



Feedback on AITSL's Draft Guidelines for the Induction of Early Career Teachers in Australia

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Our comments are provided in relation to the various sub-headings of the Consultation *Draft Guidelines for the Induction of Early Career Teachers in Australia*.

1. Introduction

In the context of dire teacher shortages, improving retention must be a focus across all stages of teachers' careers. However, given alarming data on the attrition of early career teachers showing up to 50 percent leaving in the first five years (Weldon, 2018; AITSL, 2016; AITSL 2023), special attention must be given to the important and formative transitional period from ITE student to beginning teacher.

Induction guidelines are critical to overcoming the current chasm between what the "literature advocates, what the government recommends and what schools practice" (Kearney, 2021, p. 154). Too often, induction is conflated with orientation and/or mentoring only – rather than seen as "an initial phase in a continuum of professional learning" (Kearney, 2021, p. 148). There is also a clear discrepancy between the extent and quality of induction school leaders feel they provide and what beginning teachers feel they receive (AITSL, 2017). Concerningly, between 2020 and 2022 more than 40 percent of teachers in their first five years reported they did not receive a formal induction (AITSL 2023).

We need an evidence-informed, national approach that ensures *all* early career teachers are receiving the quality induction they need to thrive in the teaching profession.

2. Why does induction matter?

Teaching is a unique profession in that beginning teachers are often expected to fulfil the same roles, functions and responsibilities as more experienced classroom teachers from their first day on the job (Green, 2015; Helmz-Lorenz et al., 2016; Hudson, 2012; Kearney 2021). This expectation does not take adequate account of the challenges associated with gaining local knowledge of student, curriculum, and school contexts; designing programs; creating classroom learning communities; and developing professional identities (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Beginning teachers also report insufficient opportunities to discuss their teaching practice with mentors (Kearney, 2021) – challenges which are exacerbated for casual and temporary teachers and those teaching in rural and remote schools, who are less likely to receive any induction support (AITSL, 2017; Paris, 2013). The cumulative effects of limited support for addressing these challenges include decreased job satisfaction and a lack of confidence (Kelly et al., 2019; Kidd et al., 2015; Paris, 2013).

3. What is the focus of induction?

A thorough orientation and understanding of expectations, role and responsibilities are important parts of the induction process. While it's pleasing to see the development of professional practice and collegial relationships included in this section of the guidelines, they are not referred to in detail again. Development of professional practice and collegial relationships should be given priority attention. As noted above, the tendency across the sector to conflate induction with orientation or mentoring only is insufficient.

The proposed guidelines tend to place the burden of responsibility on early career teachers, by focusing on stress management and resilience building. We contend that the guidelines should also address the ways in which systems and schools could support early career teachers, by reducing workloads and providing powerful mechanisms for building meaningful professional relationships and enhancing teaching practice.

Early career teachers are often limited by the isolated nature of teaching, their confidence in discussing practice, and the power hierarchies within schools. Here, the induction guidelines could draw on rigorously studied approaches such as Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) as a significant mechanism for enhancing induction.

The Australian Government has funded the University of Newcastle to expand QTR to support the induction of early career teachers as part of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. The project, *Strengthening Induction through Quality Teaching Rounds*, aims to address the teacher shortage and lift outcomes for both students and teachers, based on the compelling evidence base that sits behind QTR (Gore et.al, 2017; Gore & Rickards, 2020; Gore & Bowe, 2015; Harris et.al, 2022; Povey et.al, 2023; Gore et.al, 2021).

The project will support 1,600 early career teachers and their more experienced colleagues from schools across Australia to take part in QTR over the next four years. The project aims to support teachers to remain in the profession by improving their morale, confidence, and job satisfaction through professional development focused on the quality of pedagogy.

Opportunities for beginning teachers to participate in QTR build their confidence in their teaching practice and help in the development of their professional identities. QTR enables beginning teachers to form strong professional relationships with colleagues and overcome feelings of isolation (Gore & Bowe, 2015). These relationships help beginning teachers feel more comfortable to reach out to colleagues for assistance.

Significantly, participation in QTR benefits experienced teachers too and “refuels [them] for the very work of teaching” (Gore & Rickards, 2021).

In an educational landscape where teachers are often pulled in many directions and away from their classroom practice, QTR gives them time and space to hone their approach to teaching and get back to ‘core business’ with renewed enthusiasm.

We suggest the guidelines would be fortified by an overview of QTR as an approach to supporting the induction of early career teachers that addresses many of the key characteristics of effective induction and is backed by rigorous evidence of positive effects across a broad range of educational contexts.

