

# Early Childhood Education sector

## PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The *Guidelines for Induction and Mentoring and Mentor Teachers* (the *Guidelines*) were published by the Council in 2011 to “support the provision of nationally consistent, high quality and comprehensive support for PRTs in their first few years of practice and to enable them to become fully registered teachers”. They were designed to shift the policies and practices of schools, kura and early childhood education services (ECE) “towards an ‘educative mentoring’ approach—a shift from a view of induction as ‘advice and guidance’ to one of skilled facilitation of ‘learning conversations’ focusing on evidence of teachers’ practice”. Our evaluation investigated how induction and mentoring programmes were operating in English medium ECE services and schools. We wanted to know to what extent the *Guidelines* and the *Registered Teacher Criteria* (RTC) were supporting a shift to educative mentoring. We were also interested in professional development opportunities for mentors and any other impacts of the *Guidelines* and the *RTC*.

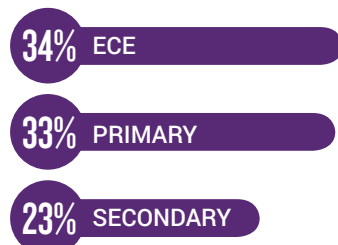


The evaluation was carried out by NZCER between February 2012 and June 2014. The full report can be accessed at <http://www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/evaluation-induction-mentoring>.

## What we did

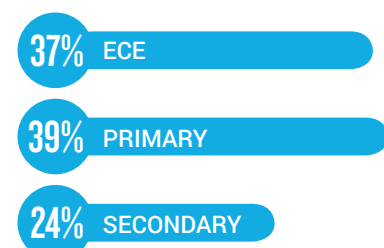
**We surveyed Provisionally Registered Teachers (PRTs) and their mentor teachers in two cohorts, at the beginning of provisional registration and nine months later (so four surveys in total). We also carried out 21 case studies of mentoring and induction in schools and ECE services throughout New Zealand. The ECE case studies were two community based services, three state kindergartens and five privately owned education and care centres.**

We received 4,242 responses from PRTs across the four surveys. Ten percent worked across different sectors or did not provide that information. The rest came from the following sectors:



Over two-thirds of ECE teachers responding to the surveys were employed in private education and care centres, with around a quarter in community based education and care and around 10 percent in kindergartens.

We also got information from 840 mentors in four surveys, 311 (37 percent) from ECE.



## Findings

### Induction and mentoring programmes

Almost all PRTs surveyed felt accepted as a valuable member of their ECE service and reported that their environment was safe for **86%** learners and staff. Eighty-six percent of ECE mentors agreed or strongly agreed that their service was a safe environment.

The majority of ECE PRTs had access to an induction and mentoring programme throughout their two years of provisional registration.

**43%** 43 percent of ECE PRTs rated their programme as “structured and regular”, and 44 percent reported “informal and flexible” programmes.

**18%** A minority (18 percent of ECE PRTs) indicated that they had been left alone to “sink or swim”. These PRTs tended to have had no induction or mentoring programme, or an informal and flexible one.

**59%** ECE PRTs with mentors were most likely to have mentor meetings once a month or once a term (59 percent). In schools, mentor meetings were most likely to be once a week.

“Structured and regular” programmes appeared to offer benefits over more informal approaches. Those with structured and regular programmes also reported greater understanding of what quality teaching looked like in practice and a stronger focus on developing teacher expertise to enhance children’s learning than those reporting informal or flexible

programmes. Their workplaces were more likely to have clear policies and procedures in place to support mentoring, and to have other teachers taking an active interest in the programme.

Most ECE PRTs reported having a dedicated mentor to support their induction and mentoring programmes. ECE PRTs were more likely than PRTs in schooling to have a mentor from a different part of the education sector, elsewhere in their organisation, or

**66%** a contracted mentor.

A majority of mentors (66 percent strongly agreed) said mentoring benefited their own

**70%** practice and their ECE service. Most mentors (70 percent) also reported that their work as a mentor helped them to

**86%** support the work of other teachers. Most (86 percent) intended to continue their mentor role in the long term, suggesting this work can be a source of professional satisfaction.

### Requests for support

PRTs and mentors wanted additional teacher-friendly resources and tools to enable them to better support induction and mentoring.

