

TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

**Quality and Regulation
Directorate**

**Research and Information
Mentor Strategy
2022-2026
Guidance Document**

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1. Introduction

The National Research Office (NRO) has concluded the implementation of the first cycle of Tusla's Research and Information Mentors Strategy 2018-2020¹. The strategy sets out an approach for Tusla staff (Research and Information Mentors) to work with their colleagues to develop and strengthen their research and information skills. The strategy has been led by the NRO and has been implemented by the Research and Information Mentor Governance Group and the Research and Information Mentor Network.

A review of the implementation of the strategy was undertaken internally in late 2020. Several meetings took place in early 2021 to discuss the content and recommendations of the review report. These meetings involved the Research and Information Mentor Strategy sponsor, the Research and Information Mentor Governance Group and the Research and Information Mentor Network.

From September 2021 – December 2021, four meetings took place with the existing group of mentors (10) and the Research and Information Mentor Governance Group which focussed on refining the role of the Research and Information Mentor, future induction training, additional training, development and supports, methods to capture activity and measure impact and scoping the approach for the intake of new mentors.

The strategy sponsor has approved the continued implementation of the Research and Information Mentor Strategy over a second cycle, which will factor in learnings from the implementation experience to date. The second cycle will run from 2022-2026 and will retain 10 Research and Information Mentors who have been approved by their respective line managers for continuation of the role, plus an intake of a further 10 mentors in 2022.

1.1. Purpose of this document

This guidance document will accompany the Research and Information Mentor Strategy 2017 and includes a refined approach with specific actions. This document will be of interest to all staff but more specifically it will be used by the strategy sponsor², the NRO, the Research and Information Mentor lead, the Implementation Support Group³, the Research and Information Mentor Network and their line managers.

The document sets out the vision and goals of the second cycle 2022-2026 and will be a guide to the overall implementation. It will specify the core duties and developmental aspects of the Research and Information Mentor role. The document will guide the development of methods to share and capture activity and to establish feedback measures. It will guide the intake of new mentors to the network and will set out the expectations of mentors, line managers and the NRO. The document also outlines both a revised induction training programme, and an additional training and development plan. Detail on the implementation support group and timeline of activity is also included.

¹ [Research and Information Mentor Strategy 2017](#)

² Since January 2022, the NRO is located within the Quality and Regulation Directorate. The Director for Quality and Regulation is the sponsor of the Research and Information Mentor Strategy 2022-2026.

³ The previous Governance Group is now replaced with an Implementation Support Group for 2022-2026.

1.2. Tusla Child and Family Agency Goals and Values

The strategy implementation supports the goals and values of Tusla.

Tusla Goals

1. Ensure children, young people, families, and communities receive a consistent, quality and integrated response from all our services.
2. Deliver an independent regulatory service focussed on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people through continuous improvement and partnership with stakeholders.
3. Ensure our staff and leaders are empowered to continuously learn and improve so that children and families and communities benefit from our service.
4. Ensure our local services and teams are facilitated and supported by national systems and resources that promote integration and accountability.

Tusla Values

Trust – Respect – Kindness – Empowerment

1.3. Locating the Research and Information Strategy within Tusla

Section 8(f) in the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 states a function of Tusla shall be to *undertake or commission research into matters related to the functions specified in paragraphs (a), (b), (c) and (d) or into such other matters as the Minister may request.*

Tusla's Research Strategy 2015-2017 sets out a number of objectives in support of developing research skills and capabilities within the agency including the establishment of information stars (Tusla staff) - these information stars are now identified within the Research and Information Mentor Strategy 2017 as Research and Information Mentors who work with their colleagues to develop research and information skills and capabilities. The mentors enable staff to acquire, critique and utilise evidence for practice development, service improvement and decision-making. The Research and Information Mentor Strategy contributes to the Agency's commitment to continuing professional development. Members of the Research and Information Mentor Network are located regionally and locally across the Agency and they support practice, culture and structure. Tusla is undergoing a structural reform, and the strategy supports the Agency's new approach to integrating services at local and regional levels.

1.4. Locating the Research and Information Mentor Strategy within Tusla Business and Corporate plans.

The Research and Information Mentors Strategy relates to the Tusla Business Plan 2021 actions:

- 3.2(a) Develop the Research Strategic Plan
- 3.4(a) Develop Tusla's capacity as a learning organisation, through shared learning and continuous development.

