

Neonatal Intensive Care - Post-Graduate Pathway at The Royal Women's Hospital, Parkville- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU) is one of five tertiary level units in Melbourne dedicated to providing specialised care for premature and critically ill newborns across Victoria. Each year approximately 1,600 premature and medically vulnerable babies are admitted. Beyond clinical care, the Neonatal Service plays a vital role in education and training at local, national and international levels, supporting healthcare professionals in enhancing their neonatal expertise. The unit is actively engaged in various research programs, including those that contribute to long-term follow-up care of high-risk infants.

The Women's NICU is a 59-bed unit. It consists of 27 level 5 -6 cots, and 32 level 3-4 cots. There are additional care spaces to provide some flexibility depending on patient mix, acuity and needs (i.e. isolation, procedures and 'rooming in'). The team works within a Family Integrated Care Model, fostering collaboration between families and healthcare professionals. This approach empowers parents to become confident, knowledgeable and independent primary care givers.

Registered Nurses with NICU qualifications are responsible for strengthening health outcomes through the provision of safe, high-quality, holistic and sensitive care from admission through to discharge. They work collaboratively in partnership with families, consumers and the multidisciplinary team to deliver specialised care to newborns who are premature, unwell, or have complex medical needs. This includes caring for neonates with critical illness or physiological instability, those requiring advanced respiratory support (including invasive and non-invasive ventilation, high-frequency ventilation, nitric oxide therapy and complex respiratory management), and infants with neurological, genetic or metabolic conditions. NICU-qualified Registered Nurses assess, plan, deliver and evaluate care, while supporting families through education, communication and advocacy, fostering a safe and nurturing environment that promotes the best possible start to life.

1. About the Program

What is the Postgraduate NICU Program?

The Postgraduate NICU Program is delivered in partnership with La Trobe University and provides a structured education and clinical development program for registered nurses, registered midwives and dual registered nurses/midwives transitioning into specialist neonatal intensive care practice. The program integrates evidence based theoretical learning with supervised clinical experience in a tertiary-level NICU, supporting learners to develop the advanced knowledge and skills required to care for critically ill and premature newborns.

What will I learn?

Throughout the program, you will develop the specialised knowledge and clinical skills required to care for premature and critically unwell neonates including but not limited to:

- Care of ventilated neonates, including invasive and non-invasive ventilation
- Management of high-risk and complex admissions
- Participation in code and emergency responses

- Management of nitric oxide therapy
- Care of infants requiring high-frequency ventilation
- Exposure to procedures and interventions such as intercostal catheters, central lines etc
- Development of advanced assessment, critical-thinking and clinical decision-making skills

Who delivers the program?

The program is delivered in partnership with La Trobe University and facilitated by the Neonatal Education Team at The Royal Women's Hospital. It is supported collaboratively by clinical support nurse's, senior NICU nurses, and medical colleagues, ensuring learners received comprehensive academic, clinical and interdisciplinary support through their transition into neonatal intensive care practice.

Where is the program based?

2. Eligibility and Applications

Who can apply?

Applicants must be registered nurses, midwives, or dual registered nurse/midwives with current AHPRA registration. Previous neonatal experience is desirable but not essential.

Do I need working rights in Australia?

Yes. All participants must hold valid Australian working rights (e.g., Australian citizenship, permanent residency, or an appropriate skilled worker visa) for the duration of the postgraduate year and employment with The Royal Women's Hospital.

How do I apply?

Applications are submitted through The Royal Women's Hospital careers website when positions are advertised.

When do intakes occur?

Intakes are annual and are generally advertised between March and April each year.

3. Employment and Contracts

Am I employed while completing the program?

Yes. Participants are employed by The Royal Women's Hospital and complete the program while working clinically in NICU.

What employment fraction (EFT) is required?

The minimum EFT requirement for nurses/midwives completing the post-graduate NICU program is 0.6-0.8FTE. This ensures sufficient clinical exposure to meet the programs learning objectives and supports your success throughout the course.

4. Study Requirements

Is postgraduate study required to work in NICU?

Yes. As a tertiary centre caring for some of Victoria's most complex and medically unwell neonates The Royal Women's Hospitals NICU requires a post graduate qualified workforce. Participants are required to enrol in the approved postgraduate neonatal course (currently delivered via La Trobe University), which is aligned with the clinical program.

Can I complete my postgraduate NICU studies with another university/Education provider?

No. Participants are required to enrol in the approved postgraduate neonatal course through La Trobe University as this program is specifically designed to align with the structure, learning objectives and clinical requirements of The Royal Women's Hospitals NICU program.

