

Mentoring Guidelines

Supporting pre-service and early career teachers



Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands, sea countries, and waterways from across Australia. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and living cultures; and to Elders past and present.

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Introduction

The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP) was developed to address the crucial issue of teacher workforce shortages within Australia. The NTWAP adopts a holistic approach to attracting and retaining qualified teachers and school leaders and outlines how to better inform future workforce modelling.

Under the NTWAP, AITSL was commissioned to develop national guidelines to support the induction of early career teachers (Action 14) and national guidelines to support high-quality professional experience (Action 8). Accordingly, AITSL has developed Mentoring Guidelines to focus on supporting both pre-service teachers and early career teachers.

The Mentoring Guidelines provide a framework for supporting implementation of the *Guidelines for the Induction of Early Career Teachers in Australia* and the *Australian Professional Experience Guidelines*. The successful implementation of both guidelines relies to a large extent on the quality of support provided by mentor teachers.

Good mentors are selected based on specific skills and knowledge. These guidelines outline the requirements for selecting appropriate mentors and offering effective mentoring programs. Effective mentoring needs to be planned, embedded in daily practice and include regular meetings, observations of practice, and feedback.

There is discourse about the definition and role of a teacher mentor. In relation to these guidelines, a mentor is a teacher who undertakes the tasks described in these guidelines.

Purpose of these Guidelines

The guidelines define the work of teachers in education settings who are supporting pre-service teachers and early career teachers to meet their professional experience and registration requirements, respectively. The guidelines articulate the skills and knowledge required to select mentors and implement an effective mentoring program.

Importantly, the guidelines outline the roles and responsibilities of school leaders and mentors in creating appropriate, structured mentoring programs.

The *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Teacher Standards) is a key document for mentors. The two mandatory career stages of the Teacher Standards are the:

- Graduate teacher career stage, and
- Proficient teacher career stage.

All accredited initial teacher education (ITE) programs are underpinned by the Graduate Teacher Standards. Pre-service teachers must meet all of the Graduate Teacher Standards to successfully graduate from their ITE program. Similarly, early career teachers must meet the Proficient Teacher Standards to meet the requirements for full registration. These guidelines outline the knowledge and skills required of mentors to support mentees in achieving their professional experience and full registration goals.

Key elements of the Mentoring Guidelines

The Mentoring Guidelines are designed around six key components of effective mentoring. The implementation of the guidelines requires collaboration between key parties within educational contexts. The guidelines categorise broad areas of responsibility to support successful implementation.

1. Selecting mentors

An effective mentor has a specific set of skills and knowledge, including expertise as an accomplished teacher. Communication and relational skills are also fundamental requirements for effective mentoring. These guidelines summarise the personal characteristics, skills and knowledge that mentors require to support pre-service teachers and early career teachers, including:

- attributes of effective mentors
- knowledge required to support pre-service teachers
- knowledge required to support early career teachers.

2. Planning for effective mentoring

Professional experience placements provide valuable opportunities for mentoring as there are numerous opportunities for co-teaching and/or observing mentee practice. In contrast, many early career teachers will be undertaking a full-time teaching load, as will their mentor. This may result in limited opportunities for such activities; however, research indicates that the benefits associated with effective mentoring outweigh the drawbacks of placing additional demands on early career teachers (and their mentors) at this crucial point of their careers.

Early career teachers typically experience greater work–life imbalance and increased job-related stress relative to more experienced teachers, although these issues are also common amongst experienced teachers (Kutsyuruba, 2019). The quality and intensity of mentoring can have positive effects on both the wellbeing and retention of early career teachers (DeAngelis et al., 2013). Furthermore, mentoring can improve teacher self-efficacy, effectiveness and students' learning (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). As such, it can be argued the time required to implement high-quality mentoring programs represents an effective investment in early career teachers, and thus allocating time for experienced teachers to act as mentors is an investment in high quality teaching.

Effective mentoring requires an established organisational structure that is suitable for mentoring. Planning for mentoring should establish clear roles and responsibilities for all those involved in mentoring to ensure the success of the placement or induction program. This element includes:

- establishing roles and responsibilities
- planning for mentoring
- providing an orientation for the mentee.

