pilot data, please ensure that these are adequately described and also uploaded with your application.

Ethical considerations

Applicants must demonstrate an understanding of the ethical issues that may arise from the project and measures to mitigate any risks. Include a statement regarding the ethical issues you have identified, and how you will address each of these. Applicants must provide full details to indicate that the ethical issues have been adequately considered. It is not sufficient to say that an ethics committee has already approved the project.

Applicants with projects that include direct observation of registrar consultations are advised to consider and mitigate the risks to registrars, practices, patients and the researchers. It is important to consider the registrars' perspectives and vulnerabilities. These may include concerns and/or distress in relation to being observed during patient care provision, and 'revealing' their knowledge gaps and learning needs. Registrars may be concerned that any error or gaps may have negative consequences for them. The researchers also need to plan how to manage any medical error or significant incompetence that comes to light during the research. Applicants should consider how to ensure patient safety, and any other risks, and discuss realistic mitigation strategies.

It is the responsibility of the lead investigator to ensure the conduct of the project complies with all Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements. We encourage applicants to liaise with an HREC before submitting their application, especially in relation to the level of risk involved.

The process of ethical review with any HREC often takes longer than anticipated, so be sure to allow adequate time in the work plan. Applicants may apply to the RACGP National Research and Evaluation Ethics Committee (NREEC) or to a university HREC for approval of their research.

In regard to participant recruitment, be sure to consider:

- the process of obtaining consent, especially where a power imbalance may exist

- if there is involvement of vulnerable groups – in the ERG context this could be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultural and linguistically diverse populations, international medical graduates or trainees
- how data and privacy is protected
- appropriate use of reimbursements.

The standard rate of reimbursement provided directly to GPs or general practice registrar participants is approximately \$125 per hour; however, the RACGP strongly advises researchers to also consider compensating practices for loss of staff time where appropriate.

For further information, refer to the National Health and Medical Research Council's [National statement on ethical conduct in human research](#).

Collaboration

As one of the overarching aims of the ERG program is to facilitate collaboration between RTOs, the RACGP strongly encourages RTOs to consider partnering with other RTOs on ERG projects. This enables comparisons and facilitates research mentoring. RTOs are encouraged to consider engaging former academic registrars in the research project where this is appropriate.

As per the eligibility criteria, the RTO must partner with a general practice or primary healthcare department within a recognised academic institution. The university partner must have direct and ongoing involvement in the project and provide substantial input into the application, including peer review.

RTOs may also collaborate with other relevant organisations; however, the RTO must have a substantial role in research design, reporting and dissemination. The application form asks for a description of how the collaboration will build research capacity within the RTO.

Project governance and management

Applications will need to demonstrate a clear project governance structure and identify to whom the project team will report within the RTO. There should be a clear delineation between members and roles for governance, advisory and research.

As ERGs are awarded to RTOs, the RTO must nominate an RTO staff member to be responsible for liaison with the RACGP regarding grantee obligations, including reporting. RTOs must inform the RACGP of any delegation of these obligations.

- Clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of the project team. Designate a lead investigator and a project manager; these roles are permitted to be allocated to one person.
- Clearly identify milestones and timelines, identify risks with mitigation strategies and contingency plans.
- You must ensure that your timelines fit within the reporting requirements for the grant – refer to the [Administration schedule](#).

Outcomes and results dissemination

Now that you have outlined your research aims and how the project will add new knowledge to the field, consider the deliverables or outcomes that will be generated by your project. Additionally, consider how your project deliverables or outcomes could be extrapolated to become applicable to other RTOs or the AGPT Program – a key aim of the ERGs.

Results dissemination should be given strong consideration during the project planning stage. Think of who will be your target audience, what will be the key messages you want to convey and how you will wish to convey them. Avenues for results dissemination include publishing in a scientific journal, presenting at an industry conference and meeting with your organisation's key policymakers.

In the final 1–2 months of the project, consider increasing the funded hours of one of your team members and begin a first draft of your manuscript/s. The team member could be the project manager, research officer or university partner.

Project budget

Provide a project budget that is consistent with the funding inclusions and exclusions. The RACGP will consider funding up to \$150,000 (excluding GST) for each successful applicant. Applicants must ensure they can complete the project within the proposed budget. If you have funding from another source, the RACGP will ask you to identify this and explain how you will use each contribution.

To ensure favourable consideration as a ground-up, RTO-driven ERG project, any associated administrative costs should be included at an appropriate RTO level.

Be sure to include:

- full details to justify each expense
- allowance for salaries and consultants, specifying the full-time equivalent (FTE) for each role, or the total hours if it is a short-term contractor role, and ensure that this is consistent with information provided in the roles and responsibilities table.

Publication costs may be included, provided the expense is projected to be incurred before financial grant reconciliation.

