

National early career teacher mentoring and induction support

National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy

Focus Area 1-3

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AERO acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waterways, skies, islands and sea Country across Australia. We pay our deepest respects to First Nations cultures and Elders past and present. We endeavour to continually value and learn from First Nations knowledges and educational practices.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full term
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority
AISWA	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
APST	Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
CCS	Child Care Subsidy
EC	Early childhood
ECA	Early Childhood Australia
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
ELACCA	Early Learning & Care Council of Australia
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
FTE	Full-time equivalent
NESA	NSW Education Standards Authority
NQF	National Quality Framework
NQS	National Quality Standards
NWC	National Workforce Census
NWS	National Workforce Strategy
OSHC	Outside school hours care
SRC	Social Research Centre
SRF	School Readiness Funding
VIT	Victorian Institute of Teaching

Executive summary

There is widespread support for enhanced mentoring and induction for new early childhood teachers, but significant structural barriers to delivering them. National support for mentoring and induction could drive collaboration across the early childhood system to ensure no teacher misses out.

This report addresses the following action from the Shaping Our Future: Implementation and Evaluation Plan for the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (NWS):

FA1-3: Consider the appropriateness of national early career teacher mentoring and induction support, following a review of existing supports that are available at jurisdictional and local levels.

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), in partnership with Deakin University, undertook research and analysis to support implementation of this action, including analysis of existing supports, a review of international literature, and research into the perspectives and experiences of current early childhood teachers, educators and leaders.

This study found that 5 ingredients are necessary to enhance mentoring and induction nationally:

- national commitment and collaboration
- clarity of purpose and outcomes
- an adequate supply of skilled mentors
- sufficient time for effective learning
- flexible options for diverse contexts.

AERO's 5 core recommendations address these areas of need in chronological sequence. They begin with recommendations that aim to create the conditions in which effective mentoring and induction for new teachers can occur: a national commitment, clear objectives, sufficient mentors and dedicated time. The final recommendations address the kind of programs that might be delivered once these conditions are in place, and who would be responsible for delivering them.

All recommendations will require the collaboration of governments (state and federal), peak organisations, providers, universities, teachers and leaders. The recommendations also require strategic integration with other related NWS actions to ensure that reform is cohesive and efficient and that actions are mutually reinforcing. Nested within each recommendation are practical steps these actors can take to achieve equitable and sustainable support for new teachers.

Summary of key recommendations and research findings

National commitment and collaboration

Recommendation 1: Establish a national commitment to mentoring and induction for all early career teachers in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services

Recommendation 1.1: Position mentoring and induction as evidence-based strategies to improve teacher retention and wellbeing

Research shows that mentoring and induction for new teachers offer many benefits, including improved retention, professional practice and wellbeing. Promoting these benefits at all levels of the ECEC system would help drive collaborative action.

Recommendation 1.2: Review how regulatory authorities and providers implement the expectations for mentoring and induction in the National Quality Standard (NQS)

National guidance on the NQS sets clear expectations for mentoring and induction to occur, but research participants indicated a need for stronger regulatory oversight. The apparent gap between expectation and implementation warrants exploration.

Recommendation 1.3: Allocate equity funding to mentoring and induction to ensure commitment is translated into action

Government investment in mentoring and induction for new teachers would send a strong message about its importance and enable change. Investment in mentoring and induction would require careful navigation of complex ECEC funding channels.

Recommendation 1.4: Ensure national reform is informed by mentoring and induction as already enacted in Indigenous early childhood communities

The development of national support, including regulatory expectations and funding mechanisms, should recognise the principles and practices of mentoring and induction that already exist in Indigenous early childhood communities.

Clarity of purpose and outcomes

Recommendation 2: Prioritise teachers' 'belonging, being and becoming'

Recommendation 2.1: Adopt a holistic outcomes framework for supporting new teachers' professional learning, identity, communication, wellbeing and connection and contribution to their world

The 5 outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework V2.0 (EYLF) are as relevant to new teachers as they are to children. They also offer a holistic framework for the outcomes of mentoring and induction that recognises the importance of wellbeing and learning.

Recommendation 2.2: Tailor the goals of mentoring and induction to teachers' cultural backgrounds, prior experiences and needs

Effective mentoring and induction respond to the diversity of early childhood teachers, including their experience in the sector and cultural background. Culturally responsive engagement alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers needs to be embedded and implemented in mentoring and induction within every ECEC service.

Recommendation 2.3: Leverage learning from Indigenous early childhood communities' existing practice by including collaborative, interprofessional practice as part of mentoring and induction

Indigenous early childhood communities already integrate learning and wellbeing into mentoring and induction in holistic ways, drawing on a range of expertise from within their communities. These ways of knowing, being and doing must be supported.

Adequate supply of skilled mentors**Recommendation 3: Increase mentor supply using role design, remuneration and training****Recommendation 3.1: Clarify expectations for mentoring within existing roles and ensure adequate skills, time and remuneration**

Educational leaders, teachers and service leaders in ECEC services all have expectations for mentoring within their roles, but do not necessarily have adequate time, skills or remuneration. Clearer role design could help activate existing mentoring capacity.

Recommendation 3.2: Trial collaborative models for external mentors, including partnerships, a pool, universities or peers

Access to external mentors is necessary for teachers who have no suitable mentor at their ECEC service. External mentors could be provided through a range of models, such as ECEC services sharing mentors, a national pool of trained mentors, university-based mentors or peer support.

Recommendation 3.3: Provide training and ongoing support for mentors in mentoring strategies that apply relational pedagogy to adult learning

Mentors must have high-quality training in mentoring strategies, as well as expertise in early childhood practice. Responsive relationships are essential to the success of mentoring, so *relational pedagogy* could be applied to adult learning.

Recommendation 3.4: Retain and fund Elder-led mentoring and induction processes within Indigenous early childhood organisations

Elders and community leaders have important roles in both cultural and professional mentoring in Indigenous early childhood communities. These processes should be determined by the Elders and community leaders within the early childhood organisation and be recognised and funded within national mentoring and induction support.

Sufficient time for effective learning**Recommendation 4: Increase available time for mentoring and induction by integrating it within new teachers' and mentors' workloads****Recommendation 4.1: Provide funding to ensure new teachers and mentors have dedicated time for mentoring and induction**

The time that new teachers and mentors have for mentoring and induction depends on the level of investment. Dedicated funding is needed for teachers in all types of ECEC services to ensure that they have dedicated time for professional learning.

Recommendation 4.2: Complement dedicated time for mentoring and induction with collaboration and observation of practice

In addition to (not as a substitute for) funding for dedicated time, new teachers may benefit from opportunities to work collaboratively with their mentor while engaging with children. The team-based nature of ECEC work offers opportunities to do this.

Recommendation 4.3: Integrate mentoring and induction into initial teacher education courses

Mentoring and induction to the sector are already embedded in some preservice teacher education courses, although student experiences vary widely. Connecting mentoring for students with mentoring for graduates could streamline processes and strengthen continuity.

Recommendation 4.4: Extend timeframes for mentoring and induction to respond to the diverse needs of new teachers

Mentoring and induction for new teachers commonly occur over 1 to 2 years, but longer timeframes may be needed due to the high proportion of early childhood teachers working part-time. ‘Slow and deliberate mentoring’ can also lead to deeper learning.

Flexible options for diverse contexts**Recommendation 5: Establish national evidence-based guidelines for mentoring and induction provision adaptable to local contexts****Recommendation 5.1: Establish national, evidence-informed expectations for the components of mentoring and induction processes**

Mentoring and induction for new teachers requires action at system, ECEC service and individual level. National guidance could clarify system, service and individual responsibilities, and help to ensure mentoring and induction for all new teachers comprises evidence-based features flexible enough to be adapted to local context.

Recommendation 5.2: Promote a national menu of flexible options accessible to professionally isolated teachers

Professionally isolated teachers include those in rural and remote ECEC services or those who are the only teacher at their ECEC service. National guidelines must promote a range of options for meeting their needs, drawing on the models proposed in this report.

Recommendation 5.3: Identify, listen to and support community-led, co-designed models for supporting teachers – especially in Indigenous communities

National support must recognise the capability that exists within local communities to nurture new teachers in the context of their culture and Country. Community-led models are especially important for Indigenous early childhood communities.

About this study

This report draws on the following research and analysis:

- a review of Australian and international research literature on mentoring and induction undertaken by AERO and augmented by Deakin University
- interviews, focus groups and a national survey of teachers, educators and leaders undertaken by Deakin University. This included a dedicated ‘Yarning Up’ with Indigenous teachers, educators and leaders, with data gathered and analysed using culturally responsive Indigenous methodologies.
- stakeholder consultations undertaken by AERO (see [Appendix A: Overview of consultations and review of existing approaches](#))
- synthesis of findings and development of recommendations by AERO, with the aim of providing clear proposals for policymakers and sector leaders to consider in the next stage of implementing the NWS actions.

[Appendix B: Research methods](#) provides details of the research methods used in this study.

Participation included:

- survey responses from 454 participants (223 partially completed), covering a range of ECEC service types, roles and qualification levels, and representing all states and territories (with around one-third each coming from New South Wales and Victoria)
- interviews and focus groups with 33 participants, who were predominantly degree-qualified and working as teachers or educational leaders across a range of ECEC service types. The remaining participants included diverse roles such as preschool field officer,¹ university employee, consultant, practice coach, leader of a peak organisation, recruiter, and child and family practitioner.

Significant pressures on the ECEC sector – such as staff shortages and concurrent consultations in 2023 – made participant recruitment challenging. The efforts of educators, teachers and leaders to make time to participate attest to their enthusiasm for enhanced support. Their input provided vivid insights into the lived experiences of teachers, educators and leaders, and has shaped the report and its recommendations. There would be value in further consultation as proposals for reform are further developed and pathways to implementation begin to be identified.

The authors thank the educators, teachers and leaders who participated in the research; the representatives of jurisdictions, peak bodies and providers who participated in consultations; and Dr Katey De Gioia, Dr Melanie Thomas, Dr Kelly Johnston and Anna Razak who assisted in the preparation of this report.

¹ Preschool field officers provide short-term guidance and coaching to ECEC educators in Victoria to improve the inclusion of children with additional needs. These positions are Victorian Government-funded.

Introduction

The National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (NWS) sets out a suite of interconnected focus areas and actions to build Australia's early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce.

This report addresses the following NWS action:

FA1-3: Enhance mentoring and induction support for new teachers.

To achieve this action, the NWS Implementation and Evaluation Plan commits to:

Consider the appropriateness of national early career teacher mentoring and induction support, following a review of existing supports that are available at jurisdictional and local levels.

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) was tasked with reviewing existing supports and analysing their relative effectiveness, alongside a domestic and international literature review of mentoring and induction support.

There can be no doubt that mentoring and induction are important supports for early career teachers, as is strongly demonstrated in the research described in this report. The recent draft Productivity Commission report, *A Path to Universal Early Childhood Education and Care*, also recognised the need for teacher mentoring and support:

Better mentoring would be particularly important for new ECTs [early childhood teachers], whether they work in dedicated preschools or CBDC [centre-based day care]. Unlike school teachers, ECTs are often required to shoulder great responsibility early in their careers and with few formal structures in place to support them (Productivity Commission, 2023, p. 35).

This report addresses the question raised in the NWS about the 'appropriateness' of 'national' support, in light of the existing supports provided by jurisdictions or locally. This raises questions about the role of different bodies in Australia's complex ECEC sector and the collective effort that will be needed to achieve NWS aims.

The proposal for national mentoring and induction support in the NWS relates to the proposal to implement early childhood teacher registration in each state and territory (FA1-2). In Australian schools, mentoring and induction are recognised as important components of new teachers' transition from Graduate (provisionally registered) to Proficient (registered) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2016). Responsibility for facilitating these arrangements falls to 'systems, sectors and teacher regulatory authorities', taking account of 'varying employment arrangements and local circumstances' (AITSL, 2016, p. 11).

Current teacher registration/accreditation requirements and supports for new early childhood teachers vary across jurisdictions, and in some cases, include mentoring or induction. This report does not pre-empt any decisions about teacher registration to be made under action FA1-2, but presents proposals for mentoring and induction that could be linked to registration or adopted as beneficial in their own right.

Defining ‘early career teacher’

The variation in teacher registration across jurisdictions is just one aspect of the complexity involved in defining the ‘early career teachers’ to whom national mentoring and induction support may be delivered. The National Regulations define ‘early childhood teacher’ as ‘a person with an approved early childhood teaching qualification’, where the qualification is approved by the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and published in the list published under regulation 127. A ‘new’ or ‘early career teacher’ may be understood to be someone who has recently acquired this qualification.

This definition still allows for considerable complexity in early childhood teachers’ roles, which will need to be navigated in the design of any national support:

- **Early childhood teachers may have diverse qualifications**

Early childhood teachers must hold a bachelor or postgraduate degree that is approved by ACECQA (including overseas degrees). These degrees may cover birth to 5, or both early childhood and primary teaching. Until December 2024, qualified primary or secondary teachers may also be counted as ‘equivalent early childhood teachers’ if they hold an ECEC qualification at certificate level or higher. In some jurisdictions, a further option exists until December 2024 for those who are diploma-qualified and ‘actively working towards’ an early childhood teaching qualification to be counted as qualified teachers.

- **New early childhood teachers are not necessarily ‘early career’**

Unlike school teaching, where a degree is a condition of entry, many early childhood teachers obtain degrees after already working in the sector for some time, having first completed a vocational certificate or diploma. This progression through qualifications provides a valuable career pathway for many educators in the sector, with implications for the kind of support that may be required once the role of degree-qualified ‘teacher’ is attained.

- **Early childhood teachers may hold many different roles in ECEC services**

Most early childhood teachers deliver preschool programs, as delivery by a degree-qualified teacher (or equivalent) is a condition of preschool funding. Some teachers work with children in the birth-to-3 age range in roles that are not required to be filled by a degree-qualified teacher. From early in their careers, many hold additional roles as room leader, educational leader or even service leader. Indeed, in a small standalone preschool, the teacher is usually also the service leader. A small proportion of teachers work in family day care as educators, educational leaders or coordinators.

- **Even teachers delivering preschool programs work in different ways**

Preschool programs themselves are diverse, and may be delivered to children in the one or 2 years before school (with several jurisdictions offering 3-year-old preschool). Standalone preschools usually provide part-day ‘sessional’ programs and long day care services deliver preschool as part of a full-day program, while preschools on school sites may schedule their program to align with the school day. The dominant model of preschool delivery varies across jurisdictions (Pilcher et al., 2021).

- **Early childhood teachers may work alone or alongside educator colleagues**

Staffing arrangements for ECEC services are determined by educator-to-child ratios. For children from 36 months to preschool age, the ratio is either 1:11 or 1:10, depending on the jurisdiction. This means that teachers delivering preschool programs are likely to have at least one other educator working with them, who may hold a vocational certificate or diploma in ECEC.

Key statistics on Australian ECEC settings ([Appendix C: Overview of the Australian ECEC workforce](#)) further illustrate the varied contexts in which new early childhood teachers work. These many layers of complexity demand careful consideration of who could access national mentoring and induction support, and what form it could take. It demands flexibility and innovation in developing fit-for-purpose options for this diverse, dynamic sector, to balance equality of access for all new teachers with tailored solutions that meet their needs. The recommendations in this report aim to offer sufficient flexibility to respond to ongoing developments in how early childhood teachers' roles and identities are defined, while guaranteeing that all new teachers will be supported in the crucial early stages of their role.

Defining 'mentoring and induction'

In this report, induction is taken to mean the learning that occurs when a newly qualified early childhood teacher commences in a teaching role – including orientation to their ECEC service and the sector. The AITSL guidelines for induction of new teachers frame mentoring as part of high-quality induction programs, alongside other forms of support:

The best induction programs include practice-focused mentoring, leadership contact, participation in collaborative networks, targeted professional learning, observation and reflection on teaching, practical information and time allocation (AITSL, 2016, p. 2).

The intersection between mentoring and induction is also evident in research (AITSL, 2015; Hobson & Ashby, 2012; Hogan & White, 2021; Moore-Johnson et al., 2005; Moss, 2010). This report, therefore, examines mentoring as part of induction for new early childhood teachers, alongside other possible induction supports.

Both mentoring and induction also have broader applications in ECEC services, beyond the focus on new teachers in this report. ACECQA recognises that 'mentoring is beneficial to all educators throughout their career' (Livingstone, 2018, p. 1), and that induction also occurs when new teachers and educators join an ECEC service, not only when they begin their careers (ACECQA, 2021). While these broader uses of mentoring and induction are outside the scope of this study, the findings and recommendations of this report may also help to strengthen mentoring and induction at any stage of teachers' careers.

This report defines mentoring as a collaborative model of professional learning and individualised support involving a supportive relationship between the mentor and mentee (Bainger, 2010; Lacey, 2000; Nolan, 2017; Peterson et al., 2010). It takes account of the flexibility in how mentoring is defined in contemporary research:

- While traditional mentoring involves a novice/expert relationship, more collaborative approaches are emerging in which the mentor and mentee are both teachers and learners who co-construct learning together (Nolan, 2017).
- While mentoring typically involves a 1:1 relationship, some research defines it as involving 'two or more individuals' (Wong & Waniganayake, 2013, p. 163).

Mentors are also referred to in a range of ways, and are sometimes called coaches or supervisors (Coombe, 1994; Doan, 2016a; Doan et al., 2021; Doan & Jang, 2020; Kupila et al., 2017; Lacey, 2000; Longley & Gilken, 2020; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Moss, 2010; Pavia et al., 2003; Puig & Recchia, 2008; Quinones et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2012; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007; Walkington, 2005).