4. What is teacher induction?

This section of the guidelines does not go far enough in describing teacher induction, instead reflecting the kind of narrow focus which no doubt contributes to the reported gap between the induction beginning teachers feel they receive and what school leaders feel they provide.

In the previous section, attention to professional practice, relationships and wellbeing was presented as characteristic of effective induction. Yet in this short, three-paragraph section, these foci are largely absent.

Induction must be presented as more than orientation. Providing a framework for collaborative professional learning focused on pedagogy as part of the induction process is crucial, as elaborated in our response to the previous section.

5. Who are early career teachers?

We are pleased to see the recognition of casual relief teachers in these induction guidelines. Casual teachers are an incredibly important but often overlooked part of the teacher workforce. Students have, on average, one full year with a casual teacher across their schooling (Nicholas & Wells, 2015), even before COVID-19 and the current teacher shortages, and yet casual teachers are not funded to undertake professional development in schools.

In 2022, we conducted a study in which 24 casual teachers from eight primary schools participated in QTR. This professional development opportunity demonstrably improved the quality of their teaching, their morale and connection to the school, and their professional networks (Gore & Briskham, 2023) —clear evidence of the potential value of engaging early career casual teachers in high impact professional development.

6. What are the conditions for effective induction?

We agree with the assertion in the guidelines that induction is most effective when undertaken over an extended period of time. As previously mentioned, induction should be considered just one phase of an ongoing process of professional development throughout a teacher's career.

While it makes sense that these guidelines focus on the first two years given the alignment with the Graduate to Proficient accreditation process, the guidelines should also recommend activities that extend beyond two years to align with how early career teachers are typically defined in the research literature as those with between three and five years' experience.

The field of research on effective induction is limited. We strongly recommend more research be commissioned on induction and the experiences of early career teachers, as well as robust evaluation of the induction practices recommended in these guidelines.

While there is no clear consensus on which induction practices work best, opportunities to collaborate and form trusting relationships with colleagues, and to participate in structured discussions about teaching practice, appear to have a positive impact on retention and support the learning and development of beginning teachers (Ingersoll, 2012; Kelly et al., 2019; Mansfield & Gu, 2019).

Collegial relationships based on trust need to be at the forefront of effective emotional and intellectual support, ensuring beginning teachers feel safe to engage in both formal and informal dialogue and share their struggles without feeling judged (Hudson & Hudson, 2016; Kelly et al., 2019; Mansfield & Gu, 2019; Paris, 2013; Squires, 2019). Whether or not beginning teachers develop a sense of belonging, feel embraced within their school context, and create strong professional identities are substantially linked to their resilience (Green, 2015; Kelly et al., 2019; Mansfield & Gu, 2019), which can be supported by induction experiences.

Valuable activities include collaborative planning, goal setting, feedback, observation, additional planning time and conversation with mentors and other colleagues (Hudson & Hudson, 2016; Kelly et al., 2019; Mansfield & Gu, 2019; Squires, 2019).

Importantly, these activities and processes need to be matched with a reduction in teacher workloads – for early career teachers, mentors, and experienced teachers alike – to enable appropriate time and support given to induction and professional development.

7. Elements of effective induction

Mentors should be provided with adequate time and training to avoid problematic mentor-mentee relationships in what should be a powerful and useful professional development experience (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Induction should bring reciprocal benefits for both mentor and mentee as both teachers strengthen skills in their particular roles (Hudson & Hudson, 2016; Mansfield & Gu, 2019; Paris, 2013).

However, relying too heavily on mentors without a strong framework and process for managing their relationship with mentees can create power imbalances with detrimental effects. It can also lead to a dependency on mentors and leave beginning teachers doubting their capacity to solve problems of practice themselves (Gore, 2020).

The systematic adoption of QTR to support induction would provide the conceptual framework, shared language and powerful collaborative processes to ensure mentor-mentee relationships are positive and impactful and focused productively on enhancing pedagogy.

QTR addresses professional practice broadly, focused as it is on supporting teachers to deliver high quality pedagogy through teaching, assessment and curriculum planning. It helps beginning teachers to engage students through a focus on the three central ideas of the QT Model:

- Intellectual Quality: Developing deep understanding of important ideas
- Quality Learning Environment: Ensuring positive classrooms that boost student learning
- Significance: Connecting learning to students' lives and the wider world.

