

Scalable mentoring models



A design tool to support organisations to plan mentoring approaches that are realistic, sustainable and suited to their size, structure and context

Part of the AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework

Consultations identified that mentoring often evolves informally, leading to uneven load, role confusion and overreliance on a small number of experienced trainers. This tool addresses the mentoring design and sustainability issues described by helping organisations think through mentoring approaches that fit their size, capacity, and career-phase mix.

What this tool does not do

This tool does not prescribe a single "best" mentoring model or require organisations to adopt all elements shown. It is intended to support thinking and design conversations, not to audit current practice or mandate change.

Who the tool is for

Leaders, managers, capability teams and others who are responsible for mentoring design and workforce support.

When to use the tool

Use this tool when designing, reviewing, or explaining mentoring approaches, particularly when capacity, workload, or role clarity is a concern.

How to use the tool

Use the models to guide discussion about what mentoring support is needed, who carries it, and how it is bound and reviewed. Models can be adapted, combined or simplified depending on organisational context and career-phase needs.

1. Core principle (applies to all models)

Across all organisation types:

- mentoring works best when it is intentional, bounded and reviewed
- support should shift over time, rather than disappear or accumulate by default
- mentoring is not a substitute for management, performance processes or well-being services
- mentoring must be recognised as real work

Scalable mentoring models



A design tool to support organisations to plan mentoring approaches that are realistic, sustainable and suited to their size, structure and context

Part of the AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework

2. Scalable mentoring models by organisation type

Model 1 — Small providers

Buddy-based and networked mentoring

Typical context

- small teams, overlapping roles
- limited separation between mentor, manager and colleague
- trainers often work independently or across sites

What works well

- short-term buddy support for day-to-day sense-making
- external mentors or cross-RTO peer connections
- clear, light-touch boundaries to prevent over-reliance

Design features

- mentoring conversations are short, predictable and time-bound
- mentors are not expected to "hold everything"
- external or networked mentoring provides psychological safety where internal separation is not possible

Watch-outs

- role blur (manager = mentor = support)
- informal mentoring is becoming an invisible workload
- reliance on one experienced person

Model 2 — Medium providers

Layered mentoring

Typical context

- multiple teams or programs
- some role separation, with capacity constraints
- mix of new, established, and advanced trainers

What works well

- buddy or peer mentoring for operational questions
- capability-focused mentoring for practice and confidence
- flexibility to change mentors as needs shift

Design features

- mentoring roles are purpose-specific, not one-size-fits-all
- mentors sit outside direct line management where possible
- Review points are built in to prevent drift

Scalable mentoring models



A design tool to support organisations to plan mentoring approaches that are realistic, sustainable and suited to their size, structure and context

Part of the AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework

Watch-outs

- mentoring being assumed rather than designed
- uneven mentoring load falling to the same people
- mentoring continuing past its useful life

Helpful tools

- Tool 3 (conversation starter)
- Tool 4 (boundary and referral safeguard)
- Tool 5 (check-in and reset)

Model 3 — Large, public or enterprise providers

Structured mentoring ecosystem

Typical context

- large or dispersed workforce
- multiple career phases represented
- formal HR, well-being and capability structures

What works well

- cohort-based mentoring for new entrants
- capability coaching for establishing trainers
- clearly bounded mentoring roles for advanced and expert staff
- internal referral and triage systems to protect the mentor's well-being

Design features

- mentoring roles are defined, resourced and reviewed
- mentoring load is monitored and distributed
- mentoring is clearly separated from performance management

Watch-outs

- over-formalisation that reduces trust
- mentors becoming default problem-solvers
- mentoring continuing without review

Helpful tools

- Tool 3 (conversation starter)
- Tool 4 (when support needs to shift)
- Tool 5 (check-in and reset)

Scalable mentoring models



A design tool to support organisations to plan mentoring approaches that are realistic, sustainable and suited to their size, structure and context

Part of the AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework

3. Mentoring models across career phases

Rather than a single program, mentoring typically shifts like this:

- New entrant: buddy support and sense-making
- Establishing: capability-focused mentoring and coaching
- Advanced: bounded mentoring contributions, peer support
- Expert: strategic mentoring, knowledge-sharing, choice-based contribution

This reinforces the guidance principle that support evolves rather than accumulates.

Learn more about the Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework

Explore more practical tools, guides and resources supporting VET capability, wellbeing, industry engagement and career development