This report draws a distinction between coaching as focused on specific structured elements of practice and mentoring as providing more holistic support (Nolan, 2017). Coaching may be part of a mentoring relationship, especially if the focus is on improving practice.

The distinction between supervision and mentoring is more complex to define. Several supervisory roles exist in Australian ECEC services (service leader/director, educational leader, nominated supervisor, responsible person, room leader), which have the potential to overlap with mentoring responsibilities for new early childhood teachers. By focusing on ‘mentoring’ as a practice rather than ‘mentor’ as a designated role, it is possible to explore those intersections and the opportunities that they offer to the sector.

Defining ‘national support’

Consideration of ‘national early career teacher mentoring and support’ under the NWS calls for a definition of what ‘national support’ may involve. Many government-led supports for ECEC services are provided by state and territory governments (referred to in this report as ‘jurisdictions’) or local government. Large ECEC providers also offer a range of support for the teachers they employ, as do peak organisations for their members. Any proposals for national action must build on, not inhibit, these existing approaches.

The NWS is a collaborative strategy agreed between ECEC sector stakeholders and government representatives, involving collective effort to achieve change. Proposals therefore also need to consider what ECEC providers, peak bodies and other organisations can contribute and the support they may need to do so, as well as approaches that are already proving effective and warrant ongoing support. Like governments, these approaches may operate at national, state or local level.

Based on the existing architecture of the Australian ECEC sector, supports that could be provided at the national level include funding, regulation, guidelines or direct delivery of services or programs. National actors also have an important role in setting cultural expectations for the sector and catalysing action from stakeholders at all levels of the system. This array of possibilities – and the various actors who may implement them – frames the recommendations in this report.

Defining ‘appropriateness’

‘Appropriateness’ is perhaps the most critical term to define in the NWS action, as the standard against options will be appraised. This report has taken 3 dimensions of appropriateness into account in framing recommendations:

Do the recommendations reflect the best available research?

Mentoring and induction research provides few evaluations of the effectiveness of specific programs, or how they can operate within the diverse Australian ECEC sector. Few studies used designs that delivered *very high confidence* in the findings according to AERO’s Standards of Evidence (AERO, 2020). The research nevertheless provided valuable general insights into components of mentoring and induction that are *likely* to deliver benefits if certain conditions are met. These insights are presented throughout this report to support the relevant recommendations.

The new research undertaken for this study (see [Appendix B: Research methods](#)) adds further insights from teachers, educators and leaders about the appropriateness of mentoring and induction in the current Australian ECEC sector context.

Do the recommendations support the achievement of policy goals?

The NWS Implementation and Evaluation Plan positions mentoring and induction in Focus Area 1: Professional Recognition, along with actions to improve pay and conditions, teacher registration, a communications campaign about ECEC careers, and use of consistent terminology. The anticipated benefits of this suite of actions are:

- increased sense of professional identity
- improved community perception of the sector workforce
- increased professional registration of the sector workforce.

While professional identity is one reported benefit of mentoring and induction, this study found that the benefits more strongly reflected other Focus Areas of the NWS – especially *quality of practice*, *wellbeing* and *retention*. In interviews and focus groups, participants expressed some scepticism about the likelihood of mentoring and induction improving professional recognition, noting that decades of professional learning had not raised the status of ECEC careers.

This suggests that national mentoring and induction support *is* appropriate to NWS policy goals, but not the specific goals to which the Plan attaches it. The need for clarity about the goals of mentoring and induction is discussed further in this report.

Do the recommendations reflect the priorities of practitioners?

The survey, interviews and focus groups provided rich data about the priorities of teachers, educators and leaders in relation to mentoring and induction for new teachers. These insights are summarised under relevant recommendations, including key quotes.

The qualitative data also revealed a tension between enthusiasm for mentoring and induction and a prevailing sense of exhaustion at what is already expected of the sector. Unsurprisingly, participants were often preoccupied with workforce shortages, intensifying workloads and the need to improve pay and conditions. Their endorsement of mentoring and induction was often framed in these terms, as a strategy to stem the exodus of teachers and drain of the sector's expertise.

Perspectives from Aboriginal participants in Yarning Up groups contrasted with this urgency and presented a hopeful vision of what mentoring and induction could look like in the longer term. Priorities in these groups concerned cultural safety, Country and community as essential considerations in any national action.

Recommendations

The core vision of this report is that all newly qualified early childhood teachers across Australia, no matter the context they work in, receive effective mentoring and induction support.

Effective support for new teachers is a vital component of quality practice leading to improved child outcomes. It establishes a foundation for teachers' ongoing professional growth, thereby influencing workforce retention in the ECEC sector.

Inequality in access to mentoring and induction was a recurrent theme in focus groups and interviews, as well as in the research literature. ECEC service-level differences emerged as a major factor in teachers' access to mentoring and induction, including the service's philosophy, organisational structure, expectations and level of managerial support (Morrissey & Nolan, 2015). Provider size was another factor, with teachers working for large ECEC providers being more likely to have access to a mentor. Yet even new teachers in large organisations may have limited access to expert colleagues.

All participants considered mentoring and induction essential for all new teachers in any context. Many shared their positive experiences, while some lamented that they did not receive support and reflected on how beneficial it would have been had it been available to them. Most saw the proposal for national support as an important opportunity to address inequalities in access and ensure every teacher is supported.

The hopes of participants and insights from research can be drawn together into a vision for mentoring and induction for new teachers in Australia:

Access to mentoring and induction is guaranteed for all new teachers by a strong culture of collegial learning across the sector, underpinned by government funding and regulation.

Mentoring and induction support teachers' holistic 'belonging, being and becoming' in the early childhood profession.

All new teachers are matched with a mentor who is an expert in practice, trained in mentoring, compatible in personality, culturally responsive and attuned to their needs and goals.

Both mentor and mentee receive regular paid time outside of their normal duties for observations of practice, engagement with evidence and shared collegial reflection.

The tensions in this study did not arise from disagreement about the elements of this vision, but the vast gap between what is desirable and achievable in the current ECEC context. Participants' aspirations for universal access to mentoring and induction crashed against substantial barriers to making the vision a reality. The recommendations in this report aim to bridge the gap between the desirable and the possible.

The following ingredients are necessary to enhance mentoring and induction nationally:

- national commitment and collaboration
- clarity of purpose and outcomes
- an adequate supply of skilled mentors
- sufficient time for effective learning
- flexible options for diverse contexts.

The 5 core recommendations in this report address these areas of need. Within each core recommendation are detailed proposals that identify practical steps that governments and other stakeholders can take to progress towards mentoring and induction for all new teachers, reflecting the NWS's collaborative approach.

These recommendations must be considered in the context of other NWS actions to create a cohesive approach to reform. In particular, several participants noted the potential for mentoring and professional networks to provide complementary forms of collegial support to early childhood teachers at early career stages and beyond. This report, therefore, is best read in conjunction with [AERO's second NWS report: National Professional Practice Network for Educators and Teachers](#). Many insights are relevant across both reports, as both concern the ways in which early childhood professionals can support one another and create a culture of collegial learning. This culture has great potential to sustain ongoing improvement across the ECEC sector and help elevate the status of the profession.



Recommendation 1: Establish a national commitment to mentoring and induction for all early career teachers in ECEC services

Enhancing mentoring and induction for new teachers requires a shift in the ECEC sector towards a culture of embedded peer support and collegial professional learning. This study found that this culture is not yet embedded in the sector:

There is no culture of ‘transferring knowledge’ and that is very important to foster.

Our teachers are being thrown in the deep end and not given any floaties.

One teacher vividly described the impact that lack of induction has on new teachers:

I expected more support from the organisation that I work for, from other early childhood teachers within the industry, from my colleagues. Yeah, as far as a new grad, I expected to be mentored ... I'm driven. I have a drive to learn, and I don't want to give up. I'm not ready to give up. But I'm just like, I'm burnt out like, it's only halfway through the year ... I just want someone to sit down with, a more knowledgeable other to sit down with, and for them to like, map it out, you know. Okay, this is what it looks like, step by step. So it's not just like one big, overwhelming process. And I feel defeated before I've even begun.

Stories like this speak urgently to the high personal cost of inadequate mentoring and induction, as new teachers’ enthusiasm is extinguished rather than nurtured.

Research participants frequently saw the greatest need for cultural change at the level of individual ECEC services. While many services value new teachers and invest in supporting them to thrive, this experience is not universal. In some ECEC services, mentoring and induction are ‘perfunctory and not valued as important’, reflecting a ‘lack of value and understanding’ of the needs of new teachers and long-term benefits of support. One participant complained of:

The number of organisations who try and avoid or by not making induction and mentoring a priority, but just to get away with not doing what they’re supposed to do.

One Australian study found that reluctance to effectively induct new teachers caused some ECEC services to avoid employing them altogether (Boyd et al., 2020).

While commitment at the service level is essential for a culture of mentoring and induction to thrive, change will require collective effort at all levels of the ECEC sector:

It's a team effort by everyone to ensure early career teachers feel supported and don't burn out.

The recommendations in the following sections explore specific strategies that governments and other stakeholders can use to motivate a commitment to mentoring and induction for all new teachers throughout the ECEC sector: including the ‘soft influence’ lever of cultural leadership, backed by the ‘hard’ levers of funding and regulation.

Recommendation 1.1: Position mentoring and induction as evidence-based strategies to improve teacher retention and wellbeing

Support for mentoring and induction at service level depends on awareness of the potential benefits of supporting new teachers in the short- and longer-term:

Some do it well because [they] recognise the value and are prepared to provide funds and time as they know they benefit in the long run.

Leadership need to see the value in induction support and how that can impact that educator's career and likelihood of remaining within the sector.

The review of relevant literature found that the benefits of mentoring and induction are difficult to define precisely, because of wide variation in the nature of programs and the number of variables that can influence their outcomes (Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Price & Jackson-Barrett, 2009; Quinones et al., 2020; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007). Nevertheless, the research indicates a range of benefits that mentoring and induction may deliver:

- reduced attrition (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Tekir, 2022) with retention effects persisting for at least 5 years (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017)
- improved professional competence and wellbeing (Richter et al., 2013)
- greater professional commitment and identity (Vaitzman & Berkovich, 2021)
- enhanced outcomes for children (Nolan et al., 2012; Nolan & Beahan, 2013)
- better pedagogy (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Kwok et al., 2022; Nolan & Molla, 2021).

The strong support for mentoring and induction among participants in this study also reflected the range of benefits such supports are likely to deliver.

Championing these benefits at a national level may help motivate change at the level of individual ECEC services, leaders and teachers, and create the desired outcome of 'Organisational commitment and value placed on setting people up for success'. Governments can champion change by informing and influencing stakeholders. Engaging stakeholders with the 'why' of policy (rationale and underlying concepts) is increasingly recognised as the key to successful educational reform (Burns & Rouw, 2017). Other sector leaders also play a role – for example, Early Childhood Australia (ECA) effects strong cultural leadership in the sector through its Code of Ethics, which includes a commitment to 'implement strategies that support and mentor colleagues to make positive contributions to the profession' (ECA, 2016, p. 2).

Recommendation 1.2: Review how regulatory authorities and providers implement the expectations for mentoring and induction in the National Quality Standard

Our study suggests that a gap exists between regulatory requirements for mentoring and induction, and participants' experience of their implementation. Regulatory requirements already exist at a national level for ECEC services to provide induction (which may include mentoring) – both to new teachers and others new to the service. The initial 2012 version of the National Quality Standard (NQS) for ECEC services explicitly named induction as an essential component of quality practice:

Element 7.1.2: The induction of educators, co-ordinators and staff members is comprehensive (NQS, 2012).

While induction is not named in the streamlined 2018 version of the NQS, it is implicit in the requirement for clarity in roles and responsibilities for all staff:

Element 7.1.3: Roles and responsibilities – Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and understood, and support effective decision-making and operation of the service (NQS, 2018).

The Guide to the National Quality Framework (NQF) (ACECQA, 2023a) also sets out what authorised officers may look for in assessing and rating an ECEC service against the NQS. It recognises the importance of induction in overall ECEC service culture:

A comprehensive induction process plays a critical role in creating and maintaining a positive and professional culture (ACECQA, 2023a, p. 325).

It states that authorised officers may examine the following aspects of induction:

[all staff members'] experience of, and satisfaction with, the service's induction process (ACECQA, 2023a, p. 326)

[new staff members'] level of understanding of the philosophy of the service and the context in which it operates (ACECQA, 2023a, p. 326)

The service's documented induction procedure (ACECQA, 2023a, p. 326).

It also states that authorised officers may examine mentoring arrangements:

how educators and staff members are encouraged to support and mentor each other (ACECQA, 2023a, p. 241)

how educators are mentored and supported through learning communities, positive organisational culture and professional conversations (ACECQA, 2023a, p. 337).

This does not mean that authorised officers will examine all these aspects of practice in every assessment, but clearly indicates that mentoring and induction form part of the evidence that authorised officers gather to inform assessment and rating decisions.

ACECQA (2021) has published further guidance on effective induction for new ECEC staff. This guide signals a shift in how induction is positioned in regulation, from a discrete process that may be 'ticked off', to a more holistic part of quality practice. It connects induction to NQS elements concerning risk management (7.1.2), performance evaluation and staff development (7.2.3), as well as the ECEC service's statement of philosophy (7.2.3). The guide also highlights the link between induction and Standard 4.2: Professionalism, including professional standards (4.2.2) and collaboration (4.2.3):

Element 4.2.3: Professional collaboration – Management, educators and staff work with mutual respect and collaboratively, and challenge and learn from each other, recognising each other's strengths and skills (NQS, 2018).

Additionally, ACECQA (2021) advises that induction needs to include the ECEC service's educational program and practice (Quality Area 1) and awareness of the needs of any vulnerable children and families attending the service (Quality Area 2).

Given the extent of this guidance, it was surprising that research participants saw a need for stronger regulatory oversight of mentoring and induction. Many participants argued for it to be made compulsory for ECEC services to deliver mentoring and induction, as a perceived solution to the inconsistency in what new teachers receive. Suggestions for 'legislative' or 'policy' requirements came from participants in preschool and long day care across different provider types and jurisdictions. One participant asked for services to be assessed to ensure that mentoring and induction are 'adequate', while another sought changes to the NQS to require 'concrete evidence and outcomes' of mentoring and induction practice.

The apparent gap between regulatory requirements for mentoring and induction, and participants' experiences of their implementation may be because practical barriers (discussed elsewhere in this report) prevent regulatory expectations from being implemented in meaningful ways. It may also indicate scope for stronger alignment between the NQS and other policy and regulatory mechanisms that can support mentoring and induction for new teachers at all levels of the system, including:

- state-level preschool funding guidelines
- industrial awards negotiated between employers and unions
- ECEC services' own internal policies for staff professional development.

Aligning expectations across all policies governing the sector can help to translate national expectations for mentoring and induction into changes to practice.

At the same time, there is also a risk that reliance on regulatory levers may generate superficial compliance rather than deep change, as one participant observed:

A lot of the training that ECEC does is to tick the boxes, sometimes because of the assessment and ratings. It's not so much out of passion or interest, because it's very busy ticking everything off.

While regulatory and policy levers can set a 'national baseline standard' for mentoring and induction, they are best deployed as supports for a deeper cultural shift towards supporting new teachers, not as substitutes.

Recommendation 1.3: Allocate equity funding to mentoring and induction to ensure commitment is translated into action

Funding is necessary to both incentivise and enable improvements to mentoring and induction for new teachers. One teacher spoke about the powerful message that government investment sends about the importance of new teachers:

I just think that the government investing – that for the new graduate teachers [it] is an investment ... in the long term, and it shows and makes you feel that you matter because they're willing to put that money in.

Another supported the value of this recognition, contrasting the current situation in ECEC with the additional funding that schools receive to support new teachers:

I look at this beautiful wrap around support [in schools] that you don't have to fight for. You don't have to push for it. It's actually given to you and encouraged, because that professional development is so important. I feel like in the ECEC sector ... that investment isn't there, as it is in a primary school setting, although we're all teachers and we all have a degree. It's not embraced and recognised. And I think that kind of impacts the ability of upping that professional lens on early childhood teachers ...

Many other research participants expressed similar views: that if mentoring and induction for new teachers is to be given the priority it deserves, then it must be adequately funded. This view was also supported in research, with Langdon et al. (2016) arguing that governments must support mentoring and induction for new teachers through both funding and regulation, or it is unlikely to occur.

The pathway for investment is far less clear. Costs associated with mentoring and induction almost all involve staff time (for both mentor and mentee), which poses challenges for how funding is allocated and distributed. ECEC funding in Australia is fragmented and complex, involving many channels for investment:

- Funding for preschool programs (whether standalone programs or within long day care services or schools) is distributed directly to services by jurisdictions under the national Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA). As most early childhood teachers deliver preschool programs, this funding stream pays for most of their time, but does not pay for the time of teachers working with younger age groups (0–3) or in family day care services.
- Funding for long day care and family day care services is provided by the Australian Government to families through the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). Combined with fees to families, this funding stream pays for the time of teachers working with children aged 0–3 years or in family day care services, as well as many teachers employed as educational leaders or service leaders.