3. Supporting staff wellbeing

Undertaking professional experience placements and starting work as an early career teacher can be challenging. School leaders and mentor teachers play an important role in supporting the wellbeing of both the mentor and mentee by:

- providing access to wellbeing resources, including introducing the mentee to staff with wellbeing roles or responsibilities
- creating a safe space for all those involved to discuss issues
- providing advice on managing workload and expectations
- actively modelling strategies to promote and support wellbeing.

4. Developing professional identity

Forming a professional identity starts while a pre-service teacher is enrolled in their ITE program including during their professional experience. The first few years of teaching practice are crucial for ensuring early career teachers adopt a positive professional identity that reinforces their self-efficacy, resilience and approach to professional development.

Effective mentoring is vital for pre-service teachers and early career teachers to develop the requisite understanding and knowledge that underpins the development of professional identity. This element describes the components that contribute to constructing a positive professional identity, including:

- responsibilities and accountabilities of the teaching profession
- positive and professional engagement within, and beyond, the education setting.

5. Developing professional practice

This element describes the activities that contribute to building the mentee's professional practice, including accessing professional learning and engaging with relevant educational research.

The mentor can provide subject specific support to mentees who are teaching content that is outside of their tertiary preparation. This may occur in subject areas with shortages of qualified teachers such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). In these instances, a subject specific mentor can provide one-on-one support and direct the mentee to appropriate resources.

The importance of the mentor's role in promoting ongoing mentee learning cannot be over-emphasised. Critical components include the mentor modelling effective practices, structured observations, coaching conversations, opportunities for co-teaching and providing constructive feedback. Practices that are particularly challenging for pre-service and early career teachers to master include creating safe learning environments and meeting the needs of all learners.

This element focuses on strategies that mentors can use to support mentees to develop these skills, including:

- promoting professional learning
- focusing on effective teaching strategies
- collaborating for professional learning
- observing practice.

6. Providing feedback

Providing feedback to the mentee is a key role for the mentor. Feedback will typically cover numerous aspects of pre-service and early career teachers' professional practice, including their understanding of the educational context, professional boundaries, child protection and education policies and their ability to accept and act on any feedback provided.

Providing ongoing, formative feedback to the mentee is the most effective way to support their career development. The mentor and the mentee should have transparent and collaborative conversations referencing the relevant Teacher Standards and any areas of need and support. The mentor and mentee should also discuss the evidence that demonstrates where the Teacher Standards have, or have not yet, been met.

The four components within this element encompass:

- providing feedback about the mentee's knowledge regarding the education setting, child protection, and education policies
- providing feedback about professional practice and professional identity
- providing feedback about the mentee's ability to work with colleagues and the broader community
- monitoring workload and wellbeing.

How should these Guidelines be used?

This document can be used:

- to support leaders in education settings to guide the selection and development of mentors
- to provide guidance on the knowledge, skills, actions and behaviours required to be an effective mentor
- as a structure to underpin the development of effective mentoring programs in education settings
- as a basis for developing expert professional learning programs
- to support leaders and aspiring leaders to implement high-quality induction programs
- to support high-quality professional experience placements.

Unpacking the key elements of the Mentoring Guidelines

The following section unpacks the key elements required to select mentors and implement effective mentoring programs. In some cases, the indicators specifically target pre-service teachers or early career teachers. Implementation of an effective mentoring program is a responsibility shared by a number of people across the relevant education setting. These guidelines are coded to indicate the recommended breakdown of responsibilities.