The ERGs will only provide funding for costs incurred during the funding period, 1 January – 31 December 2021. The AAP will only approve funding applications that meet the selection criteria and application requirements listed below. The project's budget total cannot be changed once it has been approved by the AAP.

Successful grant holders may request an amendment to re-allocate their funds to new or existing line items of the approved budget by writing to gpedresearch@racgp.org.au during the grant period. Amendments must include only items that are consistent with the funding inclusions list.

Funding inclusions:

- salaries for staff undertaking the project (list staffing requirements as percentage of FTE); for short-term contractors, list total hours
- travel and meeting costs
- data analysis and data transcriptions
- reasonable recruitment incentives – refer to the guidance provided under the [Ethical considerations section](#)
- items related to dissemination of research findings, including poster printing, conference registration, economy flights and accommodation within Australia.

Please note that the ERGs may be used to cover costs related to conference

attendance that will occur beyond 31 December 2021 as long as the conference registration and related costs have been booked and paid for during the funded research period. Conference-related costs will only be accepted if conference registration has been paid.

Funding exclusions:

- non-specific administrative overheads
- expenses incurred beyond the project funding period
- ongoing costs associated with resource management and maintenance beyond the project completion date
- physical infrastructure/contribution to large capital projects
- subscriptions or memberships
- items related to international conference attendance.

Please note that the RACGP 2021 conference will be held in Auckland, New Zealand. As per the Department of Health funding restrictions to international travel, teams will not be able to use ERG funds to attend this conference.

Applicants must indicate on the RACGP application form if they have also applied for funding for the same project through an Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine ERG. An ERG project may only be funded by one college.

Selection process

Academic Assessment Panel (AAP)

The AAP is a selected group of RACGP and external representatives. The main function of the AAP is to assess the suitability of applications submitted for an ERG. At a minimum, the AAP consists of the following:

- a representative from an organisation with an interest in academic and educational research in general practice and primary care
- the senior academic advisor of the RACGP Education Research Unit who will act as Chair
- one current or former senior medical educator with an academic background from an RTO
- an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person with health research experience
- a representative from the RACGP Expert Committee – Research
- an academic with research experience in medical education and/or health policy.

Assessment process

AAP members individually assess and score each of the ERG applications against the [selection criteria](#). At a meeting of the AAP, panel members discuss their assessments and decide whether an application meets the minimum criteria for the grant. The RACGP will offer up to eight ERGs for 2021. In the event that there are more suitable applications than grants available, the panel will rank the applications based on the panel's scoring of each applicant against the selection criteria.

Outcome

The RACGP will notify all applicants on the outcome of their application as well as provide feedback from the AAP. The decisions of the AAP are final and are not subject to appeal.

Contractual arrangements and funding

Funding agreement

The funding agreement is a contract between the RACGP and the RTO that contains the obligations and responsibilities of both parties, and the funding obligations for the completion of the ERG project.

RTO project teams should ensure they understand their responsibilities before an authorised representative of the RTO signs and returns the funding agreement to the RACGP by the specified date.

RTOs receive funding in three stages:

- 50% of the total funded amount on execution of the funding agreement
- 35% of the total funded amount on receipt and approval of the mid-term report signed by the lead investigator
- 15% of the total funded amount (less unspent funds as per financial reconciliation) on receipt and approval of the completed final report and financial reconciliation signed by the lead investigator.

Resource ownership

Physical resources

Where the RTO procures resources on the basis that they are to be shared between project collaborators, the RTO shall bear responsibility for maintaining the resources and provision of a clear plan for use and access by all relevant training practices.

Data and information

Data and information collected in the course of this project will be the property of the RTO. The RTO must make available results and outcomes, and general information collected (including literature review and environmental scans) for the RACGP's use, in the context of program policy development, research and marketing purposes.

The RACGP–RTO funding agreement for ERGs specifies that the RTO owns the intellectual property (IP) but grants a perpetual licence to the RACGP to use its IP rights. The licence to the RACGP includes a right to sub-license to the Department of Health.

Administration schedule

Webinar for RTOs (register at gpedresearch@racgp.org.au)	28 April 2020
ERG applications open	4 May 2020
ERG applications close	26 June 2020
Offers made to RTOs	13 August 2020
Final outcome letters sent and all funding agreements distributed	14 September 2020
RTO signed funding agreements returned to RACGP	28 September 2020
Commencement of ERG-funded research period	1 January 2021
ERG projects initial progress report due	16 April 2021
ERG projects mid-term report due	12 July 2021
Conclusion of ERG-funded research period	31 December 2021
ERG projects final administrative, research findings and financial reconciliation report due	18 February 2022

Support activities schedule

Note that dates for the support activities are indicative only. The RACGP will provide delegates with a confirmed date and location at least two months prior to each activity. Research teams are expected to nominate at least two delegates to attend each activity, of which one must be an RTO research team member.