- Funding for professional development may be provided at state or national levels, and may include program delivery (such as employing facilitators or creating materials), and ‘backfill’ payments for services to release teachers or educators to attend. Most jurisdictions invest in professional learning programs for preschool teachers, with some also available to teachers in long day care. Nationally, ACECQA provides professional learning resources for all ECEC services.
- Some governments provide targeted professional development funding to address equity gaps. Current examples of targeted funding include:
 - the Australian Government Professional Development Subsidy, available to support ‘mandatory’ or ‘highly-recommended’ training for ECEC services in regional, remote and very remote locations, or ‘First Nations services and educators’ (Australian Government Department of Education, 2023, p. 1)
 - Kindy Uplift funding in Queensland, and Victoria’s School Readiness Funding (SRF), both of which allocate additional funding to preschools based on families’ level of educational disadvantage, that ECEC services can use in a range of ways, including for coaching and mentoring. One participant reported that her employer requires all of their ECEC services to use some of their SRF funding for coaching for staff.
- ECEC providers also invest in professional learning, including resources, programs and events, or additional staff in coaching or mentoring roles. The level of investment varies according to provider size and operating model.
- Peak organisations play an active role in developing the workforce, including by providing resources and support to member organisations or individuals.
- Preservice teacher education (jointly funded by the Australian Government, universities and individual students) provides another possible channel for investment in mentoring and induction, as discussed later in this report.

Navigating this array of investment channels requires careful choices about who mentoring and induction is for, what it involves, and how funding can help make it happen. These questions are explored in subsequent sections of this report.

As with regulation, a collective commitment to supporting mentoring and induction can help make funding mechanisms more efficient and effective. Governments need assurance that any additional funding provided to ECEC services will be used to support new teachers. One participant said of current government funding that ‘we can only hope it trickles down through the service’. A strong shared culture of collegial learning could motivate both governments and ECEC services to value new teachers as a long-term investment in the sector’s future.

Recommendation 1.4: Ensure national reform is informed by mentoring and induction as already enacted in Indigenous early childhood communities

The Yarning Up findings (see the following text box) show that mentoring and induction practices are already embedded into the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood communities. These practices illustrate the capacity to generate a strong sense of community that relates with one another with the aim of reciprocally developing a strong workforce, culturally supported through Community. Further, it reinforces that communities retain self-determination in workforce development. Yet system-level policy often fails to recognise or design for these strengths. Locke (2022) has found the control over policies and practices is still in the hands of non-Indigenous systems, so that Indigenous educators, children, families and communities are left to deal with the effects and cultural misunderstandings. Policy changes are needed to increase employment opportunities and should be under the guidance and co-design of Indigenous Elders and community leaders, demonstrating the importance of engaging ethically with Indigenous peoples (Doery et al., 2022).

The non-Indigenous early childhood community can also learn from these practices, not only to improve their allyship in support of First Nations colleagues, but to elevate mentoring and induction in the culture of the entire ECEC sector. In particular, the Yarning Up findings point to a gradual, relational approach to mentoring and induction that contrasts with the 'rushed' feeling that currently dominates teachers' and educators' work (United Workers Union, 2021). It is a fine line between motivating collective effort towards achieving positive change, and further overwhelming a sector that is already stretched. To manage this, advocacy for improved mentoring and induction must be matched by enabling strategies and thoughtful sequencing of reforms. This report aims to equip change champions to navigate these tensions thoughtfully and constructively.

Yarning Up: A welcome is established, expected and important

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood communities, a slow and deliberate welcome/induction for new Indigenous and non-Indigenous early childhood staff members into the early childhood community is well-established, expected and an important element of an introductory process.

Evidence

A slower relational welcoming process is seen here in the following excerpts:

... we're just in that at the moment, we've got a new teacher who just started. And we're in the process. She actually came in a month or so, two months ago, and we've employed her and now she's stepped up as the teacher, we've sort of taken her through that. But I think she's getting involved in the community thing, she's in here. It's just being known, I suppose. Even though she lived in the community, I think she's learning another side of our community as well.

Yarning Up: A welcome is established, expected and important

And that's what we like to pass on to these upcoming staff. They've got to build that relationship, they've got to do the hard work like J__ and I did, so now it's your turn now so we're introducing them to these people ... But we're not pushing it too quickly because you don't want to frighten them. I want them to get the teaching sorted, then we can take them to that next level. Yeah, while building that relationship.

But I got involved with the community, because they had so many who hadn't. They just came in, did their teaching, nine to three, and walked out the door and that was the end of them. They wanted people who got involved, and so therefore once you were able – so I don't think they really come into it in the beginning, you've got to prove yourself and prove that you're going to stay. And I think once they find out you're going to stay, and they've worked out your qualities as well as you work out theirs as well, and I suppose it takes a few events to get to that point, it doesn't happen on the first day of walking in the door of a new school.

Literature notes

There appear to be very few published papers in relation to induction/welcome and Elder guidance/mentoring that refer specifically to helping new Indigenous and non-Indigenous early childhood staff feel welcome within Indigenous and/or non-Indigenous early childhood settings. Indigenous research can be seen in a Canadian and/or New Zealand context, often in nursing and health services, but rarely Australian and even more infrequently in ECEC services.

In this study, a marked difference is highlighted compared to participants in non-Indigenous early childhood settings where a lack of dedicated induction time was a key finding. Indigenous early childhood teachers are slowly inducted into the community and the early childhood centre. In one relevant study, Fleet et al. (2007) discuss the need for Indigenous staff to be constantly 'boundary crossing' between cultures in non-Indigenous work and study contexts, and that there are frequent misunderstandings by policymakers in relation to Indigenous ways of being and knowing and what the Indigenous staff may need. Boundary crossing is explained as '[t]his concept is useful for recognising complexities in moving across and between contexts with differing ways of communicating and accomplishing goals' (Fleet et al., 2007, p. 21).

Recommendation 2: Prioritise teachers' 'belonging, being and becoming'

Mentoring and induction for new early childhood teachers are about more than proficiency in pedagogical practice. Mentoring and induction have the potential to reap numerous benefits, including improved retention and effective practice, helping to secure a more sustainable workforce that can improve outcomes for generations of children and families. Achieving that vision requires holistic and responsive support for new teachers.

The following comment from a regional early childhood teacher exemplified a recurring view among research participants that mentoring and induction is about professional *support* as much as professional *learning*:

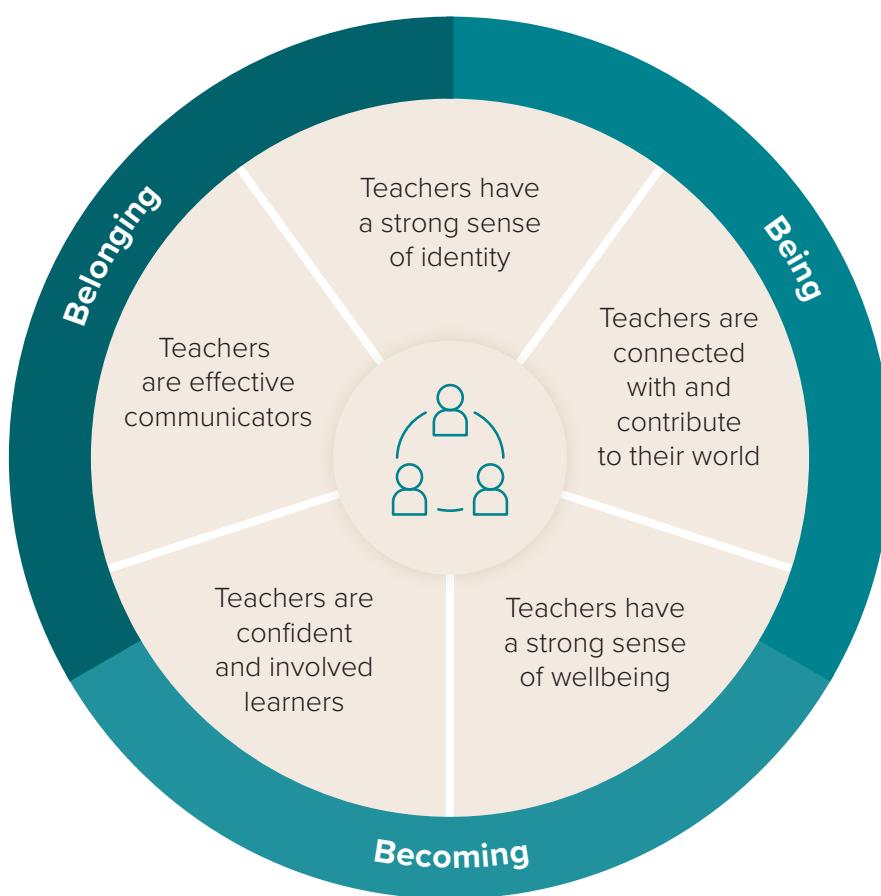
Look after us as you need teachers, support them, mentor them because you're going to lose them. That's what I would say. That's how I feel, yeah, just mentoring support, checking in on them, especially the ones that are isolated out there in little services. And you know you may think they're doing okay, but they're not. So reach out and support, support, support.

This nurturing view of the purpose of mentoring aligns with the prominence of teacher retention in research literature as a benefit of mentoring and induction (see [Recommendation 1.1](#)). There is ample evidence that mentoring and induction can have positive effects on teaching practice (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Howe & Jacobs, 2013; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Pavia et al., 2003; Singh et al., 2012). Studies from school and ECEC settings report impact on curriculum implementation, program ideas, classroom management and student engagement (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Pavia et al., 2003; Singh et al., 2012; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007). Effective mentoring and induction can also equip new teachers with strategies for working with specific children and families, including those experiencing vulnerability (Price & Jackson-Barrett, 2009; Singh et al., 2012).

The following recommendations explore a holistic framework for mentoring and induction to support a consistent focus on professional learning and support, as well as the need for bespoke approaches that reflect the diversity of teachers' experiences and goals.

Recommendation 2.1: Adopt a holistic outcomes framework for supporting new teachers' professional learning, identity, communication, wellbeing and connection and contribution to their world

A broader view of the purpose of mentoring and induction may require a more holistic outcomes framework to complement the standards for teacher registration, and align with the NWS objectives to improve wellbeing alongside professional skills and knowledge. A 2020 Mitchell Institute report proposed a holistic learning and development framework for early childhood teachers and educators, derived from a roundtable of leading Australian academics in ECEC workforce research. Grounded in adult learning theory and research, the framework applies the 5 outcomes from the national Early Years Learning Framework V2.0 (EYLF) to teachers and educators rather than children, as shown in [Figure 1](#). This simple model reflects the EYLF's positioning of teachers, educators and children as co-constructors of shared learning.

Figure 1: Holistic learning and development outcomes framework for teachers

Source: Jackson (2020, p. 26). Adapted with permission.

The components of this outcomes framework are elaborated in the following section, drawing on adult learning research:

- **Teachers have a strong sense of identity**

Mentoring and induction support teachers' sense of professional identity and belonging in the sector (AITSL 2015; Hogan & White, 2021; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Moss, 2010; Reames, 2016; Tekir, 2022). They can help new teachers work through feelings of isolation, building a sense of professionalism, purpose and self-efficacy (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Nolan, 2017).

- **Teachers are connected with and contribute to their world**

Mentoring and induction can build connections with teachers' immediate professional community, helping them align their personal philosophy with the ECEC service's and become an effective member of the team (Gibson et al., 2023). They can deepen teachers' connections to families (Morrissey & Nolan, 2015), Country and Community. Mentoring and induction can also connect teachers to the wider ECEC sector to support collaborative practice (Doan, 2016b; Howe & Jacobs, 2013; Longley & Gilken, 2020; Nolan & Molla, 2018a; Nuttall, 2016; Puig & Recchia, 2008; Quinones et al., 2020; Smith & Lynch, 2014; Thornton & Cherrington, 2019).

- **Teachers have a strong sense of wellbeing**

Mentoring and induction help new teachers develop strategies to cope with the challenges of working in the ECEC sector, helping to reduce burn out (Doan, 2019; Hobson & Ashby, 2012; Hogan & White, 2021). Mentoring may foster the ‘adaptive, flexible dispositions that make it easier to manage the high levels of multi-tasking and task-rotation required in teachers’ and educators’ work’ (Gibson et al., 2023). In recognition of the intensely physical nature of ECEC work, one participant also noted that effective mentoring and induction are essential for preparing teachers to protect both their own safety and wellbeing and the children’s.

- **Teachers are confident and involved learners**

Mentoring and induction can help establish a cycle of critical reflection on pedagogical practice that lays the foundations for longer-term practice development (Draper et al., 2007; Langdon et al., 2012, Langdon et al., 2016). It supports both mentees and mentors to examine and adjust their beliefs, philosophies and practices, challenging spurious practices and reinforcing effective ones (Agbenyega, 2012; Howe & Jacobs, 2013; Longley & Gilken 2020; Moles et al., 2023; Nolan, 2017; Pavia et al., 2003; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007; Walkington, 2005). It can also engage teachers in evidence-informed conversations to guide their practice (Livingstone, 2018) and give teachers the confidence to ask questions of leaders and colleagues (mentioned by several participants).

- **Teachers are effective communicators**

The centrality of relationships to ECEC practice – with children, families and colleagues – means that communication skills are crucial to new teachers’ success and sense of self-efficacy. Mentoring can equip teachers with strategies to navigate difficult or complex situations and manage relationships with other staff, families, and communities (Hogan & White, 2021), as well as to navigate hierarchies in the workplace (Gibson et al., 2023). It can also enhance leadership skills for both mentors and mentees (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Manning et al., 2011; Nolan & Molla, 2018b).

This holistic outcomes framework may also help to sustain a focus on positive relationships in mentoring and induction. The importance of relationships in mentoring was frequently emphasised by participants and in the literature (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Howe & Jacobs, 2013; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Nolan, 2017; Nolan & Molla, 2018b, 2018a; Pavia et al., 2003; Peterson et al., 2010). Conversely, a breakdown in a mentoring relationship can result in adverse effects on a new teacher’s practice (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015).

Within the context of these holistic outcomes for mentoring, mentors and mentees may collaboratively identify more specific goals for targeted coaching, such as technical aspects of pedagogy. The shared identification of such goals is important – unsolicited coaching that targets perceived deficiencies in a teacher’s practice can be a negative model (Elek & Page, 2019). Extending on this idea, Hobson & Malderez (2013, p. 3) use the term ‘judgementoring’ to describe mentoring that is primarily focused on ensuring new teachers meet minimum standards. While coaching is complementary to mentoring (Nolan, 2017), a mentoring relationship has broader, deeper goals.

To deliver these holistic outcomes for new teachers, mentoring and induction must involve respectful, reciprocal, responsive and reflective relationships (Nolan, 2017). This mirrors the *relational pedagogy* that teachers apply in implementing the EYLF. The need to train mentors in adult learning approaches that support holistic outcomes is explored later in this report.

Recommendation 2.2: Tailor the goals of mentoring and induction to teachers' cultural backgrounds, prior experiences and needs

Effective mentoring takes a bespoke approach to identifying objectives and supporting teachers' agency in their learning, with the application of adult learning theories to ensure transformational learning (Molla & Nolan, 2020). As one participant noted, 'each teacher's learning journey is different', and induction is a chance to help personalise their experience, in recognition of the expertise and history adult learners bring:

Induction is ... an opportunity to answer their questions, seek their feedback, understand their motivations and aspirations, and inspire them to work towards goals that support their professional growth (ACECQA, 2021, p. 1).

The research confirms that new teachers in Australia's diverse ECEC sector may require vastly different levels and types of support (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007). This can depend on the teacher's level of experience, their qualification, the type of ECEC service, and the nature of the day-to-day teaching challenges that they encounter (Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Reames, 2016). It can also reflect the diversity among ECEC teachers' employment arrangements as outlined in the Introduction.

Some aspects of teacher diversity warrant particular attention in negotiating individualised approaches to the mentoring and induction experience:

- **Prior experience and learning**

Unlike school teachers, who require a degree to enter the profession, newly qualified early childhood teachers may have already worked in the sector for many years with a vocational qualification. In 2021, there were around 5,770 educators with a diploma or advanced diploma (or 7.7%) working in the sector while studying towards an early childhood teaching degree (Social Research Centre [SRC], 2022). These educators may already have a strong sense of belonging in the profession, but may require mentoring in the transition to a teaching role, or throughout their academic studies.

Example: Future Tracks is an initiative by The Front Project to support diploma-qualified educators to obtain early childhood teaching degrees. Its initial scoping research found that educators placed a high value on mentoring, both to encourage them to undertake further study and to support them through their course and beyond (The Front Project, 2019).

On the other hand, some new teachers may emerge from their degrees with limited experience in ECEC services. Teachers completing dual primary and early childhood qualifications (e.g., birth to 8 years or birth to 12 years) may have spent more time in primary schools than ECEC services in their final year of study. These teachers may need extra guidance to adapt to the distinctive pedagogical and organisational aspects of ECEC work.

- **Cultural responsiveness and safety**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators comprise a vital part of the workforce, with numbers gradually increasing (SRC, 2022). The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators have a Certificate III qualification, and of these, educators progress to degree-level qualifications at a lower rate than non-Indigenous educators (Education Services Australia, 2021). Mentoring and induction approaches designed and determined by, with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators have a role to play in supporting this workforce to stay and grow (Burgess et al., 2022).

The ECEC workforce is also culturally and linguistically diverse, comprising a high proportion of teachers and educators from migrant backgrounds (Gide et al., 2022). Research suggests that there may be varying expectations for mentoring among teachers with diverse cultural backgrounds (Nuttall, 2016; Quinones et al., 2020; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007), and that ‘what is acceptable in one culture or country may not be acceptable in another’ (Kent et al., 2013, p. 210). It is, therefore, important to consider the cultural dimensions of new teachers’ goals, aspirations and preferences for the mentoring relationship, to avoid ethnocentric biases. This includes developing mentoring cultures within ECEC organisations that consider a broad range of values and beliefs (Kent et al., 2013; Nuttall, 2016; Price & Jackson-Barrett, 2009; Quinones et al., 2020; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007).