Rigorous randomised controlled trial evidence shows that participation in just one set of QTR improves the quality of teaching, teacher morale (Gore et.al, 2017) and teacher efficacy (Harris et.al, 2022; Lee, 2023), and student academic achievement in literacy (Harris et.al, 2022; Povey et.al, 2023) and numeracy (Gore et.al, 2021).

Importantly, QTR is **not** a teacher assessment tool. QTR works by providing a safe, respectful, non-hierarchical and confidential environment for collective refinement of practice. It creates time and space for relationship building and a focus on pedagogy that beginning teachers report make a significant difference to their confidence, efficacy, job satisfaction and morale.

Again, despite referring to the importance of collaboration, relationships and wellbeing earlier in the guidelines, these critical aspects of induction fail to gain a mention in this section. We consider this to be a significant oversight.

8. Delivery of induction programs

As noted, delivery of induction programs can take many forms. However, much of what is promoted in these guidelines depends heavily on the individual school leader/ mentor and their insights, preferences and dispositions.

The guidelines in this section, and throughout much of the document, are vague, broad and open to interpretation, which means they are unlikely to achieve the sought-after change in practice and are at risk of succumbing to the very same issues we identified in our response to the introduction. These guidelines should be more specific, recommending minimum levels of support, time to

undertake activities, and initiatives that are backed by rigorous research. The guidelines should take a position on what is essential and what is most important to effective induction practice.

We advocate for the implementation of an approach backed by robust evidence, such as QTR, that can be applied across contexts to ensure consistently high quality induction. QTR prepares teachers and graduates for all contexts of teaching and helps them develop real confidence in providing powerful learning experiences through intellectual quality, a quality learning environment, and ensuring lessons are meaningful to students which, in turn, leads to powerful student learning.

QTR is versatile, with both face-to-face and virtual formats. “QTR Digital,” a wholly online version of Quality Teaching Rounds, was developed in 2018 to ensure teachers in small, rural, and remote schools could access the same high quality professional development as their colleagues in regional and metropolitan areas. In our 2021 randomised controlled trial, we found that QTR Digital – like the face-to-face version of QTR – improved teaching quality and teacher efficacy. We also found two months’ additional growth in reading achievement for students whose teachers participated in the program compared to the control group. This evidence supports QTR Digital as a technology for improving teacher effectiveness in the classroom, including for beginning teachers.

By developing a deep understanding of high-quality pedagogy as defined by the QT Model, QTR (and QTR Digital) provides a powerful way for teachers to understand and deliver good teaching. For those teaching out-of-field (which is more common in small, rural, and remote schools), the emphasis tends to be on disciplinary knowledge and curriculum. But teaching out-of-field also depends on being able to relate lessons to the wider world and engage students, while homing in on deep understanding of key concepts.

We endorse the recommendation that early career teachers have a reduced teaching load to enable extra planning time and time to fully engage in induction activities. Reduced workloads and privileging of time for *all* teachers to engage in high-impact professional development should be a focus of schools and systems, especially at a time when teachers are under enormous pressure and attrition is high.

9. Acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Country in induction

The intent in this section is admirable and addresses the important role teachers play in understanding and acknowledging First Nations communities. We would argue, however, that the guidelines, as currently written, place the burden on early career teachers to learn about and understand Country, language and the community protocols of their school.

Teachers should take some responsibility for gaining relevant cultural knowledge, however, we suggest schools, in consultation with local First Nations communities, should facilitate opportunities for beginning teachers to learn about and engage with their local community.

With the reframing suggested above, we believe this section of the guidelines clearly articulates expectations for good induction practices and takes a position on what’s valuable and essential for school leaders and early career teachers.

10. Who plays a role in quality induction?

11. Resources to support ECTs

- a. What existing resources are available that you would want to be included as part of a resources section?

A resources section should contain information the Australian Government's *Strengthening Induction through Quality Teaching Rounds* program and how schools can access this evidence-backed initiative.

- b. What new supporting resources would you find useful and want to see developed

A guide to effective, evidence-backed professional development that focuses on professional practice and building collegial relationships should be developed to support schools choosing induction initiatives.

12. How long will it take to support the implementation of these guidelines? (0-24months)

13. What strategies can be used to implement these induction processes into schools?

14. Final comments

In general, these guidelines provide a valuable overview of induction. However there are inconsistencies and a vagueness that leaves them open to broad interpretation. We believe they would be stronger if they recommended minimum levels of support, reduced workloads, time to undertake induction activities (for both early career and experienced teachers), and initiatives backed by research that would support successful induction practices.

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