



# STRATEGY RAUTAKI 2026

Prepared DEC 2025



# WHIRIA TE TĀNGATA WEAVE THE PEOPLE TOGETHER

## *Whiria te tāngata – Weave the people together.*

### **Introduction**

The whakataukī, *Whiria te tāngata – Weave the people together*, captures the essence of the RNZAF Mentoring Programme in 2026. Connection- Taruna, lies at the centre of mentoring, leadership, and community. As we enter a new year, the programme strives to continue its mission of *leading workplace mentoring so that our people unlock and achieve success by strengthening relationships, enhancing belonging, and creating pathways where people feel seen, valued, and supported.*

Mentoring remains a cornerstone of the organisational culture of the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) and the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF). In a time of high operational demand, evolving workforce needs, and increasing expectations on leadership development, the RNZAF Mentoring Programme continues as a place where people can grow, connect, and thrive outside of the formal organisational structure.

Through intentional collaboration, cultural grounding, and future-focused development, the RNZAF Mentoring Programme strives to weave together individuals, units, bases, partners, and communities across Aotearoa and the wider Defence family.

2026 will be the Year of Connection-Taruna. Connecting people, strengthening partnerships, honouring whakapapa, and preparing our programme for the next decade of growth, innovation, and global influence.

### **Purpose**

This RNZAF Mentoring Programme strategy is intended to:

- Provide an overview of the RNZAF MENTORING PROGRAMME'S vision, mission, and strategic objectives for 2026.
- Highlight key priorities and actionable steps to ensure continued success and global recognition.
- Reinforce the program's alignment with RNZAF and NZDF objectives, particularly regarding leadership, diversity, resilience, and readiness.
- Offer a transparent outline of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure progress and impact.
- Serve as a guide for all stakeholders, fostering collaboration, advocacy, and shared commitment to the program's success.

### **Use of Te Reo Māori**

In keeping with the RNZAF's commitment to a bi-cultural environment, this strategy document strives to include the use of "Te Reo Māori" New Zealand's native language. This approach reflects the RNZAF's dedication to cultural inclusivity while making the guide accessible to a global audience.

### **DISCLAIMER**

This document is intended for internal use only by RNZAF MENTORING'S stakeholders, including Champions, Sponsors, and Members of the MAT and Steering Group. The content reflects the program's strategic priorities for 2026 and is subject to refinement as feedback and circumstances evolve.

## FOREWORD – WHAKATARE

As I look ahead to 2026, I am reminded of the whakataukī that shapes our vision this year: *Whiria te tāngata – Weave the people together*. This simple yet profound principle captures the essence of what mentoring means for the RNZAF: connection, belonging, and growth. It is a privilege to lead a programme that continues to stand as a beacon of empowerment, weaving together individuals, bases, and communities into a stronger, more resilient RNZAF and NZDF.

Mentoring is not just about guidance, it is about creating spaces where people feel seen, valued, and supported. It is about walking alongside others as they discover their potential, overcome challenges, and achieve success. These values remain at the heart of our mission and my personal commitment: to foster a culture where connection thrives, and every person knows they belong.

Over the past year, we have strengthened our programme’s mana within the RNZAF, across the NZDF, and among global mentoring communities. In 2026, our focus is clear: Connection: *Taruna*. We will deepen relationships across Bases, enhance collaboration with our NZDF partners, and strive to expand our reach internationally and throughout the South Pacific and beyond. By embracing innovation and cultural grounding, we will continue to lead in mentoring excellence while preparing for the next decade of growth.

What inspires me most as the current RNZAF Mentoring Programme Manager, is witnessing the journeys of our mentors and mentees in the courage, learning, and transformation that mentoring makes possible. These stories remind us that this programme is more than professional development; it is about weaving together people, heritage, and future capability.

As we move forward, I invite all Champions, Sponsors, Mentors, and Mentees to join us in this mission. Together, we will continue to innovate, connect, and build a mentoring culture that strengthens our people and our organisation.

Let us continue to unlock success: *tukuna te angitu* and carry the RNZAF Mentoring Programme into new horizons.

**“Whiria te tāngata – Weave the people together.”**

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Russell Bone, the RNZAF Mentoring Programme Manager.

FLTLT Russell Bone  
RNZAF Mentoring Programme Manager  
2022–present

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## **HISTORY – WHAKAPAPA**

The RNZAF Mentoring Programme was established in 2008 with the aim of embedding mentoring capability and processes into the RNZAF culture. It involved utilising the experience, motivation, and networks of Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) who did not have subordinates, creating mentoring partnerships outside the usual military hierarchical structure.