- **Willingness to engage in mentoring**

New teachers may also vary in their appetite for mentoring and belief in its value to their practice. The research indicates that a mentee’s willingness to participate is an important predictor of engagement and success (Peterson et al., 2010). Participants reinforced this by emphasising that mentees need to understand the purpose of mentoring and may even need an ‘introductory course’ on the mentoring process.

A national approach to mentoring and induction is unlikely to be successful if it is seen as being imposed upon mentees, especially if it takes a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. At the same time, an ‘opt-in’ approach to mentoring would run the risk of some who would benefit from the process missing out due to a perception on their part or their employer’s that they ‘will be okay without it’ – a particular risk for experienced diploma-qualified educators studying towards a degree. It also risks placing an undue burden on employers, who can sometimes experience frustration at new teachers lacking the knowledge required for effective practice (Boyd et al., 2020).

Balancing a clear national expectation for mentoring and induction with a flexible approach to setting goals can help new teachers design their own learning pathways, and embrace collegial professional learning as a natural part of their practice. The 5 outcomes may provide the basis for opening a constructive conversation about mentoring, even for teachers who may not see its benefits. For some, goal setting may begin with the mentor gently guiding them to ‘know what they don’t know’.

Individual agreements can provide a useful structure for ensuring outcomes are met (Walkington, 2005). Research suggests that these involve negotiation of the following:

- **goals for both mentor and mentee** (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Nolan, 2017; Pavia et al., 2003), which are ‘professional and personal to each individual and the group of children they are teaching’. The criteria for success will vary depending on the agreed goals and the content to be covered (Agbenyega, 2012; Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Farmer, 2011; Hogan & White, 2021; White, 2003).
- **roles, responsibilities and expectations** of mentor and mentee (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Doan, 2016a; Howe & Jacobs, 2013; McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012; Murphy & Butcher, 2011; Peterson et al., 2010; Quinones et al., 2020; Walkington, 2005). Service leaders also need to be involved in determining how the program can be individualised for greatest impact (Reames, 2016; Watson & Wildy, 2014).
- **opportunities for feedback** to allow for regular discussion and assessment of the progress towards goals set and identify any challenges or successes (Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Muñoz et al., 2015; Thornton & Cherrington, 2019; Thornton & Wansbrough, 2012). This requires the mentor and mentee to be open to feedback and discussion (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Longley & Gilken, 2020), and to have dedicated time to enable these conversations (addressed in [Recommendation 4](#)).

The holistic framework described in [Recommendation 2.1](#) is well-suited to individualised goal setting and feedback, as it offers a flexible menu of outcomes rather than a ‘one-size-fits-all’ checklist.

Recommendation 2.3: Leverage learning from Indigenous early childhood communities’ existing practice by including collaborative, interprofessional practice as part of mentoring and induction

The Yarning Up findings (described in the following text box) show how holistic approaches to mentoring and induction are already prevalent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood communities, which affirm the inseparability of and interconnections between learning, health and wellbeing. The findings extend this idea by showing how early childhood professionals from diverse disciplines can contribute to mentoring new teachers and educators in community, adding a rich array of professional and cultural expertise. As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families engage with many different professionals, this helps new teachers to understand their role as part of a connected community. This perspective again offers lessons for all ECEC services, as well as insights into the kinds of supports that may benefit Indigenous communities.

Yarning Up: Holistic learning through shared practice

The welcome and Elder guidance process can be seen to be in operation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous new early childhood staff members who are actively working together with other professional educators. In many Indigenous early childhood settings, staff hold qualifications in allied health work, inclusion work, social work and community development and are actively educating children each day. The importance of this is to illustrate that health, wellbeing and education are not separate entities, but are valued sources of knowledges together where shared practices continually guide and benefit children, families, fellow colleagues, and the wider ECEC service in Indigenous early childhood communities.

Evidence

The following data excerpts highlight this working together:

I'm [saying] we are unique in what we do and it's because we use therapeutic interventions but we do it culturally and we do it creatively ... Do it small, do it well. It's definitely education for families and feeling like ... having a change of our education system.

I think for our early years team it's that you're never alone. When you sit in your own little silo, yeah, you feel very, 'This is what I'm going through.' When you network and consult with others, 'This is what we are going through ... in community we do it, I don't do it [alone].

... the community [helped] me feel comfortable, let me work with them, and yes my best co-workers who help me through the baby steps to be honest because this industry is totally new to me while being an early childhood educator and coming to the community services, especially the case management like how to understand the situation for the families ... you can see something, that's okay, but let's get into the deep, what's the family going through ...

Literature notes

Leske et al. (2015, p. 105) found in their study that 'Indigenous families preferred non-licensed [playgroups, parent-child education] over licensed [preschool and long day care] programs. Reasons suggested for this choice were that non-licensed services provided integration with family supports, were responsive to family circumstance and had a stronger focus on relationship building'. We suggest that Closing the Gap data collection records on poor attendance of Indigenous children in preschool need to take this into stronger consideration.

Recommendation 3: Increase mentor supply using role design, remuneration and training

An adequate supply of skilled mentors is essential if mentoring is to become part of the induction experience for all new early childhood teachers. Difficulty locating suitably skilled mentors has proven to be a major barrier to the implementation of jurisdiction and local ECEC mentoring programs. This barrier was also clear to participants:

Where will the mentor teachers come from, given the time restrictions placed upon the profession already?

Specific challenges in mentor supply included staff turnover within ECEC services, which could disrupt mentoring relationships, lack of sufficient knowledge about practice, and lack of experience in the workforce due to high attrition:

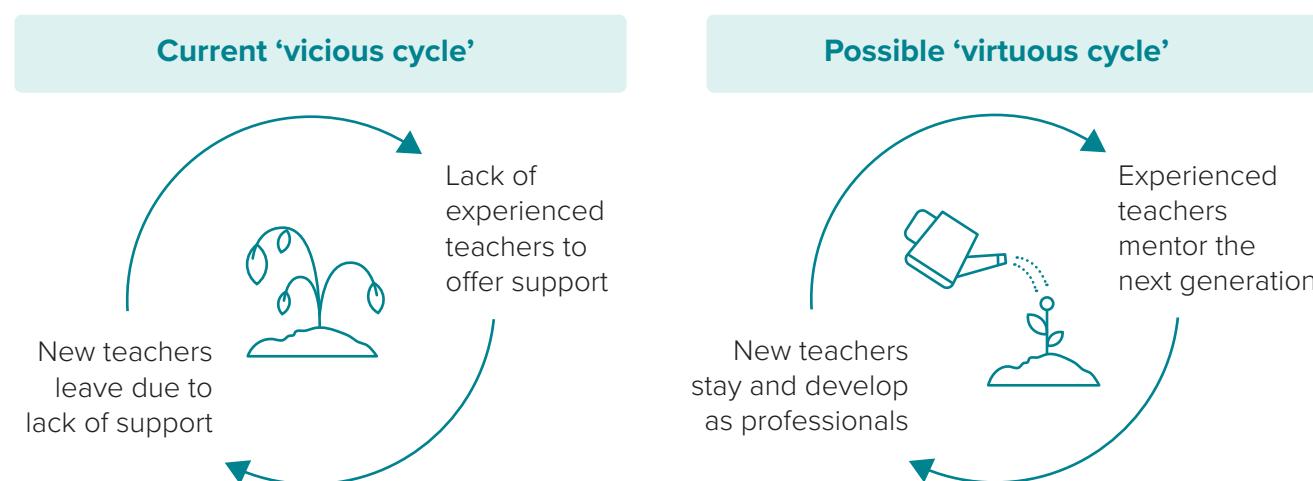
With educators leaving within the first 5 years in the sector, do we have sufficient experience within the workforce?

Even for those with sufficient expertise and stable employment, high workloads and exhaustion were also identified as barriers to mentoring participation. The issue of time is explored further in the following section, but is closely related to mentor supply.

The overall picture is of a vicious cycle: teachers leave the sector prematurely because they do not feel supported, resulting in fewer teachers being available to provide collegial support to new entrants to the sector.

A national approach to mentoring and induction could be an opportunity to reverse this into a 'virtuous cycle' (Figure 2), where new teachers are supported to grow as professionals and become mentors themselves. Over time, this virtuous cycle could help to grow the generation of experienced early childhood teachers for whom training to become a mentor represents a step in their teaching career progression.

Figure 2: Cycle of collegial support



Creating this virtuous cycle requires mentoring to be a visible, valued role in the ECEC sector, so that it feels both achievable and desirable as part of a rewarding teaching career. One participant noted that mentors can't be what they can't see:

There might not be many people that might put their hand up straight away. But I'm certain that once conversations about what people are receiving from mentoring and the learning that they're having and how much they're appreciating it get out there will be interest. Word of mouth would get around quite quickly, and other people would be saying, 'I'd like to try that'. This would be an investment in keeping our EC staff satisfied ... and the culture they are creating as well.

The professional rewards of mentoring must be backed by tangible rewards, so that the goodwill that mentors bring to nurturing the profession is not exploited:

Expectations placed on ECTs [early childhood teachers] to give more of their time – falsely labelled dedication to the children, families and community. The expectation is give, give, give and it won't change until you say no no no!!

The following recommendations explore the ingredients of a national approach to strengthening the pipeline of mentors to support new teachers' induction. They are designed to integrate with existing workforce structures to minimise additional burden, while still ensuring that mentoring is recognised as a distinctive role.

Recommendation 3.1: Clarify expectations for mentoring within existing roles and ensure adequate skills, time and remuneration

Many participants strongly expressed that any mentoring role in ECEC must be:

- **clearly defined** in terms of regulatory expectations and accountabilities
- **remunerated** in a way that directly supports the specific time and work involved in mentoring new teachers, including mentor training (see [Recommendation 3.3](#))
- **undertaken by suitably qualified and skilled staff** with expertise in professional practice and mentoring, and understanding of the mentee's community and context.

There are several roles with ECEC services that already involve mentoring responsibilities, according to ACECQA guidelines:

- early childhood teachers
- educational leaders
- service leaders.

Early childhood teachers may be mentors themselves, as 'mentoring, coaching or supporting other teachers and educators' is one of the permitted uses of an early childhood teacher's time at an ECEC service (ACECQA, 2023a, p. 457). Many early childhood teachers also fulfil educational leader and/or service leader roles.

Educational leaders (a required role in all ECEC services) have a designated mentoring role focused on supporting the educational program and practice. The Guide to the NQF states that the educational leader is required to have ‘a willingness to mentor and support educators from diverse backgrounds and with varying levels of knowledge and experience’ (ACECQA, 2023a, p. 335), and provides the example of the educational leader mentoring new teachers and educators to develop their capacity for equitable, inclusive practice (p. 338). While many participants suggested that the mentoring and induction of new teachers belongs in the educational leader role, this poses significant challenges. The first is that the role is often occupied by the new teacher themselves:

New teachers are often the only teachers working in services and there is no opportunity for teacher collaboration, and they are often required to lead a team of others without having time to navigate their own skills and experience in the classroom first.

The second challenge is the lack of clarity and support around the educational leader role, noted in research (Martin et al., 2020) and by participants:

[Government] is placing more emphasis on the ed leader role with little additional support/pay and conditions being offered to them. It's an ineffective role without the sector support to make it effective and essential.

The Guide to the NQF notes that authorised officers may assess how well the ECEC service supports the educational leader to ‘provide mentoring’ in their role (ACECQA, 2023a, p. 337), but does not set specific expectations for training, time or remuneration.

Larger ECEC services or providers can address this challenge through economies of scale, and may employ additional teachers to fulfil the educational leader role, either within a large service or working across multiple services. It is telling that single-service providers are significantly less likely than multi-service providers to meet NQS elements relating to educational leadership (7.2.2), development of professionals (7.2.3) and continuous improvement (7.2.1) (ACECQA, 2019, p. 9).

Service leaders (such as directors) are expected to contribute to mentoring alongside the educational leader, with the Guide to the NQF stating that: ‘educational and/or service leaders ... take on an active mentoring role (ACECQA, 2023a, p. 338). This mentoring is expected to develop teachers’ and educators’ professional knowledge, skills and practices; ‘creativity, imagination, innovation and continuous quality improvement’; and knowledge of theories and policies and how they affect practice (ACECQA, 2023a, p. 338). Yet participants reported that ECEC service leaders often lack the pedagogical expertise and experience to provide effective mentoring for new teachers:

Services are often led by people without experience and therefore are not able to effectively mentor new teachers.

There are a lot of centre managers who have no teaching experience, who have no understanding of what play-based learning in child education is.

One commented that diploma-qualified service leaders may not appreciate why new degree-qualified teachers need mentoring, because they have already had more time in study and placement than vocationally qualified staff. Another recommended that all ECEC service leaders be required to be trained in early childhood practice.

These comments reflect a broader debate about role design in ECEC services, and where responsibility for pedagogical expertise lies within the leadership team. For one participant, the service leader's role may focus on support rather than pedagogical practice:

Being provided with an induction process where the leadership team provide support and make you feel welcome ... and then you can see that it's a valuable professional place, and that you're valued as a professional just to be reminded that there is an open door to the office and the director. She is accessible. She is there, and that's really important too.

Another suggested that leaders may share mentoring and induction responsibilities, but noted that confusion around responsibilities means tasks fall through the gaps:

The director and educational leader lack clear communication as to which role supports different parts of the induction process.

What is clear is that current roles offer no guarantee that there will be someone at the service who can mentor a new teacher, resulting in wide variability of experience:

some [centres of major ECEC provider] ... might have a qualified teacher working as an educational leader, or running the service, and I'm thinking of one in particular. It was a qualified teacher. She was fabulous, she was just so good. And then there might be another service down the road where the centre director is diploma trained with no experience in the kindergarten room. So the kindergarten teacher comes in and is struggling, but there's no one that has any teaching experience that she can actually access.

A first step in ensuring all new teachers can access mentors is appraising the capacity that already exists within their ECEC services, and providing support for this capacity to be activated. Where a suitably skilled and experienced educational leader exists (either within a large service or across multiple services for large providers), this could involve providing additional funding to ECEC services employing new teachers to increase the time that leader has available for mentoring – with the service leader also offering support.

Where no suitable person exists within the ECEC service – for example, in a small standalone preschool where the new teacher is also the service leader, and the only qualified teacher at their service – or where additional time cannot be committed within a reasonable workload, additional funding for new teachers could be used to access an external mentor. Options for external mentoring are outlined in the next section.

Recommendation 3.2: Trial collaborative models for external mentors including partnerships, a pool, universities or peers

The pipeline of qualified mentors needs to be scaled-up to meet demand where it is most needed (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Howe & Jacobs, 2013; Pavia et al., 2003). A range of promising delivery models emerged in this study to make mentors available to teachers whose employers cannot supply them with a mentor in-house. A national approach to mentoring and induction could systematically trial and evaluate these approaches, to determine which are most effective in improving mentor supply.

Providing a mentor from outside a teacher's ECEC service who can relate to their context is not only a pragmatic response to supply issues – it also reflects the evidence about effective mentoring. When a mentor is employed externally, the mentee may feel more comfortable acknowledging their flaws or confidentially discussing challenges in the workplace (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; McIntyre & Hobson, 2015; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Nolan, 2017; Pavia et al., 2003; Puig & Recchia, 2008). There is also a lower risk of negative consequences if the relationship breaks down (McIntyre & Hobson, 2015), or if any assessment undertaken by the mentor is unfavourable (Hobson & Malderez, 2013).

Partnering between early childhood education and care services

Partnerships between ECEC services were frequently raised by participants as a response to the difficulty of only having one degree-qualified teacher at the service:

It's good to have a mentor at your service, but many services only have one or 2 teachers. Often you are the only teacher that day, so provide a mentor they can access who is separate from the service.

Partnering up smaller services that only require one ECT [early childhood teacher] with other small services to ensure all ECTs have access to a mentor who is able to adequately support them.

Perhaps assigning them [new early childhood teachers] a mentor in another service location to allow for staff shortages, or only one ECT [early childhood teacher] in a centre.

Cluster management models are increasingly being applied to overcome the challenges of small-scale providers, where one approved provider assumes responsibility for multiple independently operated ECEC services. One participant suggested a 'roving mentor' model across multiple services, which reflects the geographically based leadership roles in large ECEC providers.

A 'cluster' (rather than one-to-one partnership) approach would also enable the managing organisation to maintain oversight of the mentoring program, and match mentors and mentees from across a wider pool. The importance of a facilitator who can drive the mentoring program was noted in research (Morrissey & Nolan, 2015). If no cluster management arrangements existed, this role could also be undertaken by regional departmental employees, local council or teacher registration bodies.

There is some risk that competition for enrolments between ECEC services may inhibit mentoring across services, particularly those that are geographically close. Program facilitators may need to work with ECEC service leaders to nurture a culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration for the benefit of children and families, and the retention and development of staff. The ACECQA Excellent

rating (the highest possible rating against the NQS) recognises that ECEC services at the highest level of quality are those that extend their leadership to the wider ECEC sector and share their expertise.

An external pool of mentors

To further address the shortfall of suitable mentors in the ECEC sector there were suggestions around developing a pool of mentors. Some participants suggested that governments could provide an external program with trained mentors available for ECEC services that need them:

The solution to [lack of access] would be external mentorship ... the government might pay an hour a fortnight for someone to have additional administration time, or there's an external mentorship program that your service can access. If we're unable to provide one under [one] roofline with ... qualified teachers, who can be mentors and make those links with the teacher.

The state should train more professional mentors to support new ECTs. And most of the time, a LDC centre only has ONE teacher ...

Tekir (2022) also champions the employment of full-time high-quality mentors as a dedicated role. This pool of external mentors could be directly employed by governments (potentially as part of regionally based practice support roles), or could be employed by another centralised agency and accessed by ECEC services on a pay-per-use basis using additional funds supplied to support new teachers (Tekir, 2022).

