



THE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE HANDBOOK 2026

**This handbook is the overall guide for:
Teacher Education Students,
Principals/Directors, Supervising Teachers,
Site Professional Experience Coordinators and
University Mentors**

NOTE: In addition, please refer to individual Professional Experience Placement Course Guides issued with each course for additional information.

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1. WELCOME TO PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Introduction

This handbook provides guidelines and procedures for university students (Teacher Education Students) enrolled in School of Education professional experience courses, and who have been allocated a placement Site (classified as a school or early childhood centre) by the Professional Experience Unit (PEU) via the SONIA Online platform. This information is available for Teacher Education Students (TES), Supervising Teachers (ST), Site Placement Coordinator (SPC) or University Mentors (UM) to gain an understanding of the Professional Experience placement.

Further resources are available at the following:

- The School of Education, [PEU website](#) for further information about professional experience requirements, placement dates, resources, FAQs and links to the SONIA placement system
- The University of Newcastle [Student Professional Experience Policy](#)
- The University of Newcastle [Code of Ethical Academic Conduct Policy](#)

Key Contact Information

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Reporting Documentation

The foundation of the documentation for reporting on students (TES) Professional Experience is the National Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education (2023) and Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. See Placement Guides for details of requirements.

Teacher Education Rationale

Teacher education is a life-long process from preservice education through induction and into continuing professional development and learning. As such, teacher education is the responsibility of all educational practitioners. Therefore, the quality of partnerships between the School of Education at The University of Newcastle and schools and services is fundamental to the success of our initial teacher education programs. The School of Education is committed to developing strategies which facilitate these partnerships.



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beyond their own setting.

Initial teacher education programs at The University of Newcastle aim to equip TES with the skills and dispositions at graduate teacher level of the Professional Standards, to enable them to teach effectively, to analyze their own teaching and to develop professionally throughout their teacher education programs and in the future. To achieve this aim, TES are supported to become reflective decision-makers as well as skilled practitioners. The best teachers understand that decisions made concerning such processes instruction and management are made in the complex context educational settings, and that implications of such decisions go far

Field experiences must be more than practice without reflection, rules without understanding. They should provide opportunities for TES to inquire, to experiment, and reflect on the subtleties and complexities of the classroom, including the moral as well as technical dimensions of teaching. The learning, both formal and informal, which occurs in schools and other settings, will be a central concern in all field experiences. Those things that TES learn through school placement can only be learnt in field contexts.

Professional Experience Sequence

The professional experience component of the teacher education program represents an important opportunity for the TES to engage in new learning and to develop aspects of the Teaching Standards which are best learnt in the workplace.

Each program will have its own sequence and focus on professional experience units, and the courses must be done sequentially. To view the program's professional experience sequence, visit the [PEU website](#).

Student (TES) Eligibility for Placement

Each TES enrolled in a professional experience course is asked to provide mandatory and other documentation requirements to be eligible to proceed into the community on placement. TESs are asked to comply [NSW Department of Education Pre-Service Teacher requisites](#) to be eligible for a placement opportunity. Only TESs who are fully compliant will be provided an opportunity for placement. TESs are required to ensure their compliance is current and valid for the term of the program's professional experience sequence.

2. AT THE PLACEMENT – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Please see individual course Placement Guides for specific details.

Teacher Education Student (TES)

During placement, it is expected that the TES will gain personal experience of the total Site environment by participating in a full range of class/room and Site activities. Over the course of the placement, to gain as much experience as possible the TES will need to:

1. Gain an understanding of the Site's community, the Site's program, physical surroundings, and the Site's facilities.
2. Observe the teaching procedures used by the ST(s) and should use the Observation templates provided in the course
3. Become acquainted with the students, teaching, learning as many names as possible and acquiring some background information about students.
4. Become familiar with curricula, departmental and Site policies and resources, teaching aids, etc
5. Assist, where appropriate, in carrying out routine tasks which are normally the responsibility of teachers/educators.
6. Observe the ST's methods in obtaining effective group or behavior management and discipline and creating a positive classroom atmosphere.
7. Plan, teach and evaluate lessons.
8. Participate in reflective conferences with the ST.
9. Complete the Formative Assessment with the ST at the appropriate time(s) during the placement.
10. Discuss with the ST strategies to assist their development as teachers.
11. Communicate effectively with a range of Site personnel.
12. Work collaboratively with fellow TES and Site personnel.
13. Sign up for the attendance book each day to ensure that the Site can verify your attendance. Additionally, complete attendance or absence in the SONIA Online timesheets.
14. Develop and maintain professional experience portfolio as important written evidence of learning.
15. At all times behave in a professional manner that meets the standards of the University of Newcastle's Code of Conduct and your Site's code of ethics.
16. View and sign off on professional experience Final Report prior to leaving the placement Site on final day.

University Mentor (UM)

As a representative of the University, the University Mentor (previously referred to as the Tertiary Supervisor) is appointed to assist the TES, or a group of TESs, who have been allocated a placement location to complete their professional experience. In addition, the role of the UM is to also liaise with their allocated TESs and school staff of varying positions to provide positive support and constructive feedback to the TES. The University Mentor is not a supervisory position, nor is it an opportunity to comment on school management or procedures through the lens of observation or conversation.

Most placement courses will have one UM appointed to each TES. For the duration of the placement the UM is required to support the TES by checking in with them and communicating with the staff at the site to discuss the TESs progress to date. If staff have any queries relating to the implementation of the placement, the UM can assist or refer them to the PEU or Course Coordinator.

The University of Newcastle has implemented **two types of University Mentors from 2026:**

- **University Academic Mentor**– a contracted UON staff member who has been allocated a portion of their yearly SOE workload to mentor professional experience students before and during their placement; and
- **University Casual Mentor**- an external casual staff member who will be hired on a staff contract to be a university student mentor as required.

Both types of mentors will have similar roles and responsibilities but vary slightly relevant to each course (i.e. whether the TES is a first or final placement student).

UM ALLOCATION TO A FIRST PLACEMENT TES - Each UM supporting a TES on their first placement will mentor the allocated TESs remotely (email, phone or Zoom/Teams) during the first placement period and additional time is allocated for TESs on an Individual Support Plan (ISP).

UM ALLOCATION TO A FINAL/INTERNSHIP PLACEMENT TES - Each UM supporting a TES on their final year placement will mentor the allocated TESs remotely (email, phone or Zoom/Teams) and if the TES is within area placement they will also conduct two on-site visits to observe a lesson. Additional time is allocated for TESs on an Individual Support Plan (ISP).

TES NOT MEETING PLACEMENT REQUIREMENTS - If the TES is deemed by the ST and SPC as not meeting the requirements of the placement course and/or teaching standards the school ST will place the student on an Individual Support Plan (ISP). The ISP is not the responsibility of the UM, however in an effort to support the TES and liaise with the ST and ISP the UM will contact the **University Mentor Coordinator** (UMC) to discuss support strategies moving forward. Each ISP is implemented using a case-by-case basis. After discussion with the UMC, the UM may visit a TES on site (if appropriate and viable) for a lesson observation and meet to provide support and discuss their progress with the ST.

3. GENERAL INFORMATION

Work/Health and Safety

During orientation/induction at placement site TES should be provided with an occupational health and safety briefing. TES should ensure that they strictly follow the occupational health and safety policies and procedures of the host site at which they are placed. TESs who have an ongoing medical

condition that may be adversely affected by participation in the placement should seek medical advice and inform the Course Coordinator at any stage prior or during the placement.

Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAP)

Students on an RAP are requested to advise their Course Coordinator of any special provisions that required. RAP will specify physical or delivery of adjustments that may be required whilst on a placement. Full medical documentation is required to be submitted to **Accessibility** for registration of the RAP, and subsequent consultation with the Professional Experience Convenor will ensure student is supported during placement for an equitable outcome. If TES has not applied for RAP via AccessAbility the TES is required to complete the placement under the conditions provided in the course outline and the online Course Handbook.

Incident Reporting

An incident is something that results in (or potentially results in) harm. It can include physical injury or psychological damage. In the event of any incident/accident occurring while on placement, it cannot be ignored the following steps should be taken:

1. Seek medical attention where appropriate
2. Follow the host site's incident response and reporting procedure
3. Email your Course Coordinator, cc the PEU (peu@newcastle.edu.au) and your ST to advise of the incident details as soon as you are able. The email Subject should show your name, student number, **placement course code**, and the Site name/location where the incident took place.
4. Complete the *Incident Report* via [MyUNI dashboard](#) as soon as possible. Click the link and select *AIMS Incident and Hazard* from the left menu. Select "I want to report a hazard, near miss or incident".
5. Review the University's Insurance website - Work Integrated Learning and Career-ready Placements - <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-staff/our-organisation/governance/assurance-services/insurance>. The Insurance information contained therein is an overview designed to answer common questions. If more information is required contact the Insurance team at insurance@newcastle.edu.au

Absences on Placement

TESs are expected to be in attendance for each day of the professional experience of placement, and absences must be accounted for. There is an expectation that TESs will treat host sites as employers regarding attendance and absences.

For a complete explanation of the types of Leave, as well as the process for taking leave whilst on placement, please **access SONIA Online Home page and select 'Leave' from the content list**

If ill, injured, have a family emergency or subject to misadventure and need to take leave from the placement, the following is expected:

1. Phone the placement site as early as possible to advise of the absence.
2. If ill, obtain a doctor or pharmacy certificate, or other suitable supporting evidence.
Only return to your placement site when you have recovered
3. All absences require lodgement via the University's [Adverse Circumstances](#) online portal, with [suitable supporting documentation \(Section 5\)](#).

4. At the end of absence period apply for [Adverse Circumstances](#) as required. An acceptable and correct application will be sent by Student Services to your Course Coordinator for review.
5. Enter your absence into your SONIA Online timesheet as '*X Days Absent*'.
6. Negotiate your make up day(s) with your ST, email your Course Coordinator what those actual days are and copy (cc) the PEU (peu@newcastle.edu.au) on your email.

Dress Code

TES are required to be appropriately dressed, befitting a professional career. Some sites have strict dress codes, and pre-service teachers are advised to contact the SPC to confirm their specific requirements prior to attending their orientation. TES should be professional in their grooming and dress; therefore, smart casual dress is required. TES are expected to meet allocated sites requirements for the duration of placement. Should there be no policy for staff dress code at the site, reasonable appropriate dress should be discussed and agreed to by the TES, and the PSC.

LANTITE (Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education)

The Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education (LANTITE) is designed to assess initial TESs' personal literacy and numeracy skills to ensure teachers are equipped to meet the demands of teaching. All students enrolled in an initial teacher education course will be expected to sit and meet the test standards prior to graduation. At the University of Newcastle, TES **MUST** complete the LANTITE tests **prior to commencing the final placement in their program**. As the LANTITE tests are administered through an independent organisation and not through the university, questions can be directed to LANTITE Administrator directly <https://teacheredtest.acer.edu.au/contact>

Professional Experience Ethics

• Confidentiality

It is imperative that TES respect the confidential nature of placement records. TES should not repeat information outside the Site which may harm or embarrass a child, parent or member of the staff, or the Site itself.

Additionally, TES should disguise the name of their Site, children, and other identifying features of the placement when completing university assignments or partaking in discussions which may arise during their university classes.

