



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Defence**

# Defence School Mentor Program

## Defence Community Organisation



## Guidelines

For Australian Defence Force members  
and their families

[www.defence.gov.au/dco/](http://www.defence.gov.au/dco/)

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## **Defence School Mentor Program guidelines**

### **Produced by Defence Community Organisation**

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Follow Defence Community Organisation on social media to receive information about support services for Defence families, links with community organisations, DCO information sessions and social events.



[www.facebook.com/DefenceCommunityOrganisation](https://www.facebook.com/DefenceCommunityOrganisation)



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### **Disclaimer**

The content, including publications referred to in these guidelines, is intended to provide a summary and general overview of the process involved in the Defence School Mentor Program and other matters of interest. Defence does not provide advice concerning, or recommending or promoting, any non-government organisation referred to in these guidelines.

These guidelines are not intended to be comprehensive nor contain legal advice. Defence attempts to ensure that the content is current, but cannot guarantee its currency. It is correct as at the date of release.

Applicants and their families should consider all the information provided on its merits and undertake independent research.

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## Preface

The Department of Defence recognises the effects a military lifestyle can have on the children of Australian Defence Force (ADF) members. The Defence School Mentor (DSM) Program, managed by Defence Community Organisation (DCO), provides funding for schools to employ a DSM. Mentors provide support to Defence students when mobility affects their education through frequent moves and during long periods of separation within the family, isolation from extended family support networks and operational deployments.

DCO works with schools to support Defence students and their families to minimise these impacts on education and build resilience to support the social and emotional wellbeing of Defence students.

DCO is responsible for the policy, management and day-to-day administration of the DSM Program. Funding support payments are available to schools that support Defence with education mobility issues, and meet the eligibility criteria within these guidelines.

# 1. Overview

The Defence School Mentor Program provides annual funding to eligible Australian-based schools to minimise the impact of the mobile lifestyle on Defence students' education. The DSM Program (the Program) assists Defence students and their families with changing schools, integrating into the school community and providing support during parental absences.

This Defence funding enables the employment of a DSM to work within the school to raise awareness of the Defence lifestyle.

The Program, administered by Defence Community Organisation (DCO), is a reflection of the commitment by Defence to support its members and their families, and recognises the partnership between education authorities, Defence and schools.

A Defence student is defined as a primary or secondary school student who is a dependent of a member of the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

## 1.1 Program principles

The Program will:

- be informed by feedback from schools on the need for support for Defence students
- ensure funding allocations reflect student need, based on impacts due to the Defence lifestyle
- enable schools to purchase additional student wellbeing support.

## 1.2 Aim

The Program aims to assist Defence students in 4 key areas throughout their education and as they move from one school to another. The key areas are:

- welcoming
- integrating
- absence support
- farewelling.

Through the Program, schools will be enabled to provide the following outcomes:

- facilitation of a supportive educational environment for Defence families during times of change
- establishment of ongoing programs and resources for use during and beyond the life of the Program
- connection of Defence families with their local school community
- provision of education resources to support the Defence student's wellbeing.

DCO is committed to the continuation of the Program, which aims to alleviate the significant school challenges encountered by Defence families due to mobility and parental absence from home.

## 1.3 Program funding model

By accepting annual funding from the Program, schools:

- make a commitment to support Defence families within their school community
- commit to continuous improvement in response to Defence families' needs
- agree to comply with the governance requirements of the Program.

The Program funding criteria are based on the available annual Program budget, the number of Defence students enrolled in schools, the level of support the students require in each location and other known impacts of the ADF lifestyle.

Funding is allocated on a calendar year basis only. Schools receiving Program funding who experience a decreasing Defence student population, or other significant factors that impact the Defence students in a location and the level of support required, may no longer be entitled to Program funding. Schools and their communities will be advised once they fall into this category, and schools will be transitioned out of the Program with the assistance of the local DCO office to ensure there is still support and resources made available to Defence students and their families.

Schools are to appropriately allocate Program funding to DSM support hours, delivery of support and provision of other resources that meet the aims of the Program. A minimum standard of support must be provided to Defence students and their families, and along with reporting and acquittal requirements, are part of the conditions of accepting Program funding and remaining in the Program.