Workshop 1	Late November 2020
Webinar 1	Early April 2021
Webinar 2	Late July 2021
Workshop 2	Late October 2021
Conference attendance (to be determined by the RACGP)	TBC

Appendix A: General practice training policy research priorities

1. Competency and its measurement in general practice training

Rationale

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) standards for education and training require demonstration of assessment of competence, prior to the commencement of GPT1 and throughout training. This is not a new expectation; however, it can be difficult within a Regional Training Organisation (RTO) to develop a well validated and reliable tool to measure competence: the concepts are inherently complex, and the cohort size of a single RTO is small.

Research topics

Within this research area, the following topics have been identified:

- exploring tools to assess competency prior to general practice training
- exploring tools to assess competency during general practice training.

Connection to RACGP priorities

- In-training and progressive assessment
- Capturing learning
- Exploring predictive ability of Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) Program selection modalities
- Pre-vocational assessment and preparing candidates for the AGPT Program

2. Educational quality and its measurement

Rationale

Educational quality is difficult to measure – the field of general practice is broad and diverse, registrars enter the program with different skill sets and learning needs, and interventions are layered and complex. Nevertheless, it is essential that we develop tools to measure quality in general practice education and training. Particular focus on areas that are difficult to assess using quantitative outcome measures, such as the Fellowship exams, is of interest.

Research topics

Within this research area, the following topics have been identified:

- current practice in education quality measurement and quality improvement
- educational evaluation.

Connection to RACGP priorities

- Exploring predictive ability of AGPT Program selection modalities
- Capturing learning

3. General practice training: Workforce and sustainability**Rationale**

The medical educator and supervisor workforce across the AGPT Program is diverse and mobile, with many general practitioners (GPs) taking multiple clinical and educational roles. Some research has already been undertaken in this area. However, novel approaches that contribute to an understanding of this complex topic should be considered.

Maldistribution of the medical workforce remains a key issue. An ageing rural medical workforce combined with the increasing trend for medical graduates moving into sub-specialty practice means there has been a decline in generalism that will directly affect rural and remote areas.

Enhancing the research capacity of individual GPs and encouraging the use of research skills in clinical work are essential components to strengthening general practice research and further developing the evidence base for primary care.

Research topics

This priority area has been divided into two sections: understanding the current workforce, and planning the future workforce. Topics within these two areas are set out below.

Understanding current workforce

- Medical educator or general practice supervisor demographics
- Medical educator or general practice supervisor activities and responsibilities
- Medical educator or general practice supervisor work arrangements
- Cultural educator or cultural mentor demographics
- Cultural educator or cultural mentor activities and responsibilities
- Cultural educator or cultural mentor work arrangements

Planning future workforce

- Incentives, motivators and barriers to becoming a medical educator, general practice supervisor, cultural educator or cultural mentor
- Becoming a training practice
- Investigation of alternative models of in-practice training
- Exploring the consultant general practice supervisor model (supervisor funded to oversee multiple learners per session rather than take patient bookings)

Connection to RACGP priorities

- Rural generalism
- Supervisor recruitment, retention and training
- Enhancing general practice research capacity

4. Outcomes of training

Rationale

At the completion of the AGPT Program, some RTOs conduct exit interviews. However, there is currently little follow-up to determine whether training meets the needs of GPs in the early years of Fellowship. There has been some recent discussion among registrars around the need for mentorship in these early years of clinical practice. General practice is also becoming increasingly complex, with a range of higher order skills required.

Skills such as critical thinking, team management and business planning may be 'squeezed out' of the crowded curriculum during general practice training. If we are to adapt the program to meet the needs of recent Fellows, we need to determine what could be incorporated into general practice training, and what could be offered as continuing professional development to early Fellows.

Research topics

Within this research area, the following topics have been identified:

- aspects of training most valuable to future work as a GP
- gaps in training identified through work as a GP
- gaps in clinical experience identified through work as a GP.

Connection to RACGP priorities

- In-training and progressive assessment
- Exploring predictive ability of AGPT Program selection modalities
- Pre-vocational assessment and preparing candidates for the AGPT Program
- Capturing learning

5. Workplace training: Optimising the experience

Rationale

The apprenticeship model of training is historically core to the education of future GPs. However, the experience is rich and diverse, and we know little about how learning occurs in this context. Registrars attend RTO-hosted workshops during their general practice placement, and the workshop content is captured by most training organisations. It is less clear what occurs during 'ad hoc' supervision.

Research topics

Within this research area, the following topics have been identified:

- the need for a core curriculum for general practice supervisors
- professional development for general practice supervisors, medical educators, cultural educators and cultural mentors
- changes in clinical experience as training progresses.

Connection to RACGP priorities

- In-training and progressive assessment
- Rural generalism
- Supervisor recruitment, retention and training
- Capturing learning



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