• Data Collection

TES will be required to collect samples of students' work during their placement to demonstrate the impact on learning. When collecting and distributing this data, teacher education students must follow ethical protocols to ensure privacy and confidentiality requirements are met. TES should discuss the following with ST/s:

- What information is being collected
- The reason it is being collected
- How the TES plans to use the data

Once this discussion has taken place, the ST should then advise the pre-service teacher of the correct procedures to follow in accordance with the Site's policies. Any data collected must be de-identified

to ensure confidentiality.

- **Jury Duty**

Occasionally TES are called Jury Duty. If this falls within placement dates, the Course Coordinator needs to be contacted immediately to organize an exemption letter from the Professional Experience Convenor.

- **Exams**

If a university examination is scheduled during placement; TES must complete the exam during the special exam period. If the exam cannot be completed during this period, TES will be absent from the Site and will need to make up the whole day missed at the conclusion of placement. Attendance at the exam is considered an Absence from placement and is subject to an application for adverse circumstances via the usual process. To accompany Application, please apply to your Course Coordinator for supporting documents.

- **Public Holidays**

If there is a public holiday during the placement, then students are not required to make up the day.

- **Incidental Duties**

TES should cooperate with the staff of the Site in the matter of incidental duties, such as sports supervision, playground duty, excursions and artistic, musical, scientific, or literary projects.

- **Transporting School Students**

TES are NOT permitted to transport students attending placement Site under any circumstances.

- **Excursions**

TES can attend excursions at the discretion of the SPC. Excursion costs are the responsibility of the TES. TES should complete an "Excursion Notification Form" on the *Forms* tab of SONIA Online to advise the University of the Excursion as soon as notified of the excursion.

- **Industrial Action**

During the professional experience of placement, it is possible that teacher unions may undertake industrial action, such as stop work meetings or strikes. If the Supervising Teacher chooses to work at the Site on this day, then the decision on the appropriate course of action should be discussed with the ST and the SPC informed of the TES's decision.

TES are not required to make up single days or part days lost by industrial action. However, if there is a protracted strike (more than two days) then the Course Coordinator will provide advice on whether/how it will be made up. Any missed days or part days must be recorded on SONIAOnline Timesheet as "Public Holiday/Industrial Action."

- **Natural and other Emergencies**

In the event of any unexpected catastrophic events such as pandemics, bushfires, floods or earthquakes, or other instances where a TES's health or safety has been compromised, students should follow the instructions of State and Local authorities. Safety is paramount.

As soon as possible, TES should communicate with the Site and the Professional Experience

Unit and Course Coordinator, to provide information relating to status and plans.

TES must continue to monitor the university email address for any important updates.

Insurance for Students on Placement

The safety and protection of TES partaking in approved placement activities is a primary concern for UON. However, injuries and losses do occur, and the University has placed a comprehensive insurance portfolio to protect against financial losses which may be incurred because of undertaking approved activities. The insurances include (but are not limited to):

1. Student Personal Accident Insurance
2. Public Liability Cover
3. Professional Indemnity/Medical Malpractice Insurance

Further information regarding the insurance program arranged by the University can be found here: <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-staff/our-organisation/governance/assurance-services/insurance>

TES Personal Accident Policy

The policy provides cover for TES engaged in approved work experience activities and/or practical placement. It is an accident cover only and does not cover illness or pre-existing medical conditions.

If an accidental bodily injury is sustained, the insurer may pay the non-Medicare medical expenses incurred up to 100% of the actual costs – provided the event giving rise to the bodily injury occurs when you are engaging in approved activity. Non-Medicare medical expenses means expenses that are not subject to any full or partial Medicare rebate, nor recoverable by the insured person from any other source (including private health cover) and incurred by the insured person within twelve (12) calendar months of sustaining bodily injury for treatment certified necessary.

This policy responds after claims are made on any private medical insurance held by the student.

Public Liability Insurance

UON's Public Liability cover provides protection for claims made by third parties for damage or injury in those instances where the University may be proven liable. This cover extends to sponsoring employers who accept students on practical placement required by their course.

