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Pulse Survey Report: Trainees' experiences of interviews during Selection 2019

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Executive Summary

Introduction

For several years, trainees have provided informal and formal feedback on inappropriate discussions and processes during selection and recruitment for training positions.

To obtain a better understanding of trainee experiences during the 2019 annual recruitment campaigns (April – October 2019), the College conducted a pulse survey. It was designed to rapidly provide further data to the College to understand better the challenges for trainees in selection and recruitment.

Method

All current RACP trainees were approached with the intended sample being those who have participated in selection and recruitment over the past nine months (April – October 2019). Data collection occurred over a two-week period in late November / early December 2019.

Results & Discussion

- 512 responses
- Responses from Aotearoa / New Zealand and across Australia
- 74% interviewed for advanced training 26% for basic training positions
- 73% found application information easily accessible
- 10% were asked about family planning, 8% asked about plans for extended leave
- 83% considered panels were representative

Overall, respondents are satisfied with their selection and recruitment experiences, with positive responses sitting at 75% or higher. Nonetheless, this does mean that negative responses sit at 10-25%. The exception to this concerns pre-interview meetings, where there is discrepancy across Australasia regarding whether pre-interview meetings are held and variable views about whether information about them is readily available. Generally, it appears that candidates are required to proactively seek out and request pre-interview meetings.

Recommendations are made to improve selection and recruitment practices for trainees in the future.

Introduction

Context, Purpose & Aims

In 2019 the College published its expectations of Fellows involved in selection and recruitment activities through Principles, Policies, Posters, Guidelines and website content. This was in response to the informal and formal feedback received from trainees about the inappropriate discussions and processes they have experienced during selection and recruitment for training positions.

To obtain a better understanding of trainee experiences during the 2019 annual recruitment campaigns (April – October 2019), the College conducted a pulse survey (a fast and frequent survey system) of all trainees. It was anonymous and designed to rapidly provide further data to the College so that areas of opportunity can be identified for the College to provide further guidance to settings.

Method

Sample

All current RACP trainees (n=7400) were emailed the pulse survey, with the intended sample being those who have participated in selection and recruitment over the past nine months (April – October 2019).

Data Collection & Instruments

Data collection occurred over a two-week period (25 November - 9 December 2019). Trainees received an email which included a link to the Survey Monkey questionnaire (see Appendix 1). Reminder communications occurred via the President's Message, social media and a second email.

Data Analysis

Summary statistics were extracted from Survey Monkey using Microsoft Excel 2016. Qualitative data was analysed thematically.

