



## Submission to Senate Select Committee on Medicare

**This submission from General Practice Education and Training (GPET) addresses the Committee's Term of Reference b):**

“The impact of general practitioner shortages on patients' ability to access appropriate care in a timely manner”.

It is divided into three sections:

1. GPET Background
2. Information about the Australian General Practice Training Program; and
3. 2004 application and selection data

### 1. GPET Background

General Practice Education and Training (GPET) is a company wholly-owned by the Commonwealth Government, with responsibility for oversight and funding of the Australian General Practice Training Program (AGPTP).

GPET was established by the Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care in 2001, following the report of the Ministerial Review of General Practice Training<sup>1</sup>, and has since established 22 Regional Training Providers (RTPs), who are delivering training at regional and community levels throughout Australia.

GPET's Board is appointed by the Minister for Health and Ageing every three years and comprises an independent chair, three independent directors who are GPs, and nominees of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, the General Practice Registrars' Association, Australian Divisions of General Practice and the Committee of Deans of Australian Medical Schools.

The Regional Training Providers have been established from natural coalitions of interest, the fostering of collaborative arrangements, and existing partnerships at the regional level. Members and stakeholders include universities, medical schools, divisions of general practice, hospitals, medical colleges, community organisations and GP registrar and GP supervisor associations.

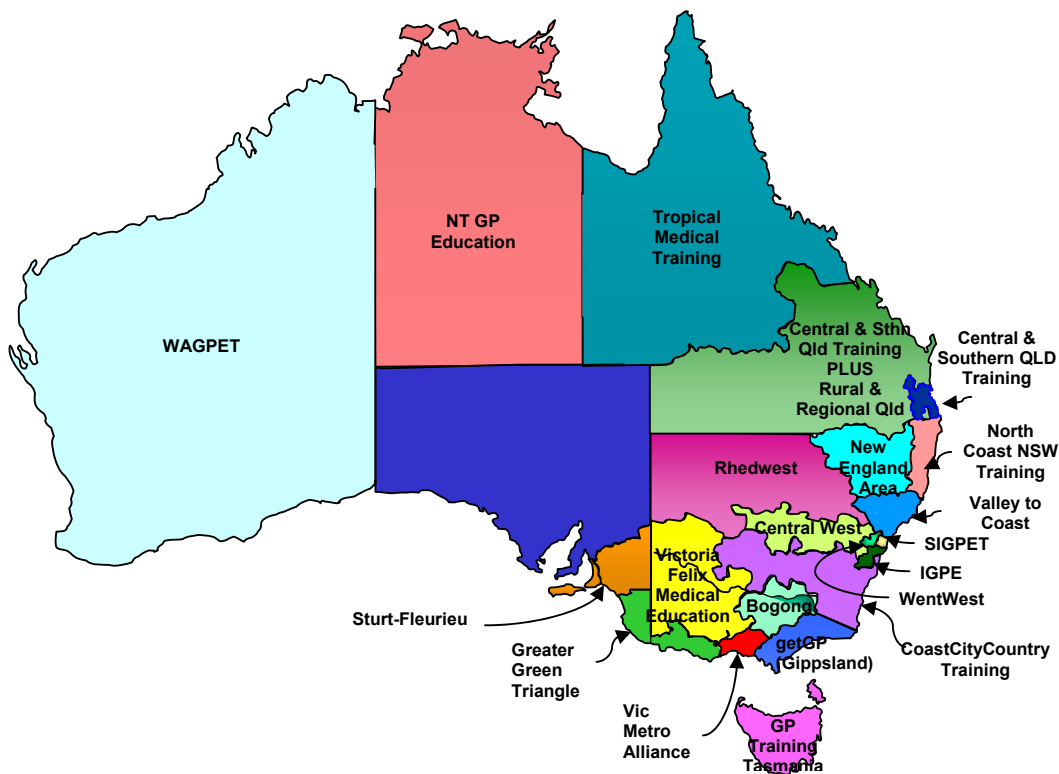
## 2. The Australian General Practice Training Program

Registrars (trainee GPs) in the GP Training Program are required to complete three years of training, following a selection process which includes a ranking system based on referee reports and an interview with their preferred regional training provider. Once accepted into the Program, registrars are expected to complete one year in a hospital post in a medical discipline relevant to general practice, and two years in the community in supervised general practice terms.

Aspiring registrars can apply to be in one of two training pathways: the Rural Pathway, which requires a commitment to complete all general practice training in RRMA (Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas) 4-7; or the General Pathway, which requires six months' training in general practices in RRMA 3-7 rural areas. From January, 2003 General Pathway registrars based in state capital cities have also been required to undertake six months' training in an outer-metropolitan area of defined work force need.