The strategy relates to the Tusla Corporate Plan 2021-2023 actions:

- 3.3 Develop a sustainable workforce where our employees are recruited, retained, and supported to have the required knowledge skills and competencies to deliver high-quality and integrated services.
- 3.4 Encourage, promote, and support shared learning across the Agency and continuous professional development for our staff.

2. The Research and Information Mentor Strategy – 2022-2026 (second cycle)

To deliver improved implementation of the strategy, a vision for the second cycle has been developed along with overarching, short, medium, and long-term goals.

2.1 Vision for the second cycle

The full implementation of the strategy will drive increased use of research evidence and information for practice development, service improvement and decision-making to support improved outcomes for children, young people, families, and communities. Research and Information Mentors will be equipped with the necessary skills to deliver on activities that are defined and measurable and the impact of the strategy on the Agency will be known.

2.2 Overarching goal of the second cycle

The overarching goal of the second cycle is to utilise the experience and learning from the first cycle to implement an improved and refined second cycle. The second cycle will be strengthened by additional intake of Research and Information Mentors, and a refined and bespoke induction and training and development plan which will enable Research and Information Mentors to embed the strategy within the Agency. The Mentors will take a renewed focus on using research and information for practice development, service improvement and decision-making to support the continuing professional development of Tusla staff.

2.3. Short-term goals for completion in 2022

- The implementation of the strategy is supported in full by the Executive Management Team.
- The implementation of the strategy incorporates and reflects the Agency goals and values as set out in Tusla Corporate Plan 2021-2023.
- The Research and Information Mentors Network benefits from additional members, a revised induction programme and a new training and development plan.
- Broader membership of the Research and Information Mentor Implementation Support Group is established.
- Mechanisms for capturing activity and feedback are designed and in place.

2.4 Medium-term goals for completion 2023-2024

- The role of the Research and Information Mentor is integrated within a range of service areas, strategies, and initiatives and is responsive to change within the Agency.
- Mentors can demonstrate that their efforts have increased the use of research evidence and information for practice development, service improvement and decision making via self-reporting and other feedback loops.
- The Research and Information Mentor Strategy is informed by and aligned with the research and information needs of the Agency as identified by the Tusla Research and Information Needs Analysis (Tusla Research Framework and strategy forthcoming)

2.5. Long-term goals for completion 2025-2026

- The strategy is considered to become mainstreamed within the Agency
- All services in the Agency have access to Research and Information Mentor support and protected time is utilised.

- Engagement with research and information activity is embedded in the Agency's continuing professional development efforts.
- Engagement with research and information activity is included as a standard item on all team meeting agendas and as part of all staff supervision.
- Agency staff will have benefitted from engaging with the Research and Information Mentor Strategy and will have increased knowledge, skills and capability for using research and information within their respective roles.
- The Agency will benefit from a knowledge repository of all activities undertaken and research supported by Research and Information Mentors, including knowledge gained via staff feedback.
- The Research and Information Mentor Strategy will be evaluated, and the impact of the strategy will be made known.

2.6 Research and Information Mentor role integration

Building the role into everyday practices and structures

The NRO, working with Research and Information Mentors, will seek to integrate the role within the Agency's existing initiatives, practices, and structures. This should include:

Supporting teams locally, regionally and nationally in their current requirements – integrating evidence into practice, service improvement, and decision-making.

Coordinating and developing synergies with the Tusla Evidence Informed Practitioner Programme and being available to support participants and programme mentors as required.

Promoting visibility of the role at every opportunity to encourage awareness and use of research and information resources to support Tusla's Continuing Professional Development strategy, as well as commitment to evidence-informed practice.

3 The Research and Information Mentor Role - Overview

The Research and Information Mentor role overview sets out specific core duties that all Research and Information Mentors will undertake with Tusla colleagues. The role overview also includes a range of developmental activities that are considered optional.

Developmental activities will, however, be encouraged by the NRO as the role progresses for all mentors. Requirements of all mentors are set out below and must be fulfilled in support of the overall strategy implementation.

3.1. Core duties of the Research and Information Mentor Role

All Research and Information mentors will be available to work with Tusla colleagues⁴ individually and in groups as appropriate to:

- Support Tusla staff to utilise research and information for practice development, service improvement and decision making.
- Promote engagement with research and information activity as a contribution to continuing professional development.

⁴ Tusla colleagues are those who are directly employed by Tusla.