To ensure the program's success, the RNZAF collaborated with the New Zealand Coaching and Mentoring Centre (NZCMC) for design and implementation assistance, while a dedicated group called the RNZAF Mentoring Advisory Team (MAT) worked to uphold mentoring best practices within the military's strict hierarchical environment.

Differentiating between mentoring and coaching in a military setting, the program emphasised relationships outside the chain of command and trades whenever possible. The programs aimed to support the goals and aspirations of mentees, even if not directly linked to organizational objectives, without interfering with regular workplace coaching or performance management systems. The privacy of the mentoring relationship was respected unless both parties agreed to breach it, in cases of ethical violations or if RNZAF orders were breached.

Over time, the program expanded from focusing on junior ranks to incorporating all RNZAF and NZDF personnel, including civilian staff. This growth led to the RNZAF Mentoring Programme achieving international recognition. In 2014, it became the first military worldwide to be awarded gold accreditation by the International Standards for Mentoring Programmes in Employment (ISMPE). The program underwent thorough examination during the accreditation process, reinforcing its quality and effectiveness.

The RNZAF Mentoring Programme received further recognition and accreditation in subsequent years, including gold standard recognition by ISMPE in 2018, 2022 and hopefully again in 2026, as well as the European Quality Award (EQA). These achievements highlight the programme's commitment to high standards, ethics, and genuine care for its people.

Today, the RNZAF Mentoring Programme continues to provide a mentoring framework, training program, and support network to help personnel and other organisations '*unlock and achieve success*'. The program plays a crucial role in developing excellent developmental relationships across the workforce, fostering a culture of supportive mentoring and coaching, and attracting top talent from New Zealand's competitive job markets.

## **ABOUT THE PROGRAM – MŌHIOHIO**

|                        |                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| VISION/ARONGA:         | To lead workplace mentoring, so that our people can unlock and achieve success.                                                   |
| MISSION/ WHAKATAKANGA: | Through innovation, provide a mentoring framework, training programme, and an experienced support network.                        |
| PURPOSE/ ARONGA:       | The RNZAF Mentoring Programme aims to entwine the NZDF values whilst developing innovation, motivation and leadership attributes. |

## **PRINCIPLES- NGĀ MĀTĀPONO**

The following are the RNZAF Mentoring Programme's Principles:

- Mentoring is a voluntary process and the most successful mentoring will be driven by the mentee's goals and aspirations.
- Mentoring is a supportive, non-judgmental constructive process. The mentor is to provide an environment which promotes and encourages innovations, openness and honesty, which is free from consequence.
- Mentoring is a protected, confidential and professional relationship built on mutual respect for all parties.
- The mentee is not compelled to follow the advice or guidance of their mentor. The mentee is at all times responsible for their own actions and must make their own choices and decisions. It is self-directed.
- There is a clear separation between the mentoring process of the RNZAF Mentoring Programme and performance management processes within the NZDF.

## **THEME FOR 2026 – KAUPAPA MATUA**

*Whiria te tāngata – Weave the people together.*

### **Connection-Taruna is the heart of 2026.**

This theme guides all objectives, priorities, and initiatives:

- Connecting people across Bases
- Connecting with partners across NZDF and RNZAF
- Connecting with Māori values
- Connecting with Pacific and global Defence partners
- Connecting through technology
- Connecting with history, heritage, and future potential
- Connecting with communities, cadets, veterans, and leaders both inside and outside the NZDF
- Connecting the programme to PLAN ASTRA and future-force thinking

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2026— WHĀINGA**

### **Strengthen Connection and Belonging – *Hononga me te Whanaungatanga***

- Embed the 2026 theme across all programme activity.
- Increase Base-to-Base engagement activities, including network events.
- Enhance relationship pathways with RNZN, NZ Army, and other militaries.
- Support programmes across the South Pacific and strengthen regional ties.
- Continue global mentoring partnerships (RAF, RAAF, ADF, RCAF, ALTA Mentoring).
- Re-establish Peer-to-Peer Mentoring with internal and external partners.
- Deepen relationships within the Directorate of People and Culture, (School to Skies Programme, Culture, Welfare)
- Strengthen engagement with: ILD, YDU, Veterans Affairs and Cadet Forces.

### **Empower and Develop Personnel – *Whakamanahia te Tangata***

- Deliver high-quality Foundation and Advanced Practitioner Workshops.
- Provide tailored PD opportunities to units across NZDF.
- Maintain and expand pathways for individual global mentoring accreditation.
- Grow capability and confidence of mentors and mentees across all ranks.
- Integrate cultural competence, te Tiriti o Waitangi Treaty principles, and RNZAF values, especially comradeship, into development pathways.