Many PRTs were uncertain about how to document their progress. PRTs in the ECE sector tended to have received more guidance or direction from their employing organisation than their colleagues in schooling about how to organise documentation to apply for full registration.

### Awareness and use of the RTC

There has been broad and growing awareness and understanding of the RTC as a tool to support induction and mentoring. PRTs become more familiar with the RTC as they near full registration.

**73%** Almost all mentors agreed that the RTC were important to the profession. Seventy-three percent of ECE mentors strongly agreed.

**50%** Fifty percent of ECE PRTs strongly agreed they could see how the RTC contributed to their development as a teacher. Almost all ECE mentors reported they frequently used the RTC to describe professional knowledge, relationships and values. The ECE sector had the strongest commitment to using the RTC to assess their PRTs’ achievement of the RTC.

**93%** Ninety-three percent of ECE mentors reported that they “frequently” used the RTC for assessment purposes.

The RTC were also used for the appraisal of teachers renewing practising certificates in the majority of case study ECE services.

### Awareness and use of the Guidelines

**74%** Seventy-four percent of ECE mentors reported using the Guidelines.

Mentors who used the Guidelines were much more likely to strongly agree that they understood the mentoring role in the registration

**76%** process (76 percent compared with 36 percent of those who did not know about the Guidelines) and to be more positive about the Guidelines.

*“Ideally it would be wonderful if mentors had the time to fully engage with these Guidelines. I often refer to them to ensure my work is progressing meaningfully and in line with regulations, requirements etc. and I often bring areas into discussion with my mentor but I am not 100% sure my mentor refers to them.” (PRT)*



**58%** Fifty-eight percent of ECE PRTs said they were aware of the *Guidelines*. PRT awareness of the *Guidelines* was strongly correlated with mentor awareness, which is not surprising as mentors were the most likely source of information about the *Guidelines*. About a third of ECE mentors surveyed strongly agreed that the *Guidelines* were “more useful than the former advice and guidance approach”, that they helped the mentor to ensure that the service had a clear policy on induction and mentoring and that they helped them understand their role as a mentor. Those who agreed and strongly agreed identified the *Guidelines* as relevant, easy to understand, comprehensive and supportive in helping the PRT achieve the *RTC*.

### Educative mentoring

Three quarters of the mentors reported frequently engaging in a number of mentoring activities that the *Guidelines* identify as educative. These included: assisting the PRT to gather and analyse learning data in order to inform next steps or different approaches to their teaching; facilitating learning conversations with the PRT that challenge and support them to use evidence to inform their teaching; and demonstrating and then discussing effective teaching.

We found few examples in our interviews, observations and documentation of objective and evidence-based approaches to mentoring (as promoted in the *Guidelines*), although this does not mean that PRTs were not well supported to teach in ways valued by their services.

### Professional learning and development

**77%** Most ECE mentors reported they had sufficient expertise to mentor effectively in most areas—a third thought they

had sufficient expertise in all areas. Seventy-seven percent said that they had had sufficient PLD on mentoring.

A minority of mentors wanted further mentor development in areas such as engaging in educative mentoring conversations and deeper knowledge about how to support the PRTs’ learning.

The case studies indicate that mentoring PLD is characteristically delivered as one-day workshops,

**20%** sometimes to combined groups of ECE, primary and secondary teachers.

Twenty percent of ECE mentors appeared to have received no PLD specifically related to their mentoring responsibilities.

### Requests for support

ECE mentors surveyed reported they were keen to learn more about using assessment information to inform teaching and learning, working with priority learners, or working in the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

*“I am thankful that I work for [ECE service] that has remained committed to providing PRTs and mentors with release time to complete documentation and reflection on teaching and learning.” (PRT)*

### The impact of the *Guidelines* and the *Registered Teacher Criteria*

The *RTC* have become better known and utilised since the beginning of the study (2012). The *RTC* appear to be having an impact on ECE service approaches to both induction and mentoring, and appraisal, in that teachers are now aware they are required to show evidence of achievement of the *RTC* to gain and maintain full registration.

ECE services are still developing understandings of the *RTC* that will enable them to determine what the *RTC* look like in their specific context.

The impact of the *Guidelines* was most evident in ECE services with collaborative cultures that used evidence-based approaches to their work.

