

Bond University

Legal Education Review

Volume 36

Issue 2

2026

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DESIGNING A PILOT MENTORING PROGRAM FOR A PRIESTLEY 11 COURSE: A TIERED AND TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH WITHOUT CROWDING CURRICULUM

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I INTRODUCTION

Mentoring programs have become a critical element for Australian law schools to address concerns of student retention and wellbeing.¹ Some mentoring programs have sought to utilise the wisdom of legal professionals, much as the classical style of mentoring relied on an older, wiser figure guiding a younger, less-experienced protege.² Others have gone beyond this classical form to utilise peer mentoring strategies to foster skills at the tertiary level.³ However, no law school has yet designed a tiered mentoring program, implementing the benefits of both peer and professional mentors to better address the concerns articulated around student retention and success. This article seeks to critique the binary of these mentoring approaches, advocating for the utility of tiered mentoring approaches combining peer to peer and professional to student mentoring to enhance student learning experiences. In doing so, this paper draws upon the breadth of evolving research related to curriculum crowding and a mapping of current mentoring programs across Australian law schools to position tiered mentoring as not only valuable and practical, but as a necessity to meet the challenges of modern legal education.

In some jurisdictions, mentoring not only serves as a means of enabling connection and enhancing student retention, but is also entwined with accreditation requirements. In 2022, the American Bar Association amended its accreditation standards to add a requirement

* School of Law and Society, University of the Sunshine Coast. We sincerely thank Victoria Jooste, Law Student, School of Law and Society, University of the Sunshine Coast, for her valuable research assistance, especially collecting data for the web-based study. No Generative AI tools were knowingly used in preparing for or drafting this article.

¹ Nickolas John James, 'Professional Mentoring Programs for Law Students' (2011) 30(1) *University of Tasmania Law Review* 90.

² Ibid 103.

³ Ibid 102.

that law schools provide ‘substantial opportunities to students’ for ‘the development of a professional identity’.⁴ This additional obligation upon accredited law schools, alongside the requirement to provide legal clinics or field placements and pro bono legal activities,⁵ enlivens critiques that institutions have failed to prepare graduates for legal practice.⁶ The placement of additional stressors and workload upon academics within law schools — and the students being educated by them — contributes to crowded curricula by enhancing the role of higher education institutions in shaping legal practitioners. These additional obligations stretch resources, with the limitation of time and capacity to broadly engage students in varied styles of professional practice potentially exacerbating risks to student wellbeing.⁷

While the obligation to provide opportunities to shape a professional identity is an outlier internationally,⁸ public discussion of the role of law schools in Australia and other common law institutions continues to focus on roles beyond doctrinal knowledges. In the recent ‘Discussion Paper on PLT Reform’ by the Legal Profession Admission Board of NSW, the Board advocate for reform of accreditation requirements to enable the embedding of Practical Legal Training within undergraduate law degrees.⁹ This proposed change, the Board argues, would provide ‘a more streamlined and integrated pathway to admission in which the academic and the practical are better and more clearly integrated and comprehensively aligned’.¹⁰ Commentary too has focused on claims that law degrees have ‘fallen behind in preparing students for modern legal practice’,¹¹ and that the centring of law

⁴ American Bar Association, *Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools 2022–2023* (at August 2022) r 303(b)(3). See Michelle Weyenberg ‘ABA passes revisions to accreditation standards’, *National Jurist* (online, 5 April 2022) <<https://nationaljurist.com/aba-passes-revisions-to-accreditation-standards/>>.

⁵ American Bar Association, *Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools 2025–2026* (at August 2025), rr 303(b)(1), 303(b)(2).

⁶ See generally Martin J Katz, ‘Teaching Professional Identity in Law School’ (2013) 42(10) *The Colorado Lawyer* 45.

⁷ Janet T Jackson, ‘Wellness and Law: Reforming Legal Education to Support Student Wellness’ (2021) 65(1) *Howard Law Journal* 45, 76–7. On the importance of diversity in higher education, see generally Glyn Davis, *The Australian Idea of a University* (Melbourne University Press, 2017) 124.

⁸ In the Australian context, the need to cover legal ethics and professional conduct expectations as part of the Priestley 11 prescribed areas of knowledge has led law schools to include content related to ‘professionalism’ broadly within these courses: Council of Australian Law Deans, ‘Learning and Teaching in the Discipline of Law: Achieving and Sustaining Excellence in a Changed and Changing Environment’ (Report, March 2008) 4.. While not present in accredited requirements, academic benchmarks for law within the United Kingdom suggest the importance of discussing the contexts which shape professional behaviours, including emotional regulation, wellbeing and broader social and cultural contexts: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, *Subject Benchmark Statement: Law* (Standard, 8 March 2023) 3 <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/sbs/sbs-law-23.pdf?sfvrsn=c271a881_6>.

⁹ Legal Profession Admission Board (NSW), ‘Discussion Paper on PLT Reform’ (Discussion Paper, 30 September 2025) <https://lpab.nsw.gov.au/documents/policy-documents/PLT_Discussion_Paper.pdf>.

¹⁰ Ibid 79.

¹¹ Grace Robbie, ‘Have Law Degrees Fallen Behind in Preparing Students for Modern Legal Practice?’, *Lawyers Weekly* (online, 22 October 2025)

schools to teach doctrinal knowledge and principles fails to prepare students for legal practice.¹² This commentary seeks to place the burden on law schools to educate students in skills such as networking, salary expectations, coping with bullying and interpersonal issues, and business development.¹³

Yet, law schools are one of many stakeholders with influence in shaping these skills. As Foley and others note, '[l]aw is a self-regulated profession; therefore, bar associations share the responsibility of training the next generation of attorneys'.¹⁴ Mentoring programs are able to bridge the perceived barriers between educational institutions and the profession, linking the instilling of doctrinal knowledges with the practice and engagement with the law that comes from the profession. In so doing, such programs elevate 'the law school experience into one that is transformative as students bridge school and practice'.¹⁵ In a more pragmatic sense, this perceived 'bridge' enables the legal community to share the burden and responsibility for shaping the next generation of lawyers.

This obligation cannot and should not rest on law schools alone. Instead, what is required is a chorus of voices shaping, intertwining, sharing together to build a nexus of learning and co-creation, providing a plurality of voices – professional, peer, academic – to empower students to grow and imagine their role as a legal professional. This article provides a schema and justification for the introduction of a tiered mentoring program for first-year students studying a Bachelor of Laws at an accredited Australian university. Enlivened by the breadth of research on the merits of mentoring within legal education scholarship and furthered by the need to avoid the crowding of curricula, this tiered mentoring program provides a balanced approach to build law students' professional identities.

This paper contributes to scholarship by providing a mapping and review of current mentoring programs within Australian law schools, the first since 2011.¹⁶ The results of this review highlight opportunities for utilising combinations of peer and professional mentors within mentoring programs in Australian law schools and provided an impetus for designing a tiered mentoring program. The model tiered mentoring program proposed in this article is designed to best support students, while enlivening the capacities of law programs to bridge divides across student cohorts (ie first-year to senior-student) and between university education and the legal profession.

