

## ARTIGO DE PERSPETIVA

# Anaesthesia, Pain, and Intensive Care Medicine Training in Malta

## *Programa de Formação em Anestesiologia, Dor e Medicina Intensiva em Malta*

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### Afiliação

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Anesthesiology/education; Clinical Competence; Critical Care; Curriculum; Malta

### Palavras-chave

Anestesiologia/educação; Competência Clínica; Cuidados Intensivos; Currículo; Malta

## INTRODUCTION

Malta is a European Union country with a population of just over half a million people.<sup>1</sup> The density of Physician Anaesthesia Providers as defined by the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA) is over 20 per 100 000 population.<sup>2</sup> As per the World Bank, Malta is considered a high-income country.<sup>3</sup>

## TRAINING DOCUMENT

Anaesthetics, Pain, and Intensive Care Medicine are considered as one specialty by the Malta Medical Council.<sup>4</sup> The details of the national training programme are outlined in what is informally known as the “training document”,<sup>5</sup> which is publicly available. This is written and developed by the Association of Anaesthesiologists of Malta (AAM) and was most recently updated in 2020. Any updates to this document must be legally approved by the Specialist Accreditation Committee (SAC) before coming into effect. The Medical Specialist Accreditation Committee was established by Article 30 of the Health Care Professions Act 2003 (Cap.464),<sup>6</sup> prior to Malta’s accession to the European Union. Members include appointees from the various relevant medical Professional Associations, among others. Two of its main functions include issuance of Certificates of Completion of Specialist Training, and accreditation of post-graduate training programmes. The President of the AAM sits on this committee. A main reference text for this document was the European Training Requirement in Anaesthesiology (ETR Anaesthesiology 2018) from the Standing Committee on Education and Professional Development (EPD) of the Section and Board of Anaesthesiology.<sup>7</sup>

## ACCEPTANCE TO THE ANAESTHESIOLOGY, PAIN, AND INTENSIVE CARE MEDICINE TRAINING PROGRAMME

Entry requirements into Malta’s training programme are defined in the training document.

Currently, these include:

- An undergraduate medical degree recognized by the Malta Medical Council;
  - Registration on the Principal List of the Malta Medical Council;
  - A license to practice medicine in Malta;
  - Completion of Foundation Programme or equivalent experience;
  - Sufficient linguistic capabilities to communicate with patients and colleagues;
  - A valid Advanced Life Support Course Provider certificate.
- Applicants are required to apply for the advertised employment post of Basic Specialist Trainee (BST) in the Department of Anaesthesia, Intensive Care and Pain, at Mater Dei Hospital, as and when these jobs are issued by the Government of Malta. In recent years, these posts have been issued on a yearly basis. Following application, eligible candidates are requested to sit for a competitive interview as a limited number of Basic Specialist Trainees are accepted each year.

## ACCREDITATION AND DURATION

Mater Dei Hospital, Malta’s main acute tertiary hospital, is the only recognized hospital for anaesthesiology and intensive care training in Malta. Together with its predecessor, St. Luke’s Hospital, it has been accredited by European bodies as meeting the European Standards of excellence and declared to be a European Centre for training of Anaesthesiologists. Plans are underway to again renew this accreditation.

The minimum duration of specialist training is five years in

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full-time practice, with a minimum averaged working time of forty-eight (48) hours per week. A minimum of one year out of the five needs to be spent on intensive care training. Approximately one third of these hours need to be completed as non-elective work, such as on-call night and weekend hours. Allowances are made for equivalent part-time, or reduced hours, training, as well as for parental and maternity leave. Training sabbaticals may also be approved at the discretion of the Training Committee (see below) and the Chairperson of the Department of Anaesthesia, Intensive Care and Pain as the employer. The maximum duration of training is governed by the duration of the training employment contract. Training needs to be completed within ten years of commencement, excluding maternity, parental, and/or sick leave, as governed by employment terms. After a maximum of four years, trainees are expected to progress from BST to Higher Specialist Trainee (HST) level once all competences are achieved.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND GOVERNANCE

The responsibility for the implementation of the training programme lies with the Anaesthesia Postgraduate Training Committee. Currently, this is made up of several specialist anaesthesiologists including:

- Training Coordinator/s. These are appointed by the Malta Post Graduate Training Centre (PGTC) by competitive interview every few years, and report to the Head of the PGTC as well as to the Chairperson of the Department of Anaesthesia, Intensive Care and Pain. They chair Training Committee meetings and are responsible for the day-to-day running of the training programme, including the organization of teaching and assessments, and monitoring of trainee progress. They are assisted in this role by a number of Education Supervisors in various subspecialty areas including intensive care, obstetrics, and paediatrics, among others;
- Three members of the Board of Administrators of the AAM. This includes the AAM President and two other Board members. Their role is to ensure that the implemented programme is in line with the approved training document and aligns with European standards; liaison with the SAC; and maintenance of patient safety. The AAM Board of Administrators is elected every three years;
- Four members representing the Department of Anaesthesia, Intensive Care and Pain at Mater Dei Hospital. These include the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, the immediate past Training Coordinator, and the individual responsible for the Trainee Mentorship Programme. Their role is to safeguard the smooth running of the clinical anaesthetic service, liaison with hospital administration, ensuring facilities for training, and safeguarding trainee wellbeing.