- Promote and support access to and registration with available research and information resources within the Tusla Research Centre, EBSCO databases, electronic journals and Barnardos Library and Information service.
- Promote, advise on, and demonstrate database and journal search skills to a proficient level.
- Identify existing and future research and information needs and liaise with the NRO in the context of its strategic priorities in line with the Agency Research and Information Needs Analysis.
- Assist Tusla staff engaged in research or developing research proposals to clarify and develop specific research questions.
- Support Tusla staff to identify, access and critique research and information sources.
- Signpost to experts in the field or organisations as relevant or appropriate.
- Provide information about Tusla Independent Research Ethics Committee and processes.
- Respond to local and regional staff queries and signpost to the NRO where required.
- Support and communicate the strategic objectives, developments, and priorities of the NRO.
- Communicate and disseminate research and information resources to staff, including information about opportunities for learning and continuing professional development.
- Use all available opportunities to disseminate relevant research in line with Tusla's Research Dissemination Policy.
- Identify emerging research, information needs or research questions, and communicate these to the NRO.
- Engage with Tusla colleagues in the context of their role, including colleagues new to the Agency at induction stage where possible, those undertaking practitioner or academic research and students who are on placement within the Agency.

3.2. Developmental activities of the Research and Information Mentor role

All Research and Information Mentors will be encouraged to:

- Facilitate learning communities (for example, journal clubs and other groups) with a research and information focussed agenda.
- Promote and support the use of up-to-date and quality evidence in aspects of service improvement, including policy development, business planning and court reports.
- Host group or team events such as Research and Information Mentor information sessions and database search skills training.
- Collaborate with the NRO on the preparation and delivery of presentations to our academic partners and/or at related conferences as opportunities arise.

3.3. Requirements of the Research and Information Mentor role

All Research and Information Mentors are required to:

- Use in full the four hours weekly that are assigned to the role.
- Develop and maintain a quarterly plan in relation to the implementation of the role.
- Update and discuss their activity, role developments, requirements, challenges, and solutions with their line manager on an agreed regular basis.
- Meet with and update and discuss their activity, role developments, requirements, challenges, and solutions with the assigned NRO staff member on a quarterly basis.

- Share their activity, role developments, requirements, challenges and solutions with the Research and Information Mentor Network for the purpose of learning, information exchange and recording.
- Attend and engage with the bespoke induction training, and additional training and development plan, and maintain continuing professional development.
- Attend and engage with the Research and Information Mentor Network meetings and events as organised by the NRO.
- Commit to personal and professional skills development and keep up to date with the latest practice, research, and information developments.
- Adhere and commit to fulfilling requirements to disseminate, document and compile feedback that supports the overall measurement of the strategy's impact on the agency.

4. Sharing and capturing activity, feedback measures and impact.

Included in the vision and goals for the second cycle is that Research and Information Mentors will be equipped with the necessary skills to deliver on activities that are defined and measurable, and that the impact of the strategy on the agency will be known. Defined duties and activities are set out in the role overview. Mentors will be equipped with necessary skills and tools through the bespoke induction training, the ongoing training and development plan and the dedicated NRO support. The following sets out how the second cycle will capture the activity and potential impact through a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures. All measures will be designed collaboratively between the NRO and Research and Information Mentors.

4.1. Sharing the learning and capturing activity

- Research and Information Mentors will attend quarterly meetings with the full network and NRO to update and share information about their respective activity, role developments, requirements, challenges, and solutions.
- This information will be recorded by the NRO.
- The quarterly recording will inform an annual record of all Research and Information Mentor activity.

4.2. Feedback measures

- Research and Information Mentors will commit to seeking feedback from Tusla staff they engage with and will disseminate feedback surveys as required.
- Tusla staff will be asked to complete a brief feedback survey following engagement with a mentor in a one-off capacity.
- Tusla staff will be asked to complete a brief pre- and post-survey when they engage with a mentor in relation to a specific skill building activity such as development of database search skills, practitioner or academic research skills, engagement with journal clubs or learning communities.

4.3. Impact

- Feedback from the Tusla staff survey responses will be collated.
- The NRO will work with Tusla communications department to monitor the number of hits to the Tusla Research Centre.
- The NRO will record the number of Athens account registrations.
- The NRO will record the number of Barnardos Library and Information registrations.
- The NRO will record Research and Information Mentor activity, role developments, requirements, challenges, and solutions at the quarterly meetings (NRO and Network).
- All feedback and activity will be collated quarterly to inform an annual Research and Information Mentor activity, measures, and impact report.
- This report will be reviewed by the Network, the NRO and Implementation Support Group to identify what is working well and what areas require attention and development.