<<https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/biglaw/43188-have-law-degrees-fallen-behind-in-preparing-students-for-modern-legal-practice?>>.

¹² Stefanie Costi 'I'm a Law Graduate, but My Uni Didn't Prepare Me for the Real World', *Australian Financial Review* (online, 23 April 2023) <<https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/education/i-m-a-law-graduate-but-my-uni-didn-t-prepare-me-for-the-real-world-20230420-p5d1wd?>>>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Joan C Foley et al, 'Merging the Bench, Bar and Law Schools: How a Student Scholars Program Achieves Professional Identity through Scholarly Writing, Mentorship, and Presentation' (2024) 93(1) *UMKC Law Review* 1, 3.

¹⁵ Ibid 33.

¹⁶ James (n 1).

This article will proceed in three key phases. Phase 1 explores the context of mentoring programs, elaborating on the necessity of mentoring programs for student wellbeing, the theoretical foundations of mentoring, differing program types and the relative benefits. Phase 2 will explore the mentoring programs offered by Australian law schools in a web-based study. Informed by Phases 1 and 2, Phase 3 reflects on the design of a pilot mentoring program that could be adopted and adapted by other institutions.

II PHASE 1: CONTEXT

A *Literature Review: Mentoring Programs in Australian Law Schools*

The Australian tertiary legal education sector, currently comprising 38 law schools, operates in an environment where high-pressure expectations have raised issues in student bodies around professional readiness and student wellbeing.¹⁷ The *Australian Universities Accord: Interim Report* acknowledged that a mentoring program has the potential to ‘increase retention’, provide ‘pastoral support’, ‘generate social inclusion and foster a sense of belonging’.¹⁸ Mentoring has transitioned from an informal support mechanism to a common strategic pillar designed to mitigate high rates of psychological distress, improve retention and foster professional identity.¹⁹

B *The Impetus for Mentoring: The Wellbeing Crisis*

The widespread adoption of formal mentoring programs in the Australian legal sector more generally was largely instigated following the 2009 Brain & Mind Research Institute (‘BMRI’) report, *Courting the Blues*.²⁰ This study revealed that approximately 35.2% to 41% of Australian law students experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress — nearly triple the rate of the general population.²¹

The research identified several structural drivers for this distress, including the competitive and adversarial nature of legal education, a perceived lack of autonomy and heavy workloads.²² Crucially, other studies found that while law students enter university with wellbeing levels equal to or higher than their peers, these levels decline sharply

¹⁷ Linda Crowley-Cyr, ‘Promoting Mental Wellbeing of Law Students: Breaking-Down Stigma and Building Bridges with Support Services in the Online learning Environment’ (2014) 14(1) *QUT Law Review* 129.

¹⁸ Department of Education (Cth), *Australian Universities Accord* (Interim Report, 19 July 2023) 71.

¹⁹ James (n 1) 95–100.

²⁰ Norm Kelk et al, *Courting the Blues: Attitudes Towards Depression in Australian Law Students and Lawyers* (Monograph, January 2009).

²¹ *Ibid* 12.

²² *Ibid* iii.

within the first semester.²³ Mentoring programs often serve as a ‘whole-of-school’ intervention aimed at attempting to normalise the stresses of law school, satisfying a law school’s duty of care to provide the social connectedness necessary to better protect student mental health.²⁴

C Theoretical Foundations of Mentoring

Contemporary mentoring initiatives in Australian law schools are grounded in several key pedagogical and psychological theories, each of which place competing emphasis on how learning occurs. While such a reality reflects the necessary alignment between pedagogical foundations and learning design,²⁵ there is the potential that such an approach may serve as a limitation rather than an optimisation. Often not explicitly described in publicly available data, the way in which programs describe the role of mentors and mentees suggests the perspectives which shape their design.

Constructivism and Social Learning Theory situate mentoring programs as social processes which provide learning opportunities. Programs like Western Sydney University’s MATES (Mentoring and Transition Equals Success) posit that learning is a social process. Mentors act as ‘friendly advisers’ who help new students navigate the ‘hidden curriculum’ of university life.²⁶ Constructivism argues that experience provides the groundwork for learning rather than the passive digestion of information. The learner — or in this case, the mentee — becomes the centre of learning, with the mentor connecting ‘new ideas to old ones’.²⁷ More specifically, what emerges as central in such mentoring relationships is social constructivism. In contrast to individual constructivism which positions the framework of growth within individuals themselves, and as therefore limited by that person’s past ideas and knowledge, social constructivism focuses on conversation and social connection.²⁸ Rather than being isolated within the individual, ‘learning is collaborative with meaning negotiated from multiple perspectives’.²⁹ When learning is positioned in this way, however, the capacity to grow and extend is determined by the capacity to engage in such social connections and with whom this conversation occurs.

²³ Natalie Skead and Shane L Rogers, ‘Stress, Anxiety and Depression in Law Students: How Student Behaviours Affect Student Wellbeing’ (2014) 40(2) *Monash University Law Review* 564.

²⁴ James (n 1) 100.

²⁵ See Jacob DB Sherman and Health L Burns, ‘Radically Different Learning: Implementing Sustainability Pedagogy in a University Peer Mentoring Program’ (2015) 20(3) *Teaching in Higher Education* 231.

²⁶ ‘MATES’, *Western Sydney University* (Web Page, 2026) <<https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/students/services-and-facilities/mates-western>>.

²⁷ Szufang Chuang, ‘The Applications of Constructivist Learning Theory and Social Learning Theory on Adults Continuous Development’ (2021) 60(3) *Performance Improvement* 6, 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Patricia L Smith and Tillman J Ragan, *Instructional Design* (J Wiley & Sons, 3rd ed, 2005) 20.

Self-Determination Theory suggests motivation and wellbeing are enhanced when students' needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are met.³⁰ Self-Determination Theory focuses on making extrinsic motivations more internalised, shifting from controlled motivations to autonomous habits — moving from pressure and compulsion to 'volition, endorsement and choice'.³¹ In legal education, such an approach is particularly valuable for first-year students, as resulting in 'a sense of autonomy and volition as they act and also regulate themselves'.³² Through this lens, mentoring supports autonomy which allows students to set their own goals. This then facilitates mentee-driven relationships and competence through structured feedback. ANU's Law Momentum Mentoring Program is one such example in Australian law schools.³³ While the grounding of such programs in shaping learners' identities and learning approaches is sound, the reliance upon the motivation of mentees to take responsibility for driving the program — particularly for students who may be from equity groups or first-in-family to study at university — could foreseeably create barriers to engagement. It has been suggested the integration of mentoring programs into curricula addressed these challenges.³⁴

While the previously outlined approaches prioritise the ways of learning in which a mentee-student may engage, Transition Pedagogy instead seeks to use mentoring as a tool of social integration. Mentoring in this sense is situated as primarily a means of shaping belonging, helping students overcome 'imposter syndrome' and embrace their position within the academic community.³⁵ Many programs try to enhance these aims, including the Griffith University Law Society Mentoring Program, which supports new law students by connecting them with more experienced law students.³⁶

Pedagogy is but one lens through which to understand mentoring programs and the values which help shape their creation and deployment. These differing approaches overlap, and are positioned

³⁰ Wendy Larcombe, Ian Malkin and Pip Nicholson, 'Law Students' Motivations, Expectations and Levels of Psychological Distress: Evidence of Connections' (2012) 22(1) *Legal Education Review* 71.