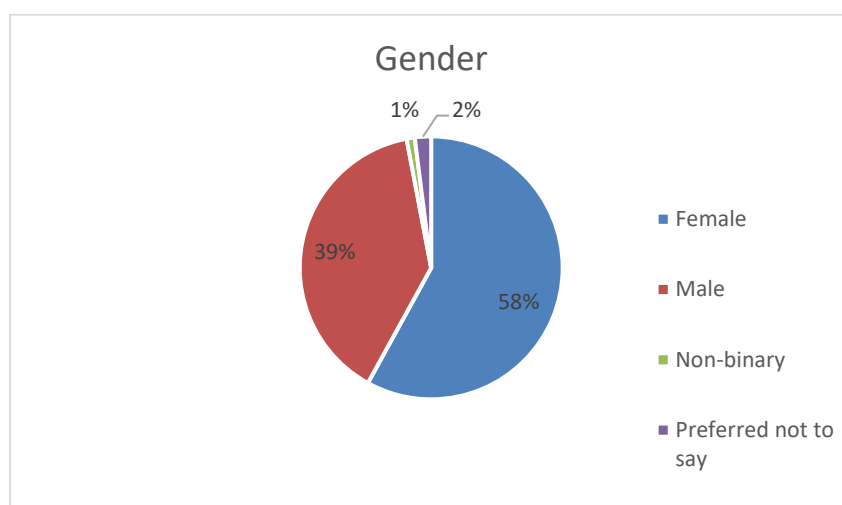
Results & Discussion

Response Demographics

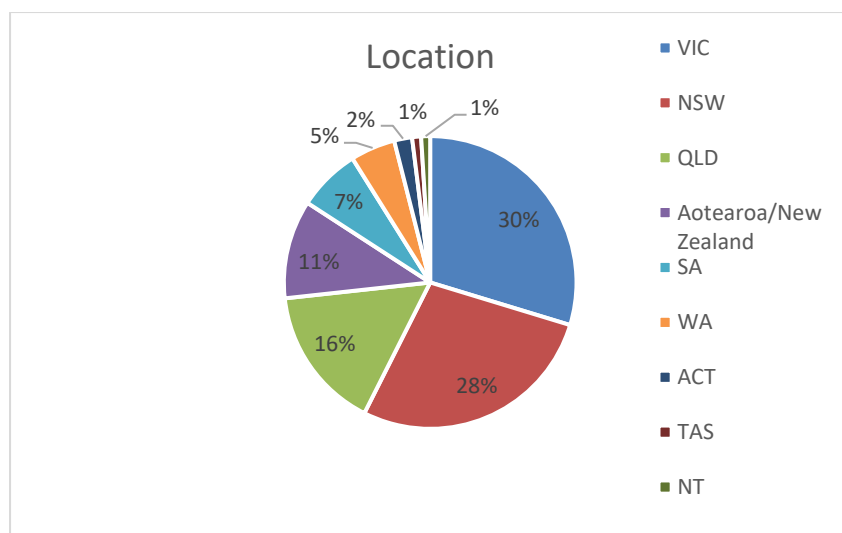
Roughly 75% (n=5,550) of trainees would have met the criteria of applying for a training position in the last nine months. The College received 512 responses to the survey, a response rate of approximately 9% .

88% (n=451) of respondents were interviewed for a training position in the last nine months. All respondents were asked their gender, location and specialty.