5. Building the network and expectations of the mentor, line manager, and NRO.

Nominations of suitable staff will be sought directly from Chief Regional Officers and National Service Managers/Directors. The NRO will engage with nominated staff and their line managers in advance of confirming the role. Meetings will take place to explore suitability and feasibility of the role to be undertaken within the substantive post.

5.1 Building the network

- 10 existing Research and Information Mentors have line manager approval to retain the role into the second cycle. <https://www.tusla.ie/research/research-and-information-mentors/>
- A further 10 Tusla staff will join the network in 2022.
- A panel may be created where gaps arise in the future.
- All mentors will have the opportunity to review their continued membership of the network at the mid-point in 2024.

5.2 Person specification

Opportunities exist for Tusla staff to take up the role of Research and Information Mentor. The role is open to staff of any grade, discipline, or location. We are specifically interested in hearing from nominated staff working in residential care services, community social care, family support, social work, educational welfare, workforce training and other roles, including business support roles or any other role where there is a need and emphasis on using research and information for service improvement and evidence-based practice. Current geographical gaps exist in the South and Northwest of the country; however, nominations of staff in any location are welcome. The role will be implemented through a blended approach of in-person and remote online activities and meetings. Specific knowledge, skills and experience are required to implement the role. Relevant qualifications and/or training are welcome but not essential. A bespoke Research and Information Mentor induction training programme and an additional training and development plan will be in place for the Research and Information Mentors Network. All confirmed Research and Information Mentors will be expected to engage with this training.

The NRO is seeking nominated staff with the following experience:

- Experience of networking within and across teams locally and regionally.
- Experience of mentoring or supporting colleagues in skills development.
- Experience of building and maintaining relationships with staff groups irrespective of discipline, service type or grade.
- Experience of using evidence in their respective role in the agency.

Nominated staff should also possess the following abilities:

- Ability to communicate effectively among colleagues at local, regional, and national level.
- Ability to work to a plan, organise meetings and events in person or online.
- Ability to report on activity and to engage with feedback measurement tools.

5.3 Process

This will be a four-step process outlined below.

5.3.1 Seeking nominations

The NRO will seek nominations of suitable staff directly from all six Chief Regional Officers and the National Service Managers/Directors. (one nomination per region or national service/directorate)

5.3.2 Application Form

- All those nominated will be invited to complete a brief application form highlighting how they match the person specification above. The application form should be endorsed by the respective line manager and submitted to the NRO. The line manager must agree to allow the staff member to allocate four hours weekly of their substantive post to undertake the role. A further commitment to training and meetings is detailed in point 6. Expectations below.

5.3.3 Meeting with NRO to explore suitability and role feasibility

- All those who apply will be invited, along with their line manager to meet with the NRO to discuss their interest in the role, the role requirements, and expectations. The discussion will explore the feasibility of the role within the applicant's substantive post and contribution that the role would make to local or regional teams, including the potential benefits for the applicant and colleagues.

5.3.4 Confirmation of role

- The NRO will confirm the role with the applicant and line manager. The NRO will notify the nominating Regional Chief Officer or National Service Manager/Director. On confirmation and acceptance, a role agreement will be completed by Research and Information Mentors, line managers and the NRO. Shortlisting may apply and, in this case, applicants will be assessed on the person specification listed above. A panel may be formed to fill gaps in the network as they arise over time.

6. Expectations - Mentor, line manager and NRO

The role of the Research and Information Mentor is an active role within the Agency. Research and Information Mentors are expected to engage with the NRO in carrying out the role and should be consistently supported by their line manager in facilitating the role.

6.1 NRO expectations of the Mentor and line manager:

- All Research and Information Mentors and respective line managers are expected to discuss and review the role on an on-going basis within their own processes – that is, at one-to-one meetings or within supervision.
- All Research and Information Mentors are expected to fulfil the duties and responsibilities as set out in point 3. Role Overview, above.
- Line managers to permit the mentor to attend an induction training programme (equivalent of two days) and additional training planned throughout the term of the role.
- Line managers to permit the mentor in fulfilling the allocated four hours weekly to the role and to permit attendance at quarterly meetings (4 half days) and one annual national network event (one full day) as organised by the NRO.
- Should the mentor and line manager decide to discontinue the role, they should inform the NRO promptly.