### **Enhance Digital Enablement and Data – *Hangarau me te Raraunga***

- Increase adoption and training for MS Teams mentoring environments.
- Improve database organisation and digital resource accessibility.
- Introduce new survey tools and reporting mechanisms.
- Trial online and hybrid mentoring formats, ensuring quality and accessibility.
- Enable the MAT network to leverage digital tools for cross-base collaboration.

### **Strengthen Organisational Alignment – *Rautaki me te Kāwanatanga***

#### **Align mentoring activity to PLAN ASTRA:**

- People systems
- Leadership development
- Partnership networks
- Future-ready workforce
- Resilient and scalable force

#### **Maintain connection to NZDF strategy pillars:**

- Stronger military capabilities
- Warfighting ethos
- Enhanced people system
- Resilient and scalable force
- Deepened relationships with key partners
- Embrace Māori values of *whanaungatanga*, *whakapapa*, and Te Tiriti principles of partnership, participation, and protection.
- Strengthen reporting, governance, and Steering Group visibility.

### **Expand Programme Presence Across Bases – *Te Ūpoko o ngā Wāhi Mahi***

- Increase presence and visibility at RNZAF Base Woodbourne, including a quarterly engagement.
- Collaborate closely with training schools to embed mentoring across the learning environment.
- Support each Base to grow local champions and MAT capabilities.

### **Prepare for Future Growth – *Te Whakawhanake Ake***

- Begin planning of early concept development for the 2028 Mentoring Hui (20-year celebration).
- Explore future innovations: social media presence, podcasts, storytelling platforms.
- Strengthen succession planning and programme resilience.
- Enhance South Pacific mentoring cooperation and potential shared initiatives

## KEY PRIORITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES—ĀHEINGA

### Workshops and Events

- **Foundation Workshops:** A one day workshop for all interested personnel, to learn a basic overview of the RNZAF Mentoring Programme, the definition of mentoring , while offering practical tools and techniques for any relationship.
- **Advanced Practitioner Workshops:** A three day workshop where all interested personnel can either gain an individual global accredited mentoring and coaching award and/or deepen their understanding of techniques and leadership competencies.
- **Professional Development Opportunities:** A way for all interested to unlock the full potential of their team and/ or unit with an array of exhilarating professional development courses, which can be tailored to suit any unique requirement, including timings, platforms, etc.
  - Courses Offered:
    - Understanding Feedback
    - How to Have Courageous Conversations
    - Active Listening Skills
    - Dealing with Imposter Syndrome
    - Building High Performing Teams
    - Caring for What Really Matters
    - Understanding Powerful Questions and How to Best Use Them
    - Dealing with Change
    - Public Presenting Skills
    - Building a Coaching and Mentoring Culture
- **Lunch and Learns:** Provides short, focused professional development sessions that create space for open discussion, shared learning, and practical tools all over a lunch.
- **Global Speaker Events:** An opportunity to hear from internationally recognized leaders and experts who share insights on leadership and development.

### Networking and Connection

- Host bi-annually Steering Group networking events across New Zealand.
  - Strengthens unity and collaboration across all the RNZAF Bases.
- Strengthen joint mentoring events with RNZN and NZ Army.
  - Deepen integrated mentoring activities with all NZDF programmes to enhance interoperability and shared leadership development across services
- Expand Lunch & Learn events across all Bases.
- Rebuild Peer-to-Peer mentoring connections domestically and internationally.
  - Reinstate structured opportunities for personnel to connect and learn from peers across organization within New Zealand.

### **Surveys and Data Collection**

- Launch improved surveys at six-and twelve-month intervals for all mentoring relationships.
- Incorporate real-time surveys for feedback from workshops and events.
- Leverage data to produce actionable insights and bi-annual reports to Sponsors, Champions, senior leadership, Steering Group, MAT members, and other global partners .

### **Technology and Digital Platforms**

- Roll out MS Teams-based mentoring resources and spaces.
  - Provides a centralized digital hub for mentoring materials and virtual engagement across the NZDF
- Improve DDMS organisation and digital accessibility.
- Continue to trial online mentoring tools and tracking systems.

### **Digital and AI Innovations**

- Trial AI-driven mentor-mentee matching tools.
- Introduce online mentoring platforms to support remote personnel.

### **Cross-NZDF and Cross-Service Engagement**

- Collaborate with ILD and DPC for alignment in culture and leadership development.
  - Ensure mentoring initiatives complement wider NZDF leadership and cultural strategies.
- Strengthen ties with Veterans' Affairs, NZ Cadet Forces, and the Youth Development Units.
  - Expand mentoring reach to support transition, youth engagement, and community development.
- Support School to Skies and aviation pathway initiatives.
  - Use mentoring to inspire and guide future Aviators through established outreach programmes.