Course Fees

Course fees are the responsibility of the participant. Some participants may be eligible for scholarships or fee support. International applicants (who hold valid Australian working rights) are required to contact La Trobe University directly to understand tuition fee requirements and applicable fee structures.

How much study time is required?

Study requirements vary by university but generally include a combination of lectures/tutorials, assessments, and self-directed learning completed alongside clinical work. The specific study load and expectations are set and determined by La Trobe University.

5. Clinical Learning and Support

What clinical support will I receive?

Participants are supported through a comprehensive clinical and education framework that includes:

- Supernumerary shifts during key learning phases to support safe transition into the NICU environment
- Clinical preceptors and experienced NICU nurses who provide direct coaching, feedback and bedside teaching.
- Support from Clinical Support Nurses (CSN), Clinical Nurse Educator's (CNE) and access to a range of education resources to guide ongoing development.

When will I care for ventilated neonates?

Progression to care for ventilated neonates occurs gradually, following completion of foundational learning and supported supernumerary shifts. This includes supported supernumerary shifts, achievement of key competencies, and demonstration of readiness in consultation with CSNs, CNEs and preceptors. Clinical exposure is structured to ensure safety, confidence and capability before progressing to care for infants requiring advanced respiratory support.

6. Assessments and Progression

How is my progress assessed?

Progress throughout the program is assessed through a combination of:

- Clinical competency assessments
- Clinical appraisals and performance review
- University assessments aligned with the postgraduate curriculum
- Ongoing feedback from leadership team, CSNs, CNEs and preceptors

What happens if I am struggling?

If you are finding any aspect of the program challenging, we will work with you early to ensure you receive the support you need. The education team works closely with you to identify specific learning needs, clarify expectations and provide targeted guidance. Together, we will develop an individual learning plan designed to support your progress, build confidence and maximise your chance of success.

7. Rostering and Leave

How are shifts rostered?

Rosters are developed in line with service needs and learning requirements. Efforts are made to support participation in study commitments and to facilitate supernumerary shifts during key learning phases. While rostering cannot accommodate all individual preferences, the aim is to balance operational needs with the educational requirements of the program.

Can I take annual leave during the program?

Yes, annual leave requests can be submitted and will be considered in line with service and operational needs. While every effort is made to accommodate leave, approval is dependent on ensuring safe staffing and maintaining the learning requirements of the program.

What about study leave?

Study leave arrangements are guided by the relevant Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) and local policy. Eligible study leave entitlements can be accessed and utilised during your postgraduate year in accordance with these provisions.

8. Support and Wellbeing

Is wellbeing support available?

Yes. Participants have access to a range of wellbeing supports including The Royal Women's Hospitals wellbeing services, employee assistance program (EAP), and ongoing support from the neonatal education and leadership teams.

Is the program demanding?

Yes. NICU postgraduate training is both clinically, emotionally and academically demanding. You will be caring for highly complex and critically unwell neonates while completing formal postgraduate study. Strong support structures are in place, and open proactive communication with the education and leadership teams is encouraged to ensure you feel supported throughout the program.

9. After Completion

What happens after I complete the program?

On successful completion of the program, you are expected to function as competent NICU clinicians, practising safely and confidently within the scope of their experience and ongoing professional development. Graduates continue to consolidate skills, build autonomy and progress toward more advanced responsibilities as part of their continuing career in neonatal intensive care.

Does completion guarantee ongoing employment?

Continued employment is dependent on successful completion of the postgraduate course, workforce requirements, and satisfactory performance during the program year.

10. Further Information

Who can I contact for more information?

For further enquiries, please contact:

Lead Educator- Natalia.toumbourou@thewomens.org.au

Or one of the NICU Nurse Unit Manager's:

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Testimonials from previous Post Graduate nurses:

"I was surprised by how supportive and inclusive the RWH NICU was for postgraduate students. I knew that I would be well supported by the education team throughout my postgraduate course, but I also felt so welcomed and encouraged by the other senior NICU staff I worked alongside, particularly in the first few months of the postgraduate course when we initially stepped up into the "NICU" rooms."

"Regardless of how busy or chaotic some shifts were, I felt that I was always able to reach out to the other NICU staff or AUM's for support, or to ask questions if educators were unavailable (e.g. on weekends). I also found that when there were procedures or equipment being used that I hadn't seen before (e.g. sensormedics, chest drains, nitric, cooling etc.) the educators and other NICU staff made such an effort to reach out and explain how they worked (particular with setup and management in the NICU space) so that when I was allocated these patients I felt so much more confident in my nursing care. "