



ANZCA
FPM

CEO

Australian and New Zealand
College of Anaesthetists

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Dr Susan O'Dwyer
Lead, Specialist IMG taskforce
Medical Board of Australia (MBA)/Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra)

Via email: Susan.ODwyer@health.qld.gov.au

Dear Susan

I am writing to follow up our meeting on 19 June 2024 regarding the proposed expedited specialist international medical graduate (SIMG) assessment process and the provision of supporting process documentation ANZCA sent following the meeting.

ANZCA is proud of our work and experience in the assessment of SIMGs. ANZCA also acknowledges the recently released report on Specialist medical colleges specialist pathway data 1 January 2023 - 31 December 2023 and ANZCA's excellent performance in meeting the MBA benchmarks for SIMG assessments, including 97% compliance with timelines.

We have provided considered documentation and information to you and your team to ensure relevant decision makers are aware of the successful existing process, our recommendations and any potential risks and solutions that we are aware of, including the following:

- Letter to Ahpra providing relevant information and insights on our processes (sent 2 April).
- Recommendations for consideration (sent 19 June following our meeting with you).
- Information relating to ANZCA and Medical Council of New Zealand concurrent pathway for SIMGs (sent 21 June).
- Feedback on the MBA/Ahpra consultation on the *Draft revised Registration standard: specialist registration* (submitted 3 July).

The ultimate aim of our practice and collaborative approach is, as always, to ensure the high standards of safety and quality of anaesthesia care continue in the community, and workforce wellbeing.

To date we have not heard anything further from you or your team regarding this input following your requests for consultation and information from ANZCA. We understand there is a lot of information for your team to digest following the conclusion of the MBA/Ahpra *Draft revised Registration standard consultation* in early July, however we are also cognisant of the ambitious December 2024 timeframe identified by the Health Ministers forum to implement an expedited pathway for SIMGs.

ANZCA would like to work with you to understand and refine any proposed expedited pathway processes as it significantly impacts a key area of business for us and has further, possibly adverse, implications for anaesthesia training and training site accreditation into the future.

ANZCA strongly believes that the optimal approach would be modifying existing SIMG assessment processes to develop one joint process (managed by the colleges) that meets government's aims of a level of acceleration, noting that ANZCA already successfully meets MBA benchmarks.

It has been ANZCA's experience that significant delay in approving SIMGs from comparable countries can lie within government and other regulatory authorities; both noted in the Kruk Review. In fact, ANZCA has a times had to alter our supervision / mentoring timelines to accommodate these "upstream" delays in comparable SIMGs starting clinical work.

Regardless of the process, ANZCA would like to collaboratively work with you via a continuous consultation process throughout design and development to ensure a workable and seamless process is adopted, rather than consultation only at the conclusion.

Questions from our community

One of the key roles of medical colleges is to advocate for fellows, trainees and SIMGs, and keep them informed of any issues that affect them and the healthcare needs of society more broadly.

A number of questions from our anaesthesia community are already coming in - some SIMGs have approached heads of departments with the MBA press release in hand questioning whether they should wait for the expedited pathway or carry on with ANZCA processes. We have also received requests from regional committees and fellows as to when we can provide updates on next steps. ANZCA is continuing to communicate with members with *known* information via news items¹, newsletter updates and articles in our 'Bulletin'² publication. However, we don't have answers to the majority of their questions. We want to prepare our fellows and potential applicants, however, do not wish to release inaccurate or misleading information.

We also have trainees asking questions as to their future employment options, at the same time we are seeing trainee positions cut for the 2025 period and FANZCAs impacted by employment freezes and job cuts in several jurisdictions. This is at odds with the Kruk recommendations to address workforce shortages and notes an undersupply of anaesthesia services in four of Australia's largest states.

Implementing an effective approach

I would also like to take the opportunity to reiterate some of the key items required to work together to minimise any unintended consequences.

- Any potential approach for fellowship following an expedited SIMG process.
- Consideration on which body (MBA/Ahpra or the medical college) would be legally responsible for the decisions and actions of any expedited pathway SIMG.
- Communication and agreement with states and territories (who are the employers and who determine the numbers of trainees and FANZCAs employed in their hospital) regarding the process of placement and distribution of these SIMGs.
- Understanding how MBA/Ahpra would undertake the required and necessary cultural safety and community awareness.

The college would like to continue to work with you and your team on this important process and would appreciate any relevant updates and the opportunity to ensure a considered and effective approach (existing or otherwise) is implemented that meets the needs and goals of all relevant stakeholders.

Yours sincerely



Mr Nigel Fidgeon
Chief Executive Officer

¹ <https://www.anzca.edu.au/news/anaesthesia-workforce-numbers>

² <https://www.anzca.edu.au/safety-advocacy/advocacy/college-publications>