



# Summary Report: Start Well



hunter institute  
of mental health

Putting Prevention First

A research project supporting resilience  
and wellbeing in early career teachers



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This summary report contains key information and results as a part of the Start Well research project conducted in 2015-2016 by the Hunter Institute of Mental Health.

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## Overview

It is predicted that almost one in two Australian early career school teachers leave the profession within five years of beginning their teaching careers. While the availability of teaching jobs is certainly a factor, there are also other reasons why early career teachers decide to leave the profession.



A research study, Start Well, was undertaken to understand more about the experiences of teachers as they join the profession, and the ways in which they can be better supported to make this transition. 453 early career teachers participated in an online survey, and a number of interviews were undertaken with educational leaders from peak organisations.

Early career teachers named a number of challenges with regards to their role, in particular time management and large workloads. Others mentioned behaviour management and the lack of a supportive school environment.

To help them meet these challenges, most early career teachers reported turning to their family, friends, colleagues, mentors and peers for support. The findings of this study suggest that good peer support is critical for early career teachers' resilience and coping, and is associated with plans to stay in teaching long-term.

Therefore, support systems that target relationships, skills and strengths are thought to be helpful to early career teachers in managing both professional and personal wellbeing.

## Research methodology

The Start Well study was carried out in three phases. The first involved a literature review of the national and international research available on teacher attrition, resilience and wellbeing. Following this, an online survey of early career teachers in NSW was undertaken, followed by one-on-one interviews with educational

leaders from peak organisations. These three phases informed the development of recommendations for action to support early career teachers' wellbeing and resilience; and to encourage them to stay within the teaching profession long-term.



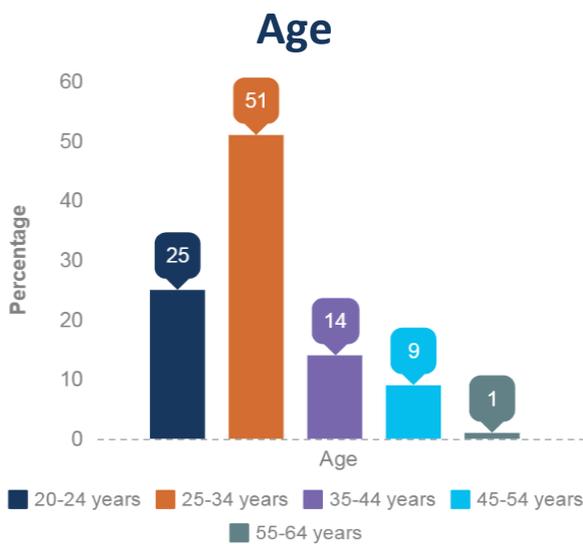
### Research questions

1. *What are the challenges and experiences of early career teachers in NSW?*
2. *What strategies can promote wellbeing in early career teachers?*
3. *What is the role of peer and social support for wellbeing in early career teachers?*

# Results

## Who answered our survey?

- Participants were predominantly female and between the ages of 25 and 34 years.
- 3% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Over 70% of respondents reported being in a relationship and having no dependants.
- There were slightly more (53%) teachers from metropolitan areas than rural and remote (47%).
- Most reported having a Bachelor of Education as their teaching qualification.



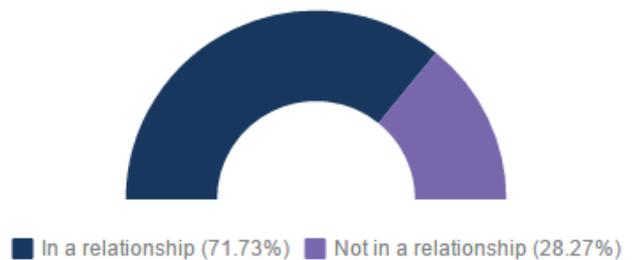
- One in five teachers were in their first year of teaching and two out of three had been in their current position for under two years.
- About the same number of respondents were in full-time employment, permanent employment and contract or temporary work.
- One in four early career teachers had relocated for their current job.
- 70% of early career teachers received an induction and/or mentoring.

## 453 Teachers in NSW



- 97% were classroom teachers, and 91% were working with mainstream students.
- There was a fairly even distribution of teachers amongst the main topics of teaching content.
- Nine out of 10 were currently teaching the content in which they were trained.
- Most early career teachers were from Government schools.
- Slightly more teachers taught at primary schools than secondary.
- Almost half of respondents reported their schools as large, with over 500 students and 20 teachers.

## Relationships



## What is it like to be an early career teacher?

- Over 60% of early career teachers felt they did not have a good work-life balance.
- Two thirds of all early career teachers said that time management and a large workload are some of their biggest challenges.
- More than half noted they felt they did not have enough time for collaboration or planning, preparation and assessment time.
- Other teachers mentioned behaviour management as difficult, as well as a lack of support at school.

*“The one that is the most difficult would be **managing the workload**. It is never-ending. I am attempting to get organised, and realise there is more to do all the time.”*

- Early career teachers were generally very confident in class and lesson planning, as well as their knowledge of the content to be taught.
- Survey respondents were also very confident in building relationships within the workplace.
- The skills that early career teachers were least confident in were behaviour management, managing their workload and managing parent-teacher relationships.

*“Making **strong relationships with other teachers** and having their support during challenging times.”*

*“**Helping students to realise their potential, to develop a love and appreciation of learning and to actually want to come to school.**”*

- Almost all teachers noted that seeing students learn or building relationships with students were the most positive experiences they had.
- Just over one in every four teachers mentioned peer support as a positive experience in their careers.
- Other positive experiences included professional development opportunities, a positive school culture, parent relationships, embracing change and obtaining a permanent teaching position.



*“I have an **experienced teacher** who is my mentor who is next door. He is **extremely approachable** and assists with anything little or big.”*

## What role does peer support play?

- When asked if they considered themselves to have a strong social support system, almost 90% of early career teachers said they did.
- In fact, more than two in three reported that other teachers were who they turned to for support.
- 94% said there were other early career teachers at their school and 93% said they had close friends who were also teachers.
- Three quarters of responding early career teachers had previously given guidance to other teachers and said it was an important experience.

*"Fellow teachers were my best support as they could identify with the issues and understand the importance of downloading about your day!"*

*"Once I have been through it, I can use my knowledge **and** experience to help others."*

## What do leaders in education think is needed to support early career teachers?

- Collaboration (especially at key times during the school year, e.g. report writing).
- Internal opportunities within schools including regular feedback from leadership.
- Mentoring and team teaching opportunities.
- Targeted support for non-permanent teachers.
- Funding for professional development.



*"One of the problems for early career teachers is that their problems are perceived to be the product of them being **relatively inexperienced**. We have to realise that they are dealing with the same sorts of problems that very experienced teachers are dealing with and they need **at least the same support**."*

## What role can technology play?

- Two thirds of all early career teachers noted they would find support services available on a mobile phone or tablet helpful.
- 90% said they use their phone at least every few days, highlighting the usefulness of a support program using this medium.