### **International and South Pacific Partnerships**

- Maintain connection with RAF, RAAF, RCAF, ALTA, and mentoring bodies.
  - Continue knowledge exchange and best-practice sharing with global partners.
- Support ADF Senior Mentoring Scheme design and delivery.
  - Contribute expertise to enhance allied mentoring frameworks and leadership development.
- Strengthen relationships with Pacific partners to build mentoring capacity regionally.
  - Collaborate to develop sustainable mentoring networks that support regional security and growth.

**KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – PAEARU MAHI (KPIS)**  
*± New for 2026*

2026 KPIs will measure connection, impact, and alignment:

- **Connection & Engagement**
  - Increase cross-base engagement by 20% by having MAT members and facilitators travel to each base to understand how the programme is handled. ±
  - Establish mentoring presence at RNZAF Base Woodbourne with quarterly activity. ±
  - Re-deliver Peer-to-Peer mentoring initiative with outside organizations and include other NZDF mentoring programme ±
- **Programme Effectiveness (measured through programme and workshop surveys)**
  - 90% programme recommendation rate.
  - 90% satisfaction rate with mentoring relationships.
  - 80% of participants matched within one month of a workshop.
  - 85% of mentees report progress toward goals.
- **Capability Development**
  - Increase number of mentors completing global accreditation pathways. ±
  - Conduct MAT/facilitator upskilling sessions across 2026. ±
- **Digital Metrics**
  - MS Teams adoption on at least three RNZAF bases. ±
  - Rollout of new survey platform before end of 2026. ±
- **International & Cross-Service Collaboration**
  - Minimum three international or cross-service initiatives delivered in 2026. ±
  - At least one South Pacific mentoring collaboration established or progressed. ±

**ADAPTING TO FISCAL CONSTRAINTS- URUTANUNGA**

- The program will maintain its effectiveness despite fiscal challenges by:
  - Prioritizing high-impact, low-cost initiatives (e.g., networking events).
  - Expanding digital and remote mentoring options to reduce costs.
  - Focusing on collaborative activities that strengthen relationships across the NZDF.

## **MENTORING IMPACT – TE PĀNGA O TE WHAKAAKO**

### **INTANGIBLE VALUE ADDS – UARA KORE E TAEA TE KITE**

Mentoring creates deep, non-measurable benefits that strengthen the RNZAF's people-first culture:

- Belonging and Identity – Builds a sense of inclusion and pride, anchoring personnel within the RNZAF ethos.
- Connection and Collaboration – Fosters trusted relationships across ranks, bases, and services, creating a unified force.
- Personal Growth and Confidence – Empowers individuals to navigate challenges, enhancing resilience and adaptability.
- Cultural Competence – Promotes understanding and respect across diverse backgrounds, reinforcing NZDF values.
- Leadership Mindset – Instills a coaching and mentoring culture that elevates leadership at every level.

### **TANGIBLE VALUE ADDS – UARA MATUA**

Mentoring delivers measurable, strategic benefits to the RNZAF and NZDF:

- Improved Retention and Satisfaction – Reduces turnover and strengthens morale.
- Leadership Readiness – Accelerates development for emerging leaders and junior ranks.
- Operational Effectiveness – Enhances teamwork, reduces conflict, and improves decision-making.
- Cross-Service and International Cooperation – Builds interoperability and strengthens global partnerships.
- Cost-Effective Capability Building – Provides informal learning pathways that reduce training burden.
- Clear Accreditation Pathways – Supports EMCC standards for professional mentoring excellence.

### **WHY THE RNZAF MENTORING PROGRAMME MATTERS – TE HIRANGA**

The programme is a cornerstone of RNZAF's strategic vision and operational success:

- Impact on Operational Readiness – Enhances leadership, resilience, and collaboration to support mission success.
- Alignment with Strategic Goals – Advances PLAN ASTRA prioritizing people, partnership, and future capability.
- Global Recognition – Positions RNZAF as a leader in military mentoring through EMCC accreditation and innovation.
- Fostering Belonging and Inclusion – Strengthens morale, reduces turnover, and weaves together Bases, communities, and cultures.
- Connecting People and Systems – Creates a cohesive, resilient force through mentoring networks that span NZDF and international partners.



## LOOKING AHEAD – *TE TITIRO WHAKAMUA*

2026 marks a year of reconnection and renewed momentum for the RNZAF Mentoring Programme. Through the theme *Whiria te tāngata*, the programme will weave together people, partnerships, culture, and capability to build a stronger, more resilient Air Force. By strengthening relationships, expanding presence across NZDF, embracing new technologies, and preparing for the 2028 Mentoring Hui, the programme will continue to unlock success—*tukuna te angitu*—for our people, our organisation, and our future

*Whiria te tāngata*  
Weave the people together.

Aotearoa New Zealand Māori Whakatauki (proverb)