Gender

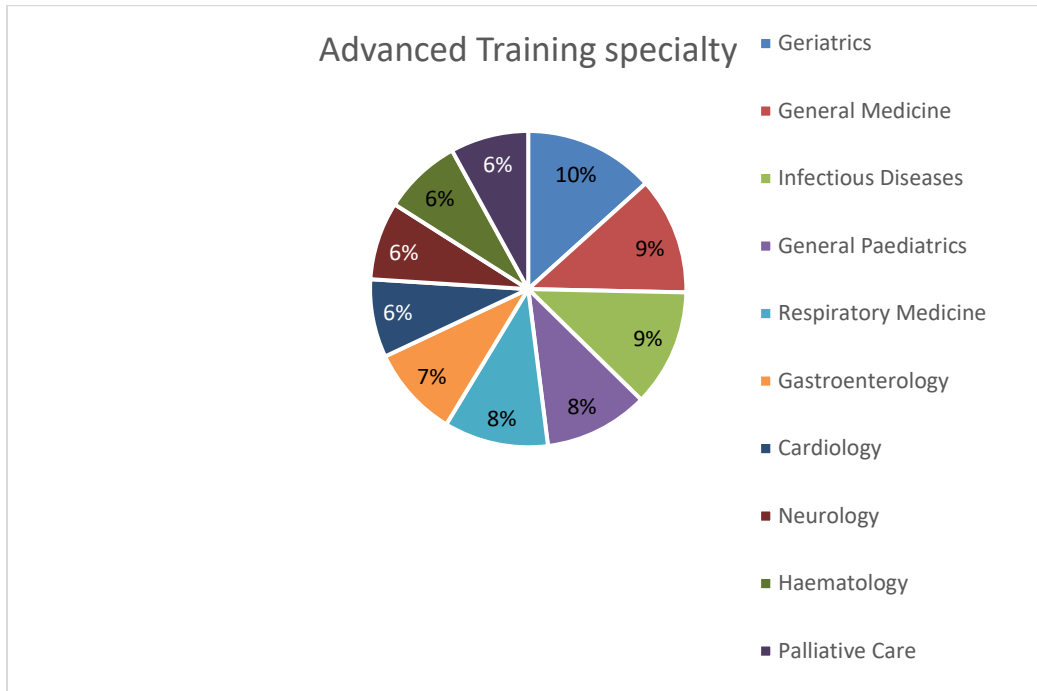


Location



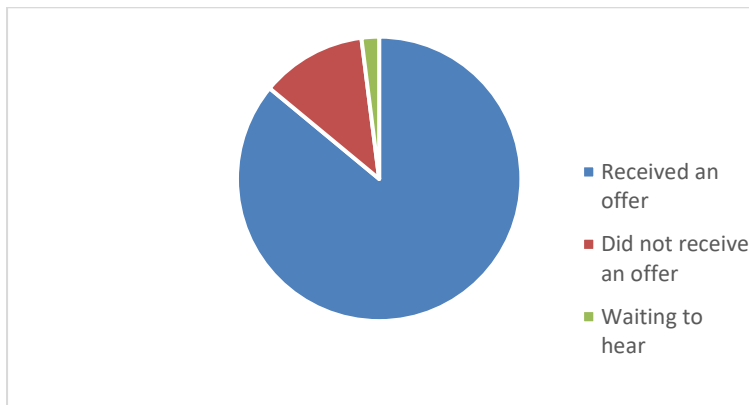
Specialty

74% (n=376) of respondents had been interviewed for an Advanced Training position with 26% (n=129) had been interviewed for a Basic Training position.



Other specialties were indicated by fewer than ten respondents, e.g., Medical Oncology, Endocrinology, Rehabilitation Medicine, Sleep Medicine, Child Protection and Genetics.

Most respondents (86%, n=437) had received an offer for a training position in 2020, while 12% (n=63) did not receive an offer and 2% (n=10) were still waiting to hear.



Results

Application Process Information

73% (n=371) found the application information easily accessible. Most (85%, n=428) were able to access a copy of the position description for the training position before they applied.

Recommendation 1

The RACP to provide training settings with recommendations on how to make the application process more transparent so that 100% find the application information easily and can access position descriptions before applying. This will be aligned with approved recommendations from the entry into training roadmap.

Questions

91% (n=460) did not feel they were asked any inappropriate questions during the interview process. Of the 46 (9%) respondents who felt that they were asked inappropriate questions, 42 indicated the types of questions they were asked:

Response	Percentage	Number
Pregnancy / family planning	40%	17
Plans for extended leave	9.5%	4
Marital status	9.5%	4

83% (n=419) of respondents felt that the questions asked if during the interview process relevant to their application or the training position.

More generally, 20% of respondents (n=110) indicated that they had been asked questions on the topics listed below during formal and informal interviews:

Response	Percentage	Number
Pregnancy / family planning	10%	50
Carers' responsibilities	8%	39
Plans for extended leave	8%	38
Marital status	7%	34
Other	6%	30
Race	1%	7
Religion	1%	5
Political views	0.20%	1
Sexual orientation	0.00%	0

Of note, one respondent reported that they were asked if they wanted to offer a bribe

Recommendation 2

Reinforce earlier communications that selection panels should only ask questions that relate to the training position and must not include questions that, even indirectly, relate to pregnancy or family planning related.

Pre-Interview Meetings

With the **quantitative** data, 187 (37%) said there was a pre-interview meeting, 320 (63%) said there wasn't. 181 said this opportunity was available to everyone.

With the **qualitative** data, 75/180 (42%) said this opportunity was available to everyone, 57/180 (32%) said this opportunity wasn't available to everyone, 23/180 (13%) said they didn't know if this opportunity was available to everyone.

One hundred and eighty respondents provided written comments, with the main issue to emerge being that **candidates are required to proactively seek out and request pre-interview meetings**. Some see this as an opportunity available to everyone and some see it as more "closed door". From the data it appears it is a practice which is variable across locations and its occurrence isn't necessarily advertised (although at some sites information is made available on the application website) nor is it necessarily made clear who to contact. Respondents sometimes rely on the advice of previous applicants. Furthermore, it appears that the capacity to undertake these meetings is limited by time restrictions due to working full-time and location (if one is based interstate or in rural / remote areas):

One hospital network undertook pre-interview meetings. This was available to everyone who requested it and there was an online booking system used to allocate meeting times. However, this opportunity was not advertised.

There are no centralised "meet and greets" for X training. It is all up to the trainee to find the appropriate contacts and then take time from their busy work schedule to meet individually with each head of unit. This is not a very easy or accessible process for most trainees.

If group-based pre-interview meetings are arranged by a site, often there is little flexibility:

If couldn't make set "group pre-interviews" then they did not reschedule.

One respondent indicated that interview candidates were pre-selected for a pre-interview meeting:

...candidates were selected for a "speed dating" style meeting with the specialty directors in XX.

A few respondents made mention of the impact of correspondence from a State Health Dept discouraging pre-interview meetings:

All pre-interviews were cancelled across the state for X specialty following the letter released.... Information nights were held and were open to all those who expressed interest.