³¹ Richard M Ryan and Edward L Deci, 'Self-Determination Theory' in Filomena Maggino (ed), *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (Springer, 2023) 1 <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17299-1_2630>.

³² Anna Huggins, 'The Threshold Learning Outcome on Self-Management for the Bachelor of Laws Degree: A Proposed Focus for Teaching Strategies in the First Year Law Curriculum' (2011) 2(2) *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education* 23, 30.

³³ 'ANU Law Momentum Mentoring Program', *ANU Law School* (Web Page, 2 March 2026) <<https://law.anu.edu.au/anu-law-momentum-mentoring-program>> ('ANU Momentum').

³⁴ Claudia María López et al, 'Critical Approaches to Mentorship: Creating Access and Equity for Undergraduate Research Experiences' (2025) 18(S1) *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* S760, S762.

³⁵ Sara L Ochs, 'Imposter Syndrome & The Law School Caste System' (2022) 42(2) *Pace Law Review* 373.

³⁶ 'Law Society Mentoring Program: Mentoring at Griffith', *Griffith University* (Web Page, 19 February 2026) <<https://www.griffith.edu.au/student-mentoring/mentoring-programs/law-society-mentoring-program>>.

differently throughout the mentoring programs, as the web-based study which comprises Phase 2 of this paper highlights. It is important, however, at this stage to acknowledge that each of these underlying pedagogical approaches offers opportunities and challenges. In this sense, attempts to converge and structure tier-style mentoring models may be able to bridge these theoretical divides.

D *Typology of Mentoring Models*

The literature categorises mentoring across the sector into four primary frameworks: peer-to-peer transition programs; professional and industry-led mentoring; academic and skills-based mentoring; and specialised equity and inclusion programs. This is not an exhaustive list, and the categorisation of mentoring programs into these nodes is challenging.

Peer-to-peer transition programs are the most common mentoring models, typically targeting ‘commencing’ or first-year students. Examples include the UTS Law Students’ Society (‘LSS’) Buddy Project and the Monash Peer Mentoring program.³⁷ These programs focus on the critical first weeks of study, using later-year student volunteers to provide informal social support and guidance on university systems.

By contrast, professional and industry-led mentoring targets senior and postgraduate students. These programs — such as the MLS Mentor Program (University of Melbourne) and Momentum (ANU) — pair students with experienced practitioners.³⁸ They emphasise career readiness, networking and the development of a professional identity. These models are often ‘mentee-driven’ and self-determined programs, requiring students to set goals and initiate contact.

Some schools embed forms of academic and skills-based mentoring into specific academic domains. Deakin University’s Writing Mentor Program provides one-to-one drop-in sessions to help students interpret academic expectations and develop legal writing skills.³⁹ Similarly, UNE’s Peer Assistance offers subject-specific support for all undergraduate students.⁴⁰

Another form of mentoring program is more targeted, offering specialised equity and inclusion programs to support students from

³⁷ See ‘Start Your UTS Law Journey’, *UTS* (Web Page, 2026) <<https://www.uts.edu.au/for-students/current-students/managing-your-course/current-students-information-law/start-your-uts-law-journey>>. See also ‘Peer Mentoring’, *Monash University* (Web Page, 2026) <<https://www.monash.edu/access-inclusion-success/peer-mentoring>>.

³⁸ ‘MLS Mentor Program’, *University of Melbourne Law School* (Web Page, 2026) <<https://law.unimelb.edu.au/students/mls-mentor-program>>. See also ANU Momentum (n 33).

³⁹ ‘Writing Mentors’, *Deakin University* (Web Page 2026) <<https://www.deakin.edu.au/students/study-support/study-resources/peer-mentoring/writing-mentors>>.

⁴⁰ ‘UNE Peer Assistance’, *University of New England* (Web Page, 2026) <<https://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/peer-assistance/peer-academic-mentoring>>.

select demographics. Some institutions and jurisdictions offer specialised mentoring programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, international students and those from diverse backgrounds.⁴¹ The Law Society of Western Australia's Indigenous Mentoring Program, for example, provides one-on-one mentoring with legal practitioners interested in assisting Indigenous students.⁴² Recent research highlights that these programs are important in promoting 'cultural safety' in the education environment.⁴³

E *Empirical Effectiveness: Quantitative and Qualitative Outcomes*

The research literature provides robust evidence for the effectiveness of mentoring across several key metrics, including the retention of students, academic performance and psychological wellbeing, in addition to benefits for the mentors and institutions.

1 *Retention and Completion*

Mentoring is one of the strongest predictors of student retention. Systematic reviews indicate that mentees have significantly lower dropout rates than non-mentored peers.⁴⁴ At Western Sydney University, a longitudinal study found that failure rates for mentored first-year students decreased by 20% compared to previous years without the program.⁴⁵

2 *Academic Performance and Self-Efficacy*

While the direct link between mentoring and GPA is sometimes variable, participation consistently improves 'academic self-efficacy' — the student's belief in their ability to succeed. Research from QUT indicates that peer-led groups in subjects like Contracts Law help students adopt 'deep approaches' to learning and improve their problem-solving skills.⁴⁶

⁴¹ See generally Susan Beltman, Shamim Samani and Kate Ala'i, *Mentoring Programs and Equity Groups: The Australian Story* (Report, May 2017) <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/app/uploads/2017/05/Beltman_Mentoring.pdf>.

⁴² 'Mentoring', *Law Society of Western Australia* (Web Page, 2026) <<https://lawsocietywa.asn.au/Web/Web/Services/mentoring.aspx>>.

⁴³ Matilda Harry et al, 'Researching and Reorienting Mentorship Practices to Empower the Success of Indigenous Australian Young People' (2023) 52(1) *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 1.

⁴⁴ Miguel A Alonso et al, 'Effectiveness of a Peer Mentoring on University Dropout and Academic Performance' (2024) 30(1) *Psicologia Educativa* 29.

⁴⁵ Erst Carmichael, 'Evaluating Evaluations: A Case Study in Peer Mentoring' (2003) 6 *Language and Academic Skills in Higher Education* 139.

⁴⁶ Nicolette Rogers, 'Improving the Quality of Learning in Law Schools by Improving Student Assessment' (1993) 4 *Legal Education Review* 113.

3 *Psychological Wellbeing*

Systematic reviews spanning 2013–23 confirm that peer mentoring reduces stress and situational anxiety.⁴⁷ By fostering a sense of belonging, mentoring acts as a protective factor against the social isolation that often drives psychological distress in law school.