The advantage of employing a pool of mentors specifically for the role is that it widens the potential mentoring workforce beyond those currently working in ECEC. There is potential for teachers who are recently retired, raising young children of their own, or wanting a break from time working directly with children to take on mentoring roles. A period of mentoring may provide a kind of sabbatical to experienced teachers, and a chance to expand their professional horizons. This may be especially attractive if there is an option of part-time or casual work.

International evidence supports recruiting retired mentors in schools

Researchers in Colorado conducted a randomised controlled trial of a 2-year intervention in which retired mentors supported public school teachers who were in their first 3 years. The study was conducted in schools with high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, high teacher turnover, and a high proportion of early career teachers. At the end of the first year, researchers found causal evidence that the teacher mentoring program improved mathematics achievement among students in the intervention group. Increased hours of mentoring were also associated with higher teacher retention in the second year. Considering the long-term potential outcomes associated with these gains, researchers estimated the program could return its annual costs 15 times over (DeCesare et al., 2017).

Academic mentors

A number of responses saw a role for universities in working more closely with the ECEC sector to support the development of mentoring – for example:

Take a triadic approach between the university/government/EYM [Early Years Management] groups where the funding and the carving out of time is provided and the organisation/universities to provide the support for mentoring and induction to teaching.

A teacher induction program from North Carolina for beginning school teachers provides an example of a partnership between a university and educational setting (Bastian & Marks, 2017). The induction program is university-based, with the university providing professional learning and resources that they are better able to provide compared to a school (for example, in having access to research). The researchers noted that a university-based induction does not necessarily replace a school-based induction but may run in conjunction (Bastian & Marks, 2017).

In the Australian ECEC sector, experienced teachers and leaders with a passion for sharing their knowledge often undertake sessional roles in initial teacher education programs. Mentoring for new teachers could potentially be a funded extension of the sessional teaching role that extends beyond graduation.

Peer mentors

The pool of potential mentors could be significantly expanded by thinking beyond the traditional expert/novice mentoring relationship. Contemporary mentoring approaches provide a supportive learning experience for both the mentor and mentee where both are positioned as both teachers and learners (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Carroll-Lind et al., 2016; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Nolan, 2017; Pavia et al., 2003; Peterson et al., 2010; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007), contrasting with hierarchical mentor-as-teacher and mentee-as-learner approaches (Longley & Gilken, 2020; Nolan & Molla, 2018b; Pavia et al., 2003; Thornton & Wansbrough, 2012). This supportive, reciprocal relationship includes learning and reflection that aims to:

... create an environment where both mentors and mentees feel empowered as they discuss their own practice, and in the process gain insight into their roles and responsibilities as early childhood professionals (Nolan, 2017, p. 274).

Professional learning within the relationship should support the co-agency (collective effort) of both the mentor and the mentee (Molla & Nolan, 2020).

While not advocating for new teachers to mentor each other (which is unlikely to foster professional growth), it may be possible to frame mentoring for new teachers as a ‘peer mentoring’ relationship that could be undertaken by any teachers or educators with the requisite skills or experience, rather than those considered ‘expert’. This nuanced reframing of the relationship could address a number of challenges affecting mentor supply and effectiveness:

- **Mentor confidence** is a key ingredient in successful mentoring (Nolan & Molla, 2017), but many teachers do not see themselves as mentor material (Kupila et al., 2017; Pavia et al., 2003). One participant affirmed this:

Feeling undervalued means we feel less confident in our own professional practice which means we don’t feel qualified to mentor others.

Framing mentoring as reciprocal learning may also encourage more teachers to engage in mentoring and build their confidence supporting others. Indeed, teachers who have experienced a reciprocal mentoring relationship may be more likely to consider becoming a mentor. Further, emphasising that teachers become mentors through training could encourage more teachers to consider it.

- **Rapid changes in ECEC practice** mean new teachers may have knowledge and skills that more experienced mentors may still be developing. Notable changes include full-day preschool programs in some states (which require pedagogical practices that are attuned to children’s needs across the day); and expansion in preschool for 3-year-olds. Reciprocal mentoring can help mentors and mentees navigate these changes together, drawing on evidence to update their practice. Reciprocal mentoring can also guard against outdated practices being reproduced (Hobson & Malderez, 2013).
- **Critical reflection** is required of all teachers, educators and leaders by the NQS and is enhanced by dialogue with colleagues. Reciprocal mentoring enables the mentor to act as a reflective critical friend (rather than critic) (Carroll-Lind et al., 2016). This story poignantly illustrates the power of reflective discussion:

I was finishing [mentoring] at one centre and leaving to go to another, and the ECT [early childhood teacher] was teary-eyed, and I said, ‘What’s going on?’ And she said, ‘It’s just been so nice to have these quick chats with you, and to reflect on my practice. It’s been so long since I’ve done that.’ And she said, ‘I love it. I love my role, but when I have the opportunity to really get a little bit deeper in conversations, it’s just, it makes me feel invigorated and excited again.’ And she said, ‘Without it, I don’t feel like anyone else in the service feels the same way. Everyone’s just doing their own thing.’ It does impact what you put into your role.

In the current ECEC context, new teachers may find themselves isolated even in large ECEC services, as workload pressures squeeze out time for collegial reflection. High staff turnover and absenteeism also affect collegial learning, as teachers ‘may end up working more with relief staff than consistent co-educators’. For one participant, even an ‘informal buddy system’ would be an improvement on the isolation that new teachers experience. Support for peer mentoring may be a more robust way to ensure all new teachers have someone to share and support their learning.

Recommendation 3.3: Provide training and ongoing support for mentors in mentoring strategies that apply relational pedagogy to adult learning

Training for mentors is a requisite component of any delivery model and could be integrated into any of the options outlined in Recommendation 3.2. Research positions mentoring as a skill that needs to be developed, practised and supported (Stanulis & Russell, 2000), including through initial and ongoing training (Morrissey & Nolan, 2015).

Training and support for mentors include guidance around setting expectations, goals, roles and responsibilities, outcomes and building positive relationships (Kupila et al., 2017; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Nolan, 2017; Pavia et al., 2003; Peterson et al., 2010; Quinones et al., 2020; Smith & Lynch, 2014). Given the importance of relationships to the mentoring process (previously discussed), it is recommended that training for mentors in ECEC focus on *relational pedagogy* as a mentoring approach. Relational pedagogy describes a mentoring relationship characterised by mutual respect and understanding, and is especially important when the relationship involves connection across class or racial differences (Hinsdale, 2015). This would build on the existing strengths of mentors as ECEC professionals skilled in relational pedagogy with children (as required by the EYLF), and would ensure that mentor training and practice align with the philosophies and practices of the sector.

Participants agreed that professional learning for mentors would support high levels of understanding of the roles. There was some enthusiasm for a dedicated professional learning opportunity for mentors:

A mentoring course designed specifically for EC professionals to undertake.

Understanding around what mentoring involves, perhaps a dedicated session for the individual who is mentoring.

Participants emphasised that training must be accessible and affordable (including paid time for the mentor to undertake it). Freely available training for mentors of new school teachers is provided in some jurisdictions, including the Effective Mentoring Program provided by the Victorian Institute of Teaching, and the Teaching Standards in Action courses offered to in-school mentor teachers in New South Wales.

Some participants suggested that the course could be delivered through a tertiary institution so that it could lead to an accredited qualification:

It could be an accredited course where the mentor qualification is recognised sector-wide. EC sector support that will enable a dedicated mentoring approach to be established and maintained.

This qualification could be a freely available microcredential. The NWS Plan (FA3-2) commits to developing microcredentials for ECEC leaders, so a mentoring microcredential could be part of this action. As with all microcredentials, this will be most effective if it is recognised and valued by the sector, and can contribute to a pathway to a higher qualification (Macklin, 2020).

In addition to formal training, it was widely agreed that mentors need adequate experience to be able to guide others. While one study suggested measuring experience in years (Morrissey & Nolan, 2015), one participant framed it in terms of familiarity with the sector in which the new teacher is working.

This distinction between *quantity* and *relevance* of experience may be important in selecting mentors in ECEC, given the diversity of the sector.

Certain interpersonal skills and personality traits were also identified as important for mentors, to build and maintain positive, trusting relationships (Pavia et al., 2003) and ensure that mentees are comfortable discussing their practice (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Muñoz et al., 2015; Nolan & Molla, 2018b).

[Mentors are] committed to helping and accepting others, skilled at providing support, having effective interpersonal skills and holding a belief in mentees' abilities (Morrissey & Nolan, 2015, p. 41).

Participants listed similar desirable traits, including 'ability to understand and support new teachers as individuals'; 'empathy, social skills, interest and emotional intelligence'; and being 'inspiring'. These skills and traits may be an existing strength of prospective mentors in the ECEC sector, as the work itself demands high levels of emotional literacy and interpersonal skills to build relationships with children, colleagues and families.

Research also acknowledged that the knowledge, experience and characteristics of effective mentors can develop over time (Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Tekir, 2022). Initial training for mentors can be seen as one step on a long-term professional development pathway, where mentors receive ongoing support and networking opportunities to build their practice (Pavia et al., 2003; Peterson et al., 2010). This further contributes to a culture of collegial learning across the ECEC sector, by enabling mentors to build leadership capacity (Nolan & Molla, 2018b) and extending their careers (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Cummins, 2004; Pavia et al., 2003).



Recommendation 3.4: Retain and fund Elder-led mentoring and induction processes within Indigenous early childhood organisations

The Yarning Up findings show the significance of Elders in mentoring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, as well as the mentoring provided by others in the community.

Yarning Up: Elders and community leaders as cultural and professional mentors

Running parallel with cultural mentoring, professional mentoring for new Indigenous and non-Indigenous early childhood staff members is commonly provided by Elders and community leaders. An early childhood qualified professional mentor who is familiar with the local community cultural knowledges and early childhood education may also be sourced to further this process for the new Indigenous and non-Indigenous early childhood staff member. This process would be determined by the Elders and community leaders within the early childhood organisation.

Evidence

Professional mentoring is commonly provided in conjunction with cultural mentoring by Elders and community leaders:

And not just our cultural mentoring, we've got a mentor who's here under another program but she's very experienced, and so she's able to give her that [professional] mentoring to help bring [up] the standard, lay things out, show her and the other staff so they're all on the same page ...

... so therefore we've been able to bring this extra person in who is able to guide that [professional work]. Not just have to pick it up, but the right way of doing it, what's expected, and to make it of a high standard. Not just scrape in, we want high standards.

Literature notes

There is a scant amount of research that speaks to the cultural mentoring by Elders and community leaders alongside professional mentoring in the ECEC context in Indigenous communities. While Indigenous people may be positioned as informants – a resource to seek knowledge and as knowledge commissioners in early childhood services (Miller, 2015) from a cultural perspective – little is known about the ways in which Elders and community leaders source outside professional learning and knowledge which may benefit their communities and early childhood workforce and when this occurs.

More research is warranted to understand how Indigenous teachers 'become' who they are, how they actively construct and perform their role (Reid & Santoro, 2006) within an Indigenous early childhood community service, and the ways this is both culturally and professionally mentored as a collaboration.

Recommendation 4: Increase available time for mentoring and induction by integrating it within new teachers' and mentors' workloads

Many participants spoke of the need to prioritise time for new teachers to engage in mentoring and induction, within (not on top of) existing workload allocations:

Adequate time allocation blocked out intentionally, not a haphazard or ad hoc approach.

In order to be responsive and create a meaningful induction, teams need additional staff and the time to sit with new educators and support them through that process.

Uninterrupted time for inductions. Often induction processes are shortened as the person providing the induction is called away.

The research literature also recommended a reduced teaching load (or time release) for new teachers to engage in induction activities (Doan, 2016b; Kearney, 2014; Santoli & Vitulli, 2014) – sometimes called ‘protected time’ (Tekir, 2022, p. 20) – and explicitly sanctioned by the employer. Suggested uses of this time included planning, meeting, giving and receiving feedback, conducting observations, and reflecting on mentoring (Connors, 2019; Howe & Jacobs, 2013; Muñoz et al., 2015; Pavia et al., 2003; Puig & Recchia, 2008; Walkington, 2005). Additional time may also encourage new teachers to engage with research to improve their practice (Connors, 2019; Kupila et al., 2017).

This desire for ‘protected time’ contrasted starkly with the severe workload pressures affecting the time available to engage in mentoring for both mentors and mentees. The ECEC workforce shortage – which already existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and has escalated since – is intensifying teachers’ and educators’ work in myriad interconnected ways. Participants captured the effects on morale:

Workforce shortages and pressures on management cannot be underestimated ...

Unrealistic expectations of out of hours work, paid or unpaid. Unrealistic expectations related to workload ...

We don't have enough staff. Staff are paid poorly for the complexity of the role. This limits time and motivation to put in discretionary effort. We work hard to try and build positive cultures and provide coaching and mentoring but governments don't have the right intentions and waste their funding on initiatives that won't work, instead of simply paying educators a professional wage for professional work.

The emotionally expensive work is exhausting along with the overwhelming paperwork so motivation of teachers/leadership to engage in effective mentoring is low.

This pressure is compounding the risk of teacher attrition, particularly for those still developing the skills to cope. One participant noted that it is especially important to protect new teachers from expectations that might feel unattainable. Mentoring and induction must be implemented in ways that build teachers’ resilience without adding further stress. This can only occur if teachers and mentors receive adequate time to engage in the process within their paid working hours.

Recommendation 4.1: Provide funding to ensure new teachers and mentors have dedicated time for mentoring and induction

There is a direct relationship between the amount of funding invested in mentoring and induction for new teachers and the time available to do it. This connection is vividly captured in the comments from one Preschool Field Officer:

So you've got early learning centres in schools, for example, who might have mentorship structures in place where there's specific administrative staff ... They can draw on the resources of the school. They've got a secretary and a principal and a vice principal and a welfare officer. So there's greater opportunity for mentorship and support if you need it. And often they'll have educational leaders that have a greater amount of time release so that they can receive that support.

At the other end of the spectrum, it might be a for-profit childcare centre which can't afford the time release for anybody. Yeah, they're already understaffed at the moment, so there's no opportunities for mentorship, because there's no one in that building that's as qualified as the teacher, or more qualified than the teacher, so they don't have any opportunities for mentorship, which is why staff turnover is incredibly high at the moment.

There was strong support among participants and in the research for ECEC services employing new teachers to receive additional funding to cover the costs of releasing them for induction and mentoring (often called 'backfill') (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Connors, 2019; Howe & Jacobs, 2013; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Pavia et al., 2003; Walkington, 2005). Victoria provides some funding to ECEC services (just over \$2,800 per teacher) to support new teachers moving from provisional to full registration (Productivity Commission, 2023). A more generous example exists in New Zealand, where schools receive 0.2 full-time equivalent (FTE) additional salary funding for employing new teachers in their first year, and 0.1 FTE additional funding in their second year (Ministry of Education New Zealand, 2023).

For ECEC services, using backfill funding effectively requires that certain conditions be in place. In larger services, a qualified teacher who is additional to ratio may cover short periods of time release for mentoring and induction. However, smaller services such as standalone preschools are likely to depend on casual relief teachers. In the context of workforce shortages, finding casual relief teachers can be challenging, especially for shorter periods of time and in regional and remote areas.

Providing such payments to ECEC services nationally would also involve navigating the complex funding arrangements outlined in the introduction. While most new teachers are employed in state-funded preschool programs, there is a substantial number in CCS-funded ECEC services too. One participant noted the need for funding to flow through state and federal ECEC funding channels. Another noted that additional funding must go to supporting practice, not profits – reflecting the diverse ownership models in the sector.

Industrial agreements were identified as another mechanism for securing new teachers' financial entitlements to time for mentoring and induction. A teacher based in a school noted that they enjoyed this entitlement already:

As a graduate teacher that's part of what I expect, because I know it's coming to me, is that I get that time once a week to reflect and go through it, and it doesn't have to be weekly in the EC sector like it might even be monthly. I'm not too sure how it would look, but it's tied up in my award, part of my role, like the school knows.

Another noted that the different awards that teachers are currently employed under impact the amount of paid time they have to focus on their professional wellbeing and learning. Any changes to industrial arrangements would require careful consideration of cost implications for employers and families, as well as interaction with other reforms to pay and conditions currently under consideration.

In exploring these proposals, it is also important to consider the wider context of the ECEC workforce and the position of new teachers within the profession. While outside the scope of this study, comments from participants indicated that time not engaging with children is scarce for all staff, even for required activities such as planning:

Currently basic programming requirements are taking a hit as staff are unable to take time off the floor to effectively document. Training and induction would require similar time off floor away from care [and teaching] responsibilities to be effective, to achieve this staff would need to replace inductees if induction was occurring during business hours.

Another showed how the benefits of more dedicated time for collegial learning and reflection could accrue to all early childhood teachers and educators:

What I find my team loves the most is dedicated one on one time discussing all things educational, curriculum, practice and pedagogy where they thrive on the opportunity to have those conversations and to troubleshoot and having the opportunity to gain new perspectives to support their ongoing role. However, the lived reality is they don't get enough time to engage with any additional learning as they are so overburdened with the everyday nature of their role.

Any national support for new teachers must consider how opportunities and time allocations for professional learning are distributed across the entire ECEC workforce, and avoid any actual or perceived imbalances that may affect collegial relationships. A major recent study of how time is used in exemplary Australian ECEC services found no significant differences spent on professional learning between degree-qualified teachers and their certificate or diploma-qualified colleagues, indicating that educators and teachers have similar professional learning opportunities (Gibson et al., 2023, p. 24).