In 2003, the 22 Regional Training Providers are delivering vocational training to about 960 GP registrars. In addition, about 560 registrars who entered vocational training before 2002, in the former Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Training Program, are being trained by General Practice Education Australia (GPEA), a training company wholly-owned by the RACGP. Late last year the Minister for Health and Ageing announced that from January, 2004, all GP registrars would be trained by Regional Training Providers. GPET, GPEA and the General Practice Registrars Association are currently implementing a plan to facilitate a smooth transition for these registrars to their chosen RTP by January 2004.

Below is a map of the 22 Regional Training Providers delivering training in Australia in 2003:



**Australian General Practice Training Program: Regional Training Providers 2003**

In January 2003, 454 registrars entered the Training Program – 190 in the Rural Pathway and 264 in the General Pathway. However, under the Federal Government’s recently-announced “A Fairer Medicare: Better Access, More Affordable” package, from January 2004 there will be 600 places in the Program - about 250 in the Rural Pathway and about 350 in the General Pathway (the General Pathway includes training places in large rural centres such as Dubbo, Lismore, Bendigo, Rockhampton and Geraldton).

When allocating GP registrars across the 22 regional training providers in 2003, the GPET Board used as a guide Australian Medical Workforce Committee (AMWAC) distribution figures, from the AMWAC report *The General Practice Workforce in Australia - Supply and Requirements 1999-2010* (AMWAC, 2000). The financial viability of RTPs, particularly in rural regions, was also taken into account in the allocation of registrar numbers.

The extra 150 places announced in the Government’s package have been allocated primarily to rural and outer urban practices, based on preliminary information from a 2003 AMWAC review of the GP workforce; as well as Health Department information on areas of workforce shortage; and on the likelihood of the places being filled.

### 3. 2004 application and selection data

#### 3.1 Preliminary Results

At the close of applications on 23 May 2003, 616 applications had been electronically submitted for 2004 entry into the AGPTP.

#### 3.2 Submitted Applications

Draft applications and logons into the online application form for 2004 increased by 10% on levels obtained in the selection process for the 2003 intake, indirectly suggesting an increased level of interest and awareness in the Training Program following national and regional advertising and marketing campaigns.

Electronic draft applications & logons*		Electronic Applications		Withdrew prior to Round 1 interviews		Final Interview number (Round 1)	
2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004**	2003	2004
780	861	604	616	37	5	567	TBA

\* Includes Multiple Drafts.

\*\* As at Sunday 25 May 2003

The number of applicants for the Training Program had been trending downwards following the 2001 cohort entry year. The application results for the 2004 intake show a change in this trend to a small positive growth in application numbers (+2%) compared to application results for the 2003 intake, as noted in Figure 1.

TRAINING PROGRAM APPLICANTS 2000-2004

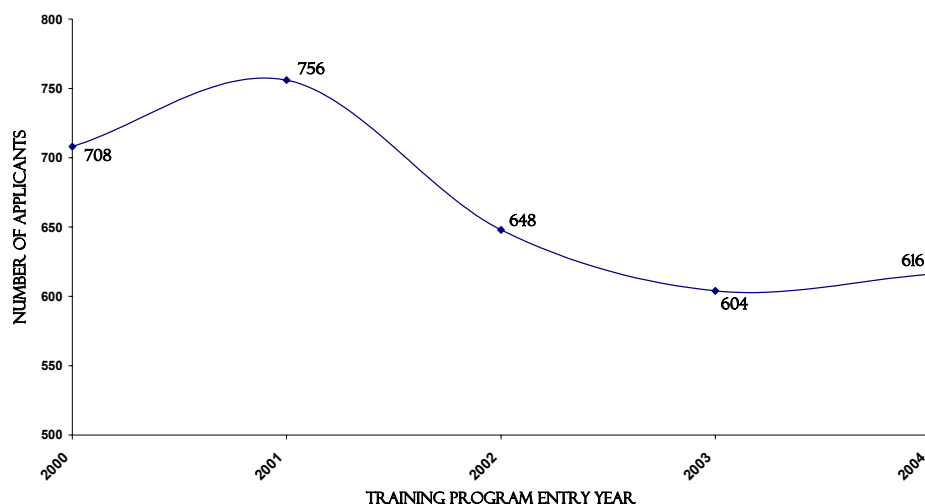


Figure 1: Comparison of Application numbers 2000-2004

### 3.3 Overview of Applicants – Demographics

The 2004 intake applicant pool has seen an increase in the numbers of female doctors, Australian-born doctors and overseas-trained doctors applying for the Training Program compared to applicants for the 2003 intake.

Male		Female		ATSI		Australian Born		Overseas Born		Australian Trained		Overseas Trained	
2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004
264	243	340	373	0	4	185	208	419	408	392	392	212	224
43.7%	39.4%	56.3%	60.6%	0%	0.6%	30.6%	33.8%	69.4%	66.2%	64.9%	63.6%	35.1%	36.4%

The age and sex distribution table illustrates similar trends to previous years, with a large number of applicants being female doctors aged 24-35 years (39.6% of all applicants).