Schools may engage a part-time Mentor in a dual role in the school; however, the Program will only fund the DSM salary component. Schools are responsible to fund the difference. The local DCO Education Liaison Officer (EDLO) must be consulted prior to ensure there is no conflict of interest between roles or any negative impact on the DSM's ability to perform Program-funded functions.

The provision of funds is subject to annual budgetary appropriation from the Department of Defence's budget and funds availability. Where funding levels are affected by appropriation, the amount paid by the Department may be adjusted accordingly.

## 1.4 DSM Program administration

DCO is responsible for managing the budget, policy and day-to-day administration of the Program. This includes governance requirements, application and assessment processes, and funding arrangements, performance monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

The Program will offer annual funding support to successful schools, made in 2 payments covering the periods January to June and July to December. Monitoring and site visits will be conducted by Program administrators and EDLOs in order to assist schools with compliance and support the success of the Program.

DCO will continue to use information collected from monitoring and site visits to support the continuous improvement of the Program, along with developing future governance requirements, including potential resource packages.

## 2. Eligibility information

Any Australian-based school with significant Defence student enrolments is eligible to apply for Program funding, provided they agree to meet the aims of the Program.

### 2.1 Program funding criteria

The Program has a finite budget each year and provides funding to schools on a demonstrated needs basis in a very competitive process. To enable a fair distribution of funding across all eligible schools nationally, criteria are applied to determine the level of funding that can be offered. Program guidelines are a reference point for all potential applicants.

The following criteria will be considered when determining eligibility for the support of Mentor positions in schools and allocation of funding:

- the available annual Program budget
- schools with large Defence student enrolments
- schools supporting areas with high operational tempo
- schools located in remote locations.

Schools that are approved for Program funding must:

- be a primary, secondary, middle years or Foundation to Year 12 (F–12) school
- demonstrate an ability to deliver innovative programs and services to support Defence families
- demonstrate an ongoing commitment to strategic partnerships between education authorities and Defence
- demonstrate commitment to the Program and compliance to the governance requirements, as detailed in the Program guidelines.

Successful applicants will receive Program funding between \$13,000 and \$70,000 per annum; these funding caps will be reviewed annually. All amounts are GST not applicable.

## 3. Application process

### 3.1 Application conditions

The annual DSM Program funding application form is used to determine whether a school is suitable to receive funding for that calendar year only. Completing an application form provides no assurance that funding will be received for that year, nor any guarantee the same level of funding will be received in future years. All information requested on the application must be completed to enable an application to be considered. Only one application per school will be assessed each year.

### 3.2 Applicant's responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that the application is complete and accurate. Giving false or misleading information to the Department of Defence is a serious offence. Applicants who do so may be prosecuted under section 137.1 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995*.

### 3.3 Opening and closing dates

Applications for annual Program funding will open in October of the preceding year. Application opening and closing dates will be advertised on the DCO website and through established communication channels.

### 3.4 Late applications

Funding applications submitted after the closing date may be assessed at DCO's discretion. Evidence outlining any exceptional circumstances that impacted the school's ability to submit their application by the closing date must accompany submission.

### 3.5 Main funding round

The DSM Program guidelines and funding application form are available on the Department of Defence website at [www.defence.gov.au/DCO/Family/Kids/Education.asp](http://www.defence.gov.au/DCO/Family/Kids/Education.asp).

Application forms can also be requested by email. All completed applications must be submitted by email to [dsm.program@defence.gov.au](mailto:dsm.program@defence.gov.au).

### 3.6 Outside main funding round

There is limited opportunity for schools to submit a Program application outside the main funding round. The Program Manager will assess each application on a case-by-case basis.

### 3.7 Assessment of applications

Program funding is a competitive process. Eligible applications will be assessed each year and prioritised against the Program funding criteria detailed in section 2.1 and on their individual merit.

DCO will acknowledge applications on receipt and reserves the right to request further information, if required.

Recommended amounts will be allocated to each school and any terms and conditions under which they should be given.

### 3.8 Successful applicants

DCO is responsible for the outcome of the funding support payments. Successful schools will receive a Letter of Approval and Funding Agreement from DCO, and will be asked to accept the Program terms and conditions in the Funding Agreement. Any school failing to meet the terms of the agreement may forfeit their eligibility for Program funding.

The Funding Agreement is required to be returned by the school as soon as possible from the date of the Letter of Approval to allow funds to be made available. No funding will be released until the Funding Agreement is signed by the funded school and DCO.