A X information night in hospitals such as XXX turned into a pre-interview on the spot where candidates were asked to print out CVs and were pre-interviewed. The event was called an information evening due to the letter... that discouraged pre-interviews.

Recommendation 3

Review guidance on pre interviews and promote it widely.

Representative Interview Panels

83% (n=422) of respondents felt the interview panel was representative. Of the 17% (n=79) who felt it wasn't, 64 respondents provided written responses explaining why. Respondents (n=34) felt panels weren't representative because:

- they include the wrong people, e.g., male and white dominated;
- there are few representatives from the networks / regions / a wide variety of hospitals; and
- panels consist of doctors only and no other healthcare staff:

Multiple interviews this year. Each has a small panel involving the unit director and another senior staff member. No junior medical staff, HR rep or community rep. Occasionally a minority represented (e.g., ethnicity, gender). Does not represent the people of society that we care for.

This question about the representativeness of interview panels prompted broader comments about problems with the interview process. Each problem was generally identified by one or two respondents only and as such don't represent themes in the data. However, taken as a whole, they suggest that some interview processes aren't robust, for example:

- the selection process is opaque and can vary across interview candidates;
- panels are poorly trained;
- interview questions may not be asked of all candidates, inappropriate questions can be asked and there are no transparent marking criteria; and
- decisions about candidates are made prior to interview based on who they are and / or where they have trained:

We were not informed of the selection process prior to or after application. Different people applying for the same position went through different selection processes. People who didn't even apply for a position were offered jobs, despite the fact that they were cutting back on numbers. The interview was 3 questions only, with 5mins per question - including the time taken to read the question. I was in the first round of interviews and I don't think the interviewers had the opportunity to realise how pressed for time we would be, one interviewer spent more time talking in the 5mins than I did. When I asked for feedback they were unable to provide any specific feedback on what I could have done better.

While the X interview process is completely non-transparent (and mostly connected to networking and which hospital you trained at), the Y board stated over the phone that I had a great CV, referees, and fantastic interview, however they felt 'obliged' to give the spot to a candidate who had applied multiple times (and hence demonstrated longer dedication to the field).

Recommendation 4

RACP to review and promote its guidance to settings on how to build representative interview panels for interviews.

Recommendation 5

Continue the promotion of the College resources produced in 2019 [guidance information on the RACP website, a poster (electronic and print versions) and guidelines] that support selection and recruitment practices.

Recommendation 6

Use a further pulse survey to assess any shifts in selection and recruitment experiences in future.

Potential Limitations of this Evaluation

Potential limitations of this evaluation include:

- The use of self-reported participant data only.
- The relatively small sample size.
- Limited context for answer. Following up the surveys (e.g., via focus groups) may be necessary to flesh out the understanding of the results.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Survey on Selection 2019

Tell us about your interview experiences for training positions

Have you interviewed for a training position in the last nine months? If you have then please complete this survey – it should only take 5 minutes. The RACP is keen to understand more about trainees recent experiences of the interview process. The survey is completely anonymous. To help trainees know they can't be identified we have limited the information we are asking.

Your feedback will be used to target future actions on interview practices during selection. It will build on the guidance information we provided in 2019 to Fellows involved in selection and recruitment. {link selection pages}.

1. I have interviewed for a training position in the last nine months. Y/N
2. Did you find application information easily accessible? Y/N
3. Could you access a copy of the position description for the training position before you applied?
4. Was there a pre interview meeting? Y/N
 - If yes was this opportunity available to everyone? [comment box]
5. During the interview process did you feel like all the questions were relevant to your application for the training position? Y/N
6. Did you feel that the interview panel was representative? Y/N
If no, why do you feel this way(optional)
7. At any stage in the selection or recruitment process were you asked about (please tick any that apply)
 - race
 - religion
 - carers responsibilities
 - pregnancy/family planning
 - plans for extended leave
 - marital status
 - political views
 - sexual orientation
 - Other (please specify)
8. Were you asked any inappropriate questions? Y/N
9. If yes, what were they?
10. Did you interview for a Basic Training or Advanced Training Position? Basic or Advanced
If Advanced: Please advise us what specialty/specialties you interviewed for (optional)

11. Have you received an offer for a training position for 2020? Yes, No, Still waiting to hear
12. What gender do you identify with? Male, Female, Non binary. Prefer not to say, Other
13. What is your State, Territory or region? ACT, NSW, VIC, QLD, SA, NT, WA, NZ, Tasmania