Investment in additional time for new teachers to learn can be framed as a time-saving initiative in the longer term. New teachers with limited skills can create additional workload for more experienced staff who must assume responsibilities that they are not yet prepared for. Research shows that mentoring and induction can improve new teachers' time management and efficiency, including in documenting practice, administrative skills and overall professionalism and practice (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Howe & Jacobs, 2013; Longley & Gilken, 2020; Muñoz et al., 2015; Nuttall, 2016; Pavia et al., 2003). This suggests a strong return on investment for funding teachers' time, as well as a reduction in costs from teacher attrition.

Recommendation 4.2: Complement dedicated time for mentoring and induction with collaboration and observation of practice

While dedicated time for mentoring and induction must be prioritised, the structure of ECEC services also provides valuable opportunities for professional learning to occur in the context of teachers' everyday interactions with children. A range of possibilities exist for mentors and mentees to work together and observe one another's practice. These are not substitutes for dedicated time, but may complement the learning that occurs in dedicated sessions by enabling practices to be demonstrated and applied. These possibilities include:

- **new teachers and their mentors work with children together**, for short or long periods. This could enable mutual observation and incidental, 'in-the-moment' guidance and reflection. This would require additional funding as it would exceed minimum ratios for qualified staff. This proposal reflects practices already in place in many ECEC services, where educational leaders work with children alongside colleagues so they are better able to observe, support and mentor their teams.
- **new teachers and their mentors share responsibility for a group of children**, potentially job sharing the early childhood teacher role in a room. This proposal would also require additional remuneration to ensure that the mentor and mentee had shared time away from children to meet and reflect. This model would have the added benefit of reducing pressure on the new teacher leading the group, and potentially improving the quality of the program for children.

These strategies to complement dedicated time for mentoring and induction leverage the opportunities that ECEC services naturally provide for multiple adults to work and reflect in collaborative teams. They also draw on research findings that observation and collaboration are powerful methods for professional learning (AITSL, 2018).

Providing support to new teachers during their day-to-day practice with children (as well as additional to it) may also help ease the stress of current workload demands. Several participants – all from long day care settings – described how the current circumstances mean that new teachers face pressure to contribute to ratios:

I was straight away 'on ratio' at my service, and finding time to have induction support would have been difficult to factor in. It has become very ad-hoc and I pop my head into the other Kinder room to ask clarifying questions which takes time away from the other teacher.

Issues with absenteeism and high turnover of staff means most ECTs [early childhood teachers] are in full contact on the floor most of their working week and when they do have time off the floor, there is certainly no time to engage in mentoring.

Often a new ECT [early childhood teachers] is just thrown in a classroom due to low staffing and lack of time at centres to complete formal induction processes.

Allowing for uninterrupted time within services during current staffing shortage means the ability to facilitate this in-house is diminished.

Especially in the current situation of staff shortage giving off floor time to new teachers might be difficult.

Others noted that the need to cover ratios made it difficult for both mentors and mentees to have 'off the floor' time, if both are employed at the same ECEC service:

I think the hardest thing is the reality of working within legal ratios and trying to share professional reflection or ideas. When teachers' shifts start and end at the same time as the children there is no opportunity for mentorship. ECTs [early childhood teachers] are released for programming one at a time. Staff meetings are not paid or limited to quarterly.

It is often difficult with our models to be able to have more than one educator 'off the floor' at a time to be able to engage in reflective dialogue.

Some comments noted that finding staff to backfill teachers engaged in mentoring would also be challenging in the current environment. Complementing dedicated professional learning time with collaborative practice could help to bridge the gap between mentoring sessions while immediate staffing shortages are resolved.

Protected time for mentoring and induction must also be delivered flexibly. Kwok et al. (2022) found that some new teachers felt frustrated by having to dedicate time to an induction program when they were already busy and overwhelmed. Similarly, teachers in a comprehensive induction program reported feeling that it was taking them away from teaching (Tekir, 2022). In a recent Australian study of high-performing ECEC services, researchers found a tendency towards 'multi-tasking' (Gibson et al., 2023, p. 16) rather than tightly delineated time. Effective mentoring and induction involve finding the right balance for each individual teacher, driven by their preferences and needs.

Recommendation 4.3: Integrate mentoring and induction into initial teacher education courses

Teacher education courses provide another opportunity for increasing time spent on mentoring and induction. Preservice teacher education itself is outside the scope of this study, but the quality of preservice courses significantly affects the extent of mentoring and support that is required for new teachers. While some employers' expectations that new teachers 'hit the ground running' (Boyd et al., 2020, p. 225) may not always be reasonable, preservice mentoring can help set teachers up for success.

Experiences of mentoring and induction to the ECEC sector during initial teacher education are highly variable. Some universities offer mentors who provide extensive support in addition to coursework and placement requirements. Other students rely on mentoring provided by their placement services, which may vary in quality and duration (with especially limited exposure to mentoring in ECEC in dual early childhood/primary teaching degrees). This variability affects graduates' preparedness both for practice and for further mentoring experiences.

Many early childhood teachers – including new ones – and other educators are involved in mentoring students on placement in ECEC degrees or vocational qualifications. One participant noted that this further adds to workload pressure, resulting in a suboptimal mentoring experience for student and teacher alike:

When I had uni students on prac [placement] I would give up my lunch break to sit and mentor them believing that this was a limited opportunity for them to learn and grow, gain insights into their practice and critically reflect on their pedagogy. Too often now as a visiting consultant in preschools I see students being used as an extra pair of hands to support an exhausted team working to ratios and needing all the help they can get.

National support for mentoring and induction could involve exploring ways to streamline mentoring and induction processes before and after graduation, to create consistent expectations (scaled to the level of support required) and reduce overall burden. This could include consideration of the types of mentoring that different graduates may need – for example, the needs of 'pathways' students transitioning from an ECEC diploma to degree may differ from school-leavers, or those transitioning into ECEC from other fields. Sharing knowledge and practices about effective approaches could strengthen mentoring and induction within and beyond preservice courses.

Recommendation 4.4: Extend timeframes for mentoring and induction to respond to the diverse needs of new teachers

There is no definitive quantification of the time it takes to effectively induct a new teacher. The literature highlights the importance of support during the first year of teaching (Bastian & Marks, 2017; Ma et al., 2021), although various studies propose different levels of frequency and intensity of support during this time (Kwok et al., 2022; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Others simply suggest that induction is long enough to achieve participants' goals (Howe & Jacobs, 2013; Peterson et al., 2010; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007). Factors that may determine timelines include:

- **connections to teacher registration (if FA1-2 is implemented).** In Australian teacher registration processes, timelines for moving from provisional to full registration currently vary. Regulatory authorities set a minimum time period within AITSL's national parameters: no less than 80 days of teaching and not exceeding the equivalent of a year of full-time teaching. Extensions may be granted for a maximum of 5 years (AITSL, 2017). Provisionally registered teachers are expected to receive support – including mentoring for the purpose of moving to full/proficient teacher registration/accreditation – during this period. Mentoring within teacher registration processes fulfils a specific purpose, and as such, should be seen as complementary to mentoring and induction supports for new teachers that respond to their broader range of needs, such as improving pedagogy and career development.

- **funding for new teachers.** Effective mentoring and induction for new teachers will require investment, so timelines will, in part, be determined by costs. Current state and territory mentoring and induction programs in Australia give an indication of possible scale and duration of investment (see [Appendix A: Overview of consultations and review of existing approaches](#)).

Given the diversity of the early childhood teaching workforce, it is likely that greater flexibility will be needed in timeframes for mentoring and induction than in schools. While many ‘new’ teachers already have substantial experience, others may take years to gain proficiency, especially those working part-time. As a highly feminised workforce, a high proportion of early childhood teachers work part-time, often alongside other roles in their families and communities. ECEC National Workforce Census (NWC) data shows that almost half (46.2%) the teachers delivering preschool programs in long day care services work part-time, with almost one-third of these working fewer than 20 hours per week (SRC 2022, p. 49). This figure is likely to be even higher if standalone preschools were included, as many deliver sessional rather than full-time programs.

The value of mentoring and induction also extends beyond the initial transition period into the sector. Many experts see mentoring and induction as part of a lifelong, sustained and intensive professional development program (Hobson & Ashby, 2012; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Nuttall, 2016). A teacher may become ‘new’ to a role or community many times in their career, especially given the high mobility between ECEC services with the current workforce churn.² They will also need to navigate new practices, challenges and ideas, drawing on support from their colleagues.

This view of mentoring and induction as gradual and contextual is profoundly evident in the Yarning Up insights (described in the following text box). Yarning Up participants viewed a slow and deliberate approach to collegial professional learning, taking the time for relationships to develop and for new professionals to find their way, as intrinsic and essential to their relationalities with one another.

In the current climate of intense time pressure in many ECEC services, there is value in considering alternative perspectives on how time may be structured (or unstructured) to create space for the things that matter most. There is growing interest in ‘slow pedagogies’ for children in ECEC services that resist hurriedness and allow time for learning (Clark, 2022). Induction for new teachers could be modelled on the principle of slow welcoming led by Elders and community leaders in Indigenous early childhood communities, reflecting the gradual nature of collegial professional learning and the need to alleviate, rather than intensify, the stress of new teachers’ work.

2 Mobility is high, especially in the early years of a teacher’s career. Almost two-thirds (65.7%) of teachers and educators in long day care had been employed at their service for 3 years or less, despite only 38.9% being in the sector for 3 years or less (SRC, 2022, pp. 24–25).

Yarning Up: Take time to build trust, respect and reciprocity

Welcoming and Elder guidance for new early childhood staff members is strengthened and enhanced through dedicated time over a long period given by Elders and community leaders, through the development of a strong ongoing cultural and professional mentoring relationship, through the establishment of a culturally safe place, and through the gradual development of trust, respect, and reciprocity along a two-way cultural mentorship continuum.

Evidence

Key features of the welcome and Elder guidance processes, such as dedicated time to slowly welcome new staff and the development of a strong cultural and professional mentoring relationship can be seen in the following excerpts:

Time is the most important thing. It's taking the time to go through things with people depending on what level they're at. We just had a new staff member start whose got a lot of life experience with children and grandchildren, but has never worked in childcare, but she's worked in disability and support care. So, when I told staff that she was starting, there's obviously different expectations for her, than there is for somebody who is walking in who has had 10 years' experience and has a diploma. But for anybody, some people adapt to a new place very quickly and others don't. And that initial meeting, trying to get to know people and getting a sense of who they are and what sort of supports you might think they need, and not making it feel rushed, that your time with them is important, and sitting down [with them] ...

Well, I had my background and understanding of the early years and how [EC organisation] works. I had a connection to some of the staff already, so that was there. But I had no experience in this community, professionally or otherwise, before I came. It was about being able to use what I was bringing with me, but being mindful of the fact that I wasn't the expert here, by any means. Because I've never worked with this community. So, I'm still learning new things all the time about this community, and I guess that's why I came in with I'm going to keep doing what was being done before I got here, and why I came in with the thought of my main focus is just connecting with people so that you can build up that understanding and learning, because it's the people that hold the understanding and the learning rather than the infrastructure that's here. You can look up what services are here and find out what they are and have a bit of an idea, but that's not really what's going to help you in the long run. It's those understandings of people and how they relate that really informs you.

Yarning Up: Take time to build trust, respect and reciprocity

I definitely come in and chat to [an Elder] and I'm like, 'How do you do this?' And she gives me encouragement. And it's like, 'Why don't you apply to this job just for the experience?' And ... I think it was a centre leader job ... just for the experience. But yeah, she's fantastic. There's definitely some key people, definitely some Elders for me are mentors ... So just people that keep me grounded that I know I can go to, to have my bit of a vent. But knowing that they're going to bring me back to why I'm there and why I'm doing what I do. And just keep grounded, I guess. And connected.

Literature notes

Grace and Trudgett (2012) reinforce the need for the creation of culturally safe workplace environments, and that misunderstandings by non-Indigenous leaders, managers and colleagues around family and cultural values can undermine the Indigenous early childhood staff members' sense of cultural identity and cultural safety. Reid and Santoro (2006) also argue that workplace relationships can become strained due to cultural misunderstandings.



Recommendation 5: Establish national evidence-based guidelines for mentoring and induction provision adaptable to local contexts

The previous recommendations in this report aim to create the conditions needed for effective mentoring and induction of new teachers to occur: a national commitment, clear objectives, sufficient mentors and dedicated time. These final recommendations address the kind of programs that might be delivered once these conditions are in place.

Despite widespread agreement about the importance of mentoring and induction for new teachers, it was apparent in this study that there is limited agreement on what effective induction involves.

Several participants called for clear national guidelines to help ECEC services understand effective, evidence-based practice:

We will need to be given clear information to make sure we are all on the same page.

Perhaps some national guidance on what effective induction can look like, a central source of information for time-poor service leaders to access.

Current ACECQA guidelines on induction focus on inducting new teachers and educators to the ECEC service, including providing a welcoming environment and ensuring that they read relevant policies and procedures (ACECQA, 2021). There is value in setting out these service-level procedures, as one participant noted that even simple induction tasks, like providing service policies to new teachers, are not always followed. At the same time, they do not address broader issues of induction into the early childhood profession.

Some participants indicated the need to differentiate guidance across ECEC service types and contexts, including for teachers and educators with different roles:

Guidance material on how to establish an effective induction process for each different role across different contexts. Templates and/or case studies of effective induction processes, and online training for both the mentor and mentee.

There is no one-size-fits-all model for mentoring and induction that will meet the needs of all new early childhood teachers across Australia. At the same time, the evidence points to certain components of effective mentoring and induction that must be in place in any delivery model. Research also supports the need for specific guidelines for implementing mentoring and induction (Doan, 2016a, 2019; Heikkinen et al., 2020; Langdon et al., 2016; Moss, 2010; Reames, 2016), including focused and consistent expectations and a formal procedure (Ma et al., 2021). Within these broad guidelines, the design of programs must be sufficiently decentralised and flexible to adapt to local contexts and teachers' diverse needs (Tekir, 2022).

Developing national support for mentoring and induction will involve balancing clear expectations with a high level of flexibility and adaptability. For example, in Indigenous early childhood communities and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, reforms to national support for mentoring and induction for new teachers must include co-design, to embed combined cultural and professional mentoring practices.

Additionally, targeted support will be especially important for meeting the needs of new teachers facing various forms of professional isolation. The recommendations that follow outline what universal guidance for mentoring and induction may involve, as well as considerations for priority groups.

Recommendation 5.1: Establish national, evidence-informed expectations for the components of mentoring and induction processes

National guidelines would help employers, new teachers and teacher education providers understand expectations for mentoring and induction, as well as effective practice. Sharing evidence about effective practice is important for raising the quality of mentoring and induction across the sector, as overreliance on providers' in-house professional learning can limit teachers' exposure to evidence-based models (Rush & Downie, 2006). National guidelines can ensure all providers understand the key elements of quality programs on which to build their own approaches.

Mentoring and induction for new teachers is a multifaceted process to help teachers develop a sense of belonging in their ECEC service, its community and the wider early childhood profession. It therefore requires action at the system, service and individual level. The broad steps involved in the process are set out in the following section, along with actors who could be responsible.

1. Access to key information (and time to engage with it)

New early childhood teachers need easy access to the core information that guides their professional practice at sector and service level. This includes:

- a. **Professional standards and requirements** – New teachers can be expected to have learned about the NQS, EYLF and AITSL teaching standards during their initial teacher education, as well as other core requirements for ECEC services, such as their obligations to support children with disability and any child safe standards that apply in their jurisdiction.

There is scope for policy and peak organisations to collaborate to ensure this information is collated and readily accessible to new teachers – which would also have value for all practitioners seeking a single source of information, as discussed in AERO's report on a national professional practice network for NWS Action FA3-3. ACECQA's new induction resources for the NQF (for example, ACECQA, 2022), as well as new e-learning materials created under NWS Action FA3-1, could form part of this resource, as well as AITSL's compilation of resources for new early childhood teachers.

- b. **ECEC service policies, procedures and expectations** – All ECEC services have a range of core documents that new teachers need to access, including policies, roles and responsibilities in the team, information about children and families, and any information that will help teachers understand their local community.

The provision of information to new teachers is only as effective as the time they receive to engage with it. Reading time is an often-overlooked part of professional learning for all teachers, and is most effective when combined with opportunities to ask questions, discuss written material and reflect on its application in practice.

2. Needs assessment

The diversity among new early childhood teachers and ECEC services suggests that induction must begin with assessment of both their needs and opportunities to learn. The ECEC service leadership team – either the service leader or educational leader – is likely to be best-placed to discuss with the new teacher what further support they may require. This could form part of the service’s performance development cycle, to set learning goals (potentially towards Proficient standards) and identify strategies to achieve them.

National support could also be provided for needs assessment, such as tools for new teachers to appraise their confidence in different areas of practice, or the availability of support within the service community. For example:

- a. **Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning (SEQUAL)** is a scale that enables educators to assess how well their workplace supports professional growth. The scale was developed and validated in the US and used in a major recent Australian ECEC study (Gibson et al., 2023).
- b. **Induction for Beginning Teachers: Needs Assessment** is a simple implementation matrix developed for US education districts to appraise how well they support the induction of special education teachers, including program goals and human and financial resources. This kind of assessment may be valuable for large ECEC providers to appraise the support that they provide (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, 2019).

Any tools developed or adopted for needs assessment must be appropriate and valid for application in Australia’s varied ECEC settings and contexts.

3. Mentor matching

Once the needs of a new teacher are identified, they can be matched with a mentor to support their induction. Research shows that the mentor–mentee match is an important factor in the success of mentoring (Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Howe & Jacobs, 2013; Kwok et al., 2022; Pavia et al., 2003), so this step requires careful attention. One participant noted the ‘professional’ skill involved:

The educator also needs to be professionally matched to a more experienced colleague – that they have the same values and want to have a mentor!