Professional Indemnity/ Malpractice Insurance

This policy indemnifies the University of Newcastle against legal liability for claims by third parties for breach of professional duty by an employee or any person for whom the University is responsible (e.g., students) resultant from any negligent act, error or omission in conduct of approved University business.

Workers' Compensation Insurance

Students are not deemed to be employees of the University. They would therefore not be entitled to cover under Workers' Compensation Insurance.

Further Questions

Any questions in relation to the above should be directed to Assurance Services - Insurance on 024913 8180 or email insurance@newcastle.edu.au

Conflicts of Interest

- Conflict of Interest on a professional experience of placement is any situation where there could be perceived or actual favoritism or over-familiarity towards a TES undertaking placement. TESs may not contact schools or centres to arrange their own placements. All placements are arranged by the PEU.
- TESs may not be placed in a school or a centre they attended themselves as a student less than seven (7) years ago.
- TESs may not be placed in a school or centre attended for previous placement (unless given approval under the NESAs Waiver of Appendix B arrangements for final placements)
- TESs may not be placed in a school or centre where a close relative or friend is currently working or attending.
- TESs may not be placed in a school or centre where they have worked in paid employment for 20 days or more over a 12-month period.

Such situations may introduce an actual or perceived conflict between personal interests and university duties. All potential questions of potential Conflicts of Interest should be declared and resolved before the placement commences and the PEU will request TES provide conflict of interest locations via the SONIA Online portal prior to being eligible for a placement.

Final approval of a placement location may require discussions between the placement of Course Co-ordinator and the Site.

4. ASSESSMENT ON PLACEMENT AND THE NTPA

Please see individual course Placement Guides for specific details.

Final Year – Newcastle Teacher Performance Assessment (NTPA)

Each placement course has an assessment item which, in combination with the Final Report, is used to determine if the student has attained a passing grade. These assessments focus on the Graduate Teaching Standards as well as build skills required for accreditation and to successfully complete the final assessment, the Newcastle Teaching Performance Assessment (known as the NTPA).

NTPA is the final assessment hurdle for all TES and is completed after their final school placement as part of a nationwide reform process. Although administered and assessed by the University of Newcastle, it is a NESAs and federal government initiative and must be passed for accreditation. Before placement begins, students undertake modules and tutorials to prepare them for the NTPA. During the final placement, the appointed University Mentor carries out Quality Teaching coding which forms part of the evidence of impact.

Assessment on Placement

- **Formative Assessment and Final Reports**

Each course will contain assessment obligations by the Sites and/or the University Mentor. Further information is available from each course's individual Placement Guide. Each stakeholder can locate the Placement Guide for the course on the SONIA Online portal –After logging into SONIA with the unique username previously supplied and the self-set password, navigate from the Home page to the 'Placements' tab and review the *Details* button.

Please find below some useful Links

- [ACER - Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education Students](#)
- [Mandatory Education Placement Requirements](#)
- [NSW Statutory Declaration - Schedule 8](#)
- [UON Code of Conduct](#)
- [NSW DoE Code of Conduct](#)
- [UON Professional Experience Unit website](#)
- [UON Student Professional Experience Policy](#)

- **Individual Support Plans**

The Individual Support Plan procedure is intended to indicate to a student that their performance is not in line with expectations as elucidated in the Graduate Teaching Standards and is intended to provide support and guidance.

An early Individual Support Plan within the placement period is the best approach so that the student has time to demonstrate the improvements for a sustained period. In their final weeks, it would be difficult to demonstrate sustainable improvement.

A TES can be placed on an Individual Support Plan at any time in the placement. TES can be placed on an Individual Support Plan on Day 1 of placement if they have not made preliminary contact with the ST or fulfilled orientation requirements prior to the placement.