4 *Reciprocity: Benefits for the Mentor*

A significant finding in the Australian literature is that mentoring provides substantial professional and personal benefits to the mentors themselves, including a consolidation of knowledge, development of soft skills and promoting both career and personal progression.⁴⁸ From the perspective of professional development, the process of teaching concepts to a mentee helps mentors refine their own legal competencies.

Mentors report enhanced leadership, communication and active listening skills, which are highly valued by employers,⁴⁹ to the point where one study found that individuals who act as mentors are six times more likely to move into senior roles, as the role demonstrates management potential.⁵⁰ Mentors report a sense of giving back and professional fulfilment from supporting the next generation.⁵¹

F *Challenges and the 'Dark Side' of Mentoring*

Despite overall success, it is important to note that the research into mentoring generally highlights several critical implementation challenges. For example, if a relationship ends earlier than planned, it can lead to a decline in the mentee's self-worth and academic confidence.⁵²

Matching itself can be a challenging process for a larger program, as mentor matching based purely on demographics is often less effective than matching based on perceived support and acceptance.⁵³ 'Contrived collegiality' — forced participation without genuine rapport — can undermine trust. A scalable mentoring program also requires significant institutional support and training. Research notes that mentors should be provided with adequate debriefing training,

⁴⁷ Anita Mackay, 'Capturing Peer-To-Peer Mentoring Advice: A Podcast Series for First-Year Law Students' (2024) 15(1) *Student Success* 114.

⁴⁸ James (n 1) 98–9.

⁴⁹ Ibid 99.

⁵⁰ James Fletcher, 'Elevating Legal Leadership: How Mentoring Can Add Value for Lawyers in a Rapidly Evolving Legal Landscape', *Law Letter Hub Articles* (Blog Post, December 2023) <<https://www.lst.org.au/elevating-legal-leadership-how-mentoring-can-add-value-for-lawyers-in-a-rapidly-evolving-legal-landscape/>>.

⁵¹ 'The Mutual Benefits of Mentorship', *La Trobe University* (Web Page, 2026) <<https://www.latrobe.edu.au/news/announcements/2022/the-mutual-benefits-of-mentorship>>; *ibid*.

⁵² Jean B Grossman and Jean E Rhodes, 'The Test of Time: Predictors and Effects of Duration in Youth Mentoring Relationships' (2002) 30(2) *American Journal of Community Psychology* 199.

⁵³ Clair Scrine, Tracy Reibel and Roz Walker, *Key Findings of the Literature on Effective Mentoring Programs for Young People* (Report, September 2012).

otherwise debriefing can be ‘destructive and counterproductive’.⁵⁴ This resourcing issue can be exacerbated by the desire for physical presence of the mentors. While online mentoring offers flexibility, it is possible that the social integration benefit of face-to-face mentoring (especially with peer-to-peer mentoring) may be lessened.⁵⁵

G Benchmarks for Effective Program Design

The literature review demonstrates the theoretical foundations of mentoring, and how mentoring can be effective and impactful. Analysis of the benefits and challenges of mentoring yielded a process to effectively develop a mentoring program within the context of an Australian law school. In this way, an embedded mentoring program, effectively designed, will have the effect of decluttering the curriculum, allowing students, mentors and the law school itself to gain the benefits of such a program, without adding to the effort students would usually experience should these benefits be extracurricular.

III PHASE 2: WEB-BASED STUDY

Phase 2 of this project explored the mentoring programs offered by 38 Australian public and private universities to law students in mid-December 2025.⁵⁶ High schools, primary schools and Australian providers of law programs that are not universities were excluded from the study. A Google keyword search of ‘[Australian university name] and mentoring and law’ was utilised to locate relevant, publicly available information from websites. A ‘web-based study’ approach has been applied in the context of work integrated learning (‘WIL’) programs by Cameron and Hewitt.⁵⁷ The WIL study by Cameron and Hewitt acknowledged planning to analyse 20 Google pages of results and then needing to reduce the number of pages to 15 after the pilot study as a result of budget and time constraints.⁵⁸ The current study was guided by Cameron and Hewitt’s WIL study, and only analysed the first three pages of the Google results because the Google keyword searches included the full names of Australian universities and was thereby more tailored. Typically, in this study, the relevant website was located on the first page of Google results. However, where the relevant website was not found by the end of page three of the Google results, the

⁵⁴ Clare Pike and Quinlan Elly, ‘Lawyers’ Perspectives on How to Manage the Psychosocial Risks They Face in the Legal Assistance Sector’ (2025) 33(1) *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 139.

⁵⁵ Zeljana Pavlovic and Lucas M Jeno, ‘Facilitating Academic and Social Integration among FirstYear University Students: Is Peer Mentoring Necessary or an Additive Measure?’ (2024) 32(1) *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning* 29.

⁵⁶ ‘Australian Law Deans’, *Council of Australian Law Deans* (Web Page, 2025) <<https://cald.asn.au/home/deans-law-schools/>>.

⁵⁷ Craig Cameron and Anne Hewitt, ‘Defining Financial Support for Students in Australian Work-Integrated Learning Programs’ (2022) 23(3) *International Journal of Work Integrated Learning* 359, 362.

⁵⁸ *Ibid* 362.

keyword ‘mentoring’ was searched on the specific Australian university’s website to improve the reliability of the data collection.

In an Excel spreadsheet, the websites of mentoring programs available to law students studying at Australian universities were systematically coded without the use of artificial intelligence. The coding generated a large dataset consisting of 79 rows and columns A–P. The coding process involved a ‘content analysis’, which enabled the themes in mentoring programs to be examined, but as Blackham rightly acknowledged recently, this is a ‘time and labour-intensive research method’.⁵⁹ The themes studied in the columns were informed by literature in the field and included name of Australian university offering a law program, name of mentoring program, type of mentoring relationship (peer-to-peer, professional-to-student, both of the previous options and unsure), structure of the mentoring program (one mentor to one mentee, one mentor to many mentees in a group, both [capturing one mentor engaging with multiple mentees, but one-on-one], multiple mentors to one student and unsure), connection to law curriculum (law course and extra-curricular) and paid mentors (yes, rewards system, no and unsure). As coding progressed university to university, the provider of the mentoring program organically grew to reflect the different governance structures at Australian universities and perhaps capture more explicit providers that were not initially envisaged (the full list includes university, support centre, careers team, international student department, faculty, school, law college, discipline of law, independent student group, student society, law students association and law society, and unsure). Where a theme was not stated or unclear on a website, the Excel spreadsheet included dropdown boxes that made ‘unsure’ available.

Further, the Excel spreadsheet enabled string data to be collected where a wide range of qualitative data was expected. For example, the name of the mentoring program; if the mentoring program was connected to a law course, the name of the law course; eligibility of mentors; eligibility of mentees; targeted mentees; website links; date website accessed; and notes. Where an Australian university did not offer a mentoring program to law students, this was recorded in the name of the mentoring program, and the remaining cells in the row were left blank. To increase reliability, the coding was reviewed and cross-checked, and uncertainties were discussed and resolved. Pivot tables were created to facilitate the data analysis.