Researchers suggest that mentoring for new teachers should involve an application and selection process that matches for similarities in backgrounds and experiences (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007), location, philosophies, personalities, life stages, schedules and responsibilities (Pavia et al., 2003). Research also suggests that a formal process for repartnering is available in the event that a partnership ends prematurely (Bonnett & Ly, 2017).

The locus of responsibility for guiding this critical step in the process depends on the mentoring model chosen. If mentors come from a national pool, the results of the needs assessment could be submitted and a match found centrally. If the mentor comes from the local community, matching might be facilitated by a service leader, local network leader or community Elder. If the mentor is sourced from within the ECEC service or approved provider, the service leader or educational leader may undertake the critical matching role.

4. Delivery of the mentoring and induction program

Delivery of the mentoring and induction program involves setting goals for professional learning and combining a range of strategies to achieve them. Induction programs often involve numerous supports, including feedback, visits to other programs or services, online support and professional development, as well as mentoring (AITSL, 2015; Bonnett & Ly, 2017; Hobson & Ashby, 2012; Hogan & White, 2021; Moss, 2010; Reames, 2016; White, 2003). This broad view of induction reflects that mentors do not have to provide all the learning themselves – they may also encourage new teachers to connect with other professional learning and collegial support as part of the induction process. Collaboration and peer learning within ECEC services is an important part of induction (Kearney, 2014; Langdon et al., 2012; Santoli & Vitulli, 2014), and may include the mentoring relationship, or supplement it.

Observation and reflection emerged as especially valuable components of induction, either involving the mentor or other experienced teachers:

New educators need access to someone to visit their classroom, as well as relief time to allow them to observe in experienced teachers' classrooms.

The experience of being observed by a colleague was also identified as valuable for new teachers (Kearney, 2014; Pavia et al., 2003), especially if there is collegial reflection around the observation (Hobson & Ashby, 2012; Hogan & White, 2021). These experiences may take different forms – with mentors playing a greater or smaller role – depending on the opportunities available within each ECEC service and community. What matters is that induction activities are situated in the context of teachers' real-life experiences, processes and roles, so they have immediate relevance for everyday practice (AITSL, 2015; Hogan & White, 2021; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015; Moss, 2010; Reames, 2016).

5. Monitoring and evaluation

Little information is available about mentoring and induction processes used in ECEC services and their outcomes, and most programs do not have a formal evaluation (AITSL, 2015; Morrissey & Nolan, 2015). Building monitoring and evaluation into the process would help to ensure that mentoring and induction meet the needs of new teachers and their employers, as well as providing insight into effective practices. Research supports the need for evaluation throughout the program (Kearney, 2014; Pavia et al., 2003).

Given that services' induction processes may be evaluated through the NQS assessment and rating process, there may be scope to collate ongoing insights from regulatory assessments to gain a better understanding of current practice – especially practices used in ECEC services rated Exceeding NQS or Excellent. There is also scope for knowledge sharing about mentoring and induction through professional practice networks, including those discussed in AERO's report on action FA3-3.

Recommendation 5.2: Promote a national menu of flexible options accessible to professionally isolated teachers

National guidance for mentoring and induction must include specific models and appropriate funding to address the needs of professionally isolated early career teachers. Professional isolation – a feeling of not having close colleagues for support – is an issue affecting many early childhood teachers at all stages of their careers. It can be especially harmful to new teachers who depend on collegial support as they build confidence in their roles.

National guidelines for mentoring and induction need to clearly outline the options available to early childhood teachers experiencing professional isolation, and how these can be accessed. The menu of options itself will depend on the strategies used to increase the supply of mentors and make time available for professional learning (as discussed previously). The success of these strategies will depend on their uptake by new teachers who stand to benefit from them, so clear access pathways are essential.

Eligibility for equity-based funding through the menu could consider 2 main factors associated with professional isolation: geography and service size. Teachers in rural and remote ECEC services are recognised as especially vulnerable to professional isolation (Doan, 2016a, 2019; Price & Jackson-Barrett, 2009), as they face both limited access to collegial learning, and limited availability of backfill to participate in it. Professional isolation may also arise from being the only degree-qualified teacher employed at their service – a situation that affects a large proportion of early childhood teachers, regardless of geographic location (Nolan & Molla, 2018a). Teachers employed at small or single-service providers have limited access to degree-qualified colleagues, rendering teachers at small and single-service providers the second main group for consideration for equity-based access to mentoring and induction options via the menu.

Targeted support for professionally isolated teachers needs to overcome specific access challenges. Digital access to mentoring and induction support naturally arose in this study as solutions both to geographic isolation and limited mentor supply. Some participants noted that expectations for face-to-face mentoring, while desirable, could be unrealistic, and that online options could provide a more workable response to current challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the trend to use online platforms for collegial interaction.

While online delivery offers clear pragmatic benefits, it was more commonly regarded as a supplement to – not replacement for – face-to-face delivery. As well as the benefits it offers for building relationships, some face-to-face contact is essential if mentoring is to involve observations of practice. Teachers in rural and remote areas may also face difficulties accessing reliable internet connections, compounding the challenges of isolation.

The provision of options for professionally isolated teachers is not intended to detract from the responsibility of employers to improve access to mentoring and induction wherever they can. There is a risk that offering mentoring and induction support to isolated teachers may create a perverse incentive for providers not to deliver support themselves. Any national support for isolated teachers needs to co-exist alongside funding to reward and incentivise providers making the effort and time to deliver quality mentoring and induction to their staff through partnerships or other innovations.

Recommendation 5.3: Identify, listen to and support community-led, co-designed models for supporting teachers, especially in Indigenous communities

The Yarning Up findings described in the following text box provide an alternative perspective on professional isolation, by suggesting that new teachers are mentored from within their local community, even before they have commenced their career in ECEC. Nurturing local teachers and educators helps to ensure that early childhood professionals have connections to the community, as well as tackling professional isolation by making mentoring within community intrinsic to becoming a professional.

These findings show the importance of supporting Indigenous early childhood communities to develop mentoring models that respect community strengths, and extend beyond the first year of teaching practice (both before and after). It also points to the risk of a different kind of professional isolation if Indigenous early childhood professionals need to move away from their communities to complete training or professional development. Indigenous-led design of pathways into the profession can help to ensure that training is delivered in culturally relevant and sensitive ways.

Yarning Up: Coming up through Community

People identified by Elders and community leaders as a ‘right fit’ for their early childhood community will be encouraged to further their formal qualifications in early childhood education towards a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) degree or further. However, a continual cultural link to Elder cultural mentoring still needs to be respected and preserved in an Indigenous program within a tertiary institution that is deemed to be culturally safe.

Evidence

‘Coming up through Community’ provides time and evidence for Elders to identify and encourage the ‘right fit’ people to continue their qualifications in early childhood education, as seen here:

She’s got to get to know the community. Get the job first, learn the job. We’ve got to make sure we’ve got the right one first.

And ... on a worker’s first day, they’re probably heightened as well, so how we support them and make them feel like we are the right fit for you, but unpack that with them and be [true] to who you are too ... and find a balance between the regulations and the policies and things that are going on, but the care needs to be – the community values need to be there as well.

Yeah, because the ones that come here, we say, ‘Be a teacher, don’t be an assistant all the time. Go and upgrade your qualifications because you can do the job.’ And they can do it, so it’s just getting that support behind them. And this place here is ideal for that type of support.

Yarning Up: Coming up through Community

Because we're supporting her at the moment to get her early childhood degree, so looking at avenues, what uni will give her more credit and stuff. And financially, we will support her financially knowing that when she's gone to uni you've still got to – she still has to get a wage. So we're looking at that as well to support her that way where we can keep her and she can grow here because she's a long-term one.

So ... making sure that, from my experience, that prior knowledge and that education is already there, so that when Aboriginal people come into a space, that the other person is already well educated, culturally aware. And that it's a safe space for Aboriginal educators to come into and already feel welcome, because we don't have to educate or share who we are, why we are ...

Literature notes

Fleet et al. (2007) found that Indigenous early childhood staff members can feel isolated from their communities due to the time demands of their work – and importantly, the distance from family and Community can severely impact their access to Elder guidance which is culturally and emotionally needed to feel culturally safe.

Conclusion

This report addresses the connection between 2 precious groups in the ECEC workforce: new teachers who bring hope and energy for building the future of the sector, and experienced teachers who bring expertise and lessons from their past.

Mentoring and induction are the processes by which these 2 groups connect as active learners, and are essential not only to sustaining and growing the knowledge and skills of the ECEC sector, but to sustaining and growing the workforce itself. These processes are too important to be left to chance, or allowed to flounder due to inadequate time, capability or funding. Investing in mentoring and induction for new early childhood teachers benefits stakeholders at all levels of the ECEC system, and especially the children, families and their local communities.

The recommendations in this report will require significant effort to implement, as they involve engagement with some of the most intractable challenges in the sector. It is hoped that the current climate of national reform will help to alleviate some of the structural barriers to mentoring and induction, increase collaboration between ECEC services, peak bodies and governments and create space for innovation to flourish.

This report would not have been possible without the voices of the teachers, educators and leaders who participated in the research, and the contributions of academics, policymakers and other sector leaders who shared their insights and ideas. The warm enthusiasm with which this proposal was greeted – alongside clear-eyed recognition of the challenges involved – gives grounds for hope that implementation is possible.

AERO thanks all those who contributed to this report, and all those whose ongoing efforts create change in the lives of Australian children and families every day.

Appendix A: Overview of consultations and review of existing approaches

AERO was tasked with reviewing existing approaches to mentoring and induction for new early childhood teachers. To document existing approaches, AERO conducted a desktop review and consultations with governments, peak bodies, providers, and teacher registration regulatory authorities. AERO issued invitations to participate in the consultations via the NWS Workforce Working Group and the ACECQA Stakeholder Reference Group. Using purposeful sampling and snowballing recruitment, AERO leveraged existing relationships with organisation representatives to spread the word and recruit more participants. A full list of participating organisations is provided in the Consultation participants section of this appendix.

AERO conducted consultation meetings with one or more participants in an open-ended interview format. The interviews explored existing approaches used in their organisation, important features of effective approaches, and opportunities to enhance national mentoring and induction for new teachers. Participants were invited to provide documentation related to existing approaches to be included in AERO's review.

Information gathered during the consultations was used in 2 ways:

- Documentation of approaches and programs was analysed as part of AERO's review of existing approaches and their relative effectiveness.
- Perspectives on effectiveness of existing approaches and opportunities for a professional practice network shared by participants were used to triangulate findings from the research and test the appropriateness of the recommendations.

AERO analysed relative effectiveness by reviewing each approach against key features for success identified in the best available research, and appraising its alignment with policy goals and the priorities of early childhood teachers and service leaders. These findings were synthesised with findings from the review of domestic and international literature and original research to formulate the report's recommendations.

Approaches were included if they were currently or recently operating, were designed for new early childhood teachers as defined in this report, and met this report's definitions of mentoring and induction (refer to [Introduction](#)).

This process yielded 27 approaches led by state and territory governments, peak bodies, universities, large providers, regional Catholic education offices and Independent school associations (see [Table A1](#)). Of these, 6 were mentor training programs for experienced teachers.

We found 7 further approaches classified as 'promising' (see [Table A2](#)). These included enhanced university-based mentoring and induction programs for preservice teachers, mentoring/coaching programs designed for entire ECEC services or new early childhood leaders that do not explicitly target new teachers but to which they may have access, and one targeted induction program to attract educators to work in a remote area.

Finally, 5 approaches provided mentoring, induction or supervisor/mentor training exclusively designed to support provisionally registered teachers to attain full registration/accreditation (see [Table A3](#)). These approaches are subject to teacher registration regulations, and due to their specific focus, did not meet AERO's definitions of mentoring or induction. Effective enhancements to mentoring and induction for new teachers can complement – not conflict with – teacher registration supports.

Table A1: Existing approaches to mentoring and induction for new teachers gathered through consultations

Agency	Existing approaches
National	
Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership	National Support for Beginning Teachers is an online resource outlining effective induction processes for new teachers, including their My Induction app.
Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) and the Queensland University of Technology	From the Ground Up is a program for early childhood educators and teachers in ELACCA member organisations nationally. A leader and an emerging leader from the same ECEC service pair up and attend weekly, whole-group online workshops, and coaching or mentoring sessions. The project aims to develop ECEC educator and teacher capabilities and support engagement and retention.
The Front Project	The Upskill Program provides diploma-qualified early childhood educators who are completing a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education with group mentoring led by experienced early childhood educators, networking opportunities and professional development. The program is open to educators in all states and territories.
Australian Capital Territory	
ACT Government	Preschool Pathways Partners are a team of 4 who work with educators in ACT public preschools, and with ECEC services that are linked with the ACT Government's 3-year-old preschool initiative . The program includes coaching, professional learning and other capacity building supports that aim to foster greater understanding of children and families in relation to school transition.
New South Wales	
Association of Independent Schools New South Wales	<p>Growing and Nurturing Educators is a 3-year program comprising a range of supports for new teachers, including early childhood teachers in Independent schools. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Schools Hubs, in which initial teacher education students are immersed in schools as Education Trainees

Agency	Existing approaches
Association of Independent Schools New South Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Early Career Experience Project, which provides professional learning for teachers as they progress through their first years of practice. Participating teachers are assigned a mentor across the course of the 2-year program. Mentors are strongly encouraged to take part in the Being an Effective Mentor Program. Being an Effective Mentor, which provides guidance for teachers on being an effective mentor and supporting mentees. Training is for new and experienced teacher mentors and is delivered in collaboration with the Association of Independent Schools Leadership Centre.
Northern Territory	
Northern Territory Government	<p>Induction for new teachers joining the Northern Territory Department of Education includes a whole-department orientation with a section for early childhood. Each preschool and school is responsible for site-based induction.</p>
Queensland	
Brisbane Catholic Education	<p>The Early Career Teacher Program provides early career teachers with a school-based induction and orientation program and a designated mentor for ongoing support.</p>
Queensland Government	<p>The Beginning Teacher Learning Suite provides online professional learning programs and wellbeing supports for new teachers. This suite of online resources consists of 10 modules and is not mandatory. The programs are accessible to new early childhood teachers in ECEC services that are part of a government school.</p>
Queensland University of Technology	<p>Mentoring Beginning Teachers is a 4-week, online mentor training course designed for early childhood, primary and high school teachers as well as professionals with education expertise who are interested in becoming mentors to beginning teachers.</p>
South Australia	
Catholic Education South Australia	<p>The Early Career Teacher Program provides support to early career teachers across their first 8 terms of teaching, as well as teachers who are new to teaching in Catholic schools (4 terms).</p>
South Australian Government	<p>The Early Career Teacher Development Program is for teachers in their first 2 years of teaching. It provides beginning teachers with support to develop professional networks, access resources and build expertise to thrive. It supports teachers to transition from graduate to proficient as described by the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST). The program includes 4 face-to-face days over 2 years.</p>

Agency	Existing approaches
South Australian Government	<p>The Start Strong Graduate Teacher Program supports graduate teachers to prepare for their first class, including in preschool settings, giving them the opportunity to work with expert teachers to build capability to be 'job-ready' as they enter their first teaching role. The program is 2-days, with an optional third day for department employees.</p> <p>Country Professional Experience Scholarships are for preservice teachers seeking a professional experience placement in country schools and preschools during the final years of their teaching qualification. The scholarship includes a range of financial support, as well as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • induction to the local community and site • networking opportunities with other participants • the opportunity to build a strong connection with the department.
Tasmania	
Tasmanian Government	<p>BeTTR Hour is a regular, one-hour targeted learning session for early career teachers in Tasmanian Government schools (including early childhood teachers), delivered online after the school day. Topics are flexible and determined in response to participant feedback.</p>
	<p>Meeting the Standard: Induction for Early Career Teachers is a year-long induction program aligned to the APST. It provides 4-days of immersive training before school begins, one-day of professional learning support each term, and recurrent workshops and online resources. Topics are chosen in response to teachers' feedback. Funding includes pay for teachers' participation in the professional learning days.</p>
	<p>In the Teacher Intern Placement Program, preservice early childhood teachers in their final year of study intending to work in a government school can apply to be assigned a mentor, at whose school they will do their placement and upon graduation be employed. Tasmanian Government funding covers paid time for the mentor to support the new teacher.</p>
	<p>The Quality Mentoring Program is a one-day workshop that prepares teachers to mentor colleagues at differing stages of practice and development, including professional experience students, early career teachers, and provisionally registered teachers, as well as experienced teachers wanting to develop their practice.</p>
Victoria	
Independent Schools Victoria	<p>The Beginning Teachers Program pairs new teachers with an experienced consultant from Independent Schools Victoria for ongoing mentoring and support. New teachers will also be supported to develop networks with other new teachers from Independent schools as part of the program.</p>
Victorian Government	<p>The Coach and Mentor Training Program supports experienced early childhood teachers and educators to develop their coaching and mentoring skills. The program is delivered by Mott MacDonald Consultancy and funded by the Victorian Department of Education.</p>