Age (5 Years Groups)	Male	Female	Total
24-30 Years	108 (17.5%)	196 (31.8%)	303 (49.3%)
31-35 Years	46 (7.5%)	48 (7.8%)	94 (15.3%)
36-40 Years	34 (5.5%)	64 (10.4%)	98 (15.9%)
41-45 Years	27 (4.4%)	32 (5.2%)	59 (9.6%)
46-50 Years	21 (3.4%)	19 (3.1%)	40 (6.5%)
51-55 Years	6 (1.0%)	7 (1.1%)	13 (2.1%)
55+ Years	1 (0.2%)	3 (0.5%)	4 (0.7%)
Not Recorded			4 (0.6%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>243 (39.5%)</b>	<b>369 (59.9%)</b>	<b>616 (100.0%)</b>

### 3.4 University Training Location (State/Country)

The proportion of applicants who had completed their primary medical training in NSW and Queensland increased by 10% and 12% respectively on 2003 intake levels. The state “retention

rates” - as indicated by the University of Graduation - compared to 1<sup>st</sup> preference RTP nominations across Australia varied markedly. South Australian graduate data show that only about one third of applicants nominated a South Australian based regional training provider, compared to New South Wales at 95.8%.

Overseas		NZ		SA		VIC		NSW		QLD		TAS		WA		Not Provided	
2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004	2003	2004
212	212	5	3	45	46	84	77	130	144	73	82	19	12	32	31	4	9

Figure 2: University of Graduation – State.

University State	1 <sup>st</sup> Preference for RTP in Grad University State (%)
South Australia	37.0%
Victoria	83.1%
New South Wales	95.8%
Queensland	86.5%
Western Australia	77.4%
Tasmania	41.6%

### 3.5 Country of Birth (Top 10 Countries by Frequency of Applicants 2003)

Applicants’ country of birth figures indicate a significant increase in Australian born applicants for entry into the 2004 Training Program, 23 additional applications or a 12% increase when compared to the 2003 intake applicants.

Significant proportional increases were recorded for applicants whose countries of birth were India or Egypt, whilst the number of applicants originating from SE Asian countries generally decreased.

Country of Birth	2003	2004	% Variation
Australia	185	208	+12%
Vietnam	48	29	-39%
Sri Lanka	34	40	+17%
China	30	32	+7%
Malaysia	30	24	-20%
India	20	37	+85%
Hong Kong	21	19	-10%
Iraq	16	16	0%
Egypt	15	22	+46%
United Kingdom	14	19	+35%

### 3.6 Regional Training Provider Preference – Initial Training Preference Nominations

Regional Training Provider	600 Training Place Allocation			1 <sup>st</sup> Preference Nominations (25-5-3)		
	Rural	General	Total	Rural	General	Total
Central West NSW	9	5	14	4	1	5
CoastCityCountry(NSW)	18	16	34	17	14	31
IGPE (Sydney)	0	28	28	0	40	40
New England (NSW)	11	3	14	9	0	9
North Coast NSW	11	6	17	10	0	10
RHEDWEST (NSW)	12	2	14	0	1	1
SIGPET (Sydney)	0	26	26	0	89	89
Valley-to-Coast (NSW)	5	27	32	20	16	36
WentWest (Sydney)	0	28	28	0	51	51
NT GP Education (NT)	12	5	17	8	6	14
Central and Sthn Qld	25	48	73	16	56	72
Rural and Regional Qld	22	6	28	8	4	12
Tropical Medical (Qld)	12	14	26	7	11	18
Adelaide to Outback	14	13	27	4	12	16
Sturt Flurieu (SA)	12	10	22	7	3	10
TAS GPE (Tas)	9	7	16	3	8	11
Bogong (Vic/NSW)	14	3	17	12	5	17
Gippsland (Vic)	16	0	16	20	0	20
Greater Green (Vic)	16	0	16	2	0	2
Victoria Felix	20	7	27	11	2	13
Victorian Metropolitan	0	79	79	0	99	102
WAGPET	25	28	53	18	19	37
	263	361	624	176	437	616

The preliminary applicants' preferences show a similar trend to the 2003 intake selection distribution. Of all the applicants, 57% indicated a first preference for Sydney-, Melbourne- or Brisbane-based Regional Training Providers.

The initial applicant preferences have shown a small movement in the Rural to General Pathway 1<sup>st</sup> preference nominations. Although it is difficult to compare to 2003 given changes in the number of available preferences for applicants, at the same stage in last year's selection process 165 first preferences for Rural Pathway were recorded. For 2004, 176 first preferences were recorded. This is a 6% increase on 2003 intake applicant figures.



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#### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services. General Practice Education – The Way Forward. Report of the Ministerial Review of General Practice Training. Canberra, AGPS, March 1998.