In mid-December 2025, this web-based study retrieved 79 mentoring programs available to law students at Australian universities. Almost 90% (34/38) of the Australian universities with a law program offer at least one mentoring program and the mode was one mentoring program. The Group of 8 (‘Go8’) universities offer more than a quarter of the mentoring programs available to law students in Australia (27% = 20/74), while one Queensland public university offered a staggering

⁵⁹ Alysia Blackham, ‘Interrogating New Methods in Socio-Legal Studies: Content Analysis, Case Law and Artificial Intelligence’ (2025) 50(2) *Alternative Law Journal* 85, 85.

five mentoring programs to law students. There are four Australian universities that do not offer a mentoring program to law students, but these are not clustered in a particular state or territory and are spread across four different jurisdictions. Of these four universities, one is a Go8, one is a private university and two are regional universities. While it was challenging to identify who offered the mentoring program, most were offered at a university level (46% = 34/74), some were offered by law student associations, societies and groups (22% = 16/74), others were offered by law schools, colleges or faculties (19% = 14/74) and a few by professional associations (4% = 3/74). Further mentoring programs at Australian universities may be available to law students on the intranet using a username and password.

Studying the structure of mentoring programs and the type of mentoring relationship/s provided a useful contemporary snapshot. Most Australian mentoring programs available to law students are peer-to-peer (65% = 48/74), some are professional-to-student (32% = 24/74) and one mentoring program enables alumni to be either mentors or mentees (1%).⁶⁰ One Australian university website did not clarify the type of mentoring relationship. None of the current mentoring programs offered to law students at Australian universities utilise both the professional-to-student and peer-to-peer mentoring. Thus, none of the current mentoring programs are tiered mentoring programs, for example, where a professional mentors a student, who in turn mentors another student. Most of the Go8 university mentoring programs for law students are peer-to-peer (65% = 13/20) while some are professional-to-student (30% = 6/20) and one offers peer-to-peer and professional-to-student mentoring. Half of the mentoring programs are one mentor to one mentee (50% = 37/74), almost a quarter are one mentor to many mentees in a group (24% = 18/74), some enable one mentor to engage with multiple mentees one-on-one (11% = 8/74) and a couple offer multiple mentors to one mentee (3% = 2/74). Victoria University incentivises mentors by paying them,⁶¹ Flinders University offers a gift voucher and point rewards system⁶² and the other universities simply relied on the myriad benefits of mentoring.

The mentoring programs at Australian universities available to law students targeted diverse student cohorts. For example, they targeted all students at the university, all law students, first-year law students, new law students, final year law students, international students, higher degree students, postgraduate students, non-research students, undergraduate students, women studying law, autistic students and First Nations students. All mentoring programs captured in this study are extra-curricular, except for one at La Trobe University that targeted a

⁶⁰ 'Alumni Mentor Program', *Bond Alumni* (Web Page, 23 February 2026) <<https://www.alumni.bond.edu.au/s/865/bp17/interior.aspx?sid=865&gid=1&pgid=829>>.

⁶¹ 'Student Mentors', *Victoria University* (Web Page, 22 February 2026) <<https://www.vu.edu.au/current-students/advice-support/learning-advice/student-mentors>>.

⁶² 'BGL Mentoring Program', *Flinders University* (Web Page, 22 February 2026) <<https://students.flinders.edu.au/cbgl/mentoring-program>>.

first-year law course, Legal Institutions and Method.⁶³ Notably, none of the existing mentoring programs are embedded in a Priestley 11 course. Almost all mentoring programs available to law students at Australian universities are voluntary (96% = 71/74), while one was compulsory (1% = 1/74) and two did not provide sufficient details on the website. Where mentoring programs were extra-curricular, optional or limited in places, the processes for selecting mentees typically included written applications, interviews, online or in-person briefing or information session, or a combination of such selection methods. Alongside mentoring programs targeting diverse cohorts, the eligibility requirements of mentees are worth noting.

While most mentoring programs did not publicly specify online the eligibility requirements for mentees, some programs frontloaded such information and it varied significantly from institution to institution. For example, some mentoring programs were open to new students in their first semester of study (ANU),⁶⁴ students who have completed at least four courses (UniSQ),⁶⁵ students in their second year of study and beyond (Edith Cowan),⁶⁶ undergraduate students, postgraduate students, final year students (Monash),⁶⁷ as an option for students who are in the first six months post-graduation (UQ),⁶⁸ students over 18 years of age and alumni (Swinburne),⁶⁹ students of satisfactory academic standing and not in breach of Student Code or Conduct or Academic Integrity Policy (Macquarie),⁷⁰ students with sufficient grade point average ('GPA') and completed credit points (eg GPA of 4.0 or 80 credit points) (Griffith),⁷¹ female students (UoW),⁷² and students diagnosed by a qualified health service provider as on the autism spectrum and/or having other related conditions, and registered with AccessAbility Services (Curtin).⁷³ Thus, the eligibility requirements of mentees typically depended on academic progression

⁶³ Mackay (n 47).

⁶⁴ ANU Momentum (n 33).

⁶⁵ 'Mentoring', *University of Southern Queensland* (Web Page, 23 February 2026) <<https://www.unisq.edu.au/current-students/careers-and-graduation/career-ready/mentoring>>.

⁶⁶ 'Peer Leader Program', *Edith Cowan University* (Web Page, 2 March 2026) <<https://www.ecu.edu.au/careers-and-employability-services/mentoring/peer-leader-program>>.

⁶⁷ 'Access Monash Mentoring', *Monash University* (Web Page, 23 February 2026) <<https://www.monash.edu/about/mentoring>>.

⁶⁸ 'BEL Career Mentoring Program', *The University of Queensland* (Web Page, 23 February 2026) <<https://mentoring.app.uq.edu.au/p/p14>>.

⁶⁹ 'Alumni and Industry Mentoring', *Swinburne University of Technology* (Web Page 23 February 2026) <<https://studentmentoring.swinburne.edu.au/p/p2/about>>.

⁷⁰ 'Buddy Program', *Macquarie University* (Web Page, 23 February 2026) <<https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/peer-support/buddy-program>>.

⁷¹ 'For Mentees', *Griffith University* (Web Page, 2 March 2026) <https://griffithmentoring.xinspire.com/programs/imp/for_mentees>.

⁷² 'Lucy Mentoring Program', *University of Wollongong* (Web Page, 2 March 2026) <<https://www.uow.edu.au/arts-society-business/school-of-law/internships-and-job-opportunities/lucy-mentoring-program/>>.

⁷³ 'Autism and Related Conditions Mentoring', *Curtin University* (Web Page, 2 March 2026) <<https://www.curtin.edu.au/students/experience/mentoring/autism-related-conditions/>>.

and performance, and specific equity groups, and the diverse cohorts targeted demonstrate the breadth of mentoring programs currently available to law students at Australian universities. For completeness, it is worth providing a snapshot of the eligibility requirements of mentors.

