

# WHO IS AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR WORK?



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*You have internal and external networks. Learn to use them.*

## Reasonable expectations of your school

*Asking for help is fundamental - it is always OK to ask.*

Congratulations! You have jumped through all the necessary hoops to achieve your graduate teacher status. By now you will have graduated from your university studies, registered with the VIT, applied for positions and perhaps started teaching your own class/es. So, what's next?! Have you felt supported throughout these processes? What networks can you access when you need help? How do you know when to ask for help? Asking for help is important. It is always OK to ask for help.

It is fundamental that a quality induction program is available in a timely manner and with a teacher focused approach. The induction program should be one that differentiates the teachers within the group and personalises the learning experience to the needs of the individual teacher (just as you would for your students.) Teachers should be invited to partake in an induction program that runs over numerous weeks and seeks teacher input in the planning of the sessions to ensure relevant and timely responses, that build clarity and confidence in practice. Knowing who, where, or when to seek additional assistance will have maximum impact on your wellbeing and the outcomes for students in your class. The education system can be a challenge at times with a confusing world of jargon, acronyms,

roles, policies and processes. Don't be afraid to speak up and ask questions to allow for purposeful and meaningful learning time in the induction phase.

## Reasonable expectations of the leadership team

Teaching has ever changing expectations, language and technology. At times the calendar of events can be overwhelming with tight deadlines for planning and reporting. Your objective should be to continuously improve and enhance your skills and knowledge with supportive colleagues and a leadership team who build you up at every opportunity.

Literature from studies indicate that high workload and a lack of support from leadership were cited as common reasons for teachers leaving the profession. (Buchanan et al 2013, Gallant & Riley 2014). Research also suggests that the inclusion of quality support systems, such as induction and mentoring (Mayer et. al 2015), encouraging supportive relationships in schools and providing opportunities for professional development (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty 2015), lead to productive careers in teaching.

The leadership team at your school are likely to have a significant influence on your teaching career. Make time to meet with a member of the school leadership team and ask them for a regular time that you can meet and check in with them. They may be very short meetings but in establishing the routine you have a relationship that will be helpful if difficulties arise. Use your own agency, don't always wait for them to take the initiative.

## Reasonable expectations of the Department and education community

The Department of Education and Training (the Department) is committed to supporting graduate teachers. On the Department website you will find the [Online induction portal for teachers](#). The portal offers a range of support described in terms of Professional Identity, Professional Practices, Orientation and Wellbeing.

You will have the opportunity to attend a Graduate Teacher Conference in third term and this Graduate Teacher Learning Series newsletter and [website](#) will also help you. The Department provides support for your mentor with a program aimed at developing a mentoring culture in your school. It might be a good discussion starter to ask your mentor what they took away from the mentoring program.

Beyond the scope of what the Department offers, the [Victorian Institute of Teaching](#) offers support and programs for graduate teachers. I also recommend to the graduates that I

work with that they review the support and programs available from the [Australian Education Union](#).

## Use your own agency – join, find or form a graduate group

*These communities of practice can be career changing.*

### *Join your school graduate group*

Ideally there will be a graduate group within your school. These communities of practice can be career changing. These groups invite new and early career teachers to join and meet regularly to chat, seek support, share resources and meet with relevant colleagues. These important conversations should contribute to deeper understandings of school processes, develop or refine specific teaching skills and provide connections with school leadership. Many graduate groups have an experienced graduate mentor assigned to the group.

A graduate group can provide support at point of need, empathy for circumstances, curriculum learning, self-care and an opportunity to create lifelong friendships and career colleagues. The opportunity to learn, share and work with your network of colleagues cannot be underestimated in terms of the confidence, encouragement and capacity that can grow from collaborating and contributing to these important graduate communities.

Part of building a supportive graduate group involves finding time to connect beyond the professional classroom practice and understand each other's lives. Don't forget that graduates come from all walks of life with all different ages and life experiences. Cherish these and use them to deepen and broaden the context of your group and be sure to invite all those early career teachers that might be looking for a group just like this.

### *Join an external graduate group*

External graduate networks might be available through the local cluster or network of primary and secondary schools. If this is the case, you will have a cross section of graduates with whom you can share ideas and an opportunity to learn collegially from one another in different settings and environments.

Remote, online and social networks can also provide tailored resources and access to expertise for graduate teachers. There are Apps that include, timely tips and resources. You should access the [AITSL My Induction App](#).

### *Form a graduate group*

If there is no group in your school or network, act to form one. It is important to discuss any plans for creating such a group with your leadership team. Draft a proposal and to seek support to organise such a group, including the possibility of an allocated mentor leader who is a passionate advocate for graduate teachers. Ask about additional Allocated Planning Time (APT) specifically for the gathering of this group or have the meeting group during a lunchtime with the teachers attending allocated this meeting as part of their professional duties. Ask questions. Attempt to locate an exemplar school within your community or beyond to compare and contrast your ideas and determine what is possible within school priorities. Learn from one another, share and build your ideas.

Create a plan for what would you like to achieve whilst part of the group, who might you like to learn from and work with. Keep the plan flexible so that you can seek the most appropriate assistance at the most appropriate times. You might like to start with a simple question such as, 'What are the challenges in teaching?'. You can ask experienced teachers, leaders and yourself. These challenges may be different in every school and will vary according to the cycle of the year e.g. report writing times, parent-teacher conversations. See [The Teaching Year](#) in this publication to get an understanding of the cycle of a year in a school.

Make the group work for you and your specific needs as a teacher. Work together to make it a safe space to share and ask questions, that you might feel afraid to ask in a different forum. Consider how you might track and share the group's progress for future reference. Ensure you celebrate, recognise achievement, share rewards and acknowledge the successes. Don't forget to let leadership know about these as well.

### *Learning in a graduate group*

I have led graduate groups at both a school and a network level, the appreciation for the relationships, approachability and the timely assistance is consistently noted. I have witnessed the ongoing, long term professional support networks that are created amongst these close-knit colleagues. These groups have shared the challenging journeys of beginning their teaching careers together and have had the support and encouragement of one another to work through difficult experiences whilst also recognising and celebrating their achievements, both big and small.

It is important that graduate networks do not become additional work on top of everything else that is already required of teachers. It is fundamental that the work of the group such as this is valued and recognised as a school priority and ideally incorporated into the duties of these teachers as an important aspect of their weekly professional development practice and wellbeing. Larger schools are likely to be able to accommodate this with relative ease, as the logistics usually offer significantly more possibilities, in timetabling and shared roles and responsibilities than smaller schools.

## Key takeaways for graduate teachers

Piaget wrote that, 'intelligence is knowing what to do, when you don't know what to do'. This is extremely relevant in the education profession and particularly in the classroom when working with students. We aim to develop and scaffold their independence and ability to successfully navigate their learning journey. This rings true for graduate teachers too. Good schools are striving to build capacity, create collaborative communities of practice and implement succession planning for teacher leaders. This begins with the way that they support graduate teachers.

### *My advice to you is:*

- Have the courage to ask for help when you feel you need it and to make use of the networks that are available to you in your local education community. Use your initiative to request to be involved in or to organise a graduate network, be it internal, external or remote. It will benefit your teaching practice, your skills and your wellbeing.
- Take the time to reflect regularly and to understand yourself as a teacher and a learner. Understand what your professional needs are and how and with whom you plan to meet these, have a sense of who your support networks are and how you will build your capacity, tools and expertise.
- Keep balance with your personal needs. Accept that you can't do it all - yet! Look after yourself.

## References

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