Responsibility for implementation

The following headings are used to indicate responsibility:

Employers and education settings
Mentors
Pre-service or early career mentors

1 Selecting mentors

Employers and education settings

Mentors

1.1 Skills and personal attributes demonstrated by effective mentors

1.1.1 Highly developed interpersonal and communication skills

1.1.2 Experience in developing and maintaining positive, trusting professional relationships and experience in collaborative practice

1.1.3 In-depth understanding of the mentee's learning stage

1.1.4 Empathy, understanding and positivity (including about teaching as a profession)

1.1.5 Experience managing complex issues and difficult conversations

1.2 Required knowledge

1.2.1 In-depth pedagogical content knowledge, understanding, and skill in the mentee's content area

1.2.2 Experience, knowledge and understanding of the education setting in which the mentee is working

Pre-service teacher mentors

1.2.3 Knowledge of initial teacher education (ITE) completion requirements, including professional experience requirements, and specifically with regard to the final professional experience placement and teaching performance assessment (TPA)

1.2.4 Knowledge and understanding of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teacher Standards) at the Graduate career stage

1 Selecting mentors

Early career teacher mentors

1.2.5 Knowledge of full teacher registration requirements

1.2.6 In-depth knowledge and understanding of the Teacher Standards at the Proficient career stage

Employers and education settings

1.2.7 Knowledge of initial teacher education (ITE) completion requirements, including professional experience requirements, and specifically with regard to the final professional experience placement and teaching performance assessment (TPA).

2 Planning for effective mentoring

Employers and education settings

2.1 Establishing roles and responsibilities

- 2.1.1** Identify roles and responsibilities of key staff, including education support staff and the senior staff responsible for the mentoring program, ensuring all those involved understand how their role contributes to the professional development of pre-service and early career teachers
- 2.1.2** Identify roles and responsibilities of all participants in the mentoring program, the professional experience placement (for pre-service teachers) and any other induction processes. This will typically include the ITE mentor, the education setting mentor, the senior staff responsible for the mentoring program, the supervising teacher (if different to the mentor), other teaching staff and education support staff

2.2 Planning for mentoring

- 2.2.1** Allocate time for mentoring and associated activities (i.e. co-teaching, observations, coaching, discussions, etc.). Where possible, take advantage of mentoring time made available by the education setting

Mentors

- 2.2.2** Engage in professional learning about mentoring, including AITSL's online modules on *Supervising Pre-service Teachers* (if not already completed) as well as context-specific learning provided in-house by experienced teachers, including Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers (HALTs)
- 2.2.3** Attend regular meetings with mentors and relevant colleagues where each mentee's progress is reviewed, the effectiveness of the mentoring program is discussed, and this information is used to inform both operational and strategic planning

Pre-service teacher mentors

- 2.2.4** Organise administrative and educational requirements for the pre-service teacher, their professional experience placement and the TPA
- 2.2.5** Establish a pre-brief or initial briefing with the pre-service teacher to:
- discuss, prioritise and set goals for the professional experience placement or semester,
 - provide baseline student data for the pre-service teacher's classes, and
 - discuss the culture and contexts of the education setting
- 2.2.6** When mentoring pre-service teachers, work alongside the education setting's professional experience coordinator (if available) and establish contact with the ITE supervisor

2 Planning for effective mentoring

2.3 Providing an orientation for the mentee

Mentors and other relevant staff

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| 2.3.1 | Introduce the mentee to key education setting staff, including colleagues within the same teaching area, staff responsible for literacy, numeracy and wellbeing, and relevant education support staff |
| 2.3.2 | Advise the mentee about the roles and responsibilities of education support staff, literacy leaders and other relevant specialists to improve teaching practice and to support students and their learning |
| 2.3.3 | Provide and discuss policies to ensure mentees comply with their legal responsibilities, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• attendance• student safety and wellbeing• emergency procedures• curriculum standards• records management• student discipline and behaviour management• education setting-specific systems and processes• disability support including the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) |
| 2.3.4 | Ensure the mentee has sufficient knowledge and understanding of child protection requirements and how to manage professional boundaries including their relationship with students |
| 2.3.5 | Outline the context in which the education setting operates, including key issues, context-specific policies, and community leaders |

Mentors

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| 2.3.6 | Provide advice to the mentee regarding the collection of documents showing evidence of teacher progress in teaching and student learning. The evidence should be generated through the teacher's daily work rather than imposing additional requirements ¹ |
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¹ Examples of documentation include lesson plans, assessment tools and plans, records of feedback to students, lesson observation notes, and the development of individualised student learning plans.