Most of the websites promoting mentoring programs open to law students via Australian universities do not explicitly state the eligibility requirements for mentors. Almost all mentoring programs in this study allowed mentors to opt in, but an extracurricular peer-to-peer mentoring program at RMIT is an example where peer mentors received an invitation from the peer mentoring team.⁷⁴ In some mentoring programs, alumni are explicitly encouraged to apply to be mentors.⁷⁵ This web-based study found that the eligibility criteria for mentors was diverse and included academic progression (such as completion of a certain minimum amount of credit points or semesters, trimesters or sessions); academic success (prescribed minimum grade point average or weighted average mark); experience in the legal profession; skills (for example, communication, interpersonal, time management, negotiating and information technology); and availability to participate in training, online briefing and/or interview. Some mentoring programs target specific mentors, for example, international students or domestic students, and undergraduate, postgraduate or higher degree by research students. Additional notable requirements or expectations of mentors include to hold or be willing to apply for a 'Working With Vulnerable People Card' ('free for volunteers');⁷⁶ demonstrating university core values;⁷⁷ 'genuine interest in supporting students, with an understanding and tolerance of human and cultural diversity';⁷⁸ and demonstrating a 'commitment to lifelong learning'.⁷⁹ The data from this web-based study was used to identify the diverse mentoring programs offered to law students at Australian universities, and inform the design of a pilot mentoring program discussed in the case study below.

⁷⁴ 'Peer Mentoring', *RMIT University* (Web Page, 22 February 2026) <<https://www.rmit.edu.au/students/support-services/study-support/peer-mentoring>>.

⁷⁵ 'Industry Mentoring Program', *La Trobe University* (Web Page, 2 March 2026) <<https://mentoring.latrobe.edu.au/>>.

⁷⁶ 'Set4ANU Mentoring', *Australian National University* (Web Page, 2 March 2026) <<https://www.anu.edu.au/students/student-life/student-communities/set4anu-mentoring>>.

⁷⁷ 'Leaders', *Edith Cowan University* (Web Page, 2 March 2026) <<https://www.ecu.edu.au/careers-and-employability-services/mentoring/peer-leader-program/leaders>>.

⁷⁸ 'Become a Mentor', *Griffith University* (Web Page, 2 March 2026) <<https://www.griffith.edu.au/student-mentoring/mentors>>.

⁷⁹ 'Become a New to Curtin Mentor', *Curtin University* (Web Page 21 February 2026) <<https://www.curtin.edu.au/students/experience/mentoring/new-to-curtin/become-mentor/>>.

IV PHASE 3: REFLECTIONS ON DESIGNING A PILOT MENTORING PROGRAM FOR LAW STUDENTS

In this third and final Phase of this article, the authors reflect on the design of a pilot mentoring program for law students at the University of the Sunshine Coast. This case study research has been approved by the Chair of the University of the Sunshine Coast Human Research Ethics Committee exemption pathway (E25033) and is a form of autoethnography.⁸⁰ The design of the pilot mentoring program is novel and evidence-based. More specifically, it is informed by the relevant literature on mentoring programs and the web-based study above on current mentoring programs offered by Australian universities to law students.

When designing the pilot mentoring program, several key considerations organically evolved including:

- 1) *purpose of the mentoring program;*
- 2) *coordination of the mentoring program;*
- 3) *optional extracurricular activity or embedded in a Priestley 11 course, compulsory law course or law elective;*
- 4) *eligibility of mentees;*
- 5) *voluntary or compulsory mentee participation;*
- 6) *mentee application process, if any;*
- 7) *eligibility of mentors;*
- 8) *mentor application and selection/screening processes;*
- 9) *the training and resources provided to mentors;*
- 10) *structure of mentoring program;*
- 11) *type of mentoring relationship/s;*
- 12) *whether mentor/s and mentee/s self-select or are matched, and if the latter, what criteria is used;*
- 13) *duration of mentoring program;*
- 14) *frequency and mode of meetings between mentor/s and mentee/s; and*
- 15) *whether mentors and mentees have opportunities to debrief, reflect and provide feedback to continuously improve the next offering.*

This list of key mentoring program considerations is neither linear nor exhaustive, and some considerations are enmeshed or contingent on

⁸⁰ Elaine Gregersen, 'Telling Stories about the Law School: Autoethnography and Legal Education' (2021) 56(2) *The Law Teacher* 241, 252.

others, which adds complexity to the decision-making and design. However, the list of mentoring program considerations is intended to provide guidance to academic and professional staff who are designing a mentoring program. These key considerations will be explored further in relation to the pilot mentoring program.

Arguably, the purpose of the mentoring program is the paramount consideration. The *Australian Universities Accord: Interim Report* acknowledged that a mentoring program has the potential to ‘increase retention’, provide ‘pastoral support’, ‘generate social inclusion and foster a sense of belonging’.⁸¹ Additional purposes of a mentoring program include enhancing study skills, communication skills, collaboration skills and leadership skills; enriching transformative student experiences by exposure to positive legal professional identities; growing networks with peers and local legal professionals; strengthening curricula vitae and thus employability in a competitive job market; and keeping alumni invested in the law program.⁸²

One of the key gaps identified in Phase 2 of this study was the voluntary nature of mentoring programs in Australian law schools, resulting in challenges providing access to the benefits of mentoring to the most at-risk students. Unlike any of the mentoring programs found in the web-based study in Phase 2, the pilot mentoring program at the University of the Sunshine Coast is designed to be embedded into a Priestley 11 course, for the primary purposes of increasing retention and supporting all first-year law students enrolled in the compulsory course, rather than being tacked on as an optional extra-curricular activity. This Priestley 11 course is Criminal Law and Procedure, which is taught in the first year, first trimester of the law program. Being a prescribed area of knowledge, it was vital not to crowd the curriculum.⁸³

Embedding the mentoring program in a Priestley 11 course for the purpose of increasing retention resulted in sequential decision-making for some of the 15 key design considerations identified above. For example, by embedding a mentoring program in a Priestley 11 course, it follows that the course coordinator shoulders the administrative workload of the mentoring program, as it is offered at a unit or course level rather than a whole-of-institution, faculty, school, discipline or program level. While the relevant Priestley 11 course is offered annually, in person at two campuses, and online, the implementation should get easier with experience. However, it is acknowledged that course coordinator workload is a risk to the implementation and evaluation of the pilot mentoring program. This may be mitigated through training future course coordinators and/or casual tutors or simplifying the mentoring program so that it fits within workload and budget constraints. Additionally, the mentees are all enrolled in the

⁸¹ Department of Education (Cth) (n 18).

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ See *Legal Profession Uniform Admission Rules 2015* (NSW) sch 1 for a list of topics that satisfy the accrediting body. Kelley Burton, Susan Rayment McHugh and Alexandra Sharp, ‘Introducing a Trauma-Informed Matrix: A Resource for Academics to Support Criminal Law and Criminology Students’ (2025) 34(2) *Legal Education Review* 103.

Priestley 11 course and so participation is compulsory rather than voluntary, and no mentee application or selection process is required.