### 3.9 Unsuccessful applicants appeal

All unsuccessful schools will be advised in writing of the outcome of their applications by DCO.

Requests for additional feedback must be received by DCO within 30 days of the date of notification from DCO advising of the outcome of the application.

Where a bid has not been successful, applicants may apply in writing via email for a review of the decision on the following grounds:

- there has been a genuine mistake or misinterpretation in the assessment and/or calculation of funds requested
- a school has made a genuine omission in the preparation or submission of a funding application.

An unsuccessful application in one year does not prevent a school from applying for funding in future years.

### 3.10 Clusters of schools

Schools may indicate a willingness to form a cluster with other schools on their funding application form. A cluster involves a number of schools formally agreeing to work together to share a DSM position and allocation of funding. A cluster will be a minimum of 2 schools, and a maximum of 3. DCO will determine through local EDLOs if a cluster arrangement is viable to proceed.

### 3.11 Funding payments—tax invoice

Program funding payments will be made available upon receipt of a correctly rendered tax invoice. Program funding is considered GST not applicable. Funding payments will be made by electronic funds transfer.

Bank account details provided by applicants must pertain to the school/education entity, not to personal accounts. Defence's payment policy is 20 days from the date that the correctly rendered tax invoice is received by the Defence centralised processing cell at [invoices@defence.gov.au](mailto:invoices@defence.gov.au).

Payment schedules are from January to June (payment 1) and from July to December (payment 2). Payments may be withheld if there is any uncertainty about governance, performance or capacity to deliver the services agreed by schools.

A tax invoice must be received in the funding period it relates to, otherwise funding allocations cannot be guaranteed. If invoices are not received by mid-April for payment 1 and mid-September for payment 2, funding may be withdrawn for that payment period.

### **3.12 Funding compliance**

Schools will be emailed a financial compliance report in June to acquit the end of financial year funding. This report is to be returned to DCO as soon as the expenditure for the financial year has been finalised. Failure to return the completed financial compliance report will impact the release of any future funding.

At the end of the January to June funding period, the end of year financial compliance reports provided by schools will be used to determine any unused funds provided by Defence. DCO will recover all unspent funds by issuing an invoice to affected schools. Alternatively, unspent funds may result in the subsequent funding amount for the July to December funding period being adjusted proportionally.

There is no capacity to pay schools over and above their initial annual funding allocation and resultant Funding Agreement signed by their principal or principal delegate.

Schools are fully accountable for their actions in respect of these funds. It is the responsibility of the school to maintain a complete set of records for acquittal purposes, including all receipts and financial statements. At any time, the school may be asked to supply financial records, as these funds are public monies and great care must be taken with the administration of their expenditure.

### **3.13 Behaviours**

DCO acknowledges that schools will have their own values and expected behaviours for employees. Schools should ensure their own values and behaviours are being upheld through the delivery of this Program, whilst being cognisant of the values of Defence.

By accepting funding from the Program, schools and their representatives are also expected to consider Defence's reputation in the public eye when promoting and conducting Program activities, and act in a manner that does not harm the reputation of the Department of Defence.

DSMs are not to identify as an employee of Defence, nor advocate for change in Defence policies.

### **3.14 Program evaluation reporting**

Throughout the year, schools will be required to report on Program delivery and demonstrate outcomes achieved for students, with a final report at the end of the year. This data will be consolidated and the overall findings outlining issues and trends will be made available at the beginning of each calendar year.

### **3.15 Failure to meet accountability and compliance requirements**

Funding offers may be withdrawn if any school is identified as failing to meet funding, behaviours, or reporting requirements. In addition, if a Program-funded school fails to meet its statutory and legal obligations, future funding for the Program may not be offered with regards to the relevant application, or withdrawn immediately.

## 4. Employing a DSM

### 4.1 Support from a local DCO Education Liaison Officer

The DSM is an employee of the school and their employment is subject to the framework of legislation, established principles, practices and procedures of the school. The role is accountable to the principal, or their delegate, under broad direction for day-to-day activities.

DCO has EDLOs located in each state or territory to provide advice and support to the school, and guidance to all DSMs in their area. The local EDLO is required to assist with the recruitment process to ensure the role is filled by a candidate with a strong understanding of the unique needs of Defence students, the ability to support these students, and capacity to provide a link for Defence families. As part of the agreement to accept Program funding and abide by the Program guidelines, no candidate should be appointed by a school without first engaging with DCO. Additionally DCO must be advised of all changes to staffing of a funded position.