3 Supporting staff wellbeing

3.1 Promoting access to staff wellbeing resources

Employers and education settings

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| 3.1.1 | Ensure both the mentor and mentee know which staff have responsibilities for teacher wellbeing and provide opportunities for discussions, networking, team building, and managing self to support individual wellbeing |
| 3.1.2 | Support staff wellbeing using resources, structured organisational frameworks and a commitment to understanding staff wellbeing needs in context |
| 3.1.3 | Create a safe space for all staff (including early career teachers and pre-service teachers) to raise issues |
| 3.1.4 | Promote the education setting's approach to cultural safety, responsiveness, and support |
| 3.1.5 | Manage performance expectations (of the school, mentors, other staff, parents and the wider community) by explicitly acknowledging that early career teachers and pre-service teachers may struggle with workload. |

3.2 Advise and support the mentee to manage their wellbeing, workload and expectations

Mentors

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| 3.2.1 | Model strategies for managing workload in collaboration with the mentee |
| 3.2.2 | Model and discuss strategies for stress management, resilience, and self-empowerment |
| 3.2.3 | Create a safe space for mentees to raise concerns before they become issues |
| 3.2.4 | Promote the education setting's approach to cultural safety, responsiveness, and support |

3.3 Monitoring the wellbeing of the mentee

Mentors

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| 3.3.1 | Monitor the mentee's confidence, resilience, and efficacy, including any growth over time, as demonstrated through their demeanor and presence |
| 3.3.2 | Assess, and discuss, the mentee's use of strategies for stress and workload management, as demonstrated through self and time management, encouraging the implementation of additional strategies if appropriate |

4 Developing professional identity

Mentors

4.1 Understanding the responsibilities and expectations of members of the teaching profession

4.1.1 Ensure the mentee understands their responsibilities and accountabilities as a member of the teaching profession

4.1.2 Model professional conduct, including demonstrating exemplary ethical behaviour with students, colleagues, and the community

4.2 Working effectively with the community

Mentors and other relevant staff

4.2.1 Support mentees to develop the skills needed to leverage relationships with community members and groups, and allied health professionals by:

- acknowledging local service providers by introducing them to mentees and supporting awareness of their role in the community
- providing relevant information to mentees prior to meetings with community stakeholders and allied health professionals
- highlighting the role of collaborative relationships in supporting the needs of learners
- enabling strong relationships within the community by modelling collaborative and inclusive leadership.

4.2.2 Encourage and support the mentee's understanding of the context in which the education setting operates, including engagement with parents and carers, and the community. Set clear expectations to create environments that foster responsive relationships between communities, the education setting, and the mentor/mentee

4.2.3 Champion the mentee's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and promote identifying and learning about Country as a core component of the mentoring program

5 Developing professional practice

Employers and education settings

Mentors and other relevant staff

5.1 Promoting professional learning

- 5.1.1 Implement a coherent program of regular and structured professional learning for the mentee. The program should promote practice-building through analysis of their own teaching and its impact on student learning
- 5.1.2 Encourage the mentee to access, use and interpret robust evidence-based educational research to inform their teaching
- 5.1.3 Mentors continually develop their own practice and knowledge (with regards to mentoring, subject-specific knowledge and pedagogical expertise) by accessing appropriate professional development and engaging with robust research
- 5.1.4 Mentors seek and reflect on feedback on their own teaching and mentoring practices

Mentors

5.2 Focusing on effective teaching strategies

- 5.2.1 Model high-quality teaching in the mentor's classroom(s), observed by the mentee
- 5.2.2 Model classroom and behaviour management strategies in the mentor's classroom(s), observed by the mentee
- 5.2.3 Promote observation as a learning tool. Encourage mentees to observe exemplary teaching within the education setting. Provide space for mentees to share their observations and reflect on the relevance of this for their own practice
- 5.2.4 Co-teach (on occasion) with the mentee to model and implement effective teaching practices
- 5.2.5 Collaborate with the mentee to provide formative and summative feedback to students, including participation in student assessment moderation opportunities