However, the structure of the mentoring program evolved after more thought and input from the local legal profession. The options included one mentor to one mentee or a form of group mentoring, whether one mentor to many mentees or many mentors to many mentees.⁸⁴ While a one mentor to one mentee program was originally envisaged, local legal professionals preferred one mentor to a few mentees. Scholarly literature recommends connecting four to six less experienced mentees with a mentor to creatively approach topics, analyse personal and professional development, share advice and meet psychosocial needs.⁸⁵ Johnson et al have determined that group episodic (short term or event-based) mentoring is as effective as matching one mentor to one mentee, especially in the areas of professional identity development, exploration of career options, and work-life balance, while having the efficiency benefits of cost-effectiveness and scalability for a course of such a significant size.⁸⁶ The cost effectiveness is evident in the reduced workload for the course coordinator who matches mentors and mentees, and a reduced workload for the mentors who can participate in short term or event-based mentoring as they prefer. Consequently, the pilot mentoring program utilises group mentoring.

The type of mentoring relationship is an important consideration in the design process. For example, the mentoring program may facilitate professional-to-student mentoring, peer-to-peer mentoring or a tiered approach. A tiered approach integrates both professional-to-student and peer-to-peer mentoring in a single mentoring program, which potentially harnesses the distinct strengths of each type of mentoring relationship, and thereby offers more benefits than either could offer alone. The web-based case above showed that none of the 38 Australian universities that offer law programs are currently offering a tiered approach of mentoring. However, there are examples of universities with several mentoring programs with either peer mentors or professional mentors.

Peer mentors are typically more accessible for law schools and deeply familiar with contemporary study practices, assessment expectations and digital learning tools. As they share the same institution and law program as their mentees, peer mentors are often more relatable and attuned to the immediate academic and personal pressures faced by law students. This proximity allows them to provide practical, timely support in relation to study skills, workload management and navigating the culture of law school. However, peer

⁸⁴ Russell L Huizing, 'Mentoring Together: A Literature Review of Group Mentoring' (2012) 20(1) *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning* 27.

⁸⁵ Wendy Nuis, Mien Segers and Simon Beusaert, 'Conceptualizing Mentoring in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review' (2023) 41 *Educational Research Review* 3.3.4 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100565>>; Beverly Kaye and Betsy Jacobson, 'Mentoring: A Group Guide' 49(4) (1995) *Training and Development* 22–7.

⁸⁶ Eileen Johnson et al, 'Matched Versus Episodic Mentoring: The Process and Outcomes for Law School Engaged in Professional Mentoring' (2013) *Legal Education Review* 153, 171–5.

mentoring alone demonstrates limited capacity to address career uncertainty or the transition from university to legal practice.⁸⁷

Professional mentoring complements these limitations by offering experience-based guidance that extends beyond the academic environment. Legal professionals bring established study and career habits, insight into the practical application of legal knowledge and access to professional networks that can assist students in understanding career pathways and developing their employability. At the same time, professional mentors may face constraints due to demanding work schedules, may be less familiar with current university teaching and assessment practices, and may not always align neatly with a student's preferred practice area or learning style.⁸⁸

To reduce workload demand on the professional mentors, our programmatic design estimates a very manageable five hours of commitment time over the span of delivery. This commitment is to be split between an hour of training, three hours of direct mentorship engagement and an hour of debrief post-delivery. Our collaboration with stakeholders from the local legal profession has indicated that this is not merely a sustainable workload commitment for professional mentors, but rather a beneficial use of resources to maintain engagement with the law school and industry visibility. As the course embedding this pilot mentoring program is offered once per year, and mentors elect the delivery site/s at which they wish to engage, the design of the program has sought to leverage, rather than exhaust, the capacity of mentors.

Phase 2 of this study identified a clear gap in the offerings of mentoring programs that combined the benefits of peer and professional mentoring within a tiered approach. By combining peer-to-peer and professional-to-student mentoring, law schools can deliver a more comprehensive and balanced support structure and address this gap in current programs. Peer mentors provide consistent, institution-specific academic support and relatability, while professional mentors offer strategic career guidance, real-world context and networking opportunities. Adopting a tiered approach reduces reliance on any single form of mentoring, mitigates the risks inherent in each and supports law students across the full spectrum of their academic journey and professional transition. Utilising both peers and professionals in a 'tiered mentoring' program has been recommended to address the deficiencies in each type of mentoring relationship.⁸⁹ Further, forming communities and combatting isolation are also highlighted by the Australian Universities Accord as two key factors linked to retention of

⁸⁷ James (n 1) 105–6; Poppy Husband and Pamela Jacobs, 'Peer Mentoring in Higher Education: A Review of the Current Literature and Recommendations for Implementation of Mentoring Schemes' (2009) 2 *The Plymouth Student Scientist* 228, 234.

⁸⁸ James (n 1) 106–7.

⁸⁹ Jane Fowler and Tammy Muckert, 'Tiered Mentoring: Benefits for First-Year Students, Upper Level Students and Professionals' (Conference Paper, HERDSA Conference, January 2004), 106; *ibid* 107.

tertiary students.⁹⁰ The tiered approach to mentoring directly creates potential for community. Accordingly, the pilot mentoring program applies a tiered approach, whereby each mentoring group consists of one local legal professional mentor, one second or later year law student as a peer mentor, and four first-year mentees studying the Priestley 11 course Criminal Law and Procedure.

As Criminal Law and Procedure has sensitive course content, the pilot mentoring program is ‘trauma-informed’.⁹¹ Before going further, it is critical to provide a definition of trauma and explain the key assumptions and principles of a trauma-informed approach entrenched in the pilot mentoring program. The leading definition of trauma is derived from the United States of America’s Department of Health and Human Services’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (‘SAMHSA’), and states ‘individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social emotional or spiritual well-being’.⁹² The key assumptions underpinning a trauma-informed approach are commonly known as the four ‘r’s and are as follows: ‘*realizes* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; *recognizes* the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and *responds* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively *resist re-traumatization*’ (*added emphasis in italics*).⁹³ The trauma-informed principles are safety (including cultural safety); trustworthiness and transparency; collaboration, mutuality and peer support; and empowerment, voice and choice.⁹⁴ The following paragraphs will connect the design of the pilot mentoring program with the trauma-informed principles and assumptions.

Most importantly, the physical safety of the pilot mentoring program is enhanced because it is designed to occur during the in-person and online tutorials in Weeks 2, 4 and 8 of the 12-week trimester under the supervision of the tutor, rather than off campus. Additionally, the one hour online mentor training for the local legal professionals and law students in their second or later year is designed to enhance psychological safety and be offered in orientation week.

While mentor training that is not trauma-informed may focus on developing skills, problem solving, providing advice and/or attaining goals, the trauma-informed mentor training in the pilot mentoring program is distinctly informed by the four key assumptions of a trauma-

⁹⁰ Department of Education (Cth) (n 18).

⁹¹ Burton, McHugh and Sharp (n 83).