Agency	Existing approaches
Victorian Government	<p>Coaching for Returning Teachers and Educators Program familiarises teachers and educators returning to the ECEC sector with early childhood programs and frameworks, and connects them with local early childhood networks. This program is delivered by Gowrie Victoria and funded by the Victorian Department of Education as part of the Best Start Best Life initiative.</p>
	<p>The First Year Teacher Professional Coaching Program provides support and advice on a range of topics, including teaching practices, inclusion, professional relationships, professional identity and career planning. Independent coaches who participate as mentors are qualified teachers with over 5 years' experience in the profession. The program is available to teachers in their first or second year of teaching, and to diploma-qualified educators who have at least 2 years' experience. The program is delivered by FKA Children's Services, Semann and Slattery, Heather Barnes and Anne Kennedy Consulting.</p>
	<p>Professional Supports for Early Career Teachers also include communities of practice for early childhood teachers in their first 5 years of practice.</p>
Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT)	<p>The Mentor Masterclass seminar is for mentors and educational leaders who direct and supervise the induction and mentoring process for beginning, new and returning teachers. This masterclass is for participants who have completed the Victorian Institute of Teaching Effective Mentoring Program or other VIT-approved mentor training programs to extend their skills and to support effective induction experiences for professionally registered teachers and beginning teachers.</p>
Western Australia	
Association of Independent Schools Western Australia (AISWA)	<p>Mentors for Early Career Teachers is a one-day course for mentors of early career teachers who are enrolled in AISWA's Graduate to Proficient Course. It supports mentors to develop the skills needed to guide and empower teachers in their first year of practice.</p>
	<p>The Early Career Teacher Induction Program is a 2-year program comprising 6 modules that include the multiday Graduate to Proficient Program for Early Career Teachers course to support professional and personal growth.</p>
Western Australian Government	<p>The Graduate Teacher Induction Program is defined in the industrial agreement that applies to teachers in government schools, including early childhood teachers. The program includes graduate teacher release time of 0.05 FTE per week, the Graduate Teacher Professional Learning Program in their first 2 years of teaching, which includes in-class coaching, and Graduate Teacher Support, including matching with a mentor trained in mentoring, instructional practice and classroom management. The agreement stipulates that a range of models of collegial support will be developed by the Statewide Services Centre in consultation with the Union to accommodate different contexts and needs. The minimum ratio of mentor/support-person to graduate teachers is 1:30.</p>

Table A2: Promising mentoring and induction programs

Agency	Promising programs
ACT Government	<p>The New Educator Support Program is for teachers in their first 3 years of teaching. It includes mentoring by an experienced educator in their school, reducing teaching hours, a 5-day induction program, opt-in coaching, ongoing professional learning, and support to transition to proficient registration. New Educator Support Guidelines outline responsibilities of schools and the Directorate for supporting new teachers. At the time of writing, the program did not include early childhood teachers. That may change with the passing of the Education (Early Childhood) Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, enabling early childhood teachers to apply for and be granted teacher registration.</p>
Catholic Schools Western Australia	<p>Kimberley Calling is an induction program that provides information and support for educators who want to work in Catholic Schools in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.</p>
Universities	<p>Several universities offer Professional Partners in Practice programs, which provide mentoring for preservice teachers alongside the academic and professional experiences in their degrees.</p> <p>The Victorian Government's Early Childhood Professional Practice Partnerships initiative provided innovation funding to 4 universities to test approaches to mentoring for preservice teachers.</p>
Victorian Government	<p>The Gowrie Victoria Coaching Program, funded by the Victorian Government, provides a coach who works with teachers, leaders and teams to build new knowledge and support the development of new practices. The program is available to all ECEC services delivering state-funded kindergarten programs in Victoria (including long day care), and is accessed using the service's School Readiness Funding.</p>
	<p>The Early Childhood Professional Practice Partnership Initiative provides 550 initial teacher education students at 4 universities (Victoria University, Deakin University, LaTrobe University and the Australian Catholic University) with enhanced placement and mentoring experiences during their early childhood teaching degree, as well as professional development for those in the workforce.</p>
	<p>The Mentors of Pre-Service Teachers Program provides free professional learning for registered school teachers working in government, Catholic and Independent schools in Victoria. Professional learning focuses on mentoring preservice teachers and was developed by VIT in collaboration with Victorian initial teacher education providers.</p>

Mentoring and induction for the purpose of supporting provisionally registered early childhood teachers to attain full registration/accreditation differ from mentoring and induction as defined in this report.

Table A3: Mentoring and induction for teacher registration/accreditation

Agency	Mentoring and induction for teacher registration purposes
Gowrie Victoria	The Gowrie Victoria Mentor Support program provides provisionally registered early childhood teachers with onsite observations and reflection sessions from a mentor who is a fully registered teacher, along with professional support and guidance to support the process of moving from provisional to full registration.
NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)	The Supervisor/Mentor Community of Practice Model pilot provides online community of practice sessions facilitated by NESA-trained accreditation supervisors/mentors.
Northern Territory Government	Mentoring takes place as part of the Northern Territory teacher registration process and provides graduate teachers with professional and wellbeing support. Training is provided for both mentors and mentee.
Victorian Government	<p>The Effective Mentoring Program prepares teachers to mentor provisionally registered teachers to attain full registration. It builds understanding of the VIT registration process and the APST. The program also supports teachers to develop skills in mentoring through the Mentoring Capability Framework. Teachers from government, Catholic and independent schools and ECEC settings can participate.</p> <p>Mentoring for Early Childhood Provisionally Registered Teachers offers mentoring for provisionally registered early childhood teachers to reach full teacher registration with the VIT. Provisionally registered teachers can find a mentor using the 'mentor map', a directory of mentors who have completed the Effective Mentoring Program. The program is part of the Best Start Best Life initiative and is delivered by Gowrie Victoria.</p>

Consultation participants

Facilitated discussions and workshops

AERO facilitated discussions at meetings of the NWS Workforce Working Group, comprising jurisdiction representatives, the ACECQA Stakeholder Reference Group, comprising peak bodies, and large providers. AERO also facilitated a consultation workshop testing research findings and draft recommendations at the 2023 National Workforce Forum.

At each discussion/workshop, participants were invited to contact AERO via email to provide further information or participate in a consultation interview.

Open-ended interviews

Open-ended interviews were conducted with:

- Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (including the New South Wales Education Standards Authority, Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory, Queensland College of Teachers, Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia and the Victorian Institute of Teaching)
- Catholic Education Canberra and Goulburn
- ELACCA and the University of Wollongong
- Gowrie Victoria
- Gowrie New South Wales
- Haywood Consulting Group
- Independent Schools Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
- Lady Gowrie Tasmania
- Semann & Slattery and FKA Children's Services
- TAFE Queensland
- The Front Project
- Jurisdictions:
 - ACT Directorate of Education and the ACT Teacher Quality Institute
 - New South Wales Department of Education
 - Northern Territory Department of Education
 - Queensland Department of Education
 - Tasmanian Department of Education, Children and Young People
 - Victorian Department of Education
 - Western Australian Department of Communities and Department of Education.

Appendix B: Research methods

This appendix provides an overview of the methods that guided the field research the Deakin University early childhood research team undertook on AERO's behalf.

The Deakin University early childhood research team worked in partnership with AERO over a 7-month period from January to August 2023 to gather insights from early childhood teachers, educators and leaders throughout Australia about the effectiveness of existing approaches and opportunities related to AERO's 2 actions in the NWS Implementation and Evaluation Plan:

- FA1-3: Enhance mentoring and induction support for new teachers
- FA3-3: Investigate options for a national professional practice network for educators and teachers.

Led by Professor Andrea Nolan, the team comprised Jenni Beahan (Project Manager), Dr Deb Moore, Carole Lanting, Kim Kinnear (Indigenous Researcher) and Jessica Ciuci.

The mixed methods study gathered qualitative and quantitative data via a national survey, focus groups and individual interviews conducted via the Zoom videoconferencing software. To ensure the research methods were respectful of all participants, the design incorporated 2 cohorts with distinct methodological approaches. Cohort 1 included early childhood educators, teachers and leaders, and Cohort 2 included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, teachers and leaders.

Participants

Of the 216,619 ECEC staff reported in the 2021 ECEC NWC (SRC, 2022), most of the workforce was employed in New South Wales (33%), Victoria (23%) and Queensland (22%), so efforts were concentrated within these states at the beginning of the project. However, participants from all states and territories were sought to be included in some way (i.e., through Zoom calls, fieldwork and/or survey) to gauge whether experiences were similar or whether location and circumstance could be seen as mediating factors in experiences of mentoring, induction and professional practice networks.

Ethics

This research was approved by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HAE-23-015; 2023-074). National, state and territory requirements for approval to conduct research involving early childhood educators, teachers and leaders differed in each jurisdiction, and extensive efforts were made to ensure recruitment and data collection complied with each jurisdiction's policies. Finally, all participants were provided with a plain language statement and consent form to enable informed consent to participate.

Methodological approaches

Case study methodological approach (Cohort 1)

This study applied a mixed methods case study approach.

The case study method has become increasingly widespread in contemporary educational research (Lichtman, 2006; Yin, 2018). It was selected for this project for its ability to provide an 'in-depth understanding of a situation and meaning for those involved' (Merriam, 1998, p. 18). A case study is bound within a 'case' or 'phenomenon', usually within a specified timeframe and location, using detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). For this case study, the 'case' or 'phenomenon' under study was the induction, mentoring and professional practice networking experiences of Australian early childhood teachers and educators. The case was bound by time (7 months) and location (across all Australian states and territories) and used multiple in-depth sources of both quantitative (a national survey) and qualitative (a national survey, focus group and individual interviews) methods for data collection.

Indigenous methodological approach (Cohort 2)

An integral aspect of this research project was to call for and listen to the voices of, and research alongside, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood teachers, educators and service leaders in Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous ECEC services. However, to conduct Western-initiated research that is ethically sound and culturally responsive alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators, there are Indigenous principles and 6 core Indigenous values that must be abided by to be deemed authentic Indigenous research and findings (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018; Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, 2019). As such, we have earnestly attempted to follow the protocols and advice provided by Elders and Indigenous community leaders so that we could authentically research alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood teachers, educators and service leaders to start to understand their early childhood workforce experiences.

We aimed to abide by the principles and protocols of Indigenous methodologies, in particular, in the use of 'yarning up' as 'a research methodology that is based on relationships' (Barlo et al., 2021, p. 40). This holistic Indigenous methodological approach requires explicit relationship building and ongoing maintenance of respectful relationships with 'data' and knowledges, which takes time. In Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) work, they claim the basis of an Indigenous research paradigm is framed by Respect for Indigenous cultural integrity; Relevance to Indigenous perspectives and experiences; Reciprocal Relationships; and Responsibility through participation. This approach is dynamic and fluid, informed by place and premised on trust.

With the view to enable the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood teachers and educators to be authentically heard, a respectful, culturally sensitive research strategy was co-designed alongside our Indigenous Deakin team member, Kim Kinnear. Kim is a proud descendant of Adnyamathanha and Nukunu Community and Country with connections to Maralinga Tjarutja Peoples and a current PhD candidate and Lecturer at Deakin University.

Further to our research design, Kim and our Deakin research team developed an Indigenous Data Sovereignty Plan to guide our research to be ethically responsible and aware of Indigenous Peoples' self-determination, their Indigenous research rights and multiple ways of knowing and being. Indigenous Elders and communities expressed their gratitude for the creation of the Deakin Indigenous Data Sovereignty Plan, again, showing our desire to work authentically alongside Indigenous peoples.

Data collection

National survey

To maximise the number of early childhood teachers, educators and service leaders' voices across Australia, a national survey was designed and activated using the Qualtrics survey platform. The plain language statement and consent form appeared on the landing page of the survey and made it clear to participants that by completing and submitting the survey, they were giving consent to have the data incorporated into the research data corpus.

The survey collected demographic information that did not identify the respondent but provided information to map against the required participant criteria. This assisted with identifying gaps in the corpus of data to be followed up. The survey had 3 sections, addressing induction, mentoring and professional networks. It collected responses relating to:

- what has been experienced and how effective this has been
- what would have been helpful when transitioning into the profession, and during the early stages of a career
- the characteristics that are deemed important – for example, those considered 'not negotiable'
- the barriers and enablers to effective induction, mentoring and engagement in professional networks.

The survey included a mixture of open-ended, short answer questions, and drop-down menu selections. It was designed to be user-friendly and time efficient, recognising the early childhood workforce is time-poor. The survey was piloted by 6 early childhood professionals (nominated by the research team), and was subsequently adapted for clarity and brevity and to include a specific group (EY Management) based on their feedback. Responses from pilot survey participants were included in the data.

Focus groups and interviews on Zoom calls (Cohort 1)

Due to the short timeframe of the project, Zoom meetings were privileged for the focus groups and individual interviews. Once participants responded to the expression of interest to participate, they were provided with a plain language statement and consent form to consider. Participants had a choice of times and dates that were convenient to them. At the beginning of the focus group or interview, the plain language statement was explained and verbal consent was requested to confirm they were still willing to participate, even though a written consent form had already been sent to the project manager. At this point, if a potential participant no longer wanted to participate, they could disconnect from the Zoom meeting.

Focus groups and/or individual Yarning Up interview (Cohort 2)

For the Indigenous participants, there were 2 main methods used for data collection to align with relational Indigenous methodologies as much as possible. These were:

1. Face-to-face focus group and individual Yarning Up interviews
2. Zoom call focus group and/or individual Yarning Up interviews.

‘Yarning up’ can be seen to be a culturally safe and respectful method of creating, gathering and collating stories of experiences (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010; Wilson, 2008). This method entails being ‘in community’ with early childhood teachers and educators. ‘Yarning up’ involved researchers (in particular, Kim Kinnear and one other non-Indigenous researcher) visiting sites where Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander teachers and/or educators were working, and then talking with the teachers and educators at a time and place that was convenient for them. It was important that Indigenous teachers and educators determined the best way to share information and uphold their voices about their early childhood mentoring, induction and networking experiences in connection with the Elders and/or community members, and the ECEC service. This acknowledges the complexity and ongoing changes that many of the identified ECEC services experience and is a respectful way to engage in person where possible, and otherwise via Zoom.

Participants were recruited via purposive sampling and snowballing. Initially, recruitment for Cohort 2 participants was introduced through Kim Kinnear’s already established relationships using purposeful sampling, followed by snowballing recruitment strategies. Palinkas et al. (2015, p. 1) argue that:

Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest.

Purposeful sampling allowed for the specific invitation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood teachers and educators, as it was their perspectives, knowledges and experiences of mentoring, induction and networking we sought to hear. These groups were contacted by Kim Kinnear, using her own professional networks, National Indigenous Knowledges Education Research Innovation Institute (NIKERI) lecturers, and through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and government agencies.

Snowballing as a recruitment strategy is said to occur when ‘members of a particular population refer you to other members of that population ... via word of mouth’ (Nolan et al., 2013, p. 128). For Indigenous communities, this is an important consideration in passing on information to other potential research participants if:

- the researchers are deemed to be trustworthy or not
- the research is worthy of participation
- it is culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate.

This practice was confirmed in a study by Guillemin et al. (2016), where Indigenous participants spoke of ‘checking them out’ first before giving or denying consent to participate.

Appendix C: Overview of the Australian Children's Education and Care Workforce

This appendix provides key statistics most relevant to this report. Additional data about Australian children's education and care services can be found in the cited sources.

The NWS concerns all 17,319 services in Australia approved by ACECQA:

- 8,855 long day care services
- 3,062 standalone preschools
- 448 family day care services
- 4,954 outside school hours care (OSHC) services (ACECQA, 2023b, p. 7).

The NWS (p. 11) provides an overview of the diversity within the sector, including:

- **Provider size** – Around one-third of providers (34%) are large (more than 25 ECEC services), with a similar proportion operating a single ECEC service (36%).
- **Ownership** – For-profit provision is common in long day care (68%), family day care (60%) and OSHC (48%), but rare for standalone preschools (1%).

The ECEC NWC (SRC, 2022) provides further details of the workforce in ECEC services approved for Child Care Subsidy (CCS). Dedicated preschools were invited to participate in the 2021 ECEC NWC, but participation was not mandatory and Western Australia and South Australia did not participate.

Nevertheless, it provides a valuable overview of the majority of the ECEC workforce to help contextualise this report. Table C1 shows key statistics for qualification levels, experience and age groups.

Table C1: Key statistics for contact staff* in CCS-approved ECEC services

Workforce profile	Long day care	Family day care	OSHC
Total number of teachers	15,749	438	2,483
ECEC-related qualification levels (percentage of all teachers and educators)			
Degree	12.4%	3.4%	11.7%
Diploma/advanced diploma	47.5%	48.3%	22.3%
Certificate III or IV	32.2%	45.4%	18.3%
No ECEC qualification	8%	2.6%	46.3%
Fewer and more years of experience (percentage of all teachers and educators)^			
10 or more years' experience	29.1%	37.7%	15%
Under one year's experience	11.4%	5.1%	17.6%
Younger and older age groups (percentage of all teachers and educators)			
Aged 15 to 24	19.1%	2.8%	42.1%
Aged 50 and over	16.4%	36.1%	14.3%

Note: * Contact staff refers to teachers and educators working directly with children. ^ We have focused on teachers and educators with 10 or more years' experience or under one year's experience as these groups are more likely to be mentors and mentees. Source: SRC (2022)

While excluded from the NWC dataset, standalone preschools are known to have a higher proportion of degree-qualified teachers, often working alone or supported by a Certificate III or diploma-qualified co-educator. Standalone preschools also have an older workforce. In all jurisdictions with available data, around one-third (or more) of staff in standalone preschools were aged 50 and over in 2021, with fewer than 10% of staff aged 15 to 24 (SRC, 2022).

Indigenous educators constitute 3.0% of educators in both long day care and OSHC, and 1.0% of family day care educators. Over 1 in 5 (21.6%) long day care services have at least one Indigenous staff member, compared to 12.1% of family day care services and 7.3% of OSHC. This increases markedly with service remoteness, with one-third (33%) of outer regional CCS-approved services having an Indigenous educator, compared to over half (54.6%) of remote or very remote services. In the Northern Territory, 37.1% of preschool staff identified as Indigenous (SRC, 2022).

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