

RACGP Policy Position Statement

Higher Degree Research during General Practice Training

General practice research underpins clinical practice, and is the foundation of the high-quality, innovative, efficient and effective general practice required to deliver positive patient outcomes for a healthier Australia. Opportunities for academic training will support the development of a future workforce that has the skills necessary to undertake and lead general practice research.

Therefore, the RACGP has developed the position outlined in this paper to develop a pathway enabling GPs in Training (GPiT) to undertake higher degree research (a PhD) alongside training. Under this PhD pathway, we will provide interested GPiT with individualised support to complete a PhD alongside general practice training, promote the opportunity to potential applicants, advocate for funding and improve collaborations with university departments of general practice.

For the purposes of this document, GPiT refers to doctors on the Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) program working towards Fellowship of the RACGP (FRACGP) and/ or Fellowship of Advanced Rural General Practice (FARGP) or the Rural Generalist Fellowship (FRACGP-RG). We are currently scoping how to include doctors on the General Practice Experience and Specialist pathways.

Position

The RACGP will support individual GPiT to complete a PhD alongside general practice training requirements on a case-by-case basis.

Developing individual PhD pathways will ensure the perspective and needs of each GPiT are taken into account. For example, some GPiT may come into general practice training knowing they want to undertake a PhD alongside training. Others may want to undertake an Academic Post Term first to ascertain whether a PhD is the right path for them. Some may be on the general pathway, others undertaking advanced rural skills training under FARGP or FRACGP-RG. Each instance requires different support and policy exemptions at different times in their training journey.

Therefore, support may come in many forms, including linking GPiT with universities to undertake research, flexibility around training requirements and providing advice on funding.

The RACGP recommends GPiT complete GPT1 prior to starting their PhD.

By completing at least one general practice training term before starting a PhD, GPiT ensure they have enough practical skills and knowledge of the field. This provides a sound basis for both their general practice training and the further research they will conduct.

However, if a GPiT wants to undertake a PhD from the beginning of their general practice training, the RACGP will work with the individual to support them. Please note, the relevant RACGP Censor holds the discretion to mandate GPT1 be undertaken full time should they deem this appropriate.

Similarly, if a prospective AGPT applicant has already started their PhD prior to applying to the program, the RACGP will work with the individual to support them to continue their PhD alongside training. The RACGP will support and promote research training and capacity building programs.

As only a small number of GPiTs currently undertake higher degree research, the RACGP will use its unique position in the sector to build interest in research careers and raise awareness of the option to undertake a PhD alongside training.

To ensure continued career opportunities following completion of Fellowship and PhD requirements, the RACGP will advocate for the availability of a funded and visible research career pathway for GPs and an increase in funding for general practice research.

The RACGP endeavours to provide GPiTs with the opportunity to apply for dedicated higher degree research funding

The RACGP is currently advocating for funding to provide financial support to several PhD pathway GPiTs each calendar year. These GPiTs will receive funding to enable them to train minimum part time hours (as per clause 4.g of the [Vocational Training Pathway – Requirements for Fellowship Policy](#)) and work on their PhD research concurrently.

Principles

The principles the RACGP will enforce include:

- Clinical work undertaken alongside a PhD must be at the minimum requirements set for part time training as per the full definition currently in place (please see clause 8 of the [Vocational Training Pathway – Requirements for Fellowship Policy](#)). Similar to the academic posts, PhD pathway candidates can apply to reduce or postpone the minimum required clinical training component for the duration of their PhD. The current minimum clinical training component comprises a 14.5-hour working week, over a minimum of two days per week, of which a minimum of 10.5 hours must be in face-to-face, rostered, patient consultation time undertaking general practice activities. Work periods of less than three consecutive hours, or of less than one month in any one practice, will not be considered.
- Academic Post registrars who intend to complete the Academic Post as part of their PhD can apply to waive the 0.2FTE time fraction currently allocated to teaching and redirect this to PhD work.
- A GPiT on the AGPT program who plans to undertake a PhD may apply for an Academic Post Term. A GPiT can apply for one more Academic Post Term as per clause 6.5 of the [Academic Posts Policy](#), noting the RACGP will give preference to first term applications. Please note, all Academic Post applications are subject to the assessment criteria as per clause 7 of the [AGPT Academic Posts Policy](#).
- For Rural Generalist Fellowship (FRACGP – RG) or FARGP, a GPiT can request for their PhD to be recognised as their Advanced Rural Skill Training (ARST). If approved, the GPiT can access the additional training time provided under the FRACGP – RG and FARGP while working on their PhD. To be recognised as an ARST, the PhD must have relevance to rural general practice and provide research outcomes directly related to this context. The Rural Censor must approve whether a PhD meets these requirements in advance of commencement of the PhD. Preference will be given to GPiTs who have already worked in a rural context prior to commencing the PhD.
- Once a GPiT meets all requirements for Fellowship of their pathway, they will be awarded Fellowship and continue to complete the PhD outside of general practice training.
- Academic Post funding is not accessible for post-Fellowship doctors wishing to undertake a PhD.

For further information or advice, please contact the RACGP Education Research Coordinator at gpedresearch@racgp.org.au.