The Individual Support Plan procedure is:

1. The ST liaises with the host SPC, with the option of including a university representative (UM or the placement Course Coordinator), to determine if the student should be placed on an Individual Support Plan
2. The ST and host SPC meet with the student. The UM or University representative may be asked to attend this meeting.
3. In this meeting, the student is notified in writing using the *Individual Support Plan form on the SONIA platform*, and a support plan aligned to the Standards is developed. The goals should be limited in number, specific in their focus, clearly explained and achievable in a 5-day period.
4. This documentation is available to all stakeholders via SONIA.
5. The TES is expected to make an immediate, significant, and sustained improvement in the identified areas within up to 5 placement days.

6. Should an additional UM visit be considered necessary, the University Course Coordinator should be contacted prior to this occurring.
7. At the 5th placement day, the student's progress can be ascertained by the ST and SPC.

Bachelor Program Final Year only: If a TES is placed on an Individual Support Plan during Phase 1 (first four weeks), then the school may decide to extend Phase 1 by up to one week to enable the TES to attain an acceptable standard. The extra Phase 1 week will extend placement by one week. No extension of time is allowed during Phase 2. If the TES has not reached an acceptable standard by the end of the extended Phase 1 period, they should fail.

If TES show the identified growth, they can proceed with their placement. If this does not occur, then they will be withdrawn from the placement and the Professional Experience Unit notified immediately (see 'Failed Placement' below this Guide)

Failed Placement

A Failed Placement is usually warranted when:

- Difficulties continue after appropriate support has been planned and provided (via an Individual Support Plan)
- The TES has been consistently unable to demonstrate attainment of one or more of the required Professional Standards for Teachers
- The professional behaviour of the TES is unacceptable
- The host site's students are adversely affected by the TES being with the class

In exceptional circumstances, the host site has the right to terminate the placement at any time. This can, for example, be the result of misconduct, and can occur without the implementation of an Individual Support Plan procedure or warning to the student.

If the placement is terminated by the host site, the ST will request the Withdrawal from Professional Experience Form be uploaded to their SONIA portal by the PEU and submitted when complete.

Student's Self-Withdrawal from Placement

The student may decide to withdraw from the placement at any time, but this will also be recorded as a Fail unless special circumstances apply. The TES will complete the *Withdrawal from the Professional Experience Form and submit online via their SONIA portal* to the Professional Experience Unit as soon as possible. Within 24 hours of termination of the placement, the TES should make an appointment with Course Coordinator and seek support from the Placement Success Coordinator.

Disclosures

Due to privacy concerns, disclosure of a failed placement to the next placement site is at the discretion of the TES and the matter should be discussed with the Placement Course Coordinator. TES is required to discuss their options with the Course Coordinator.

TESs who Fail are normally permitted to re-enroll the next time the professional experience course is offered. TES who has had an unsuccessful placement are required to engage with the School of Education's Teach Ready support program prior to commencing the subsequent placement. TES who has failed a

placement course for the second time are asked to “show cause” to the Head of the School of Education as to why they should be granted a subsequent attempt.

TESs who are working with a RAP (Reasonable Adjustment Plan) should present this to their Placement Coordinator at the commencement of the course. The TES can choose to disclose to their placement site the nature of their requirements and the adjustments that may be required. This should be discussed with the SPC who can communicate with the Professional Experience Unit about the situation. TESs can also choose to disclose only some of the identified reasonable adjustments.

5. FURTHER SUPPORT AVAILABLE

IT Support

For IT support, contact the University IT Support Services at:

<https://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-students/support/it>

Personal Support

The University has a variety of personal support available for current TES. The following link provides an overview of the supports which are available:.

<https://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-students/support/personal>

Counselling: <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-students/support/personal/counselling>

Sexual assault, sexual harassment and crisis support:
<https://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-students/support/personal/sexual-assault-harassment>

Health Services: <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-students/support/personal/health-lifestyle>

Financial Wellbeing: <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-students/support/personal/financial-wellbeing>