5 Developing professional practice

Mentors

5.3 Collaborating for professional learning

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| 5.3.1 | Co-plan lessons and sequences with the mentee to ensure curriculum and assessment practices (including student feedback) are appropriately understood and embedded into their teaching |
| 5.3.2 | Co-plan with the mentee to ensure they understand the need for, and can apply, practices which create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments |
| 5.3.3 | Use multiple approaches (e.g. modelling, coaching, co-teaching) to develop the capacity of the mentee to engage with, and effectively teach, learners with a diverse range of learning and accessibility requirements. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• higher ability learners• learners with disability• learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds• learners experiencing disadvantage due to factors such as learning difficulties or socioeconomic circumstances |

6 Providing feedback

Mentors

6.1 Providing feedback about the mentee's knowledge of the placement, education setting, and education policies

- 6.1.1 Evaluate, and provide constructive feedback about, the mentee's knowledge and understanding of:
- the roles and responsibilities of participants in the placement (pre-service teachers), induction process and/or mentoring program
 - the administrative and education requirements of the placement (pre-service teachers) and teacher registration process (early career teachers)
 - the culture and contexts of the education setting
 - child protection requirements and setting appropriate professional boundaries; and
 - education policies more generally

Mentors

6.2 Providing feedback to the mentee about their professional practice and sense of professional identity

- 6.2.1 Implement a program of regular classroom observations, coaching conversations, self-reflection, feedback with challenge, and collaborative discussions of the mentor's and mentee's practice, focused on content and pedagogy
- 6.2.2 Foster the mentee's sense of professional identity through the provision of affirmative, constructive feedback that reinforces effective teaching practices and encourages positive perspectives of teaching
- 6.2.3 Mentor and mentee discuss approaches to learning and achievement in the education setting, and cycles of improvement during their final professional experience placement and TPA (pre-service teachers only)
- 6.2.4 Jointly evaluate the mentee's growing repertoire of teaching strategies, as identified through observation and dialogue
- 6.2.5 Use practice observations, discussion, and student data to identify and evaluate evidence that the mentee's practice has promoted student learning
- 6.2.6 Evaluate if co-learning (of the mentor and mentee) has led to knowledge building, using evidence identified through observation and dialogue
- 6.2.7 Assess the mentee's understanding and use of robust educational research within their teaching practice
- 6.2.8 Regularly assess and discuss the mentee's use of effective strategies for:
- teaching and learning
 - creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments
 - assessing, moderating, and providing feedback on student learning

6 Providing feedback

- 6.2.9** Work collaboratively with the mentee to evidence growth in practice and the achievement of the Teacher Standards at the relevant career stage for the pre-service teacher/early career teacher (note that some ITE providers may target specific Standards in each placement)
- 6.2.10** Discuss priorities for ongoing professional development beyond the ITE program or mentoring program (for pre-service teachers/early career teachers, respectively)

Mentors

6.3 Providing feedback about the mentee's ability to work with colleagues and the community

- 6.3.1** Provide constructive feedback to the mentee on their work, when appropriate, with education support staff, literacy leaders and other relevant specialists to improve teaching practice and to support students and their learning
- 6.3.2** Evaluate the mentee's development of the skills needed to leverage collaborative relationships with community members and groups, and allied health professionals
- 6.3.3** Evaluate the mentee's development of an understanding of the context in which the education setting operates, including engagement with parents and carers, and the community, and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to identify and learn about Country as a core component of the mentoring program
- 6.3.4** Assess and discuss the mentee's understanding of the education setting's approach to cultural safety, responsiveness, and support, demonstrated through teaching and documentation, and proactively introduce remedial actions (when appropriate)

6.4 Support further development of the mentor's professional practice

Employers and education settings

- 6.4.1** Assess and provide constructive feedback to the mentor about their mentoring practice and the development of the mentoring relationship
- 6.4.2** Seek feedback from the mentee and other staff to support the mentor's development of mentoring, collaboration and leadership skills