*The findings presented in this summary are averages from across the four surveys.*

### Future considerations

- Increased use of the *RTC* requires further system-wide learning and development activities.
- More effective implementation of the *RTC* in the ECE sector is more likely to occur as services develop their understandings of how to utilise it as a tool to both support and assess professional growth.
- Take up of the *Guidelines* tends to reflect internal ECE service capability. Contexts that provided expansive<sup>1</sup> learning environments for teachers were more likely to understand and use the *Guidelines*.
- ECE services were often unaware of the available PLD opportunities.
- PLD opportunities need to take account of the research findings about what is effective. One-off PLD courses are unlikely to have much impact, especially when significant shifts in practice are required.<sup>2</sup>

1 Hodkinson P., & Hodkinson, H. (2005) Improving teachers’ workplace learning. *Research Papers in Education*, 20, 2, 109-132

2. Timperley, H., Wilson, A, Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2007). Teacher Professional learning and development: Best evidence synthesis iteration. Wellington. Ministry of Education.

## Examples from the case studies

### Supportive ECE environments

PRTs at Plains ECE\* reported that induction and mentoring is taken very seriously. “It’s an expectation that you join the team if the philosophy fits with your beliefs. We are about ongoing learning, action research and review”. A mentor said that PRTs understand the underlying philosophy of the centre which is to let everyone - teachers and children - explore, and ask questions so that others also may learn and change. Reciprocal dialogue is important. Each staff member (including unqualified and support staff) sets their own goal, collects evidence, and displays the professional and personal learning that is “collectively constructed and achieved”. Achieving full registration is the PRTs’ goal. Conference attendance and presentations are encouraged, readings are provided, ongoing study is encouraged, parallel professional development is provided, and whole centre development (e.g. bicultural development in 2013) is carefully and collectively planned.

### Providing a structured Induction and mentoring programme

A Kindergarten Association-wide seminar programme is an “add-on” to the induction and mentoring in the kindergarten – it spans a two

year period and offers a series of workshops. The topics are chosen by the senior teachers in response to needs they see in their kindergartens and reflect core issues around the RTC. Mentors are encouraged to attend with their PRT. In addition, the association holds an annual 2-day conference. The seminars are seen as an opportunity to make strong connections between everyone involved in induction and mentoring.

The senior teachers, head teacher and PRT are all very clear that provisional registration should be about demonstrating growth as a teacher and that the RTC should help with this process rather than dictate it. The PRT and mentor develop a group contract and identify PLD that will help the PRT meet their identified goals for the year. The contract is intended to make induction and mentoring workable for the PRT. Negotiating the contract could include things such as: “How do you like to have feedback?”

### Educative mentoring

At River Road ECE a mentoring meeting focused on discussion of the goals set in the last meeting and the documentation related to that RTC. Andrea gave advice on how to present evidence in relation to the RTC.

*Evidence is not an example of what you do—e.g. Dominic is unsettled on arrival at the centre*

*“Incorporating an online option for the PRT to set goals and record successes and reflection on practice has also been a life saver in terms of recording and communicating about learning and teaching.”*  
(Mentor)

*so I crouch down and smile, then a week later he comes in the gate and smiles at me. So the evidence is that I notice that the child is now more settled as a result of my changing my practice. I want specific examples about your practice and things you do differently as you tune in to a child’s needs. (Mentor)*

There was also evidence that professional readings were being used to support the PRT’s responses to children’s learning as well as the Ministry of Education’s “notice, recognise and respond” assessment approaches. At ANZAC ECE the PRT appeared to demonstrate considerable personal agency which may have reflected her growing confidence as a team leader. For example she raised attachment theory (a topic of a previous meeting discussion) and outlined a new primary care-giving procedure she had instigated to help calm the room and benefit children. The mentor supported this new plan and asked for more details. The pair then discussed additional strategies and solutions, identified possible problems, and discussed the issues in more depth. The mentor then suggested that the PRT test the plan and discuss the results at their next meeting.

\*All names are pseudonyms.

*“The key to successfully meeting the PRT criteria for an individual is in part personally driven, but the success or failure of an individual to meet the criteria is often helped or hindered by the quality of support they are getting. That I think is the weakness in this [induction and mentoring] process.” (PRT)*