⁹² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach* (HHS Publication No (SMA) 14-4884, July 2014) 7.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (n 92); Burton, McHugh and Sharp (n 83).

informed approach outlined above. The latter approach to mentor training enables mentors to recognise the signs of trauma and understand the impacts of trauma on first-year law student mentees' communication, trust and behaviour. The mentors are provided with practical tips on how to frame questions for the first-year law student mentees in a thoughtful and empathetic way, rather than being direct and confrontational. Further, the mentors are trained on how to connect first-year law student mentees with internal and external support services, to mitigate the risk of re-traumatisation. Finally, the mentor training includes guidance on how to practise self-care, set boundaries and apply a growth mindset, so the mentors can model such behaviours and encourage the same from the first-year law student mentees. The trustworthiness and transparency of the pilot mentoring program is strengthened by the alignment between the mentoring and two assessment tasks. More specifically, tutorial participation in a range of goal setting, short answer and problem-based activities in weeks 2 and 4, and a journal reflection on a court visit discussed in the tutorial in week 8. The alignment between the pilot mentoring program and the pre-existing tutorial work and assessment tasks means that the curriculum is designed to draw on more lived experiences and be more authentic, without removing topics or overcrowding the Priestley 11 course. Further, the mentor training emphasises being approachable, honest, reliable and clarifies professional boundaries with the mentees, and thus, aimed to enhance trustworthiness.

Collaboration, mutuality and peer support is exemplified by the tiered approach to mentoring discussed above. More specifically, the tiered approach enables connections between local legal professionals, second and later year law students and first-year law students in the Criminal Law and Procedure tutorials. Consequently, the pilot mentoring program is designed to support small learning communities.

Finally, empowerment, voice and choice are evident, as the first-year students can choose their mentors, saving the course coordinator the administrative workload of matching mentors and mentees. Further, the first-year law students can choose the topics to be discussed in the week 8 tutorial with their mentors, such as how they could apply the learnings from the court visit in future. The mentor training encourages the creation of a supportive learning environment where the first-year students are comfortable to express their learnings, reflections and make mistakes. The pilot mentoring program design encourages mentors to participate in a one-hour debrief to improve future offerings. Separately to the mentors, mentees are encouraged to do the same.

While the pilot mentoring program is yet to be implemented and evaluated, the primary purpose is to increase retention in first-year law. Mentoring programs have been cited as a key strategy for addressing retention in higher education.⁹⁵ One of the significant issues with

⁹⁵ Fowler and Muckert (n 89) 105; Mariana Guerreiro and Saul Neves de Jesus, 'The Role of Peer Mentoring Program Elements in Promoting Academic Success and Preventing Student Dropout in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review' (2025) 49(5) *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 671, 672.

voluntary or application-based mentoring programs is that they are often accessed by those students who are already excelling and are looking to further their development.⁹⁶ It is very difficult to target a mentoring program at the retention of those students who are most ‘at risk’.⁹⁷ Embedding a pilot mentoring program in the course work for a first-year Priestley 11 course is well-placed to ensure that the purpose and benefits of the mentoring program as outlined above can be shared among both high-performing students and the students who require it most. However, the authors are cognisant that the evaluation outcomes may show a need for interventions before the week 2 tutorial.

V CONCLUSION

The character of Mentor in Homer’s *Odyssey* provides the etymological foundation of the word ‘mentor’ today. It has become almost tradition for academic articles engaging with mentoring to wax lyrical on this connection.⁹⁸ Yet, it is often forgotten that the figure of Mentor in the *Odyssey* is a disguise worn by various figures to guide the story’s protagonist. The changing identity and position of Homer’s Mentor suggests that the position of mentor is a role that is subject to change and repositioning. Put plainly, mentors change and evolve alongside the journey of the mentee. So too, this paper has articulated, must mentoring programs evolve to reflect the changing nature of higher education and the enhanced pressures on law schools to balance doctrinal knowledge with the harnessing and fostering of practical skills and professional identity.

This article lays the strong foundations for a pilot tiered mentoring program informed by wellbeing and trauma-informed approaches to be embedded within a Priestley 11 course at an Australian law school. Phase 1 discussed the literature around mentoring programs as it pertains to the context of Australian law schools. Phase 2 contributed to the field with a web-based study of current mentoring programs offered to law students at Australian universities. This study identified that none of the current mentoring programs target Priestley 11 courses, are tiered and/or trauma-informed. Reflecting on the web-based study identified that future web-based studies of mentoring programs could explore the training and resources offered to mentors, duration of mentoring programs, frequency and mode of meetings between mentors and mentees, and evaluations of mentoring programs. Phase 3 built on these preliminary Phases to articulate how a pilot mentoring program

⁹⁶ James (n 1).

⁹⁷ Narelle Eather, Myrto F Mavilidi, Heather Sharp and Robert Parkes, ‘Programmes Targeting Sstudent Retention/Success and Satisfaction/Experience in Higher Education: A Systematic Review’ (2022) 44(3) *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 223.

⁹⁸ Maryann Jacobi, ‘Mentoring and Undergraduate Academic Success: A Literature Review’ (1991) 61(4) *Review of Educational Research* 505, 506; Joon Pio Hong, ‘What Does it Mean to Be a Good Mentor?’ (2024) 51(6) *Archives of Plastic Surgery* 527; Johnson et al (n 86) 171–5, 154; Bob Garvey, ‘Mentoring Origins and Evolution’ in David Law et al (ed), *Making Connections: A Handbook for Effective Formal Mentoring Programs in Academia* (Utah State University, 2023) 6.

will allow for the benefit of supporting law students across the full spectrum of their academic journey and professional transition. Further, Phase 3 recognised how embedding a pilot mentoring program within a Priestley 11 course has the potential to address the key concerns of student retention, wellbeing and academic success by targeting the program to both ‘at risk’ and high-achieving students alike. Embedding such a program declutters a crowded curriculum, allowing students to gain the benefits of academic, personal and professional development without the burden of engaging extracurricular organisation in an already busy schedule.

The evaluation of the pilot mentoring program is beyond the scope of this article, but it will be implemented through the deployment of a mixed-methods approach, comprising quantitative and qualitative data collection from mentors, mentees and tutors pre- and post- delivery. Drawing upon evaluative frameworks previously deployed by Chester et al,⁹⁹ we seek to use this comparative data to assess the program’s effectiveness in alignment with Lizzio’s Five Senses of Success (capability, connectedness, purpose, resourcefulness and academic culture).¹⁰⁰ More generally, this data will assist in determining any logistical barriers which may arise in navigating the tiered mentoring program style, a vulnerability which may arise given its embedding within an undergraduate course.

This article provides a blueprint for Australian law schools to address these same issues of retention, wellbeing and success, given the national and even global nature of these concerns. By creating and implementing tiered mentoring programs embedded within Priestley 11 courses, institutions can take the next step in the endless drive to improve the student experience.

⁹⁹ Andrea Chester et al, ‘Peer Mentoring: Supporting Successful Transition for First Year Undergraduate Psychology Students’ (2013) 65(1) *Australian Journal of Psychology* 30.

¹⁰⁰ Alf Lizzio, ‘Designing an Orientation and Transition Strategy for Commencing Students: Applying the Five Senses Model’ (Research Paper, Griffith University, 2006).