6.2 Mentors and line managers can expect the NRO:

- To provide an induction programme and an additional training and development plan.
- To support the mentor by appointing a designated NRO support person to each mentor to discuss role development, challenges, and solutions.
- To promote and encourage a buddy system between existing and new mentors.
- To schedule quarterly meetings and one annual national network event.
- To provide mentors with regular updates on internal Tusla research and information developments.
- To provide mentors with updates on external research and information developments.
- To provide the required tool for mentors to provide electronic feedback on their activity and to seek out feedback from Tusla staff as described above.
- To provide the tool for the recording of all activity at quarterly meetings.
- To provide feedback to mentors and line managers on all mentor activity and impact annually.
- To provide information to mentors about relevant opportunities for professional development as they arise.

6.3 NRO – mentor - line manager agreement

- A role agreement will support the Research and Information Mentor in the implementation of their role. The purpose of the agreement is to clarify the role, responsibilities, and expectations of the NRO, mentor and line manager. The role agreement should be reviewed annually and will include process for instances where the role is not fulfilled.

7. Induction training and additional training and development plan

The NRO will provide an induction training programme. Subsequent additional training will be provided.

7.1 Induction training

Induction training will cover the following components:

- Tusla National Research Office – overview and value of research and information within the Agency.
- Learning from experience – The strategy development and progress to date, hearing from existing mentors in relation to practical examples, what works, challenges and solutions.
- Role expectations – requirements, core duties, developmental work, sharing learning, capturing activity, feedback measures and impact.
- Skills development – Developing research questions, Tusla Research Centre demonstration, database search skills sessions, open research, Barnardos Library and Information service presentation and evidence training programme, Tusla Independent Research Ethics Committee requirements and processes.
- Role agreement – scoping the role agreement for NRO – mentor - line manager.
- Role planning, NRO supports and mentor to mentor buddy system.

7.2 Training and development plan

A training and development plan will include:

Key skills training will be provided in the areas of:

- Refresher and intermediate database search skills training
- Mentoring skills (including developing and managing mentoring relationships)
- Presentation and public-speaking skills.
- Group facilitation skills

Key inputs (internal or external) will be provided in the areas of:

- Open data
- Patient and Public Involvement
- Research Ethics
- Research Integrity
- New research developments related to the work of the Agency.

Key development opportunities will include:

Mentor-to-mentor buddy system in place.

Regular brief check-in meetings between mentors for updates and information sharing. Frequency to be decided by the network.

Quarterly meeting of the mentor and NRO support person prior to NRO and full network quarterly meetings.

Quarterly meetings between the NRO and full Mentor Network for information sharing, recording activity, training or inputs as planned or required.

One annual National Network Day with NRO, full mentor network and strategy sponsor to include opportunities for information exchange, external or internal inputs, training, acknowledgement, and celebration of the work.

Notification of meetings, events and training will be provided.

Additional optional opportunities will be shared as they arise – that is, conferences, workshops, and webinars.

8. Research and Information Mentor Implementation Support Group

The existing members of Research and Information Mentor Implementation Support Group will continue. The group will benefit from the addition of new members. The expanded membership will reflect the wider agency functions in support of the strategy to include representatives from:

- Workforce Learning and Development
- Office of the Chief Social Worker
- Services and Integration
- Quality and Regulation
- The group will meet quarterly. The group will have terms of reference, and an agenda will be provided in advance.

9. Timeline

2022 Short-term goals p.2	<p>Q1/2 – Agreeing the guidance document.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seeking stakeholder support for new members– that is, Chief Regional Officers and National Service Managers/Directors. <p>Q2 – Intake of new mentor process commences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seek new Implementation Group members. - Designing measurement survey tools. - Revision of induction programme <p>Q3 – New mentors confirmed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New Implementation Group members in place. <p>Q4 – Induction programme delivered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buddy system commences - Quarterly meetings commence - Survey tools in place - Annual reporting - Consideration of evaluation planning.
2023 Medium-term goals p.2	<p>Quarterly meetings</p> <p>National Network Day</p> <p>Training and development plan</p> <p>Evaluation planning</p> <p>Implementation Group</p>
2024 Medium-term goals p.2	<p>Mid-point membership review</p> <p>Quarterly meetings</p> <p>National Network Day</p> <p>Training and development plan</p> <p>Evaluation planning</p> <p>Implementation Group</p>

2025 Long-term goals p.2	Quarterly meetings National Network Day Training and development plan Preparation for evaluation Implementation Group
2026 Long-term goals p.2	Quarterly meetings National Network Day Training and development plan Evaluation Implementation Group

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