In addition, the AAM's Trainee Representative, elected on a yearly basis by trainees undergoing this training programme, is regularly invited to present any training issues experienced by trainees directly to the Training Committee.

## Main Outline

The training programme is formally divided into fifteen four-month modules as follows:

- Two initial modules covering general, gynaecology, urology, vascular, orthopaedics and trauma surgery;
- Three intensive care modules (one at BST, and two at HST, level);
- Orthopaedics, trauma, and regional anaesthesia (at HST level);
- Two obstetric anaesthesia modules (one at BST, and one at HST, level);
- Two paediatric and ENT modules (one at BST, and one at HST, level);
- Plastics, dental and neurosurgery;
- Advanced general surgery incl. transplants & remote site anaesthesia (at HST level);
- Chronic pain (at HST level);
- Cardiac and thoracic surgery (at HST level);
- Trainee choice module.

As trainees progress, the level of supervision moves from direct, to indirect, to distant.

For each module, trainees are required to keep a logbook of procedures, as well as complete an e-portfolio which includes mandatory competencies to be achieved. Feedback on daily performance from specialist trainers also needs to be logged into the e-portfolio, in at least ten instances for every training block. A simulation training session is offered at least once per calendar year, and one year of the five may be completed in a training centre outside of Malta. Past trainees have completed this training year in England, Scotland, and Belgium. Prospective approval needs to be obtained from the Anaesthesia Training Committee and the SAC.

Formal teaching is provided in the form of a tutorial programme, departmental continued medical education lectures, and morbidity and mortality meetings. Trainees are expected to perform at least four audit or clinical governance projects, such as publication of hospital guidelines, during their training period. Ideally, these projects should be published or presented at local or international conferences.

## ASSESSMENT, PROGRESSION AND COMPLETION OF TRAINING

To progress from one year of training to the next, anaesthetic and intensive care trainees in Malta need to satisfactorily pass a yearly ARCP – Annual Review of Competence Progression. This involves an interview with one training coordinator, one AAM representative, and one member of the clinical

department. An assessment is made of the trainee's completion of the required modules, including a review of the logbook and e-portfolio. Success in annual in-training assessments, which include a viva voce examination, a written assessment, and/or a written literature review, are also required for passing the relevant yearly ARCP. The trainee is required to present evidence of completion of audit or governance projects, as well as information on optional features of the training programme. These may include conference attendance, course or workshop completion, evidence of additional self-directed learning, completion of academic degrees, etcetera. An essential requirement for the completion of anaesthesiology and intensive care training in Malta is the achievement of the EDAIC – European Diploma in Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care Part 1 and Part 2 examinations, offered by the European Society of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care. Without the EDAIC, a Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training is not issued. This Certificate is required for inclusion in the Malta Specialist Register for Anaesthetics and Intensive Care.

## RECERTIFICATION

Once specialist status is obtained, formal recertification is not required for the maintenance of this specialist status in Malta.

## STRENGTHS

The training programme in anaesthesiology, pain, and intensive care medicine in Malta is a clearly defined, transparent, and well-established post-graduate route to attaining specialist status. The obtained specialist certificate meets the standards detailed in Articles 25,26, and 27 as appropriate of the EU Directive 2005/36/EU<sup>8</sup> and is therefore recognized throughout the European Union. It is a rigorous programme, the success of which is validated through the requirement of attainment of the EDAIC examination by all trainees prior to completion of training. Additionally, all training blocks including cardiothoracic anaesthesia, neuroanaesthesia, paediatric anaesthesia, chronic pain, and obstetric anaesthesia can be completed in the same hospital.

## WAY FORWARD AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

The training document which governs the training programme in anaesthesiology, pain, and intensive care medicine in Malta is currently being updated. This is being done to ensure that Maltese training is in line with the "Training Requirements for the Specialty of Anaesthesiology" issued by the UEMS (European Union of Medical Specialists) in the 2022 update.<sup>9</sup> Main areas of focus include the introduction of Entrustable Professional Activities; increased emphasis on simulation training and point of care ultrasound; and training of specialists as teachers and assessors. Train

the Trainer courses for anaesthesiology specialists were organized in Malta in 2019, and further courses are planned for 2024. The constant challenges to implementing a training programme include time availability for both trainees and trainers; ensuring that high-quality training can be delivered while ensuring the safe and effective provision of clinical services; and maintaining high professional standards throughout the process.

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