### 4.2 Delivering desired outcomes with a DSM

The DSM is not a teacher or counsellor. Schools are encouraged to offer and embed the role as part of the pastoral care/student wellbeing services team within the school.

It is expected that the DSM will be embraced and recognised as a valued member of the school staff and provided with an appropriate place to work, with access to telephone, computer and school support for stationery and other basic needs, as required.

## 5. Other important information

### 5.1 Child safety

The Australian Government has introduced the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework, a whole-of-government policy that sets minimum standards for creating and embedding a child safe culture and practice.

The Framework sets out the minimum standards for Commonwealth entities to protect children. Successful Program applicants, funded to provide services directly to children, will be required to meet the child safety requirements consistent with the Framework.

More information about the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework is available at <https://pmc.gov.au/domestic-policy/national-office-child-safety/commonwealth-child-safe-framework>.

### 5.2 Social media

Social media allows school communities to share events and activities, communicate key messages and create awareness of opportunities and services in the community in which they live. All schools should already have in place guidance for use of social media.

However, as a general rule, schools should not post material that is offensive towards any group or person based on any personal traits, attributes, beliefs or practices that exploit, objectify or are derogatory of gender, ethnicity or religion.

In addition, schools in receipt of funding must exercise judgment to ensure that no information breaches security or adversely affects the safety and wellbeing of their students and their families, or that might damage the reputations of their school, DCO or the Department of Defence.

### 5.3 Conflicts of interest

DCO reserves the right to assess the potential impact of any conflict or perceived conflict of interest and what plans, if any, are proposed to address the conflict of interest in relation to the application for funding. DCO may reject an application if it is not satisfied that there are arrangements in place to appropriately address/manage a perceived or actual conflict of interest. DCO also has mechanisms in place for identifying and managing potential or actual conflicts of interest, such as requiring assessment staff to sign conflict of interest declarations prior to undertaking the assessment of applications.

### 5.4 Web-based reporting

Defence will publically report all successful schools awarded Program funding each financial year. The list of schools that are successful in obtaining Program funding will be displayed on the DCO website once recipients have been notified of the outcome of their application and the offer of funding has been accepted.

## 5.5 Review of the program

DCO will review the Program annually to ensure the aims of the Program are being met and remain relevant, and, where necessary, adjust the guidelines in line with departmental and Commonwealth priorities.

## 5.6 Disclaimer

The Australian Government will not accept responsibility for any misunderstanding arising from the failure by an applicant to comply with these Guidelines, or arising from any ambiguity, discrepancy or error contained in an application.

## 5.7 False or misleading information

Applicants should be aware that the giving of false or misleading information to the Commonwealth is a serious offence under the *Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)*. Where false or misleading information is provided, or relevant information withheld, criminal or disciplinary action under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, *Defence Force Discipline Act 1982*, *Public Service Act 1999*, or the *Criminal Code Act 1995* may be taken, depending on the circumstances.

If the applicant is a member of Defence, or employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*, administrative action may also be taken by Defence and sanctions imposed.

Applications may be disregarded if, in the belief of the Department, false or misleading information has formed a component of an application.

## 5.8 Fraud

For the purpose of this document, fraud means dishonestly obtaining a benefit from the Commonwealth or causing a loss to the Commonwealth by deception or other means.

The school must take all reasonable steps to prevent and detect fraud in relation to the performance of the Program. The school will acknowledge that the occurrence of fraud will constitute a breach of the Funding Agreement.

If an investigation finds that the school or its employees have committed fraud, or the school has failed to take reasonable steps to prevent fraud by an employee or subcontractor, the school must reimburse or compensate the Commonwealth in full.

## 5.9 Privacy

For information on how DCO collects, uses and discloses personal information, see the DCO Privacy Statement, available at [www.defence.gov.au/DCO/\\_Master/documents/Factsheets/DCO-Privacy-statement.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/DCO/_Master/documents/Factsheets/DCO-Privacy-statement.pdf).

## 5.10 Contact information

Further information is available by contacting the Program administrators at [dsm.program@defence.gov.au](mailto:dsm.program@defence.gov.au).